BRITISH POETRY FROM CHAUCER TO GRAY

Edited By
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Printed by
LAXMI PUBLICATIONS (P) LTD.
113, Golden House, Daryaganj,
New Delhi-110002
for
Lovely Professional University
Phagwara

SYLLABUS

British Poetry from Chaucer to Gray

Objectives:

- To acquaint the learners with the most important poetic texts of the eighteenth century.
- To help the learners to appreciate the poetic imagery.

Sr. No.	Topics
1.	Geoffrey Chaucer: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (non-detailed study): Introduction to the text and author Geoffrey Chaucer: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (non-detailed study): Discussion and analysis
2.	Milton: Paradise Lost-I; Introduction of the author and the text, importance of Prologue, ; (Non detailed study) : Discussion and analysis, Grand style and Character portrayal of Satan
3.	Shakespeare as a poet, Sonnets: Introduction, Being your slave what should I do, Love , Shakespeare: Thou blind fool, That time of year thou mayst in me behold, what dost thou to mine eyes
4.	Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock; (non detailed study): Introduction of the author and Text analysis Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock; the use of supernatural machinery Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock; as a social satire n as a Mock Epic
5	Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Introduction of the author and the text Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Discussion and analysis Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Theme

CONTENT

Unit 1:	Geoffrey Chaucer *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	1
Unit 2:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-I *Jayatee Bhattacharya, Lovely Professional University*	6
Unit 3:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-II *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	19
Unit 4:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-III *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	26
Unit 5:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-IV *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	37
Unit 6:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-V *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	44
Unit 7:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-VI *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	54
Unit 8:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-VII *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	63
Unit 9:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-VIII *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	71
Unit 10:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-IX *Jayatee Bhattacharya, Lovely Professional University*	78
Unit 11:	The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-X *Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University*	88
Unit 12:	John Milton—Paradise Lost *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	98
Unit 13:	Paradise Lost-I (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-I *Jayatee Bhattacharya, Lovely Professional University*	104
Unit 14:	Paradise Lost-I (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-II *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	117
Unit 15:	Paradise Lost-I (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-III *Jayatee Bhattacharya, Lovely Professional University*	127
Unit 16:	Shakespeare's Sonnets *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	144
Unit 17:	Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock *Jayatee Bhattacharya, Lovely Professional University*	154
Unit 18:	Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard *Digvijay Pandya, Lovely Professional University*	180

Notes

Unit 1: Geoffrey Chaucer

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

1..1 The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Introduction to the Text

1.2 Prologue to the Canterbury Tales: Introduction to the Author

1.3 Summary

1.4 Keywords

1.5 Review Questions

1.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Know the introduction to the text, the Canterbury Tales
- Know about the author, Geoffrey Chaucer.

Introduction

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century. The tales are told as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.

Following a long list of works written earlier in his career, including Troilus and Criseyde, House of Fame, and Parliament of Fowls, the Canterbury Tales was Chaucer's magnum opus. He uses the tales and the descriptions of the characters to paint an ironic and critical portrait of English society at the time, and particularly of the Church. Structurally, the collection bears the influence of The Decameron, which Chaucer is said to have come across during his first diplomatic mission to Italy in 1372. However, Chaucer peoples his tales with 'sondry folk' rather than Boccaccio's fleeing nobles.

1.1 The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Introduction to the Text

The Canterbury Tales is at once one of the most famous and most frustrating works of literature ever written. Since its composition in late 1300s, critics have continued to mine new riches from its complex ground, and started new arguments about the text and its interpretation. Chaucer's richly detailed text, so Dryden said, was "God's plenty", and the rich variety of the Tales is partly perhaps the reason for its success. It is both one long narrative and an encyclopedia of shorter narratives; it is both one large drama, and a compilation of most literary forms known to medieval literature: romance, fabliau, Breton lay, moral fable, verse romance, beast fable, prayer to the Virgin and so the list goes on. No

single literary genre dominates the Tales. The tales include romantic adventures, fabliaux, saint's biographies, animal fables, religious allegories and even a sermon, and range in tone from pious, moralistic tales to lewd and vulgar sexual farces. More often than not, moreover, the specific tone of the tale is extremely difficult to firmly pin down.

This, indeed, is down to one of the key problems of interpreting the Tales themselves-voice: how do we ever know who is speaking? Because Chaucer, early in the Tales, promises to repeat the exact words and style of each speaker as best he can remember it, there is always a tension between Chaucer and the pilgrim's voice he ventriloquises as he re-tells his tale: even the "Chaucer" who is a character on the pilgrim has a distinct and deliberately unChaucerian voice. Is it the Merchant's voice-and the Merchant's opinion-or Chaucer's? Is it Chaucer the character or Chaucer the writer? If it is Chaucer's, are we supposed to take it at face value, or view it ironically? It is for this reason that, throughout this ClassicNote, a conscious effort has been made to refer to the speaker of each tale (the Merchant, in the Merchant's Tale, for example) as the "narrator", a catch-all term which represents both of, or either one of, Chaucer and the speaker in question.

No one knows for certain when Chaucer began to write the Tales-the pilgrimage is usually dated 1387, but that date is subject to much scholarly argument-but it is certain that Chaucer wrote some parts of the Tales at different times, and went back and added Tales to the melting pot. The Knight's Tale, for example, was almost certainly written earlier than the Canterbury project as a separate work, and then adapted into the voice of the Knight; and the Second Nun's Tale, as well as probably the Monk's, probably have a similar compositional history.

Chaucer drew from a rich variety of literary sources to create the Tales, though his principal debt is likely to Boccaccio's Decameron, in which ten nobles from Florence, to escape the plague, stay in a country villa and amuse each other by each telling tales. Boccaccio likely had a significant influence on Chaucer. The Knight's Tale was an English version of a tale by Boccaccio, while six of Chaucer's tales have possible sources in the Decameron: the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's, the Clerk's, the Merchant's, the Franklin's, and the Shipman's.

Notes Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury form a wider range of society compared to Boccaccio's elite storytellers, allowing for greater differences in tone and substance.

The text of the Tales itself does not survive complete, but in ten fragments. Due to the fact that there are no links made between these ten fragments in most cases, it is extremely difficult to ascertain precisely in which order Chaucer wanted the tales to be read. This Classic Note corresponds to the order followed in Larry D. Benson's "Riverside Chaucer", which is undoubtedly the best edition of Chaucer currently available.

1.2 Prologue to the Canterbury Tales: Introduction to the Author

Before William Shakespeare, Geoffrey Chaucer was the preeminent English poet, and he remains in the top tier of the English canon. He also was the most significant poet to write in Middle English. Chaucer was born in the early 1340s to a fairly rich, well-to-do, though not aristocratic family. His father, John Chaucer, was a vintner and deputy to the king's butler. His family's financial success came from work in the wine and leather businesses, and they had considerable inherited property in London. Little information exists about Chaucer's education, but his writings demonstrate a close familiarity with a number of important books of his contemporaries and of earlier times. Chaucer likely was fluent in several languages, including French, Italian, and Latin. Sons of wealthy London

Notes

merchants could receive good educations at this time, and there is reason to believe that, if Chaucer did not attend one of the schools on Thames Street near his boyhood home, then he was at least well-educated at home. Certainly his work showcases a passion for reading a huge range of literature, classical and modern.

Chaucer first appears in public records in 1357 as a member of the house of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster. This was a conventional arrangement in which sons of middle-class households were placed in royal service so that they could obtain a courtly education. Two years later, Chaucer served in the army under Edward III and was captured during an unsuccessful offensive at Reims, although he was later ransomed. Chaucer served under a number of diplomatic missions.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by
   (a) Geoffrey Chaucer (b) William Shakespeare
   (c) John Milton (d) John Keats
2. Chaucer drew from a rich variety of literature sources to create the
   (a) Stories (b) Articles
   (c) Tales (d) Nobel
3. The name of Geoffrey Chaucer is
   (a) William Chaucer (b) Duke Chaucer
   (c) Philippa Chaucer (d) John Chaucer
4. Chaucer first appears in public records in 1357 as a member of the house of
   (a) Edward (b) Elizabeth
   (c) Parliament (d) None of these
5. Chaucer first published work was
   (a) The book of the country (b) Courtly love
   (c) The book of the Duchess

By 1366 Chaucer had married Philippa Pan, who had been in service with the Countess of Ulster. Chaucer married well for his position, for Philippa Chaucer received an annuity from the queen consort of Edward III. Philippa's sister Katherine de Roet was John of Gaunt's mistress for twenty years before becoming the Duke's wife. Through this connection, John of Gaunt was Chaucer's "kinsman." Chaucer himself secured an annuity as yeoman of the king and was listed as one of the king's esquires.

Task Write brief introduction to the author of Canterbury Tales.

Chaucer's first published work was The Book of the Duchess, a poem of over 1,300 lines, supposed to be an elegy for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, addressed to her widower, the Duke. For this first of his important poems, which was published in 1370, Chaucer used the dream-vision form, a genre made popular by the highly influential 13th-century French poem of courtly love, the Roman de la Rose, which Chaucer translated into English. Throughout the following decade, Chaucer continued with his diplomatic career, traveling to Italy for negotiations to open a Genoa port to Britain as well as military negotiations with Milan. During his missions to Italy, Chaucer encountered the work of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, which were later to have profound influence upon his own writing. In 1374 Chaucer was appointed comptroller of the customs and subsidy of wool, skins, and tanned

hides for the Port of London, his first position away from the British court. Chaucer's only major work during this period was House of Fame, a poem of around 2,000 lines in dream-vision form, which ends so abruptly that some scholars consider it unfinished.

Did u know? According to Derek Pearsall, "the one biographical fact everyone remembers about Chaucer" is his brush with the law, when, in a deed of May 1st 1380.

Derek Pearsall is released from culpability in the raptus or rape of Cecily Chaumpaigne. No-one knows exactly what the accusation-despite attempts to mistranslate "raptus" as "abduction" - precisely amounted to, still less whether it was rooted in truth. But it casts an ominous shadow over an otherwise pure-white biography, and, rather like the presence of the Pardoner and the Manciple in the Tales, gives a discordant dark wash to our image of Chaucer.

In October 1385, Chaucer was appointed a justice of the peace for Kent, and in August 1386 he became knight of the shire for Kent. Around the time of his wife's death in 1387, Chaucer moved to Greenwich and later to Kent. Changing political circumstances eventually led to Chaucer falling out of favor with the royal court and leaving Parliament, but when Richard II became King of England, Chaucer regained royal favor.

During this period Chaucer used writing primarily as an escape from public life. His works included Parlement of Foules, a poem of 699 lines. This work is a dream-vision for St. Valentine's Day that makes use of the myth that each year on that day the birds gathers before the goddess Nature to choose their mates. This work was heavily influenced by Boccaccio and Dante.

Chaucer's next work was Troilus and Criseyde, which was influenced by The Consolation of Philosophy, which Chaucer himself translated into English. Chaucer took some the plot of Troilus from Boccaccio's Filostrato. This 8,000-line rime-royal poem recounts the love story of Troilus, son of the Trojan king Priam, and Criseyde, widowed daughter of the deserter priest Calkas, against the background of the Trojan War.

The Canterbury Tales secured Chaucer's literary reputation. It is his great literary accomplishment, a compendium of stories by pilgrims traveling to the shrine of Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. Chaucer introduces each of these pilgrims in vivid, brief sketches in the General Prologue and intersperses the twenty-four tales with short dramatic scenes with lively exchanges. Chaucer did not complete the full plan for the tales, and surviving manuscripts leave some doubt as to the exact order of the tales that remain. However, the work is sufficiently complete to be considered a unified book rather than a collection of unfinished fragments. The Canterbury Tales is a lively mix of a variety of genres told by travelers from all aspects of society. Among the genres included are courtly romance, fabliaux, saint's biography, allegorical tale, beast fable, and medieval sermon.

Information concerning Chaucer's descendants is not fully clear. It is likely that he and Philippa had two sons and two daughters. Thomas Chaucer died in 1400; he was a large landowner and political officeholder, and his daughter, Alice, became Duchess of Suffolk. Little is known about Lewis Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer's youngest son. Of Chaucer's two daughters, Elizabeth became a nun, while Agnes was a lady-in-waiting for the coronation of Henry IV in 1399. Public records indicate that Chaucer had no descendants living after the fifteenth century.

1.3 Summary

- The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century.
- The Canterbury Tales is at once one of the most famous and most frustrating works of literature ever written.
- The text of the Tales itself does not survive complete, but in ten fragments.

Notes

- Geoffrey Chaucer was the preeminent English poet, and he remains in the top tier of the English canon.
- Chaucer first appears in public records in 1357 as a member of the house of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster.

1.4 Keywords

Comptroller : A controller used in the title of some financial officers.

Magnum Opus : A work of art, music or literature that is regarded as the most important or best work that an artist, composer or writer has produced.

Pilgrim : A person who journeys to a sacred place for religious reasons.

Shrine : A place regarded as holy because of its associations with a divinity or a scared person.

1.5 Review Questions

1. Describe the Introduction to the text, the Canterbury Tales.
2. Write an essay on the biography of Geoffrey Chaucer.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (c)	3. (d)
4. (b)	5. (c)	

1.6 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barrons/cntrtal03.asp
http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury12.asp

Jayatee Bhattacharya, Lovely Professional University

Unit 2: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-I

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

2.1 General Prologue

2.2 The Knight's Tale

2.3 The Miller's Tale

2.3.1 The Miller's Prologue

2.3.2 The Miller's Tale Text

2.4 Summary

2.5 Keywords

2.6 Review Questions

2.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Know general prologue of the Canterbury tales
- Explain the Knight's tale
- Explain the Miller's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of general prologue, the Knight's tale and the Miller's tale.

Introduction

The narrator opens the General Prologue with a description of the return of spring. He describes the April rains, the burgeoning flowers and leaves, and the chirping birds. Around this time of year, the narrator says, people begin to feel the desire to go on a pilgrimage. Many devout English pilgrims set off to visit shrines in distant holy lands, but even more choose to travel to Canterbury to visit the relics of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, where they thank the martyr for having helped them when they were in need. The narrator tells us that as he prepared to go on such a pilgrimage, staying at a tavern in Southwark called the Tabard Inn, a great company of twenty-nine travelers entered. The travelers were a diverse group who, like the narrator, were on their way to Canterbury. They happily agreed to let him join them. That night, the group slept at the Tabard, and woke up early the next morning to set off on their journey.

The narrator begins his character portraits with the Knight. In the narrator's eyes, the Knight is the noblest of the pilgrims, embodying military prowess, loyalty, honor, generosity, and good manners. The Knight conducts himself in a polite and mild fashion, never saying an unkind word about anyone.

Notes

The Knight's son, who is about twenty years old, acts as his father's squire, or apprentice. The pilgrims applaud the Knight's Tale, and the pleased Host asks the Monk to match it. Before the Monk can utter a word, however, the Miller interrupts. Drunk and belligerent, he promises that he has a "noble" tale that will repay the Knight's. The Host tries to persuade the Miller to let some "bettre" man tell the next tale. The narrator apologizes to us in advance for the tale's bawdiness, and warns that those who are easily offended should skip to another tale.

2.1 General Prologue

"When April comes with his sweet, fragrant showers, which pierce the dry ground of March, and bathe every root of every plant in sweet liquid, then people desire to go on pilgrimages." Thus begins the famous opening to The Canterbury Tales. The narrator (a constructed version of Chaucer himself) is first discovered staying at the Tabard Inn in Southwark (in London), when a company of twenty-nine people descend on the inn, preparing to go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. After talking to them, he agrees to join them on their pilgrimage.

Yet before the narrator goes any further in the tale, he describes the circumstances and the social rank of each pilgrim. He describes each one in turn, starting with the highest status individuals.

The Knight is described first, as befits a 'worthy man' of high status. The Knight has fought in the Crusades in numerous countries, and always been honored for his worthiness and courtesy. Everywhere he went, the narrator tells us, he had a 'sovereyn prys' (which could mean either an 'outstanding reputation' or a price on his head for the fighting he has done). The Knight is dressed in a 'fustian' tunic, made of coarse cloth, which is stained by the rust from his coat of chainmail.

The Knight brings with him his son, The Squire, a lover and a lusty bachelor, only twenty years old. The Squire cuts a rather effeminate figure, his clothes embroidered with red and white flowers, and he is constantly singing or playing the flute. He is the only pilgrim (other than, of course, Chaucer himself) who explicitly has literary ambitions: he 'koude songes make and wel endite'.

The Yeoman (a freeborn servant) also travels along with the Knight's entourage, and is clad in coat and hood of green. The Yeoman is excellent at caring for arrows, and travels armed with a huge amount of weaponry: arrows, a bracer (arm guard), a sword, a buckler, and a dagger as sharp as a spear. He wears an image of St. Christopher on his breast.

Having now introduced the Knight (the highest ranking pilgrim socially), the narrator now moves on to the clergy, beginning with The Prioress, called 'Madame Eglantine' (or, in modern parlance, Mrs. Sweetbriar). She could sweetly sing religious services, speaks fluent French and has excellent table manners. She is so charitable and piteous, that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap, and she has two small dogs with her. She wears a brooch with the inscription 'Amor vincit omnia' ('Love conquers all'). The Prioress brings with her her 'chapeleyne' (secretary), the Second Nun.

The Monk is next, an extremely fine and handsome man who loves to hunt, and who follows modern customs rather than old traditions. This is no bookish monk, studying in a cloister, but a man who keeps greyhounds to hunt the hare. The Monk is well-fed, fat, and his eyes are bright, gleaming like a furnace in his head.

The Friar who follows him is also wanton and merry, and he is a 'lymytour' by trade (a friar licensed to beg in certain districts). He is extremely well beloved of franklins (landowners) and worthy woman all over the town. He hears confession and gives absolution, and is an excellent beggar, able to earn himself a farthing wherever he went. His name is Huberd.

The Merchant wears a forked beard, motley clothes and sat high upon his horse. He gives his opinion very solemnly, and does excellent business as a merchant, never being in any debt. But, the narrator ominously remarks, 'I noot how men hym calle' (I don't know how men call him, or think of him).

The Clerk follows the Merchant. A student of Oxford university, he would rather have twenty books by Aristotle than rich clothes or musical instruments, and thus is dressed in a threadbare short coat. He only has a little gold, which he tends to spend on books and learning, and takes huge care and attention of his studies. He never speaks a word more than is needed, and that is short, quick and full of sentence (the Middle-English word for 'meaningfulness' is a close relation of 'sententiousness').

The Man of Law (referred to here as 'A Sergeant of the Lawe') is a judicious and dignified man, or, at least, he seems so because of his wise words. He is a judge in the court of assizes, by letter of appointment from the king, and because of his high standing receives many grants. He can draw up a legal document, the narrator tells us, and no-one can find a flaw in his legal writings. Yet, despite all this money and social worth, the Man of Law rides only in a homely, multi-coloured coat.

A Franklin travels with the Man of Law. He has a beard as white as a daisy, and of the sanguine humour (dominated by his blood). The Franklin is a big eater, loving a piece of bread dipped in wine, and is described (though not literally!) as Epicurus' son: the Franklin lives for culinary delight. His house is always full of meat pie, fish and meat, so much so that it 'snewed in his hous of mete and drynke'. He changes his meats and drinks according to what foods are in season.

A Haberdasher and a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and a Tapycer (weaver of tapestries) are next described, all of them clothed in the same distinctive guildsman's dress. Note that none of these pilgrims, in the end, actually tell a tale.

A Cook had been brought along to boil the chicken up with marrow bones and spices, but this particular Cook knows a draught of ale very well indeed, according to the narrator. The Cook could roast and simmer and boil and fry, make stews and hashes and bake a pie well, but it was a great pity that, on his shin, he has an ulcer.

A Shipman from Dartmouth is next-tanned brown from the hot summer sun, riding upon a carthorse, and wearing a gown of coarse woolen cloth which reaches to his knees. The Shipman had, many times, drawn a secret draught of wine on board ship, while the merchant was asleep. The Shipman has weathered many storms, and knows his trade: he knows the locations of all the harbors from Gotland to Cape Finistere. His shape is called 'the Maudelayne'.

A Doctor of Medicine is the next pilgrim described, clad in red and blue, and no-one in the world can match him in speaking about medicine and surgery. He knows the cause of every illness, what humor engenders them, and how to cure them. He is a perfect practitioner of medicine, and he has apothecaries ready to send him drugs and mixtures. He is well-read in the standard medical authorities, from the Greeks right through to Chaucer's contemporary Gilbertus Anglicus. The Doctor, however, has not studied the Bible.

The Wife of Bath was 'somdel deef' (a little deaf, as her tale will later expand upon) and that was a shame. The Wife of Bath is so adept at making cloth that she surpasses even the cloth-making capitals of Chaucer's world, Ypres and Ghent, and she wears coverchiefs (linen coverings for the head) which must (the narrator assumes) have 'weyeden ten pound'. She had had five husbands through the church door, and had been at Jerusalem, Rome and Boulogne on pilgrimage. She is also described as 'Gat-tothed' (traditionally denoting lasciviousness), and as keeping good company, she knows all the answers about love: 'for she koude of that art the olde daunce' (she knew the whole dance as far as love is concerned!).

A good religious man, A Parson of a Town, is next described, who, although poor in goods, is rich in holy thought and work. He's a learned man, who truly preaches Christ's gospel, and devoutly teaches his parishioners. He travels across his big parish to visit all of his parishioners, on his feet, carrying a staff in his hand. He is a noble example to his parishioners ('his sheep', as they are

Notes

described) because he acts first, and preaches second (or, in Chaucer's phrase, 'first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte'). The narrator believes that there is no better priest to be found anywhere.

With the Parson travels a Plowman (who does not tell a tale), who has hauled many cartloads of dung in his time. He is a good, hard-working man, who lives in peace and charity, and treats his neighbor as he would be treated. He rides on a mare, and wears a tabard (a workman's loose garment).

A Miller comes next, in this final group of pilgrims (now at the bottom of the class scale!). He is big-boned and has big muscles, and always wins the prize in wrestling matches. There's not a door that he couldn't lift off its hinges, or break it by running at it head-first. He has black, wide nostrils, carries a sword and a buckler (shield) by his side, and has a mouth like a great furnace. He's good at stealing corn and taking payment for it three times. But then, Chaucer implies, there are no honest millers.

A noble Manciple (a business agent, purchaser of religious provisions) is the next pilgrim to be described, and a savvy financial operator. Though a common man, the Manciple can run rings round even a 'heep of lerned men'. The Manciple, his description ominously ends, 'sette hir aller cappe': deceived them all.

The Reeve, a slender, choleric man, long-legged and lean ("ylyk a staf"). He knows exactly how much grain he has, and is excellent at keeping his granary and his grain bin. There is no bailiff, herdsman or servant about whom the Reeve does not know something secret or treacherous; as a result, they are afraid of him 'as of the deeth'.

The Summoner is next, his face fire-red and pimpled, with narrow eyes. He has a skin disease across his black brows, and his beard (which has hair falling out of it) and he is extremely lecherous. There is, the narrator tells us, no ointment or cure, or help him to remove his pimples. He loves drinking wine which is as 'reed as blood', and eating leeks, onions and garlic. He knows how to trick someone.

Travelling with the Summoner is a noble Pardoner, his friend and his companion (in what sense Chaucer intends the word 'compeer', meaning companion, nobody knows) and the last pilgrim-teller to be described. He sings loudly 'Come hither, love to me', and has hair as yellow as wax, which hangs like flaxen from his head. He carries a wallet full of pardons in his lap, brimful of pardons come from Rome. The Pardoner is sexually ambiguous-he has a thin, boyish voice, and the narrator wonders whether he is a 'gelding or a mare' (a eunuch or a homosexual).

The narrator writes that he has told us now of the estate (the class), the array (the clothing), and the number of pilgrims assembled in this company. He then makes an important statement of intent for what is to come: he who repeats a tale told by another man, the narrator says, must repeat it as closely as he possibly can to the original teller - and thus, if the tellers use obscene language, it is not our narrator's fault.

The Host is the last member of the company described, a large man with bright, large eyes - and an extremely fair man. The Host welcomes everyone to the inn, and announces the pilgrimage to Canterbury, and decides that, on the way there, the company shall 'talen and pleye' (to tell stories and amuse themselves). Everyone consents to the Host's plan for the game, and he then goes on to set it out.

What the Host describes is a tale-telling game, in which each pilgrim shall tell two tales on the way to Canterbury, and two more on the way home; whoever tells the tale 'of best sentence and moost solas' shall have supper at the cost of all of the other pilgrims, back at the Inn, once the pilgrimage returns from Canterbury. The pilgrims agree to the Host's suggestion, and agree to accord to the Host's judgment as master of the tale-telling game. Everyone then goes to bed.

The next morning, the Host awakes, raises everyone up, and 'in a flok' the pilgrimage rides towards 'the Watering of Seint Thomas', a brook about two miles from London. The Host asks the pilgrims to draw lots to see who shall tell the first tale, the Knight being asked to 'draw cut' first and, whether

by 'aventure, or sort, or cas', the Knight draws the straw to tell the first tale. The pilgrims ride forward, and the Knight begins to tell his tale.

Analysis

The General Prologue was probably written early in the composition of the Canterbury Tales, and offers an interesting comparison point to many of the individual tales itself. Of course, it does not match up to the tales as we have them in a number of ways: the Nun's Priest and the Second Nun are not described, and, most significantly, the work as we have it does not reflect the Host's plan. For starters, the pilgrimage only seems to go as far as Canterbury (for the Parson's Tale) and only the narrator tells two tales on the way there, with all the other pilgrims telling only a single tale (and some who are described in the General Prologue not telling a tale at all).

We must, therefore, view the General Prologue with some hesitation as a comparison point to the tales themselves: it offers useful or enlightening suggestions, but they are no means a complete, reliable guide to the tales and what they mean. What the General Prologue offers is a brief, often very visual description of each pilgrim, focusing on details of their background, as well as key details of their clothing, their food likes and dislikes, and their physical features. These descriptions fall within a common medieval tradition of portraits in words (which can be considered under the technical term ekphrasis), Chaucer's influence in this case most likely coming from The Romaunt de la Rose.

Immediately, our narrator insists that his pilgrims are to be described by 'degree'. By the fact that the Knight, the highest-ranking of the pilgrims, is selected as the first teller, we see the obvious social considerations of the tale. Still, all human life is here: characters of both sexes, and from walks of life from lordly knight, or godly parson down to oft-divorced wife or grimy cook.

Each pilgrim portrait within the prologue might be considered as an archetypal description. Many of the 'types' of characters featured would have been familiar stock characters to a medieval audience: the hypocritical friar, the rotund, food-loving monk, the rapacious miller are all familiar types from medieval estates satire (see Jill Mann's excellent book for more information). Larry D. Benson has pointed out the way in which the characters are paragons of their respective crafts or types - noting the number of times the words 'wel koude' and 'verray parfit' occur in describing characters.

Yet what is key about the information provided in the General Prologue about these characters, many of whom do appear to be archetypes, is that it is among the few pieces of objective information-that is, information spoken by our narrator that we are given throughout the Tales. The tales themselves (except for large passages of the prologues and epilogues) are largely told in the words of the tellers: as our narrator himself insists in the passage. The words stand for themselves: and we interpret them as if they come from the pilgrims' mouths. What this does-and this is a key thought for interpreting the tales as a whole - is to apparently strip them of writerly license, blurring the line between Chaucer and his characters.

Thus all of the information might be seen to operate on various levels. When, for example, we find out that the Prioress has excellent table manners, never allowing a morsel to fall on her breast, how are we to read it? Is this Geoffrey Chaucer 'the author of The Canterbury Tales' making a conscious literary comparison to The Romaunt de la Rose, which features a similar character description (as it happens, of a courtesan)? Is this 'Chaucer' our narrator, a character within the Tales providing observation entirely without subtext or writerly intention? Or are these observations-supposedly innocent within the Prologue-to be noted down so as to be compared later to the Prioress' Tale?

Chaucer's voice, in re-telling the tales as accurately as he can, entirely disappears into that of his characters, and thus the Tales operates almost like a drama. Where do Chaucer's writerly and narratorial voices end, and his characters' voices begin? This self-vanishing quality is key to the Tales, and perhaps explains why there is one pilgrim who is not described at all so far, but who is certainly on the pilgrimage-and he is the most fascinating, and the most important by far: a poet and statesman by the name of Geoffrey Chaucer.

Notes

2.2 The Knight's Tale

The Knight begins his tale with the story of Theseus, a prince, who married Hippolyta, the queen of Scythia, and brought her and her sister, Emelye, back to Athens with him after conquering her kingdom of Amazons. When Theseus returned home victorious, he became aware of a company of women clad in black who knelt at the side of the highway, shrieking. The oldest of the women asked Theseus for pity. She told him that she was once the wife of King Cappaneus who was destroyed at Thebes, and that all of the other women lost their husbands. Creon, the lord of the town, had simply tossed the dead bodies of the soldiers in a single pile and refused to burn or bury them.

Theseus swore vengeance upon Creon, and immediately ordered his armies toward Thebes. Theseus vanquished Creon, and when the soldiers were disposing of the bodies they found two young knights, Arcite and Palamon, two royal cousins, not quite dead. Theseus ordered that they be imprisoned in Athens for life. They passed their time imprisoned in a tower in Athens until they saw Emelye in a nearby garden. Both fell immediately in love with her. Palamon compared her to Venus, and prayed escape from the prison; similarly, Arcite claimed that he would rather be dead than not have Emelye. The two fight over her, each calling the other a traitor.

This happened on a day in which Pirithous, a prince and childhood friend of Theseus, had come to Athens. Pirithous had known Arcite at Thebes, and at his request, Theseus set Arcite free on the promise that Arcite would never again be seen in Theseus' kingdom. He now had his freedom, but not the ability to pursue Emelye, and lamented the cruelty of fate. Palamon, however, envied Arcite, since he did now have the option of raising an army against Theseus to conquer Athens. The Knight asks which of the nobles has it worse: Arcite, who has his freedom but not access to Emelye, or Palamon, who can see Emelye but remains a prisoner?

Two years passed. After spending two years in Thebes, one night Arcite dreamt that he saw the god Mercury standing before him, bidding him to be free of hope and care, and telling him to go to Athens to relieve his grief. Arcite decided to disguise himself, return to Athens and pass unknown.

Arriving at the court, Arcite offered his services, and took a post with Emelye's steward under the name of Philostratus. Arcite worked as a page in Emelye's house and was so well loved that Theseus soon made him squire of his chamber. Meanwhile Palamon had lived for seven years in his dungeon, before, eventually, he escaped from the tower and fled the city, with the intention of disguising himself and making toward Thebes. That morning Arcite went horseback riding. In the area outside of the city, he dismounted and began to speak to himself, lamenting life without Emelye. Palamon, overhearing, leapt out and revealed himself to Arcite. Since neither had weapons, they made a vow to meet in the same place tomorrow and fight to the death over Emelye.

They returned the next day armed for battle. At the same time, and in the same place, Theseus, Hippolyta and Emelye were out hunting, and, reaching the area where Arcite and Palamon were fighting, Theseus stopped the battle. Palamon told Theseus that Arcite is the man who was banished (and that he has returned, disguised as Philostratus), while he himself is the escaped prisoner. He also told Theseus that both men love Emelye. Theseus ordered the death of both, but the queen and Emelye took pity on the two men, and begged Theseus for mercy. Considering how much they loved Emelye to risk death by not escaping to Thebes, Theseus asked them to swear that they will never make war against any realm of his. Theseus then decided that the two will wage war on each other, each with one hundred knights, in order to decide whom Emelye will marry.

Theseus commissioned the building of a stadium a mile in circumference for the duel between Arcite and Palamon. This stadium was opulent, featuring carvings and portraits as well as temples honoring Mars, Diana and Venus. When the day of the duel approached, Palamon brought Lycurgus, the king of Thrace, to fight with him, while Arcite brought Emetreus, the king of India.

The night before the duel, Palamon prayed to Venus to solace his pains of love, asking Venus (goddess of love) to let Arcite murder him if Arcite will be the one to marry Emelye. The statue of Venus shook, an omen that the goddess was listening. Emelye prayed at the shrine to Diana, the goddess

of chastity. She prayed that she could remain a maiden all her life and not be a man's lover nor wife. She prayed, moreover, for peace and friendship between Arcite and Palamon. But if it was to be her destiny to marry one against her will, she asked to have the one who wants her most. The statue of Diana shed tears of blood, another omen. Then Diana herself appeared to Emelye and told her that she will marry one of the two. Arcite prayed to Mars. He prayed for victory in battle, and the statue of Mars whispered the word "victory" to him, the third omen. Mars and Venus thus waged war upon one another, but aged Saturn found a means to satisfy both of them. He told Venus that Palamon would have his lady, but Mars would help his servant.

Theseus set the rules of the battle between the two opposing factions. He ordered that, during the war between the two sides, nobody would suffer a mortal blow. If an opponent was overcome, he was to leave the battle. The people raised their voices in exultation. The two armies were equal in prowess, age and nobility, and Arcite pursued Palamon viciously, and Palamon returned with equal severity. But Emetreus seized Palamon and pierced him with his sword. In the attempt to rescue Palamon, King Lycurgus was struck down, and then Emetreus himself was wounded. Theseus declared that Arcite had won. Venus was disappointed at the outcome, but Saturn told her that Mars was now appeased and she would receive a similar appeasement. Suddenly, as Arcite was proclaimed victorious, there was an earthquake sent by Pluto that frightened Arcite's horse, which swerved and fell, throwing off Arcite and mortally wounding him. Before he died, Arcite tells Emelye that she could have no more worthy husband than Palamon. His last word before he died was her name. Theseus, in a very long speech referred to as the "First Mover" speech, then ordered Emelye to marry Palamon after a funeral ceremony honoring Arcite: and the Knight's story finishes on a happy note.

Analysis

It is very likely that the Knight's Tale was written before the Canterbury Tales as a whole project was planned, and so it has the unusual status of being both a part of the tales as a whole, but also a separate work of literature in its own right (though the text has been adapted into the Tales–lines 875-92). It is a very free adaptation of a story by an Italian writer, Boccaccio, whom it seems clear Chaucer very much admired. Chaucer–as he regularly does – hugely compresses the story into the Tale, and adds material heavily influenced by his philosophical hero Boethius.

The Tale is undoubtedly a romance as Chaucer presents it, supposedly a true history of many hundreds of years ago told by an authoritative, high-status figure (in this case the Knight). Yet Chaucer never merely adopts a literary tradition without commenting on it, and the oddities of the Tale often lie in the way it over-stresses the traditional things expected of a romance of its genre.

For example, the question of status (raised at the end of the General Prologue when the Host–perhaps duplicitously–has the Knight picked as the first teller) and rank is immediately raised by the progression of the tale. The Knight begins not with the main characters of the tale, Arcite and Palamon, but instead, he begins at the apex of society, describing the exploits of Theseus of Athens, working downward until he reaches the less distinguished Theban soldiers.

Moreover, the tale is deeply improbable in all sorts of ways, and the situation and the moral questions it poses seem more important than the qualities of the individual characters. Characters, in fact, exist only to be moved by the events of the story: to be imprisoned and set free whenever the plot demands, or to fall in love at first sight when it is dramatically convenient. Even the characters acknowledge their lack of free will within the story. The two knights pray to Venus for a literal deus ex machine, for they are unable to control their own fate. The Knight's Tale very openly acknowledges the role of fate through the gods: Palamon leaves his fate to theology, blaming his fate on Venus, Juno and Saturn.

Arcite and Palamon as characters, then, without any real autonomy and speaking only formal, elegant laments, are virtually indistinguishable from each another. There is no information on which a reader may base an opinion on their respective virtues. Emelye is equally something of a cardboard-

Notes

cutout, rather than a fully rounded character (compare her, for example, with the garrulous, fully-individualised Wife of Bath). The Knight describes her as a typical fairy-tale maiden-though there is an interesting inversion of the usual formula in that her suitors, not her, are the ones imprisoned in a tower. She even first appears in a garden, a pastoral symbol that balances both purity and fertility.

Emelye proves a problematic character in the scheme of the story. Arcite and Palamon are prepared to fight to the death for her love, despite the fact that neither have had any significant contact with her, nor have any idea whether she would love either man. Yet Theseus accepts this code of conduct and offers the queen's sister as a prize for the two men, whom he previously had imprisoned and had threatened with death only moments before.

The Knight's Tale adheres to traditional values of chivalric, knightly honor in which there are strict codes of behavior which one must follow. This code of chivalry is not necessarily polite and decent, and Chaucer is always keen to draw attention to how unheroic such behavior seems. Within the morality of the tale, for example, Theseus' sudden decision to ransack Thebes to right a wrong is perfectly acceptable as punishment for a transgression against the honor of the dead soldiers; modern and medieval readers alike might feel somewhat differently. Finding them fighting, Theseus condemns condemns Arcite's and Palamon's actions not because they were fighting, but because they did not do so under the proper rules of a duel.

Task What characteristics of Chivalary are evident in the story?

One interpretation of the tale might therefore see Chaucer as almost parodying–showing the ridiculousness of–such masculine, chivalric codes. Or is Chaucer rather parodying the genre–romance–in which such actions are endorsed? Immediately, in this first tale, the looming question of tone hangs over the tale. Where does the Knight's voice stop and Chaucer's begin? If there is parody involved in this tale, is it supposed to sit in Chaucer's mouth, or in the Knight's? The dramatic nature of the tales themselves makes it extremely difficult to pin them down to a single, univocal interpretation.

Emelye is also the first of a series of interesting portrayals of females in the Tales. Emelye is, almost, a stereotype of a female character: though, significantly, her will is laid out as entirely separate to her actions. She does not wish to marry either of the knights, preferring a life of chastity to marriage.

Did u know? Emelye acknowledges her role as a pawn in the situation, and accepts the destiny proscribed to her by the goddess Diana and the mortal king Theseus.

The Knight, like the genre of the romance itself, has a tendency toward lush description, elaborate phrasing, and within his tale, things keep becoming displays of wealth and power. Each of the final events in the story is punctuated by great pageantry. Take, for example, the transformation of the simple duel between Arcite and Palamon into a gala event requiring the construction of a massive coliseum for two armies to wage war on one another, even bringing in the kings of two foreign nations. Other books tell the Knight's story "more playn" (1464), according to the tale, and we can quite believe it. Yet it is precisely the dressed-up chivalry of the Knight's tale that makes it very difficult to discern precisely what answer it is proposing to its key question: "What is this world? What asketh men to have?".

2.3 The Miller's Tale

2.3.1 The Miller's Prologue

After the Knight finishes telling his story, it meets with the approval of the whole company. The Host then moves to the Monk (another high-status teller) to tell "somewhat to quite with the Knyghtes tale". It is at this point that the Miller, extremely drunk, interrupts "in Pilates voys", proclaiming that he has a tale that will quit the Knight's.

The Host tries to dissuade the Miller, telling him "thou art a fool", and that he is drunk – a statement with which the Miller immediately agrees. The Miller starts to introduce a tale about how a clerk "set the cappe of" (made a fool out of) a carpenter and his wife, but is immediately interrupted by the Reeve (himself a carpenter) who tries to silence him. The Miller, though, refuses to be dissuaded by the Reeve's argument that tales should not be told about adulterous wives, claiming that

> An housbonde shal nat been inquisityf
>
> Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf.

Yet before the Miller's Tale itself begins, our narrator makes another interruption to the story's flow, repeating a sentiment he already voiced in the General Prologue: that the tale he is about to repeat is not his own, but the Miller's. Our narrator has no evil intent in rehearsing such a tale, but he must repeat all the tales told–otherwise, he will be falsifying his material.Thus, should any readers find it offensive, they should turn over the leaf and choose another tale. Men, the prologue finishes, should not "maken ernest of game"; find a serious moral in trivial things.

2.3.2 The Miller's Tale Text

A rich carpenter lived at Oxford, with his wife and a clerk, an impoverished student of astrology and constellations: this clerk was called "hende" (crafty, or cunning) Nicholas. The carpenter had recently wedded a wife, only eighteen years old, who he protected fiercely–because, as she was young and he old, he knew he might well be cuckolded.

One day, while the carpenter was at Osney, Nicholas fell to playing and teasing with this young wife, Alison, and caught her "by the queynte", telling her that he'd die for love of her and holding her hard by the hip-bones. She sprang away from him, refusing to kiss him, but he followed her, crying mercy and speaking fairly: and eventually, she agreed to sleep with him. However, the wife worried, as her husband was so jealous and protective, it would be difficult to find an opportunity–Nicholas resolved to beguile his master, and the two agreed to wait for an opportunity.

Another clerk in the parish, Absolon, who had curly, golden hair, was also mad with desire for Alison, and used to sing at her window at night-time, wooing her until he was woebegone. But, of course, there was no point in Absolon's wooing: Alison was so in love with Nicholas, that Absolon might as well go and whistle.

Meanwhile, Nicholas had come up with a plan. Nicholas told Alison to tell John (the carpenter) that he was ill, and lay in his chamber all weekend, until–on Sunday night–the carpenter sent his slave to knock on the door on check that Nicholas was in health. The slave looked through the keyhole, and seeing Nicholas' eyes gaping upward as if possessed, called to the carpenter, who–seeing Nicholas–panicked, and attributed Nicholas' state to his interest in astrology.

Notes Nicholas, he thought, had seen the secrets of God, and gone mad. Having ordered his slave to knock down Nicholas' door, the carpenter awoke Nicholas from his "trance" and the two began to speak.

Notes

Nicholas (all going exactly to his plan) swore John to secrecy, and promised to tell him of Christ's counsel. John was aghast as Nicholas told him that, according to his reading of the moon, next Monday, a flood akin to Noah's flood would drown the world in less than an hour. With the carpenter terrified, Nicholas proceeded to the next stage of his plan: that, in the manner of Noah, John was to take large wooden troughs, one for each for Nicholas, Alison and John, and hang them up in the roof (full of supplies) so that no-one can see them, sit in them, and wait. Then, when the water arrives, all John would have to do is take an axe, cut the cord, break a hole in the gable, and float away with his wife and his clerk intact.

Moreover, Nicholas continued, God had requested that, lying in their troughs on the Monday in question, nobody spoke a word-and the carpenter's and his wife's troughs should be hung far apart. The credulous carpenter instantly assented, and went off to make preparations, finding troughs and stocking up food.

Monday arrived, and, as night drew in, the three climbed up to the roof. In their troughs, the three of them prayed, and then the carpenter (probably worn out from all his business setting up the troughs) fell fast asleep, snoring. Nicholas and Alison sped down the ladder, and "withouten words mo they goon to bedde", where they remain until the "laudes" bell (a bell for a church service before daybreak) rang.

Absolon, meanwhile had got some information about John the carpenter, and, thinking that John was away from his house, went to sing to Alison and woo her at a low, hinged window which only came up to his breast height. After a first, gentle song, Alison appeared at the window and gave him short shrift-telling him that she loved somebody else, and warning him that she would "caste a ston" unless he went away. Absolon promised to go away if she would kiss him, once.

Alison tells Nicholas to be quiet and watch her: she then unlocks the window, and, as Absolon leans in to give her a kiss, she puts her naked ass out of the window, which Absolon kisses "ful savourly", feeling, as he does it, something rough and long-haired. "Tehee!" says Alison, and slams the window, and Nicholas and her openly mock Absolon from behind the window. Absolon hears it, and resolves to "quyte" the lovers.

Absolon, moving away from the window, continually says "allas!", sometimes weeping like a beaten child. By the time he arrived at a blacksmith called don Gerveys, Absolon didn't care a bean for Alison, and persuaded his friend to lend him the hot poker in the chimney. Holding it by the cold steel, Absolon returns to the carpenter's window, and knocks again, promising Alison that he has brought her a ring which his mother gave him.

Nicholas had got up "to pisse", and thought he would make the joke even funnier–pulling up the window, he put his ass out of the window for Absolon to kiss. Absolon then asked Alison to speak, so he can see where she is, and Nicholas, at this moment, lets fly a fart "as greet as it had been a thunder-dent", so loud that it almost blinds Absolon. But Absolon was ready with his hot iron, and seized his chance, branding Nicholas' arse.

Nicholas, almost dying of his burning pain, cried out for "Water!", and that cry, awoke John the carpenter from his slumber; thinking Nicholas referred to the flood "Water!", John, sitting up "withouten wordes mo", cut the cord with the axe, bringing everything crashing down from the roof, through the floors, until finally landed on the cellar floor, knocked out.

Nicholas and Alison ran out into the street, crying for attention, and the neighbors ran into look at John, who still lay swooning on the floor, pale and white, his arm broken by the huge fall. And, when he opened his mouth to explain himself, he was shouted down by Nicholas and Alison, who claimed he was mad, being frightened of something as ridiculous as Noah's flood. People laughed at his fantasy, staring into the roof of his smashed house, and turning all of his hurt into a joke–and everything that John argued to preserve his dignity was ignored. Thus ends the Miller's Tale.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. How many pilgrims are making the journey to Canterbury?
2. How many of the tales did Chaucer actually complete?
3. What weaknesses within the church do the pilgrim clergy represent?
4. Why is it appropriate that the Knight should tell the first story?
5. Which features of the romance are evident in this tale?
6. How do Arcite and Palamon come to be imprisoned?
7. What is the theme of the Knight's Tale?
8. What does Chaucer seem to be saying about marriage?
9. What basic human need motivates each of the characters?
10. What is the theme of the Miller's Tale?

Analysis

"Game" and "ernest" are two important concepts in reading the Tales representing respectively jokiness, frivolousness and fun, and seriousness, morality and meaningfulness. Yet one of the things the Miller's Tale makes clear is that it becomes very difficult to decide what is lighthearted fun and what is meaningful, moral telling. The story of John the carpenter is grounded in reality: the details of the story all make sense, and it appears to be set within a suburban, believable Oxford that Chaucer might have known. Yet the story itself is clearly a fabliau: and its sources confirm its debt to fabliau-a hugely elaborate trick, set up with huge care in the story, which snaps shut as the story ends. Immediately "realism" is juxtaposed with "fantasy".

The same problem is bequeathed directly to the reader at the end of the tale: when, after the glorious moment at which John comes crashing down through the roof, and our pleasure in Nicholas' elaborate trick stops, Chaucer suddenly focuses on John's pain. The result of the elaborate trick is an old man, lying unconscious, pale and wan, with a broken arm on his cellar floor-his house destroyed, his wife cuckolded. Is Chaucer doing precisely what the narrator tells us, at the end of the prologue, we musn't do, and making "ernest" of "game"? Maybe–and the Tales as a whole tread a careful, ambiguous line between the serious and the comic.

The same ambiguity of tone is applied to the Christian theme which runs throughout the tale. John the carpenter's plan involves floating up through the roof in his kneading tub when the flood comes; and yet the tale replaces his idealistic upward movement with a crashing downward movement, through his house to the cellar floor. Christian uplift is replaced with a rather damning fall. We might usefully compare this to the fall in discourse and in subject matter from the Knight's Tale to the Miller's Tale: a step downward for the tales themselves as a linear movement (as the Host seems to know full well) in Middle English class distinction–a noble knight to a churlish, drunken miller. Metaphorically speaking, John the carpenter isn't the only thing to come crashing down in this tale.

Is this, then, a blasphemous version of Christianity? Well, it all depends how seriously we read it. If we are offended by Absolon's devilish transformation at the end of the tale (into a blackened devil carrying a flaming iron), or if we recognise the alignment of Alison and Nicholas with Adam and Eve (and the respective falls from grace which follow), then perhaps we might view the tale as deliberately depicting sin. And yet, even though the tale itself is a comic delight-and there is a tremendous amount of pleasure to be had from reading it-the Miller's Tale is far from a negative, anti-type example of sinners in action.

Notes

Task How do all the pilgrims react to "The Knight's Tale"? Which group especially thinks it is worth remembering?

It's also instructive to note the pleasure of the trick in the Miller's Tale, and the fabliau trick rules it demonstrates. The plot within the tale is hugely clever and elaborate, studded with religious imagery: indeed, when John the Carpenter is mentioned as regularly leaving the house, you wonder why the two didn't just sleep together when he was out? The answer can only be because of the sheer pleasure in executing such a complex structure. The tale moves extremely quickly from plot point to plot point, and everyone (except - and this is significant-Alison) is outsmarted. Even ingenious Nicholas ends up wounded on the buttock. In fabliau, you are only as good as your last trick.

Language is also undergoing a fall from grace in the Miller's Tale. Summarize the tale and note how little of its action depends on words or dialogue: unlike the long, protracted speeches of the Knight's Tale, the drunken Miller deals in bodily noises. The mechanics of the tale itself twist on a series of non-verbal sounds, bodily noises and one-word exclamations: Absolon's twice knocking at the window, Alison's cry of "Tehee!" as she closes the window the first time, and Nicholas' final, cumulative cry of "Water!". "Withouten wordes mo" is a key phrase in the Canterbury Tales-marking moments at which action is more important than words. The courtly language of the Knight becomes furtive, silent stealing to bed without words in the Miller's Tale.

The degradation–or the problematization–of the whole question of language is present throughout the tales, and draws our attention to the warning the narrator gives us before the Tale itself, that he is only "rehearsing" or repeating the words of the Miller. The narrator retells us the words of the Miller, who, telling his tale, repeats the "Tehee!" and "Water!" of Alison and Nicholas. What use–what poetry–what value have these second or third hand words? What do they signify? And most importantly, how far should we read them as belonging to the Miller, to the narrator, or to Chaucer himself?

2.4 Summary

- The General Prologue was probably written early in the composition of the Canterbury Tales, and offers an interesting comparison point to many of the individual tales itself.
- It is very likely that the Knight's Tale was written before the Canterbury Tales as a whole project was planned.
- The Tale is undoubtedly a romance as Chaucer presents it, supposedly a true history of many hundreds of years ago told by an authoritative, high-status figure.
- The Knight's Tale adheres to traditional values of chivalric, knightly honor in which there are strict codes of behavior which one must follow.

2.5 Keywords

Crusade : Any of a series of medieval military expenditions made by European to recover the Holy land of Muslims.

Cuckold : The husband of an adulteress regarded as an object of derision.

Piteous : Deserving.

Wooing : Try to gain the love of a woman.

Notes

2.6 Review Questions

1. How is each man released from prison?
2. Why is Arcite not recognized when he is employed in Emelye's household?
3. What happens to prevent the man who won Emelye's hand from marrying her?
4. Who does the Host ask to tell the next tale?
5. Who interrupts the Host's request?
6. How does the Miller respond when the Host tries to talk him out of interrupting?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. There are 30 characters including Chaucer and the Host.
2. There are 23 tales, two of which are fragments.
3. The clergy represent corruption, greed and abuse of power in the church.
4. He is the highest ranking member of the group.
5. The romantic features of this tale are: nobel characters, ideal love, romantic past as setting and trial by combat.
6. They are discovered, half-dead on the battle field at Thebes.
7. The theme of this tale is ideal love and chivalrous conduct.
8. Older men should know better than to marry young girls.
9. Sexual appetite is the motivational human need in this tale.
10. The theme of this tale is may be "youth and age are often at odds".

2.7 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp
http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

Unit 3: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-II

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

3.1 The Reeve's Tale

3.1.1 The Reeve's Prologue

3.1.2 The Reeve's Tale Text

3.2 The Cook's Tale

3.2.1 The Cook's Prologue

3.2.2 The Cook's Tale Text

3.3 Summary

3.4 Keywords

3.5 Review Questions

3.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the Reeve's tale
- Explain the Cook's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of the Reeve's and the Cook's tale.

Introduction

A miller named Symkyn lives on some property by a bridge not far from the town of Cambridge. (A miller is a person who grinds corn and grain into flour.) He likes to fight, carries multiple weapons, and enjoys wrestling. Most people in the town avoid conflict with him, even though the regularly cheats his customers by stealing corn from them or "padding" their sacks of flour with less-expensive substances. Symkyn has married the illegitimate daughter of a local cleric, a woman who's proud because of her expensive upbringing in a nunnery. When the manciple of a school in Canterbury that regularly grinds its corn and wheat with Symkyn gets sick, the miller takes the opportunity to cheat the school even more than usual. Two students there, Aleyn and John, ask their headmaster to allow them to go have the corn ground the next time it needs grinding, convinced they can prevent the miller from cheating them. The headmaster agrees, and the two set out on their journey by horseback.

The Cook is mightily entertained by the story the Reeve told and wants to tell a funny story of his

own. However, the Host reminds the Cook, who is named Hodge of Ware, that he owes the company a good tale since food he prepares so often makes travelers ill. Good-naturedly, the Cook begins his story. Perkin the Reveler is apprenticed to a guild of food merchants. He is a wild and fun-loving youth, particularly fond of gambling and womanizing. Both vices require money which he lifts from his master's safe.

3.1 The Reeve's Tale

3.1.1 The Reeve's Prologue

The company laughs at the foolish story of Nicholas and Absolon. But the narrator notes that Oswald the Reeve alone is angry because he was a carpenter, like John, the butt of the joke in the Miller's Tale. The Reeve then speaks, claiming that, despite his age, he still cunning, and that the qualities of boasting, lying, anger and greed pertain particularly to the elderly. The Host interrupts this rather bitter monologue, pushing the Reeve to tell his tale if he is to speak at all. The Reeve then promises to "answere" and to some extent "sette the Miller's howve" ("set his hood"–make a fool out of him). The Miller has scornfully told a tale, the Reeve continues, about how a carpenter was tricked. The Reeve resolves to "quit" the Miller's Tale.

3.1.2 The Reeve's Tale Text

At Trumpington, near Cambridge, there was a brook upon which stood a mill. The miller who lived there wore ostentatious clothing and could play the bagpipes, wrestle and fish. He also was heavily armed: carrying a "panade" (a cutlass) in his belt, a "joly popper" (small dagger) in his pouch, and a "Sheffeld thwitel" (a Sheffield knife) in his trousers. Bald as an ape, with a round face and flattened nose, this miller's name was Symkyn, and he was a dishonest thief, cheating money out of King's Hall, a Cambridge college, and stealing meal and corn.

His wife came from a noble family, and she was as haughty as ditch-water - "stinking with pride" as the OED has it. The couple had a twenty year-old daughter, and a son who was only six months old and lay in his cradle. The daughter was a large girl with a pug nose, broad buttocks and high, round breasts (though, the narrator is at pains to point out, she did have nice hair).

Two Cambridge students, John and Aleyn, received permission from the master of the college to see the corn ground at the mill-and resolved not to let the dishonest miller cheat them out of even half a grain of corn. The two clerks arrived at the mill, and greeted Symkyn, telling him they were there to grind their corn and take it back to the college. While they ground the corn in the mill, Symkyn crept outside, found the clerks' horse, and set it loose.

Their cornmeal ground and bagged into sacks, the clerks stepped outside to discover that their horse had run away; Aleyn, almost out of his mind with frustration, forgot all about the corn. The miller's wife claimed that the horse had run off to the fen with some wild horses, and the two gullible clerks ran off toward the fen. With them out of the picture, the miller took half a bushel of their flour, and told his wife to go and make a loaf of bread out of it, satisfied with himself for outwitting the clerks. Meanwhile, the two clerks ran up and down, spending hours chasing their horse, until, at almost night-time, they caught him in a ditch.

Returning, weary and wet, the two arrived at the mill, finding the miller sitting by the fire, and they begged for his help. Though my house is narrow, the miller joked, I'm sure you'll be able to make it seem bigger: because clerks can "by arguments make a place / A myle brood of twenty foot of space" (4123-4). Symkyn let the two clerks stay the night, providing ale and bread and a roast goose for dinner.

Symkyn then made them a bed up in his own room, only ten or twelve feet from his own bed. His daughter also had a bed in the same chamber. At midnight, the party had finished eating, and went

to bed, the miller's head shining with the alcohol he had drunk. The miller and his wife got into bed, placing the baby's cradle at the foot of their bed, and the clerks and the daughter followed suit. Shortly, the miller began to snore. Before much longer, his wife and daughter were joining in, and the noise was such that you could have heard it two furlongs hence.

Aleyn, kept awake by the snoring, prodded John (next to him in the bed), and resolved to have sex with the miller's daughter, in revenge for the corn that he felt sure the miller had stolen from them. John warned him not to wake the miller–but Aleyn didn't care for his advice, and proceeded straight to the daughter's bed, where he very quickly achieved his aim: and continued to achieve it all night.

John, alone in his bed, felt jealous of Aleyn (still having sex with the miller's daughter) and decided to get some of the action for himself-taking the baby's cradle from the foot of the miller's bed and placing it at the foot of his own. Shortly after this, the miller's wife woke up to go "for a pisse" (4215), and, coming back into the bedroom, felt around in the dark for the cradle – of course, it wasn't at the foot of her bed, but at the foot of John's. As she climbed into the bed, John jumped on her, and gave her, "so myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yore" ("the sort of good time she hadn't had for ages"). The two clerks thus lay happily occupied until the third cock crew.

Leaving the bed as the morning dawned, Aleyn was told by the miller's daughter the location of the loaf of bread made from the corn the miller had stolen. Aleyn crept back to the bed, feeling for the cradle, and finding it with his hand. Thinking that the cradle signified the miller's bed, Aleyn thought he had the wrong bed, and so continued on toward the next bed, and, finding no cradle at its foot, crept in beside the miller. Taking him by the neck, he spoke to him softly - telling "John" to wake up and make ready to leave, as he had been copulating with the miller's daughter all night.

Task What advantages does Symkyn's daughter have that make her a desirable bride?

"Ye, false harlot, hast?" said the miller, catching Alayn by his Adam's apple and punching him in the face, causing blood to run down Aleyn's chest. The two men rolled, fighting, on the floor like two pigs in a poke, up one minute and down the next, until the miller tripped on a stone and fell backwards onto his sleeping wife.

The miller's wife, thinking a devil had visited her, began to cry out in panic to God, and to her husband to wake up and help her, as she thought the two clerks were fighting. With that, John awoke, and tried to find a stick to help her–but the wife, who knew the room better than John, found it first. Seeing a "litel shymeryng of a light" reflecting the moon's light, and thinking it Aleyn's nightcap, the miller's wife brought down the staff hard onto the miller's bald skull. "Harrow! I dye" he cried, and fell down. The clerks gave him a beating, dressed themselves, took their horse, their corn and their loaf of bread, and escaped.

Notes The Reeve makes a final proverb at the end of his tale, "One who does evil should not expect good", before concluding with God's blessing on the company, adding finally that he has now "quyt the Millere in my tale".

Analysis

From the beginning of its prologue, The Reeve's Tale takes the idea of "quitting" and puts it center stage, changing altogether the dynamic of the first fragment. As the Knight's Tale was "repaid" and "replayed" in the Miller's Tale (both about two men in love with the same woman) on a different

status level, and as the Miller parodied and highlighted the idealized nature of the Knight's Tale by replacing its romance setting with gritty realism, so the Reeve's Tale performs a similar treatment on the Miller's.

It is clear from the moment that the angry Reeve quietly fumes among all the jollity after the Miller's Tale that he is of rather a severe disposition, and there is nothing of the warmth and good humor of the Miller's Tale: there is no sign of an elaborate, enjoyable fabliau trick like Nicholas' elaborate (and, when you consider that John the Miller goes out to the country regularly anyway, rather unnecessary) plan. What the Reeve narrates is brutal, animal, copulation:

> Withinne a while this John the clerk up leep,
>
> And on this goode wyf he leith on soore.
>
> So myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yore;
>
> He priketh harde and depe as he were mad.

There is a harder, more vengeful quality to this "quitting" tale, and, again, our attention is drawn to the anger of the teller in the Canterbury framework–how far does the bile of the vengeful Reeve seep into the telling of the story as Chaucer repeats it to us? Larry Benson supposes the Reeve's Tale, like the Miller's, based directly on a French fabliau, since two surviving fabliaux offer close parallels to Chaucer's story, and yet the tone of the tale is quite different from that of the Miller's.

What the Reeve's Tale undoubtedly demonstrates is Seth Lerer's observation that language becomes gradually broken down, gradually devalued as the first fragment progresses. Where the Knight's courtly, formal language descended to the bodily noises of the Miller's Tale, language in the Reeve's Tale seems replaced altogether for the most part-by action. Symkyn's wife and daughter are not persuaded into bed, or even seduced slightly, but just leapt upon. The denouement of the tale is a dumbshow played out in the dark: silent sex, moving cradles, and, eventually a brawl involving most of the participants on the floor. The graceful, formal, rhetoric of Theseus' "First Mover" speech already seems a long way away.

Note too that no-one-and this is different even to the Miller's Tale-actually does any verbal persuading in words in the Reeve's Tale. The plot of the tale consists largely of moving things around: beginning with the release of the clerks' horse, followed by the hiding of their loaf of bread by the Miller, and then, of course, the various movements of the cradle at the bottom of the bed. Instead of words, we have another form of signification, in which objects carry certain meanings. The cradle, for example, (a neat symbol, considering what happens in the bed it delineates!) is used to dictate which bed is the miller's and which not. The meaning and the value of words and speaking is central to the Tales as a whole - and language in The Knight's Tale became verbal exclamations in The Miller's Tale, and, in The Reeve's Tale, is replaced by simple, physical signposts.

Note too that the two clerks speak in a Northern dialect of Middle English, which might be seen to disintegrate the formality of the language even further: Chaucer, of course, claiming to repeat exactly the words in which someone told the tale, meticulously transcribes the dialect into the direct speech of the clerks.

"The feend is on me falle" (4288) the miller's wife cries out as the miller trips and falls onto her, and the idea of a fall–from grace, from the ceiling in a kneading trough, or from a horse – is key to the final twists of each of the Canterbury Tales told thus far. In a more metaphorical sense, too, we can see that the idea of man's fall from paradise is replayed to some extent in the move from the romantic Knight's Tale to the bawdy, human tales of the Miller and Reeve: it is a post-lapserian, "real" world we are presented with.

One final question is the question of justice. How far is the justice delivered on Symkyn deserved– how far is it funny, how far a necessary justice, and how far is it trickery gone too far? Symkyn is struck out cold by his wife at the end of the tale, and yet Chaucer carefully includes the detail of the clerks beating him even when he lies unconscious. Do we laugh at this, or recoil from it? Whose

Notes

side are we on? Deceivers will be deceived: bad people should not expect good things, the Reeve tells us as his moral. But this simplistic justice doesn't play out so simply within his tale: and the subversion and complication of ideas of justice will only continue through the Tales as a whole.

3.2 The Cook's Tale

3.2.1 The Cook's Prologue

Roger of Ware, the Cook, claps the Reeve on the back "for joye". Delighted with the way Symkyn the miller had received his comeuppance in the tale, the Cook then promises a tale of his own, despite the fact that he is only a "povre man" (a poor man). The Host answers, granting Roger the next tale. But he adds "looke that it be good", and comments on Roger's tendency to draw the gravy out of unsold pies, and resell pies that have already been reheated twice in his shop, full of flies.

The Host's conclusion incites Roger the Cook to tell a story "in game" (in jest, in fun).. Roger agrees, and, reminding Harry Bailly (the Host) not to be angry, particularly because his tale is about a "hostileer" (pub-owner, like the Host himself), he begins his tale.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. How does the Miller, Symkyn, parallel the Miller on the pilgrimage?
2. How is Symkyn paid back by the clerics for his cheating?
3. What was the reaction of the other pilgrims to the tale told by the Miller?
4. What qualities does the Reeve say characterize old men?
5. How does the infant in the cradle function in this story?

3.2.2 The Cook's Tale Text

Once an apprentice lived in "our city" (perhaps "Ware" in Hertfordshire – the town the Cook is from) and his craft was selling food. He was a short man, with a dark complexion and black hair–and he was an excellent dancer: so good, that people called him "Perkin Reveller" (to "revel" is to dance and have a good time).

He loved the tavern better than his shop, and, whenever there was a procession in Cheapside, he would run out of the shop to enjoy himself and dance, forgetting about work. He often stole from his master, with whom he lived until he had finished his apprenticeship. However, one day, his master sent for him, and quoting the proverb "It is better to take the rotten apple out of the bag than to have it rot all the other apples", decided to get rid of him.

Now this jolly apprentice had his leave, and could riot all night if he so pleased–and eventually, he found board with a companion of his own sort: who loved dice, and reveling, and pleasure. This companion had a wife who, for the sake of appearances only, kept a shop–and had sex for a living. Thus–abruptly–ends the Cook's Tale.

Analysis

Thus ends the first fragment of the Canterbury Tales with a tale that breaks off before it has really gets anywhere - and the real question is whether the tale is deliberately left unfinished by Chaucer, whether he intended to return to it, or whether we have just lost some of the manuscript. There are no definite answers, unfortunately, and critics have argued for all three positions.

Notes

That said, there are a few interesting things about the tale as we have it. Firstly, Roger of Ware seems to have been a real person who lived at the same time as Chaucer. This lends a whole new aspect to the Canterbury Tales, if we consider that Chaucer might have populated his pilgrimage with real people, whom his audience might have recognized. The whole question, raised already in other tales, of reality verses fiction, takes on a deeper level when we consider that Chaucer is not the only pilgrim to have a dual existence-in the real world and within the fictional one.

Did u know? Might this tale be in some way a parody or a joke at the real Roger's expense? It's very possible, but impossible to prove.

Seth Lerer has persuasively argued that–like many other of Chaucer's works, including "The House of Fame", and "The Legend of Good Women"–there is a very real possibility that the Cook's Tale might have been left deliberately unfinished. It is, Professor Lerer argues, a tale which breaks off just at the point where we understand what sort of tale it is to be – a grim, gritty tale about a prostitute and a drunken, good-for-nothing apprentice. The trajectory from the formal, fictionalized, stylish romance of the Knight's Tale, down through the fabliaux of the Miller and Reeve hits rock-bottom with a realistic tale about a real Cook and animal copulation in exchange for money. We don't hear the Cook's Tale told: but we know all too well what sort of thing is to come next-and so language disintegrates completely at the end of the First Fragment. Formal language was replaced by bodily noises in the Miller's Tale, language was replaced by action in the Reeve's Tale, and now language stops altogether. The whole project of the Tales comes to a dead standstill.

3.3 Summary

- A miller named Symkyn lives on some property by a bridge not far from the town of Cambridge.
- The cook is mightily entertained by the story the Reeve told and wants to tell a funny story of his own.
- The miller's wife, thinking a devil had visited her, began to cry out in panic to God, and to her husband to wake up.
- The Reeve's Tale takes the idea of "quitting" and puts it center stage, changing altogether the dynamic of the first fragment.
- Symkyn's wife and daughter are not persuaded into bed, or even seduced slightly, but just leapt upon.
- Roger of Ware, the Cook, claps the Reeve on the back "for joye".

3.4 Keywords

Illegitimate : A child born of parents not lawfully married to each other.

Vice : A metal tool with movable jaws which are used to hold an object firmly in place while work is done on it.

Vengeful : Seeking to harm someone in return for a preceived injury.

Dialect : A form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region.

Grim : Very serious or gloomy.

Notes

3.5 Review Questions

1. What features of human nature are exaggerated in the Reeve's tale?
2. What elements of the fabliau are present in the Reeve's tale?
3. How does the Reeve pay the Miller back with this story?
4. Why was the Miller's tale so offensive to the Reeve?
5. How does Perkin fund his partying?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. The pilgrim Miller is loud and boastful, he is also dishonest. Symkyn has the same characteristics.
2. One of them has sex with his wife while the other sleeps with his virgin daughter.
3. They all find it very funny.
4. The Reeve says old men characterized by boasting, anger, lying and covetousness.
5. The infant is the cradle is used to confuse Symkyn's wife and ultimately confuses one of the young men, as well.

3.6 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp
http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

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Unit 4: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-III

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

4.1 The Man of Law's Tale

4.1.1 Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale

4.1.2 Prologue of the Man of Law's Tale

4.1.3 Man of Law's Tale Text

4.1.4 Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale

4.2 The Wife of Bath's Tale

4.2.1 Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale

4.2.2 The Words between the Summoner and the Friar

4.2.3 The Wife of Bath's Tale Text

4.3 Summary

4.4 Keywords

4.5 Review Questions

4.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and introduction to the man of law's tale
- Explain the prologue and text of the wife of bath's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of the man of law's and wife of bath's tale.

Introduction

In the prologue to *The Man of Law's* tale, there is a reference to stories Chaucer has already published in The Legend of Good Women. This leads to commentary about the nature of a story as something told rather than as something that happened. It also presents the medieval notion that stories are something like a commodity which can be used up. In other words, there is a limited number of plots and most of the good stories have already been told. Actually, Chaucer will contradict this notion in *The Canterbury Tales* by rearranging incidents and characters to create vigorously new stories. Because several elements of this prologue do not seem to fit what follows, many critics believe that the Man of

Notes

Law was originally intended to be the first of the travelers to tell his story. This would account for the very literary nature of the prologue. The extreme wordiness and the rambling nature of the Man of Law's introduction certainly do fit the character who is described in the General Prologue as a very pompous and successful lawyer. It would be natural for such a man to use elaborate language and to talk in circles. By this time, the reader has noticed that many of *The Canterbury Tales* relate to themes examining the nature of love and the nature of marriage. This story of Constance continues in that vein, extolling the virtues of the good wife through extreme tribulation. Unlike the women in the fabliau tales, all of whom are sexually "easy," Constance is chaste and pure. The men who try to steal her virtue are all killed.

The Wife of Bath tells the travelers that she has buried five husbands and has lived in the married state since she was 12 years old. Furthermore, she is now looking for her sixth husband. For these reasons, she considers herself an expert on the subject of matrimony. Before telling her story, the Wife feels compelled to defend her numerous marriages. In a lengthy monologue, she counters the religions arguments against multiple marriages. For instance, she says, although God and St. Paul recommend chastity as a perfect state, neither of them expressly forbid marriage. Since she is not perfect and has no desire to be, she personally prefers being married as she has an enormous appetite for sexual activity. In any case, she says, God calls people to Him in many ways: He calls her to marriage. Continuing the argument, the Wife adds that God would not have given men and women sexual organs if He did not intend for them to be used. The good Wife has learned to use her sexual organs to their best advantage, which is, in her opnion, as instruments with which to control her husbands. The Pardoner interrupts to say that he was about to marry, but now that he has listened to the Wife of Bath, he is not so sure he wants to volunteer to be controlled in the way she is describing. The Wife tells him to keep listening.

4.1 The Man of Law's Tale

4.1.1 Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale

The Host, realizing that time is moving on, reminds the pilgrims that, while lost cattle can be found, lost time never returns. Addressing the Man of Law (a lawyer, in modern terms) in a mock-legal way, the Host asks him to tell the next tale, and "stonden in this cas at my juggement" (a joke, for the Host, of course, is to judge which tale is the best).

"Host", the Man of Law, replies, "To breke forward is nat myn entente", and reiterating that he does not break agreements, agrees to tell the tale. But, the Man of Law continues, "I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn" (I have no suitable tale now to tell [say]), because Chaucer–excellent at metre and at coming up with clever rhymes – has already told them all in one book or another. The Man of Law then recites a little list of Chaucer's (actual!) works so far: Ceyx and Alcione (in The Book of the Duchess), and the Legend of Good Women–noting that Chaucer has never told a tale about wicked Canacee, who sinfully had an incestuous relationship with her own brother. Nor will the Man of Law tell a tale about her either.

"I speke in prose", the Man of Law continues, juxtaposing himself with the poet, Chaucer, and then with a good cheer begins his tale.

4.1.2 Prologue of the Man of Law's Tale

The Prologue begins by lamenting the condition of poverty; it makes a person steal, beg or borrow for money, it makes a person blame Christ, and it makes a person jealous of his neighbor. If you are poor, the Prologue continues, your brother hates you, and all your friends fly from your side. The Prologue then finally addresses "rich marchauntz", who are always happy, because they are always rich – before the Man of Law's personal voice seems to segue in, adding that he would be without a tale to tell, had he not heard a tale from a merchant, many years ago.

4.1.3 The Man of Law's Tale Text

Notes

(I) In Syria there dwelt a company of wealthy traders who made a journey to Rome. After a certain time there, they heard of the beauty of Constance, the emperor's daughter, renowned equally for her virtue, her goodness and her beauty. When they had seen her themselves, the merchants returned to Syria, and reported to the sultan, who was immediately taken with lust and wonder for Constance.

The sultan met with his advisors and told them of his intent, but they could conceive of no way that he could marry Constance, for no Christian emperor would allow his daughter to marry a Muslim. "Rather than I lese / Custance, I wol be cristned" (Rather than I lose / Constance, I will be christened) answered the sultan, and, insisting that his baronage were christened with him, the sultan set about having his court christened.

The Roman Emperor heard of the sultan's desire, and agreed to it, organizing a huge amount of pomp and circumstance for the occasion. The day arrived for Constance to depart, and everyone prepared themselves. But Constance, overcome with sorrow, arose from bed and dressed to depart, knowing that there was no other way things could be.

It is no wonder, the narrator comments, that she wept, considering that she was being sent to a foreign country, away from her friends, to be married to someone she had never met. Constance then addressed her father, sad to leave him and go to the "Barbre nacioun" (pagan land), hoping that she would fulfill Christ's behest, continuing

I, wrecche woman, no fors though I spille! (I am just a wretched woman, and it doesn't matter if I die)

Wommen are born to thralldom and penance, (women are born to slavery and suffering)

And to been under mannes governance. (and to live under men's governing)

Constance was brought to the ship, and desperately trying to put on a brave face, sailed away.

Meanwhile, the Sultan's mother, "welle of vices" (a well of vice), who knew her son's intention, called her counsellers to her and told them that she would rather die than renounce Mohammed's law (and Islam). Each man swore to live and die with her, and she instructed them to be baptized as her son had ordered ("Cooold water shal nat greve us but a lite!")

The first part of the tale ends with a damning of the Sultanesse, the "roote of iniquitee", as the Sultan agrees to do her the honor of having the Christians to feast at her table.

(II) The Christians arrived in Syria with a great and solemn crowd, and, after many celebrations, the time came for all of the Christian folk, along with the Sultan's entourage, to feast at the Sultanesse's house. The tale breaks off to mourn "sodeyn wo, that evere art successour / To worldly blisse" (sudden woe, which is always the successor of worldly bliss) before revealing that every one of the Christians and the Sultan were knifed and cut to pieces at the table. There was now in Syria no-one who had converted to Christianity–only Constance survived.

The Sultanesse's men took Constance and put her in a ship without a rudder, bidding her to learn to sail out of Syria and back to Italy. She had a certain amount of treasure on board, and the men had supplied her with food and with clothes-and forth she sailed across the sea. Constance blessed herself and said a prayer to Christ's cross. At this point the story breaks back to narrative again, and the Man of Law (or Chaucer) raises the question of why Constance was not also killed at the feast– answering it with another question: who saved Daniel in the lion's den? Christian God is the answer to both.

The ship finally crashed on the shores of Northumberland. The warden of a nearby castle found Constance and gave her shelter, but she refused to reveal her identity. He and his wife, Dame Hermengyld, were pagans, but Constance soon secretly converted the wife to Christianity. In this heathen land, Christians could only practice their faith in secret. While walking on the beach,

Notes

Constance, Hermengyld and her husband came upon a blind Christian, who identified her without his eyes. Although Hermengild feared that her husband would reproach her for attempting the conversion, this miracle converted him too to Christianity.

The warden was not the lord of the castle. Instead, it was Alla, the king of Northumberland. A young knight, influenced by Satan, fell in love with Constance, but she would not return her favors. In an attempt to exact revenge upon her, he broke into the bedchamber where Constance and Dame Hermengyld slept, slit Hermengyld's throat and placed the knife beside Constance. Soon after the warden came home with Alla and found his wife murdered. Taking her before King Alla, who was told all the circumstances of Constance's arrival in Northumberland, the false knight (who killed Hermengyld) insisted that Constance had done the murder.

The people spoke out on her behalf, unable to believe that Constance had done the crime; and this provoked the king to inquire further into the circumstances of what had happened. Constance fell to her knees and prayed, looking around her for help. "Now hastily do fecche a book", King Alla commanded, deciding that, if the knight swore on the book that Constance was responsible, he would think carefully about his decision. A book was brought, and, the knight swore on it that Constance was guilty - at that time, a hand struck him down on the neck-bone, and he fell down like a stone, both of his eyes bursting out of his face.

Witnessing this miracle, the king–"and many another in that place"–was converted to Christianity., and decided to take Constance for his wife. But, who was upset about this wedding but Donegild, the knight's mother? She thought her heart had broken in two. In the meantime, the couple were wedded, and Constance gave birth to a boy, named Mauricius, while Alla was away in Scotland fighting. A messenger, taking the news to the king, was forestalled by the queen who insisted he stayed with her that night, and, while he was asleep, replaced his letters with forged ones. Her letters claimed that Constance's baby was foul and wicked; and when Alla wrote back that he vowed to love the child regardless, Donegild replaced his letter with an order to banish Constance and her child from the land on the same boat from which they came.

(III) When Alla returned home, he learned what had happened and murdered his mother for her cruelty, and for being a traitor. But Constance had already set sail, and washed up in another heathen land, where the warden's steward came on board her ship, telling her that he would be her lover whether she liked it or not. Her child cried, and Constance cried also; but the Virgin Mary came to her aid, and, in the struggle that ensued, the steward fell overboard and drowned in the sea.

Returning to Syria, the emperor of Rome had sent an army, hearing of the slaughter of Christians by the sultaness, and, having burnt, slain and avenged themselves on the heathen people, this army was now returning homeward to Rome. The senator in charge of the army met Constance in her ship, and, not knowing who she was, brought her home to Rome, where she stayed for a "longe tyme".

King Alla, having slain his mother, had come to Rome to receive his penance and seek Christ's forgiveness for the wickedness he had performed. The rumor spread through Rome of how Alla was to come in pilgrimage, and this senator came to do him reverence. Constance's son went in the entourage of the senator to feast with King Alla.

The child stood at the feast, looking into the king's face; Alla then asked the senator whose the child was. "A mooder he hath", replied the senator, "but fader hath he noon", and told him the story of how the child was found. Remembering Constance's face, and seeing the resemblance in her child's face, Alla sped from the table as soon as he could, debating with himself about the hallucination he thought he was having. But afterwards, the senator sent for Constance, and, when Alla saw his wife, he wept, because it had come true. Constance stood as dumb as a tree, stiff with emotion, when she remembered his unkindness: which he soon explained had not been of his doing. When all was explained, they kissed a hundred times, and were blissfully happy.

The Emperor had granted that King Alla could dine with him; and, as she saw her father in the street, Constance laid down at his needs, and explained to him who she was. There was such joy between the three of them that it cannot be described.

Later, Constance's child Maurice was made Emperor by the Pope, but, the narrator reiterates, "Of Custance is my tale specially". Constance and Alla came to England to live in joy and in peace, but sadly, only a year after they had been reunited, Death took King Alla from the world. Constance, at the very end of the tale, widowed, makes her way again to Rome, to find her father and praise God.

4.1.4 Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale

"This was a thrify tale for the nones!" proclaims the Host, happy with the Man of Law's tale, before turning to the "Parisshe Priest" to tell the next tale. The Parson then rebukes the Host for swearing blasphemously, only to be mocked in turn by the Host as a "Jankin" (a derisive name for a priest) and a "Lollard" (a heretic). The Host, announcing that the "Lollard" will do some preaching, is interrupted by the Shipman, who objects to the idea of the Parson glossing the gospel and teaching. He promises a tale which will "clynk" like a merry bell, and wake up all the company. But, the Shipman continues, there will be no philosophy or legal matters in his tale (unlike in the Man of Laws)–"ther is but litel Latyn in my mawe!" (there is only a little bit of Latin in my stomach").

Task State the moral of the Man of Law's tale.

Analysis

There's another moment at the very start of the Man of Law's Prologue, in which the boundary between fiction and reality once again seems extremely blurred: the "Geffrey Chaucer" who exists as a character on the Canterbury pilgrimage is ascribed the bibliography of the Chaucer we are reading by the Man of Law, who cites works we know that the "real" Chaucer actually wrote. Once again, the Tales pretend to a real, documentary status, as if they are dramatizing or merely reporting word for word true events, and real people–and our narrator, Chaucer, seems to elide the fictional world with the reader's world.

The Man of Law, then, a "lawyer" is someone concerned with the laws and rules that hold in place the real world, and–at least, so the General Prologue tells us–he knows by heart all the lines of the common law: "every statu koude he pleyn by rote". Carolyn Dinshaw, the excellent feminist critic, has written that the Man of Law is indeed "of law", made up of law, his head filled up with laws; and moreover, she reads the tale of Constance as asserting the status quo of Chaucer's world at the time the tale was written.

Women, Dinshaw argues, were a matter of business in the middle ages, and–particularly as the marriage of a daughter could produce a strong link between two merchants or families–children were an important financial asset. Constance, then, first appearing in the tale as a tale told by merchants, is effectively sold forth by her father; the marriage is actually dealt with as if it were a business deal. The Prologue to the tale tells us that the Man of Law even heard this tale from a merchant: and it is not a huge leap to make from the business of merchants, trading goods back and forward across the sea, to Constance, sent from Rome to Syria, to Northumberland, to another heathen land, and eventually back to Rome. Constance, in other words, serves as "goods", saleable, valuable, and whose value, appropriately, remains constant.

Dinshaw then relates the tale as a whole to that end of the Chaucer bibliography the Man of Law recites in the prologue: the final lines where he disdains to tell a tale concerning incest. The Man of Law's Tale is indeed full of contradictions: in Dinshaw's words.

Notes

"He promises to tell a tale in prose, for example, but instead we get a poem in rime royal. The "poverte" Prologue seems to have only the barest, most expedient relation to the Tale itself…. Most puzzling of them all is the Man of Law's specific insistence, on the one hand, that he will not tell a tale of incest, and his choice, on the other hand, of a narrative whose motivation in well-known analogues is, in fact, incest..."

The critic Margaret Schlauch has suggested persuasively that in all of the sources to the Man of Law's tale, Constance's father makes sexual demands upon his daughter, and Dinshaw wonders whether Constance might be escaping from a father with incestuous desires. What, we might ask, is the relevance of this incest theme to the idea of Constance as a mercantile pawn?

Levi-Strauss has the answer. If marriage (and the marital sex it makes permissible) is a pawn in a merchant's transaction, and the social order is maintained through trading women and trading marriage, then forbidding incest is the best way to maintain that order. For a daughter–a father's mercantile asset–is no longer an asset in circulation if the father sleeps with her himself.

Did u know? Incest breaks down the idea of a woman as something to be traded: breaks down, in short, the law.

Dinshaw's interpretation is a fascinating one, and one which ties together the prologue and the tale, as well as some of the key notions explored about female identity in the Tales: (*i*) the idea of the woman as something to be traded, as merchandise, (*ii*) the idea of a patriarchal society keen to keep women "in circulation", and (*iii*) the idea of the woman as duplicitous and evil, as presented by the two malicious mothers. What it misses, however, is the over-riding religious nature of the tale; and the good fortune visited on Constance (herself, literally a child of Rome) for maintaining her Christian faith.

Yet Constance is not simply merchandise. Chaucer's–and the Man of Law's tale–also keeps "Constance", (or "a Constance", in precisely the way that "Geffrey" is "a Chaucer") in circulation; within the context of the tale-telling game, it uses Constance's story as a potential avenue for profit. There is an interesting moment early in the first part of the tale when Constance is described as "pale", as if, pre-marriage, she is white, blank, hardly visible. The tale itself dresses Constance-clothes her, and makes her palatable to an audience in order to exchange her-and remember that "text", "textile" and "cloth" (a major piece of merchandise in the Middle Ages) have shared linguistic roots.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. What concession does the Sultan of Syria make in order to obtain the hand of constance in marriage?
2. How does constance end up a widow landing on the coast of Britain?
3. What type of wife is constance entended to represent?
4. How does this contrast with the wives in the preceding stories?
5. What device is employed extensively in the structure of the tale?

Perhaps part of the reason that the tale is the "Man of Law's" and not the "Lawyer's" is precisely to emphasize the fact that Constance, exchanged by men for profit within the tale, is also being exchanged by a **Man** within the tale-telling framework. The Man of Law and Chaucer, by writing

Constance's story, contribute to the way she is exchanged and re-presented as a feminine symbol within it. Writing a woman is to make her the creation of a man; an idea worth emphasizing before the next tale–the Wife of Bath's, which takes this idea several stages further-begins.

4.2 The Wife of Bath's Tale

4.2.1 Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale

"Experience", even if no written authorities existed in the world, "is right ynogh for me". Thus begins the voice of the Wife of Bath. She has certainly had "experience", and is keen to justify it against biblical authority. She has had five husbands and justifies it in scripture: Christ never taught that people should only be married once, the Bible says "go forth and multiply", and Solomon had more than one wife. The Wife's husbands, picked out by their "chestes" and "nether purs", have all been good men, and she is looking forward to the sixth. She also points out that Jesus never lays down a law about virginity, and essentially states that we have the parts for sex and should use them as such: "they were nat maad for noght".

Scripture, the Wife points out, can be interpreted "bothe up and doun"–you can argue that genitals are for purgation of urine, or to tell the female from the male, and for nothing else. The Wife then states again that she will "use myn instrument" whenever her husband decides he wants to "paye his dette". Her husband, the Wife continues, shall be both her "dettour and my thral" (debtor and slave) and that she would mark it on his flesh.

At this point, the Pardoner interrupts, claiming he was about to marry a wife and that the Wife has put him off–and she advises him to listen to her tale before making a judgement, and looks like beginning it, before going off on another tangent, silencing the Pardoner altogether.

Three of the Wife's husbands were good, and two were bad: the three were good, rich and old (and impotent!) and they gave the Wife all their land, which resulted in her withholding sex from them in order to get exactly what she wanted. Women, the Wife continues, can lie and steal better than any man. She reveals her tactic for manipulating her husbands–deliberately attacking her husband with a whole fistful of complaints and several biblical glossing (for justification) and starting an argument, with the result of her getting what she wants. By accusing her husband of infidelity, the Wife disguised her own adultery–even calling her maid and Jankin in false witness to back her up.

The Wife also got money out of her husbands by claiming that, if she were to sell her "bele chose" (sexual favours), she would make more money than they lavished on her. Thus the Wife treated her first three husbands, the three, good, old, rich men. The Wife's fourth husband was a reveler and had a mistress as well as a wife. He was a match for the Wife of Bath, sharing some of her qualities, but he soon died.

The fifth husband was the most cruel to her: kind in bed but otherwise violent, beating her viciously. He could "glose" (gloss–persuade–flatter) her extremely well when he wanted to have sex, and she loved him best, because he played hard to get with her. He had been a student at Oxford, and came to be a boarder at the home of the Wife's best friend, Alison, while she was still married to husband number four. Soon after he died, she married Jankin (number five) who was, at twenty, exactly half the Wife's age.

Very regularly, Jankin read his book of "wikked wyves", a compilation volume of anti-feminist literature, containing works from Valerius and Theophrastus, St. Jerome, Tertullian, Solomon, and many others. The Wife interrupts herself to express her anger at the anti-feminist portrayals of women in books written by male clerks–and wishes that women "hadde written stories" like clerks have, in order to redress balance. Then, her story continues: Jankin was reading aloud from his book by the fire, and the Wife, fed up that he would never finish reading his "cursed book al nyght", tore out three pages, punching him in the face so that he fell backward into the fire. Jankin got up

fast and hit her on the head with his fist, knocking her to the floor, where she lay as if dead. "Hastow slayn me, false theef?" the Wife bellow when she awoke, "and for my land thus hastow mordred me?" (Have you killed me, false thief? And have you murdered me to get my land?"). Jankin, of course, then begged her forgiveness; and the Wife made him burn his book right there.

Having gained for herself all of the "maistrie" (mastery, control, dominance), Jankin then begged her to keep all of her own land, and–after that day–they never argued again. The Wife was true to him, and he to her, and she was extremely generous to him. At this point, the Wife announces again that she is to tell her tale.

4.2.2 The Words between the Summoner and the Friar

The Friar laughs to hear everything that the Wife has said, commenting that it is a "long preamble of a tale" (a long prologue to a tale)–and when the Summoner hears the Friar's voice, he attacks him, commenting that friars are notorious for their long-windedness, telling him to "go sit doun!".

Notes The Friar promises, in revenge, to tell a tale about a summoner to make everyone laugh. The Host quiets them down, and encourages the Wife to tell her tale.

4.2.3 The Wife of Bath's Tale Text

The Wife of Bath's Tale tells a story from a distant time, when King Arthur ruled the nation and when elves used to run around impregnating women. However, the Wife immediately digresses: now friars have taken the place of elves-they are now the copulating, evil spirits.

King Arthur had a knight who, when riding home one day from hawking, found a maiden walking alone and raped her. This crime usually held the penalty of death, but, in court, the queen intervened and begged her husband to spare the knight, promising the knight that she would grant his life if he could answer the question "What do women most desire?" She gave him one year to find the answer.

The knight went on a journey but could find no satisfactory answer; some said wealth, others jollity, some status, others a good lover in bed. Despondent that he might not find his answer, the knight was mournful, when, riding beside a forest on his way back to his home, he saw a dance of twenty-four ladies. Approaching them, they vanished, and in their place, the knight found a hideous old woman, the "lothly lady", to whom he put his question. She agreed to give the answer and assured him that it was the right one, but would only tell him the answer if he would do the next thing that she required of him. When the knight agreed, she whispered in his ear.

When they arrived at court, the knight faced the queen again, and told him that women desired to have sovereignty and "to been in maistrie" (to be in mastery) above their husbands. The lothly lady then spoke up before the court, announcing the knight's pledge, and asking him to take her for his wife. The knight, although now pardoned, was miserable that he had to marry such an old crone, but there was no way for him to get out of it.

Privately, the knight wedded the lothly lady the next day, and the two of them lay in bed. She realized his unhappiness, and confronted him about it. He criticized her for not only being old and ugly, but low-born. She scoffed at his snobbery as a definition and defended her poverty as irrelevant to God. She then gave him a choice, making him see both sides of the argument. Either he could have her as an old and ugly wife who would be entirely faithful to him; or he could have her as a young and fair wife, who would probably cuckold him.

Task How does the ending of the story reconcile with the wife's philosophy?

The knight sighed sorely, and thought, but finally told his wife to choose herself whichever option would bring most honor to the two of them. "Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie" (In that case, I've got mastery over you) she said – and the knight agreed that she had. The lothly lady asked him to kiss her and "cast up the curtyn" (lift up the curtain) to look on her face–she had transformed into a young and beautiful woman. They lived happily ever after: and, the Wife concludes, let Christ grant all women submissive husbands who sexually satisfy their wives, and let Christ kill all men who will not be governed by their wives.

Analysis

The Wife of Bath is one of Chaucer's most enduring characters, and rightly, one of the most famous of any of the Canterbury pilgrims. Her voice is extremely distinctive–loud, self-promoting, extremely aggressive – and her lengthy prologue silences the Pardoner and the Friar (who is then parodied at the start of the Tale) for daring to interrupt her. One of the key issues for interpreting the Wife's tale historically has been the relationship between prologue and tale: some critics have found in the Wife's fairy-tale ending a wistful, saddened dreaminess from an elderly woman whose hopes for a sixth husband might turn out to be futile. Other critics have treated the tale as a matter of "maistrie" and control, arguing that the Wife's tale, starting as it does with a rape (a man physically dominating a woman), is deeply ambiguous at its close about precisely whose desire is being fulfilled. Surely there is little point in the woman having the maistrie if all she is to do with it is to please her husband?

Yet it seems to me that the Wife's tale and prologue can be treated as one lengthy monologue, and it is the voice we attribute that monologue too which proves impossible to precisely define. The Wife's tale inherits the issue of the woman as literary text (Constance, in the Man of Law's tale, was "pale", like paper waiting to be written on, and used as an exchangeable currency by the merchants and– perhaps–by the Man of Law) and develops it.

Text and the interpretation of text is absolutely central to the Wife of Bath's Tale. The General Prologue describes her as being swathed in textile, and, of course, "textere", the Latin verb meaning "to weave" is the key to a close relationship between "cloth" and "text" in the Middle Ages. For the Wife, as well as being excellent at spinning a tale, is also excellent at spinning cloth – and is surrounded, problematically in text in just the way the Prologue has her covered in cloth. When, at the very end of her tale, the lothly lady implores her husband to "cast up the curtyn" and see her as she really is, she highlights one of the key problems in the tale: it is very difficult to ascertain precisely where fiction stops and reality begins.

The Wife claims to represent female voices–and her tale consists of a set of women representing each other. The raped maiden is represented by the queen, who in turn is represented by the lothly lady, who in turn becomes a beautiful lady: the image which precedes her appearance is, appropriately, twenty four ladies apparently vanishing into one. The Wife speaks on behalf of women everywhere: and against the male clerks who have written the antifeminist literature that Jankin reads in his book of wikked wyves.

It is odd then, that the Wife, who claims to stand for "experience", spends much of her prologue dealing with written "authority", glossing the Bible in precisely the manner she criticizes the clerks for doing. The Wife is against text, but expert in text; against clerks, but particularly clerical; and, of course, venomous about anti-feminist literature, but also made up of anti-feminist literature. When the Wife throws Jankin's book in the fire, she is in fact burning her own sources which constitute a bizarre act of literary self-orphanage. It is as if she burns her own birth certificate.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

6. At what age was the wife of bath first married?
7. What ongoing argument begins in this prologue?

Notes

8. What type of tale does the wife tell?
9. For what crime is the young knight being punished?
10. Why is it fitting that this tale should be told by the wife of bath?

When we notice too that the Wife (whose name is Alison) has as her only confidant another woman called Alison, there is an unusual sense that she might be talking only to herself. Add to that her almost uninterrupted monologue of tale and prologue – and the almost-uninterrupted monologues of Jankin (reading from the book of wives) and the lothly lady's lengthy monologue on poverty and gentilesse – and we see that, in fact, the voice of the Wife does indeed take the "maistrie" in the tale itself. It entirely dominates the tale.

The Wife, then, is a far more complicated figure than simply a proto-feminist. She asks the key question herself: "Who peynted the leon, tel me who?", referring to the old myth that, a lion, seeing the picture of a man triumphing over a lion, asked the rhetorical question which pointed out that the portrayal was biased as it had been painted by a man, not a lion. If the Wife's tale is a depiction of a woman triumphing over a man (and even that is not easy to decide) can it be similarly dismissed?

Perhaps, but of course, for all the Wife decries the clerical tradition and the clerks who leave out the good deeds of woman, she herself as a text is another example of a lecherous, lying, manipulative woman. She falls into the anti-feminist tradition she represents. This is even before you mention that the Wife is being written, at the very least ventriloquised, by Geoffrey Chaucer, a clerk and a man. Is this Chaucer's opinion of proto-feminism and a disavowal of the anti-feminist tradition? Or is Chaucer endorsing the anti-feminist tradition by giving it a mouthpiece which, in arguing against it, demonstrates all of its stereotypical arguments as fact?

Who painted the lion? Whose voice is the Wife's? Is she worthy of–as she does–speaking for women everywhere?

These are all huge, open, fascinating questions that demonstrate why the tale itself is so complex, and interesting to interpret. The key fact not to forget is that you can't have a Wife without a Husband. Whether married to Chaucer, whether Chaucer in drag, or whether a feminist persona all of her own, it's important to view the apparently proto-feminist Wife of Bath from a point of view which understands her strong links to the men in her fictional–and literary–lives.

4.3 Summary

- "Host", the Man of Law, replies, "To breke forward is nat myn entente", and reiterating that he does not break agreements, agrees to tell the tale.
- The Prologue begins by lamenting the condition of poverty; it makes a person steal, beg or borrow for money, it makes a person blame Christ.
- The warden of a nearby castle found Constance and gave her shelter, but she refused to re-veal her identity.
- The Wife of Bath's Tale tells a story from a distant time, when King Arthur ruled the nation and when elves used to run around impregnating women.
- The knight sighed sorely, and thought, but finally told his wife to choose herself whichever option would bring most honor to the two of them.

4.4 Keywords

Chaste **:** Abstaining from extramarital.

Ramble **:** Walk for pleasure in the countryside.

Vanishing **:** Disappear suddenly and completely.

Thrift **:** The quality of being careful and not wasteful with money and other resources.

Fist **:** A person's hand when the fingers are bent in towards the palm and held there tightly.

Notes

4.5 Review Questions

1. How does constance come to wed king Aella?
2. Describe the underlying theological theme of the Man of Law's tale.
3. Describe the events that lead constance from joy to despair to joy and so on.
4. Name two arguments that the wife uses in her defense of the married state.
5. In what way her fourth and fifth husbands different from first three?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. He agrees to become a Christian.
2. The Sultan is murdered by his mother who also casts constance off in a rudderless ship.
3. The virtuous wife who endures all tribulations and trials.
4. Those women were sexually very lax while constance is chaste and virtuous.
5. Repetition is employed extensively.
6. The wife of bath was 12, when she first married.
7. The feud between the Friar and the Summoner.
8. A cross between a folktale and a romance.
9. He has ravished (rape) a young maiden.
10. It concerns a young man marrying an old woman.

4.6 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp
http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

Notes

Unit 5: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-IV

CONTENTS

Objectives
Introduction
5.1 The Friar's Tale
5.1.1 Prologue to the Friar's Tale
5.1.2 The Friar's Tale Text
5.2 The Summoner's Tale
5.2.1 Prologue to the Summoner's Tale
5.2.2 The Summoner's Tale Text
5.3 Summary
5.4 Keywords
5.5 Review Questions
5.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and text of the Friar's tale
- Explain the prologue and text of the Summoner's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of the Friar's and the Summoner's tale.

Introduction

The Friar insults the Summoner, continuing the feud the two began earlier. He then uses his tale to intensify the insult. In his tale are all the elements of the fabliau: the plot unfolds scene by scene; it turns on trickery; and the ease with which a stupid man is outsmarted. The Friar's Tale also has elements of the exemplum, a perfect story of terrible behavior with a moral ending. This story of the Summoner meeting the devil is found in earlier Latin and German versions and had also been told in English. This problem with an exploitive clergy was an ancient one, and it is somewhat ironic that while the story is intended to condemn the Summoner, it actually condemns all extortioners, many of whom were Friars. Nevertheless, the theme is unmistakable: the relationship between avarice and the devil is extremely close and will land its practitioners in hell very quickly. The tale is concluded with the Squire's serving boy offering a solution to the division problem for the price of a new suit. The insult is never addressed, Thomas goes unpunished, and the pageboy gets a new suit.

The Summoner comments immediately on the close relationship between avarice and the devil by telling a wicked joke. His tale, which follows continues the insult in the form of a fabliau. It turns on trickery, deception, and the ease with which the evil man, in this case the Friar of the story, is outwitted. Unlike the other fabliaux in the *Tales,* however, The Summoner's Tale is truly base and obscene, revealing him to be of a purient nature. There appear to be no models for this story; it is presented rather as a parody of sincere religious stories which preachers used in those days to teach their listeners moral lessons. By the end of this particular story, friendly professional rivalry between the Summoner and the Friar has degenerated into open quarrelling through stories in which each man has damned his opponent to hell.

5.1 The Friar's Tale Text

5.1.1 Prologue to the Friar's Tale

The Friar commends the Wife of Bath for her tale, and then says, in line with his promise between the Wife's Prologue and Tale, that he will tell a tale about a summoner. He does not wish to offend the Summoner who travels with them, but insists that summoners are known for fornication and lewd behavior. The Summoner, on the surface at least, does not take offense, but does indicate that he will "quit" the Friar in turn. The job of a summoner, to which the Friar objects, is to issue summons from the church against sinners who, under penalty of excommunication, pay indulgences for their sins to the church, a sum which illicit summoners often pocket. The Host quiets the argument down, and the Friar's Tale begins.

5.1.2 The Friar's Tale Text

The Friar's Tale tells of an archdeacon who boldly carried out the Church's laws against fornication, witchcraft and lechery. Lechers received the greatest punishment, forced to pay significant tithes to the church. The archdeacon had a summoner who was quite adept at discovering lechers, even though he himself was immoral. Friars, the Friar says, are out of the jurisdiction of summoners, and at this point, the Summoner interrupts the Friar's Tale, disagreeing.

Notes The Host allows the Friar to continue his tale, and he immediately continues to attack summoners.

The summoner of the Friar's Tale would only summon those who had enough money to pay the church, and would take half the charge himself: he was a thief, and a bawd, enlisting the help of prostitutes who would reveal their customers to the summoner in exchange for their own safety (and offer of sexual services).

One day, the summoner was traveling to issue a summons to an old widow, when he met a yeoman on the way, dressed in a green jacket. The summoner claimed to be a bailiff, knowing that his actual profession was so detested. The yeoman offered hospitality to the summoner. The two travelled together, and the summoner asked where the yeoman lived, intending to later rob him of the gold and silver he claimed to possess. The summoner asks the yeoman how he makes money at his job, and the yeoman admits that he lives by extortion and theft; and the summoner admits that he does the same.

The two reveal to each other their villainy, until the yeoman finally declares that he is a fiend whose dwelling is in hell. The summoner asks the yeoman (the devil) why he has a human shape, and he

replies that he assumes one whenever on earth. The summoner asks him why he is on earth, receiving the reply that sometimes devils are God's instruments. The devil claims that the summoner will meet him again someday and have better evidence of hell than Dante or Virgil.

Did u know? The summoner suggests that the two continue on their way and go about their business, each taking their share.

On their travels they found a carter whose wagon, loaded with hay, was stuck in the mud. "The devel have al, bothe hors and cart and hey!" cursed the carter, and the summoner, taking the carter literally, implored the devil to take all of the carter's belongings. The devil comments that, although that is what he is literally saying, that is not what the carter means: "the carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another". On the devil's encouragement, the carter prays to God, and, lo and behold, the horses pull the wagon from the mud.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. How does the pilgrim Summoner respond to the insult?
2. In what way might a sinner in the tale have the charges of the Summoner dismissed?
3. Who does the stranger he meets say he is?
4. What is the real identity of the stranger?
5. Why do the curses of the old woman have the result of sending the Summoner to hell?

The summoner suggests that they visit the widow he was originally visiting. On arriving, the summoner gives her a notice to appear before the archdeacon on the penalty of excommunication, but she claims that she is sick and cannot travel there. She asks if she can pay the summoner to represent her to the archdeacon, and he demands twelve pence, a sum that she thinks is too great, for, she claims, she is guiltless of sin. The summoner then demands her new pan from her, claiming that he paid her fine for making her husband a cuckold (an accusation which she expressly denies). She curses the summoner, saying that she gives his body to the devil. The devil hears this and tells the summoner that he shall be in hell tonight. Upon these words, the summoner and the devil disappeared into hell, the realm where summoners truly belong.

Analysis

The pattern of reciprocity and "quitting", as seen in the Miller's and Reeve's tale in the First Fragment, is reintroduced with the Friar's and Summoner's tale. These two would likely be, to Chaucer's readers, easily recognizable characters, and the rapacious clergyman was very much a stock figure for Middle English readers and listeners.

The Friar's Tale, like the Reeve's Tale, seems to exist for a single purpose: the humiliation and degradation of members of a certain profession. The Tale begins by exposing the means by which summoners blackmail and extort persons, but does not attack the church system that allows this to happen, but rather the men who represent this system and exploit these workings of the church. Yet the Friar's Tale surpasses the Reeve's Tale in its vitriol for its main character. While Symkyn, the immoral miller of the Reeve's tale, is hardly an exemplary character and exists only for ridicule, he at least is given a proper name that separates him from his profession. The main character of the Friar's Tale is an impersonal representation of all summoners and the fate they deserve.

The comic twist to the Friar's Tale is that, when he meets the devil, the summoner is neither shocked nor overcome with fear. Rather, the summoner regards the devil as a curious colleague, and is almost impressed. In fact, the narrator too seems to hold a higher opinion of the devil than of the summoner. When the devil leaves the summoner, the devil tells him that they shall hold company together until he forsakes him. This may be a chance for redemption that the devil offers the summoner, just before he visits the old crone, but he does not take it.

Task What genres are combined in the Friar's tale?

Of course, as well as preaching against hypocrisy, the Friar's Tale turns it into a plot feature. How can we know, the tale asks, who we meet on the road: a yeoman or a devil? A religious, pious summoner or a downright crook? Moreover, there is nothing very ambiguous about the ending to the tale: the summoner is taken to hell. A metaphorical hell, like the furnace of Gervase the smith in the Miller's Tale, is a far more distant representation, but when the summoner disappears, with Satan, it is simply, unmetaphorically, to hell. What in the Miller's tale was comedy, when stated literally by the Friar, starts to look a little like blasphemy, and one wonders how easily Chaucer's original readers would have related to it.

Penn R. Szittya has written, in his essay "The Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady: The Friar's Parody of the Wife of Bath's Tale", that the Friar's Tale might actually be a parody of the Wife of Bath's tale. Szittya notes such pertinent details as the appearance of the Friar riding "under a forest syde"-in precisely the same phrase that the Wife uses in her tale - and argues that the Wife's fairytale forest, and the Friar's real one in some way elide. It is difficult however to be entirely persuaded by Szittya's argument, and see the Friar's tale as a closer relation to the Wife's than it is to the Summoner's.

Simply put, the Friar's tale is also a reminder to watch what you wish for, and not to speak without thinking. The devil, it seems, takes words literally - and whether you mean them or not, can decide to act upon them as he pleases, as long as they have been uttered (note the way the widow's curse is made reality by the devil as the tale resolves). As Chaucer's Tales look perilously close to potential blasphemy, the Friar's Tale's warning that anything said can be used against the sayer seems doubly pertinent; and the issue of blasphemy in the Tales, present here, runs right through the work to Chaucer's final Retraction.

5.2 The Summoner's Tale

5.2.1 Prologue to the Summoner's Tale

The Summoner was enraged by the tale that the Friar told, quaking in anger. Since, he says, you have all listened to the Friar lie, please do listen to my tale. The Summoner claims that friars and fiends are one and the same. He tells a short anecdote in his prologue. One day, a friar was brought to hell and led up and down by angel, and was surprised to see no friars there. Are friars so graceful, he asked, that they never come to hell? The angel told him that many millions of friars came to hell, and led him directly to Satan. Satan had a tail as broad as a sailing ship, and the angel called to Satan to lift up his tail. Satan did, and twenty thousand friars swarmed out of his arse like bees from a hive.

5.2.2 The Summoner's Tale Text

A friar went to preach and beg in a marshy region of Yorkshire called Holderness. In his sermons he begged for donations for the church and afterward he begged for charity from the local residents. The Friar interrupts, calling the Summoner a liar, but is silenced by the Host.

Notes

Along went this friar, house by house, until he came to the house of Thomas, a local resident who normally indulged him, and found him ill. The friar spoke of the sermon he had given that day, commenting on the excellent way he had glossed the biblical text-and essentially ordered a meal from Thomas's wife.

She told the friar that her child died not more than two weeks before. The friar claimed that he had a revelation that her child had died and entered heaven. He claimed that his fellow friars had a similar vision, for they are more privy to God's messages than laymen, who live richly on earth, as opposed to spiritual riches. The friar claimed that, among the clergy, only friars remain impoverished and thus are closest to God; and told Thomas that his illness persists because he had given so little to the church.

Thomas claimed that he had indeed given "ful many a pound" to various friars, but never fared the better for it. The friar, characteristically, is irritated that Thomas is not giving all of his money solely to him, and points out to him that a "ferthyng" (a farthing) is not worth anything if split into twelve. Continuing to lecture Thomas, the friar began a long sermon against anger ("ire"), telling the tale of an angry king who sentenced a knight to death , because, as he returned without his partner, the king automatically assumed that the knight had murdered him. When a third knight took the condemned knight to his death, they found the knight that he had supposedly murdered. When they returned to the king to have the sentenced reversed, the king sentenced all three to death: the first because he had originally declared it so, the second because he was the cause of the first's death, and the third because he did not obey the king.

Another ireful king, Cambises, was a drunk. When one of his knights claimed that drunkenness caused people to lose their coordination, Cambyses drew his bow and arrow and shot the knight's son to prove that he still had control of his reflexes. The friar then told of Cyrus, the Persian king who had the river Gyndes destroyed because one of his horses had drowned in it.

At the close of this sermon, the friar asked Thomas for money to build the brothers' cloister. Thomas, annoyed by the friar's hypocrisy, told the friar that he had a gift for him that he was sitting on, but that he would only receive it if he promised to split it up equally between each of the friars.

Task What distracts the lord of the shire from dealing with the insult?

The friar readily agreed, and put his hand down behind Thomas' back, groping round – and Thomas let out a fart louder than a horse could make. The friar became immediately angry, and promised to repay Thomas for his fart, but, before he could, the servants of the house chased the friar out.

The enraged friar found the lord of the village and told him of the embarrassment he suffered, angrily wondering how he was supposed to divide a fart into twelve. The lord's squire spoke up with a suggestion, in return for a "gowne-clooth" from his master: take a cartwheel, and tell each of twelve friars to lay his nose at the end of a spoke. Then the friar of the tale could sit in the centre of the wheel and fart, and each of the spokes would carry the smell along to the rim–and therefore, divide it up between each of the friars.

Analysis

Chaucer carefully shows us the Summoner, quaking with anger, after hearing the Friar's Tale, and those pious readers who might have thought that the Friar's Tale veered close to the line of blasphemous sin would likely have been straight out offended by the Summoner's. It is a bilious, aggressive tale which does not even consider pulling its punches, and the Friar's contempt is roundly "quyt" with a full-on, unrelenting attack from the Summoner.

Anality is a key ingredient in the tale, potentially a reference to the possible interpretation of the General Prologue which argues that the Summoner and Pardoner are engaged in a homosexual

relationship. Regardless of whether this reading is accepted, the prologue begins with a journey into the devil's arse, and the tale finds its resolution with the division of a fart, first from Thomas' arse, and then from the friar's.

This journey from arse to arse is only one of several ways in which the Summoner's Tale mechanically closes in on itself, in precisely the way that the friar within it manages to bring about his own humiliation. There is a neat irony in the way that the friar, after a lengthy lecture about anger management and doing away with "ire" (anger) then becomes absolutely furious, looking as if he were "a wilde boor".

Did u know? The structure of the tale has a "quitting"-like circularity to it.

This circularity also features in individual words: The Summoner's Tale operates on a series of clever puns. At the end of the tale, the division of the fart is a challenge, the lord remarks, in "ars-metrike"–in the art of measurement, but, as Seth Lerer, points out, a challenge too in the metrics of the arse. Moreover, Jankin's vision of the friars gathered at the spokes of a huge wheel is actually a parody of the Pentecost: the day where the twelve apostles receive the Holy Spirit as Christ ascends to heaven. It is, one might suggest, a reworking of religion entirely appropriate to the piety of the friar (and even the Summoner!) in question.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

6. What is the reaction of the Summoner to the Friar's Tale?
7. What happened to the prayers that were supposed to be offered for all who donated to the Friars?
8. What new donation does Thomas make by way of response to the Friar's sermon?
9. To whom does the Friar take his case against Thomas?
10. Who finally solves the problem of dividing the "gift"?

The most significant pun, however, is the most interesting. The friar in the tale berates Thomas, telling him that a "ferthyng" (a farthing coin) is not worth anything split into twelve; and, then, of course, he is paid for the tales he then tells with a farting, which he must split into twelve. The two words were likely homonyms in Middle English, and the punning extends the idea of quitting–which structures this tale and the Friar's as a pair–down into the fabric of the tale itself.

Yet there is another question, which raises a serious point. Is religious advice actually worth people's money? Is the Summoner (or the Friar, or any of the pilgrims) actually telling the company anything which could be valued more highly than a fart? Perhaps Chaucer, aware of the level of potential offense contained within his tale, poses its key question deliberately to those inclined to take it too seriously: isn't tale telling, like farting, just a lot of hot air?

5.3 Summary

- The Friar's Tale tells of an archdeacon who boldly carried out the Church's laws against fornication, witchcraft and lechery.
- The summoner suggests that they visit the widow he was originally visiting.
- The Friar's Tale, like the Reeve's Tale, seems to exist for a single purpose: the humiliation and degradation of members of a certain profession.
- The Summoner was enraged by the tale that the Friar told, quaking in anger.
- Thomas claimed that he had indeed given "ful many a pound" to various friars, but never fared the better for it.

Notes

5.4 Keywords

Pageboy : A woman's hairstyle consisting of a shoulder-length bob with the ends rolled under.

Privy : A person having a part or interest in any action.

Furious : Extremely angry.

Elide : Join together.

5.5 Review Questions

1. What insulting remark about Summoners is made by the Friar in his prologue?
2. What causes the Summoner in the tale to declare enternal brotherhood for the stranger?
3. Why don't the farmer's curses send his animal to hell?
4. What happen in the Summoner's joke about the Friars?
5. Why is Thomas so angry with the Friar?
6. How does the Friar try to calm his benefactor's anger?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. He say he will pay the Friar back when he tells his own tale.
2. He could give the Summoner money.
3. He say he is a bailiff.
4. He is a demon from hell.
5. The old woman's curses are totally sincere.
6. He is infuriated.
7. All the names of those who donate are erased so the prayers never get offered.
8. He gives the Friar a fart.
9. The Friar goes to the overlord of the district.
10. The young squire of the lord concocts an outlandish solution.

5.6 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

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Unit 6: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-V

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

6.1 The Clerk's Tale

6.1.1 Prologue to the Clerk's Tale

6.1.2 The Clerk's Tale Text

6.1.3 Lenvoy de Chaucer

6.1.4 The Words of the Host

6.2 The Merchant's Tale

6.2.1 Prologue to the Merchant's Tale

6.2.2 The Merchant's Tale Text

6.2.3 Epilogue to the Merchant's Tale

6.3 Summary

6.4 Keywords

6.5 Review Questions

6.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and text of the clerk's tale
- Know about Lenvoy de Chaucer
- Explain the prologue and text of the Merchant's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of the Clerk's and the Merchant's tale.

Introduction

The jovial Host teases the young Clerk for his quiet, demure behavior, but begs him to tell them a gay story with no preaching and no rhetoric. This gentler clergyman, in contrast with the two who precede. As might be expected of a scholar, the Clerk uses his prologue to express his devotion to Petrarch, most famous of the medieval Italian poets and one with whom Chaucer was very familiar. The Clerk is speaking for Chaucer in his enthusiastic admiration. Many elements of the story of Griselda come from Petrach and much of it is modelled from a tale in Boccaccio's Decameron. Chaucer's version of this

Notes

Italian story, however, combines elements of the romance (joyful ending, noble characters) with the promise, the magic, and the testing which characterize a folktale. However, the tale is probably intended to be considered an exemplum with its strong moral lesson and its perfect character, Griselda. The hearer is to marvel at Griselda's faithfulness but is never expected to imitate it; rather, he is at all costs to avoid behaving as Walter did in applying cruel and irrational tests to the loyalty of those he loves.

The Merchant's Tale is another example of fabliau with its deceiving, tricking, and making a fool of a foolish man. The elements of the romance (*i.e.,* the knight, the rituals, the gardens, the palace) are inserted to add humor and contrast to the tale of an earthy young woman who determines to enjoy her young lover and gets away with it. As with many of the tales, the material for this story is drawn from many sources: Italian, German, and French literature, as well as English oral tradition. The theme of blindness dominates this tale. January is too blind to see his foolishness in marrying such a young woman. After the marriage, his love and his desire to be happy blind him to May's infidelity. His physical blindness reinforces the theme.

6.1 The Clerk's Tale

6.1.1 Prologue to the Clerk's Tale

The Host remarks that the Clerk of Oxford sits as coyly and quietly as a new-married bride, and tells him to be more cheerful: "Telle us som myrie tale!" ("tell us a merry tale"). The Host continues to argue that, when someone is entered into a game, they have to play by the rules of that game; and adds that he doesn't want a tale told in "heigh style", but spoken "pleyn".

The clerk replies kindly that the Host has the "governance" over the company (is "in charge" of the company) and says that he will tell a tale which he learned from a worthy clerk, Francis Petrarch, who is now dead and nailed into his coffin. He then praises the renowned Petrarch for his sweet rhetoric and poetry; though warns the company, before he begins, that Petrarch wrote a poem in a "high style" exalting the Italian landscape.

6.1.2 The Clerk's Tale Text

(I) The tale begins with the description of Saluzzo, a region at the base of Mount Viso in Italy. There was once a marquis of this region named Walter. He was wise, noble and honorable, but his mind was always on seeking immediate pleasures–turning aside more worthy pastime, and even refusing to marry.

The people of his realm confronted him about his steadfast refusal, pleading with him to take a wife, so that his lineage could continue (and so that his son could continue his work in the event of his death). They offer to choose for him the most noble woman in the realm for his wife. He agrees to marry, but makes this one condition: he will marry whomever he chooses, regardless of birth, and his wife shall be treated with the respect accorded to an emperor's daughter, no matter her origin.

He set the day on which he would be married; his people thanked him on their knees, and returned home.

(II) Not far from the marquis' honorable palace, among the poor people, lived a man named Janicula, who had a daughter Griselde, who was exceedingly virtuous, courageous and charitable. While hunting, the marquis caught sight of Griselde and, recognizing her virtue, immediately decided that this exemplary woman should be his wife.

On the day of the wedding, Walter had not revealed to the public the woman he would marry, and the populace wondered whether he might, in fact, not marry at all. Walter had, however, already

prepared rich garments and jewelery in Griselde's size. That morning, the marquis came to Janicula's home and asked him for his permission to marry his daughter. Janicula was so astonished, he turned red, and could not speak–but did manage eventually to assent to the marriage.

Walter, however, wanted Griselde herself to assent before he married her, and, the two men went into her chamber. Walter asked her hand in marriage, and asked her to to be ready to do whatever he said, whenever he said it, but never to resent him; if she agreed to this, he said, he would swear to marry her. Griselde swore never to disobey him–and he took her outside to introduce her to his populace as his new wife.

The marquis' servants took Griselde and dressed her in all new, expensive clothes for the wedding; she appeared as if she had been born as nobility, not from her actual humble origin. Her virtue and excellence became renowned throughout Saluzzo, and in many other regions, for she was essentially a perfect wife – she appeared as "from hevene sent". Soon she gave birth to a baby girl, although she would have preferred a son to be his father's heir.

(III) Soon after his daughter was born, the marquis decided to test his wife. The narrator, at this stage, explicitly expresses doubt about why the marquis would test his wife: "as for me" he says, I think it sits "yvele" ("evilly") "to assaye a wyf whan that it is no need" ("to test a wife when there is no need to").

The marquis told her that although she was dear to him, to the rest of the nobility she was not. They, he said, objected to her new daughter, and wanted her to be taken away from Griselde and put to death. Griselde received this news without grievance, and answered that she and her child would do anything that pleased her husband. Rather than putting the child to death (though allowing Griselde to believe her child was dead), the marquis instead sent the child away with one of his sergeants to be raised by his sister, the husband of the Earl of Panago, in Bologna. Walter did pity his wife, who remained steadfast and dedicated to him, silently accepting her fate and that of her child whom she believed dead. Griselde never spoke of her daughter, nor even mentioned her name.

(IV) Four years passed, and Griselde had another child, a boy, and, when it was two years old, Walter repeated the same test. The people, Walter argued, did not want the low blood of Janicula to succeed him as marquis. She accepted this, and told Walter that she realized she was of low birth and would consent to die if it pleased him. However, she did point out that she had had no benefits of motherhood, only the pain of childbirth and a continued pain of losing her children. The same sergeant came to take away her son, and Griselde kissed her child goodbye.

The people came to loathe Walter, thinking that he had murdered his children. Walter, unruffled by their disapproval, devised his next test: organizing the court of Rome to send a counterfeit papal bull which ordered Walter to divorce Griselde and take another wife. Upon hearing this, Griselde remained steadfast.

However, the marquis had written a secret letter to Bologna, ordering the Earl of Panago to return home his children with huge pomp and circumstance, but without telling them whose children they were. Indeed, the Earl was to pretend that the daughter was to marry the marquis himself.

(V) Walter told Griselde of the papal bull, returned her dowry to her, and sent her back to her father's house. She was stoic upon hearing this, and, though she reiterated her love for Walter, she did not repent for loving him. She only asks that she not be sent naked from the palace, but will be given the simple smock, just the like the ones she used to wear in poverty, to wear to spare her from suffering the indignity of returning home completely unclothed. Walter granted this request, and in, stripping herself of all of her riches, Griselde returned home to her father in her poor clothes once more.

The people followed her home, weeping for her bad fortune, but Griselde herself did not shed a tear, and, as she approached the house, her father ran out to cover her with his old coat. The narrator, at the end of this part, compares the suffering Griselde has endured to that of the biblical Job.

(VI) The Countess of Panago arrived at Saluzzo from Bologna with Griselde's two children. Walter sent a message to Griselde that he would be married soon and wished for Griselde to plan the ceremony; patiently, Griselde agreed and began to make the arrangements. When the people saw the new wife, they thought, for the first time, seeing her riches and the stately procession, that Walter was right to change his wife.

As the party sat down to dinner, Walter called Griselde into the hall. When he introduced Griselde to his new wife, she pleaded with him not to treat the new wife as unkindly as he did her (not to "prikke with no tormentynge / This tender mayden") but meant no malice in her words.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. On which two Italian classics is the Clerk's tale based?
2. Which two genres are represented in this story?
3. How does Walter use public opinion to persuade the pope to grant nullification of his marriage?
4. Why does Walter not allow the people to select his wife for him?
5. How is the hearer intended to respond to this tale?

At that, Walter kissed Griselde and claimed that she had always been his wife. Griselde stood, astonished, like someone who had woken from a sleep. Walter then revealed to her the actual fate of her two children - the supposed new wife was actually Griselde's daughter. Griselde fell down in a swoon, and, on awaking, called her children to her, where she kissed them and held them so tightly that they could not tear the children from her arms. The ladies took her into her chamber, and took her out of her poor clothing, replacing it with a "clooth of gold that brighte shoon", and a coronet on her head. The two lived happily ever after, and, eventually, the son succeeded his father after his father's death, and was kind in marriage.

This story, the Clerk then continues, is not told so that wives should follow Griselde's example in humility-it is impossible that they would. Every person, however, should try to be constant in adversity and in the face of God, like Griselde was to Walter: this is why Petrarch wrote the story.

Notes People under God must live in virtuous patience, accepting whatever will God serves on them.

However, the Clerk continues, it were very difficult to find even two or three Griseldes out of a whole town of people nowadays. If you put them to the test, their "gold" has been so mixed in with "brass" that the coin would snap rather than withstand the pressure. For which reason, for the love of the Wife of Bath (whose sect God maintain "in heigh maistrie"), the Clerk continues, I will now sing a song to gladden you.

6.1.3 Lenvoy de Chaucer

Griselde is dead and her patience is too, and both of them are buried in Italy. No wedded man should try his wife's patience in trying to find Griselde: he will fail. The Envoy continues to address "O noble wyves", advising them not to nail down their tongues in humility, or Chichevache will swallow them whole. Follow Echo, that held no silence, and take on the governance yourself, the Envoy continues, and use the arrows of your eloquence to pierce your husband's armor.

Notes

Did u know? The conclusion of the Envoy tells fair women to show off their good looks, and ugly women to spend all of their husband's money!

6.1.4 The Words of the Host

When the Clerk had finished his tale, the Host swore "By Goddes bones" that he would rather lose a barrel of ale that his wife had–even once–heard this tale. It is a noble tale, he continues–before advising the company not to ask why he'd rather not have his wife hear it.

Analysis

That the Clerk, in a typically clerical touch, gets his tale from a very worthy literary source is not a fiction of Chaucer's. The tale does indeed come from a tale of Petrarch's; yet what the Clerk fails to mention in his citation is that Petrarch himself took it from Bocaccio's Decameron (a fact which Chaucer certainly knew). Another thing, surely known to the clerks in Chaucer's audience, that the Clerk omits to mention is that even Petrarch had difficulty interpreting the tale as he found it in Boccaccio. The key problem, in fact, to reading the Clerk's Tale is interpretation.

The tale itself is simple enough: woman of low birth is horribly tested by her noble husband, made to suffer extremely, and eventually, is restored to good fortune. But what does the tale mean? Not, according to the Clerk, at least, what it seems to mean at first reading: that women should patiently submit themselves to their husbands will. This sentiment, of course, is deeply at odds with the Wife of Bath (herself explicitly acknowledged and praised by the Clerk in the tale) and her tale only a little earlier–and the Clerk endorses the Wife's desire for female maistrie.

Task What promise does Griselde make to Walter before accepting his offer of marriage?

Yet why is the tale not to be read as endorsing female subjugation to the husband? Perhaps because the Clerk (as he implies) wholeheartedly endorses the maistrie-seeking of the Wife of Bath, but also, as is twice said in the tale, because there are no Griseldes left in the world today. Is this lack of patient Griseldes a sign of progress, or something to be mourned? If the story is a celebration of Griselde's fortitude, the Clerk accurately judges that it would be impossible for any woman to legitimately withstand the suffering that Griselde faced with such resignation; and indeed, her extreme behavior might not even be read as commendable, for she allows her husband to murder her two children without struggle. The Clerk indicates that women should strive toward the example that Griselde sets, but not necessarily follow her example in such an extreme form. Where does one draw the line? The tale could be read as supporting either pro-feminist or anti-feminist sentiments.

Petrarch's solution to the problem is also voiced by the tale: that the tale is not, in fact, about men and women at all, but how men in general should relate to God. This is a perfectly reasonable interpretation, but as presented by Chaucer, Walter–cruel, testing for no obvious reason, and extremely self-satisfied–does not make for a particularly attractive representative of God. Petrarch's interpretation of his own story is not an absolute one: and nor is Chaucer's (it is important to note that the envoy at the very end of the tale is attributed "de Chaucer" and not to the Clerk–perhaps something more significant than a simple print-setting error). For the envoy advises wives not to nail down their tongues, but to attack their husbands and be shrews-a sentiment which the tale does not reflect at all, particularly when you consider that it is Griselde's strength of character and humility which justify her eventual reward and reunion with her children.

Chaucer, Petrarch, and the Wife of Bath–each have separate lines of interpretation for a single tale, and each of them are potentially justified in the text. Yet the Clerk's presentation does not invite the reading of the tale as simply a fable-there is little heightened or distanced in the presentation. In

Notes

fact, the telling strives to arouse our displeasure at Walter's conduct, and our sympathy for Griselde-Chaucer, in fact, studs the narrative with deeply humanizing, sympathetic details (for example, the way Griselde, reunited with her children, cannot bear to release them from her embrace) which make an allegorical reading of the tale even more difficult. It is difficult to believe that this tale is simply an allegory of man's relationship with God, when the allegory is written with such focused, emotional detail.

One might note too that Griselde is stripped and dressed in new clothes as her status changes from low, to high, back to low, and eventually back to high. The idea of the woman dressed in cloth (cloth, as we noted in the Wife of Bath's tale, is a symbol for text) reflects the unknowability of a woman's heart and mind, as well as the way Griselde herself can be interpreted and reinterpreted (as peasant and as noble wife) in precisely the way that her tale can.

Petrarch is dead and nailed in his coffin, the Clerk emphasizes at the start of the tale–and so is Griselde, he tells us at the end. How either of them felt about the subject matter of the Clerk's Tale is no longer of any relevance; and the complexity and problematic nature of this apparently simply-structured tale depends on just that incitement – how an audience, hearing the tale now, interprets and understands it in the context of their own (medieval or modern) attitudes to gender and marriage.

6.2 The Merchant's Tale

6.2.1 Prologue to the Merchant's Tale

Following the Clerk's pronouncement on marriage, the merchant claims that he knows all about weeping and wailing as a result of marriage-and so, he thinks, do many people who are married. Even if his wife were to marry the devil, the merchant claims, she would overmatch him. Having been married two months, and having loathed every minute of it, the merchant sees a "long and large difference" between Griselde's patience and his wife's cruelty. The Host asks the merchant to tell a tale of his horrid wife; and, though "for soory herte" (for sorry heart) the merchant claims he cannot tell of his own sorrow, he will tell another tale.

6.2.2 The Merchant's Tale Text

Once there was, dwelling in Lombardy, a worthy knight who had lived nobly for sixty years without a wife. However when this knight, January, had turned sixty, whether out of devotion or dotage, he decided to finally be married. He searched for prospects, now convinced that the married life was a paradise on earth, particularly keen to take a young, beautiful wife.

The narrator then defies Theophrastus, the author of a tract attacking marriage, arguing that a wife is God's gift, which will last longer than any other gift of Fortune. There follows a lengthy passage extolling the virtues of a wife, and the virtue of marriage, citing many biblical examples.

January one day sent for all of his friends, telling them of his intent to marry, explaining that he was ill and old, and wanted a wife no older than twenty, which he could mold like warm wax in his hands. Various men gave him various advice about marriage, some praising it, some arguing against it, and the altercation continued all day. The core of the argument was between Placebo and Justinus. Placebo cited Solomon, advising January that it would be excellent to marry a young wife, and telling him to do exactly as he pleased. Justinus cited Seneca, arguing that January should be more careful and more thoughtful before taking a wife, warning that a young wife was like to cuckold an old husband.

"Straw for thy Senek!" January responds, agreeing with Placebo's response that only a "cursed man" would argue against marriage; and with that word, they all arose and January began to prepare for his wedding. Fair women and fair bodies passed through January's head like images reflected on a mirror set up in a market-place–but eventually, January selected one women from the many available to him.

Calling his friends to him again, January asked them not to make any arguments against what he had resolved to do, and voiced his only concern - that a man who finds perfect happiness on earth,

as he would with his wife,would never find a similar happiness in heaven, for one must choose between one perfect happiness and another. Justinus, furious with January's foolishness, advised him that God sent a married man more reason to repent than a single man, and so, married, he might be more likely to get to heaven–even suggesting that marriage might be January's purgatory.

The narrator then, by way of an occupatio leaves out the wedding ceremony, but tells us that January married his intended, May, in a lavish and joyous ceremony. Venus, the goddess of love, laughed at all of the guests, as January had become one of her knights: when tender youth has wedded stooping age, the narrator continues, there is such mirth that it cannot be written.

At the end of the feast, the men cast spices around the wedding house, and everyone was full of joy–except for Damian, the knight's squire, who was so in love with the lady May that he was almost mad. The men rode home, and said their farewells and thanks to January, who then decided he would go to bed. He drank strong spiced and sweetened wines, and many a medical mixture, before taking his fresh wife in his arms, rocking her and kissing her often, his bristly beard scratching her tender skin. January made an apology for the offense he was about to do her, but reminding her that legally, he could do whatever he liked to her body. The two then had sex until the day began to dawn, at which point January awoke, drank some bread in wine, and sang loudly, sitting upright in his bed. Quite what May thought of all this, only God knows, the narrator comments–though she thought his sexual exploits absolutely useless.

However, Damian, had written a love letter to May that he pinned in a silk purse next to his heart. One day, Damian was not attending January, and to cover for him the other squires told January that Damian was sick. May and January sat at dinner, and January decided to send May to visit Damian, to tell him that January would soon visit soon, after he had rested. May went straight to Damian, and, secretly, Damian slipped his letter into her hand: knowing that she could not afford to have it discovered, May hid the letter in her bosom. Reading it later, she tore it up and cast it in the toilet so as not to have it discovered.

May had already decided to return Damian's advances, and replied to his letter telling as much–taking her letter to his bedroom, putting it under his pillow and giving him a secret handshake. Damian awoke the next morning, his sickness all vanished, and returned to serve January humbly. January's house had a garden so magnificent, the narrator now continues, that even he who wrote Romance of the Rose could not describe its beauty, nor could Priapus accurately describe its art. January loved this garden so much that only he possessed the key to it. In the summer he would go there with May and have sex. January had also, in this time, become blind and became increasingly possessive of his wife, which caused Damian great grief–and May too wept very often, for January was always in her company. However, May and Damian kept in touch via letter, and by various secret signs.

May imprinted January's key to the garden in warm wax, and Damian made a secret copy of the key. The eighth of June came round, and January decided, thanks to the incitement of his wife, to go and have sex in his beautiful garden. He sang a beautiful song to awake his wife and tempt her to the garden, and eventually, January, blind as a stone, and May, unlocked the gate and stepped into the garden.

Damian had already entered the garden, as May had made signs to him to do so, and now she signaled to him to climb up a nearby tree, full of fruit. At this point, the narrator makes an unusual departure from the supposed realism of January's story to narrate the descent of Pluto and Proserpina into the garden, who have a long argument about marriage, citing various classical sources. Pluto, feeling pity for January, wants to restore January's sight so that he can see the villainy about to be done behind his back; Prosperina rejects his argument, telling him that the classical sources which proclaim the evil of women missed out the evil performed by men.

Did u know? Proserpina wants May to have sex with Damian; Pluto wants to restore his sight to prevent it-and Proserpina forcibly ends the argument.

Notes

Damian sat high in the pear tree, and May told her husband she longed to pick and eat one of the pears. January bent over so that May could stand on his back to climb the tree-she grabbed a branch, and climbed up into the tree with Damian, who pulled up her dress and began to have sex with her. But, when Pluto saw this, he restored January's sight–and January, seeing his cuckoldry, let out a huge roar and asked his wife what she was doing.

Without missing a beat, May responds that she had been told that the best way to restore January's eyesight was to "struggle" with a man in a tree; January responds that she was not struggling, but having full penetrative sex. In that case, May continues, her medicine is false–January clearly isn't seeing clearly, she argues. And when January asserts that he can see perfectly, May rejoices that she has restored her sight, and persuades January that he did not see her having sex with Damian. January is delighted, kisses her and hugs her, and strokes her on her stomach, leading her home to this house.

6.2.3 Epilogue to the Merchant's Tale

"Goddes mercy!" said the Host, praying God to keep him from such a wife, and noting that clever wives easily deceive foolish men by ducking away from the truth. "I have a wyf ", the Host continues, who, though she is poor, is a shrew, always blabbing–and she has several other vices too! The Host then cuts himself off again from discussing his wife, as he worries that someone in the company will report his doing so back to his wife. He is, he claims, clever enough not to reveal everything, and therefore his tale is done.

Analysis

There is a real sense in this tale of goodness slightly gone bad, ripeness becoming slightly rotten. This starts, perhaps, with the opening paean to marriage and the description of January as a worthy, noble knight. It is only as we read on that we realize that, in fact, this apparent positivism is flecked with a bitter irony. January, the noble knight, is also portrayed in unforgiving detail, even down to the scratchy bristles on his neck, and the loose skin on his aged body. We, like May, recoil at the description–there is nothing, for example, of the comfortable, stylized presentation of (for example) the Nun's Priest's Tale here. The narrator is unstinting when he wants to focus our attentions on something unpleasant.

The authorial condemnation of May also departs from the other fabliaux of the Canterbury Tales. Like Alison of the Miller's Tale, she is crafty, but May is also wicked. She escapes without punishment from her husband, but unlike the Miller's Tale this is not a satisfactory conclusion. While the Miller's Tale prized cunning and crafty behavior, the Merchant's Tale adheres to more traditional values. Therefore, May's escape from punishment is a dissonant element of the story, for she behaves contrary to the established values that the Merchant has set for his tale.

May, unlike her husband, largely escapes from the spotlight of the tale – it does not have access to her thoughts (only God knows, at one point, what she thought of her husband) nor does it really describe her body in anything like the detail it lavishes on her husband's. What we see of May is largely a matter of her secret signs and cunning behavior: and the only lengthy description of her, significantly, is given in the context of presenting her as a good option for January to marry. What appears beautiful on the visible outside is clearly rotten in the middle.

Task Why is it appropriate that this tale be told by the Merchant?

This too is represented in the strand of Biblical imagery throughout the tale. It is rather obvious, perhaps, to see May's infidelity with Damien (whose very name, some critics argue, means "snake") as a version of Eve's transgression with the snake–both, indeed, take place in a beautiful garden, though the Bible's Adam does not share the physical disgust of January. Characteristic of the

Merchant's apparent bitterness, perhaps, is the remark which follows January's really rather beautiful pastiche (calling May to awake and come into the garden) of the Song of Songs: it refers to them in a blunt, dismissive phrase as "olde, lewed words".

Notes In Merchant's tale, beautiful women are really venomous, malicious tricksters-beautiful, lyrical poetry is really only old, obscene words.

May, however, despite her low blood, proves herself hugely more intelligent than her noble husband: we might also find analogues for this (at least in sympathy, if not in intelligence) in Griselde of the Clerk's Tale. There is nothing of the indulgent, joyful trickery of the Miller's Tale in the Merchant's Tale, but instead a return to the signification of the Reeve's Tale - the moment of sexual intercourse is presented with the same unflinching, uneuphemistic detail, and the preceding action between the illicit lovers in both tales is largely a matter of signs.

Secret signs are everywhere in the Merchant's Tale: things which, like the mirror in the common marketplace (the metaphor for January's pre-wedding fanciful mind), leave a certain impression on the mind. From the letter that May reads and then casts into the privy, to the secret handshake between May and Damien, to the impression of January's key which allows Damien into the garden, this tale is focused on tricky actions rather than words, secret, illicit events rather than open actions.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

6. What is the literary genre of the Merchant's tale?
7. What is the theme of the Merchant's tale?
8. What is this story saying about marriage?
9. What does the Merchant reveal about his own marriage in his prologue?
10. Who sympathizes with him?

The bitterness of the Merchant, trapped in his unhappy marriage, can be felt, then, coursing through the veins of the Merchant's Tale at various points; but particularly in its bitterly unhappy (happy) ending, in which blind January is entirely gulled into believing that he has not been made a fool of. Moreover, when we consider that January happily strokes his wife on her "wombe" ("stomach", but also "womb") at the end of the tale, the Merchant might even leave us with a taste of what would happen next: has May just become pregnant with Damien's baby? The suggestion is not as ridiculous as it initially sounds-particularly when you consider that the pear (it is a pear tree in which the couple have sex) was a well-known remedy to help fertility in Chaucer's day. Perhaps May–at the end of this tale–has actually got something (someone!) rotten growing inside her.

6.3 Summary

- Walter, however, wanted Griselde herself to assent before he married her, and, the two men went into her chamber.
- The marquis told her that although she was dear to him, to the rest of the nobility she was not.
- The people came to loathe Walter, thinking that he had murdered his children.
- The narrator then defies Theophrastus, the author of a tract attacking marriage, arguing that a wife is God's gift, which will last longer than any other gift of Fortune.
- The authorial condemnation of May also departs from the other fabliaux of the Canterbury Tales.

Notes

6.4 Keywords

Incitement : Persuade to act in a violent or unlawful way.

Villa : A large country house in its own grounds.

Stoic : A member of the ancient philosophical school of stoicism.

Pomp : Ceremony and splendid display.

6.5 Review Questions

1. Name each of the tests Walter applies to test Griselde's loyalty.
2. Does Walter ever relent in his testing of his wife?
3. What does "Chaucer's Envoy" add?
4. What is the significance of the names of the husband and wife in the Merchant's tale?
5. Describe the trickery and deception used to dupe January.
6. What is function of the advisors to the old Knight?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. This tale is based on the writing of Petrarch and Boccaccio's Decameron.
2. It combines the elements of the romance and the exemplum.
3. He persuades the Pope that his people are turning against Griselde since she is lowborn.
4. He thinks his peasants are not wise enough to choose his bride.
5. The hearer is intended to avoid behaving as Walter did while still admiring Griselde.
6. It is a fabliau.
7. Men are easily manipulated and made fools of by their wives.
8. Old men should not marry extremely young women.
9. He is very unhappily married.
10. The host sympathizes with him.

6.6 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

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Notes

Unit 7: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-VI

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

7.1 The Squire's Tale

7.1.1 Introduction to the Squire's Tale

7.1.2 The Squire's Tale Text

7.2 The Franklin's Tale

7.2.1 Prologue to the Franklin's Tale

7.2.2 The Franklin's Tale Text

7.3 The Physician's Tale

7.3.1 The Physician's Tale Text

7.4 Summary

7.5 Keywords

7.6 Review Questions

7.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the text and analysis of Squire's tale
- Explain the prologue and text of Franklin's tale and Physician's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of Franklin's and Physician's tale.

Introduction

The prologue to *The Squire's Tale* refers back to the deceitful nature of women and looks ahead to a tale of pure and ideal love. Though it is incomplete. The Squire's Tale is obviously going to be a romance. All indications are that it would have been an intricate one with several plot threads and several important characters. The interesting device of setting a story within a story is used with the falcon's tale of an unfaithful lover. This insertion is probably meant either to foreshadow or to contrast with the love story planned for Canace. Like others of the tales Chaucer invented, this one has roots in both French and English literature, but unlike any other of Chaucer's stories. The Squire's Tale reveals considerable Oriental influence. This adds an exotic quality absent in the other tales. There is little mystery, however, as regards the theme of this narration. It strongly promises to deal with wonders, constancy in love, and virtuous character. Ideal love will no doubt triumph in the end.

Notes

At the end of The Squire's Tale, the Franklin effusively praises the Squire's scholarship and affected language. He is revealed to be an imitator of the nobility so it is no wonder that he introduces his tale by apologizing for not having had the education of a noble. His lack of tranining requires him to speak in plain language. Actually, the Franklin displays extensive learning in this introduction, citing numerous classical references and attempting a clumbsy rhetorical pun. The Franklin tells a tale which he hopes might have been told by a noble, as romances were supposed to be confined in circulation to the nobility. His romance centers on ideal love, the virtuous woman, and the capacity of Man to be supremely generous and to behave according to the knightly ideal. Further confirming his tale as a romance, the Frankline includes noble characters, a classical setting, and elements of magic which give a hint of the mysterious and otherworldly.

The rash promise made without reflection and possibly, without intent to fulfill, are further features of the romance. Just as the Franklin relates, one of Chaucer's sources for this story is the Breton lais. He has also borrowed from the writings of St. Jerome; from Boccaccio's Decameron; and from the French *Le Roman de la Rose*. Like most of the tales, the Franklin's Tale concentrates on the relationship between husbands, wives, and lovers, exposing the vices and virtues of men and women. All of the characters in this particular story are virtuous, unlike those presented in the fabliaux. There is nothing crass about Aurelius and Dorigen, for although both of them err, all are shown in the end to be capable of great honor, loyalty, and generousity. The sanctity of marriage is upheld and respected in The Franklin's Tale.

7.1 The Squire's Tale

7.1.1 Introduction to the Squire's Tale

The Host asks the Squire to draw near and tell the next tale.

7.1.2 The Squire's Tale Text

(I) The Squire tells the tale of Cambyuskan, the king of Sarai in Tartary. With his wife Elpheta he had two sons, Algarsyf and Cambalo, and a daughter Canacee. In the twentieth year of his reign, on the Ides of March, his subjects celebrated his nativity. During the great feast with the king and his knights, a strange knight came into the hall on a brass horse, carrying a broad mirror of glass, wearing a gold ring on his thumb and carrying a naked sword by his side.

This knight saluted the king and queen, and all the lords, in order, so reverently and nobly that even Gawain could not have bettered him. The narrator apologizes for not being able to reproduce the nobility of his elocution, punning that he could not climb "over so heigh a style", and resolving only to reproduce the meaning, not the expression, of what the knight said.

This knight had been sent from the king of Arabia and India, to bring Cambyuskan a steed of brass that could, within twenty-four hours, transport a person safely anywhere on the globe. He also presented to Canacee a mirror that foresaw impending mischance and could determine the character of friends and foes, and a ring that enabled the wearer to understand the language of any bird, and the healing properties of all herbs. His final gift was the sword, whose edge would bite through any armor but whose flat would cure any wounds inflicted by the edge.

Having told his tale, the knight rode out of the hall, leaving his steed standing in the court, and was led to his chamber. The presents were carried into the tower, and the ring given to Canacee, but the brass steed would not move until the knight taught people how to move it. The horse was a source of wonder for the people, compared alternately to the Pegasus and the Trojan horse. All one had to do to move the brass horse was to twirl a peg in its ear, according to the knight.

(II) After the revelry of the night before, the next morning everybody but Canacee remained asleep until late. She had dreamt of the mirror and the ring and thus had her first satisfying rest in a very long time. As she went out walking that morning with her maids, she came across a bleeding peregrine falcon that cried out in anguish. It had maimed itself. Canacee picked up the falcon and spoke to it, a power she had gained from the ring the knight had given her. The falcon told her a tale of a handsome tercelet as treasonous and false as he was beautiful, who fell in love with a kite as well as with the falcon, and left the falcon to love the kite. Canacee healed the bird with herbs which she dug out of the ground, and carried it to a box, covered in blue velvets, with a painted meadow inside it, which she laid by her bedside.

The narrator then leaves Canace, promising to return to the story of her ring and show how the falcon regained her love, thanks to the mediation of Cambalo, the king's son. First, the narrator says, he will tell of Cambyuskan, and how he won his cities, and after that of Algarsyf, and how he won his wife (for whom he would have been in great peril, were it not for the brass horse) and after that of Cambalo, who fought with the brothers in order to win Canacee, and then–after all that–the narrator intends to pick up where he left off.

(III) The narrator has just begun to set the scene, when he is interrupted…

The words of the Franklin to the Squire and the words of the Host to the Franklin

The Franklin tells the Squire that he has served himself well, praising his wit, and asserting that no-one in the company is as eloquent as the Squire. The Franklin then comments that he would give twenty pounds worth of land if his own son were a man of such discretion as the Squire–who needs possessions, if he is virtuous! The Franklin continues that he has often rebuked his own son for not listening to virtuous people-the Franklin's son only plays at dice and spends money, and would rather talk with a page than a nobleman.

At this point, the Host interrupts-"Straw for youre gentillesse!" ("Straw to your nobility!")–reminding the Franklin that what he is saying is irrelevant, and that each pilgrim must tell at least a tale or two, or break his vow. The Franklin reassures the Host that he is aware of this, even if he is taking a moment to speak to the Squire, and–as instructed by the host–tells his tale, commenting that, if it pleases the Host, his tale will certainly be a good one.

Analysis

Since the Squire's Tale exists only in a fragmentary form, it is difficult to determine precisely how we are supposed to read it. The tale may be a fragment because Chaucer never finished the tale or because the later section of the tale was lost in the manuscripts from which the Canterbury Tales were taken. And yet, the Franklin's interruption comes at a point which suggests that the Squire's Tale might be one of Chaucer's many trick interrupted-endings.

For the moment at which the Franklin interrupts comes only two lines after the Squire has outlined his plans–extremely lengthy plans–for the rest of his tale, giving as the last plot point to be covered in his telling Cambalo's fight for the hand of Canacee. There seems nothing very unusual about that, until we remember that, at the start of the tale, we are clearly told that Canacee and Cambalo are brother and sister. And this is where the tale becomes interesting. Canacee, of course, is the person discussed in the Man of Law's Prologue-Chaucer, the Man of Law claims, will not tell her story, and nor will he.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. What element is inserted in the Squire's tale that is not present in any of the others?
2. What is the probable theme of the Squire's tale?
3. What type of tale is the Falcon's story intended to imitate?
4. Who has sent the strange knight?

Notes

Yet here is Chaucer, in the mouth of the Squire, promising to tell the story of incestuous Canacee. It is certainly true that the Squire's plan for the rest of his tale looks as if it might take four pilgrimages of its own to complete–the Squire, the son of the Knight, certainly inherited his father's long-windedness–and some critics have argued that the Franklin breaks off the tale (either with irony or with faux modesty and compliments) only to prevent the pilgrimage from having to endure all of it. Yet critics–who have paid scant attention to the Squire's Tale, often disregarding it as unfinished–have yet to come up with a fully persuasive explanation of why it is the promise of incest which seems to motivate the abrupt termination of the Squire's Tale.

Notes William Kamowski has also pointed out that the abridgement of the Squire's Tale precedes an abridgement of the Host's original tale-telling plan.

In fact, at the very moment when the Squire breaks off, an apparent reshaping of the grand plan for the Canterbury Tales also takes place. Harry Bailly reminds the Franklin, "wel thou woost / That ech of yow moot tellen atte leste / A tale or two, or breken his biheste" (696-98). Evidently the Host's original plan for four tales apiece will not be realized. It seems more than coincidence that the Host trims his own colossal ambition so soon after the aborting of the Squire's grand plan, which is too large to be realized within the framework of either the Host's storytelling contest or Chaucer's frame narrative.

Task What elements of the romance are present in this fragment?

There are lots of interesting avenues for exploration and interpretation with the Squire's Tale, yet it only seems fair to conclude that the critical work on the Tale remains, like the Tale itself, frustratingly inconclusive.

7.2 The Franklin's Tale

7.2.1 Prologue to the Franklin's Tale

The old Bretons, in their time, made songs, and the Franklin's Tale, the narrator says, is to be one of those songs. However, the Franklin begs the indulgence of the company because he is a "burel man" (an unlearned man) and simple in his speech. He has, he says, never learned rhetoric, and he speaks simply and plainly–the colors he knows are not colors of rhetoric, but colors of the meadow.

7.2.2 The Franklin's Tale Text

The Franklin's Tale begins with the courtship of the Breton knight Arviragus and Dorigen, who came to be married happily. Their marriage was one of equality, in which neither of the two was master or servant; and the narrator comments specifically that when "maistrie" (the desire of the Wife of Bath and the women in her tale) enters into a marriage, love flaps its wings and flies away.

However, soon after their marriage, Arviragus was sent away to Britain to work for two years. Dorigen wept for his absence, despite the letters that he sent home to her. Her friends would often take her on walks where they would pass the cliffs overlooking the ocean and watch ships enter the port, hoping that one of them would bring home her husband. However, although her friends' comforting eventually started to work, Dorigen remained distressed by the grisly, black rocks visible from the cliff-side, near to the shore. She asked God why he would create "this werk unresonable"

(this unreasonable work), whose only purpose was to kill people. Her friends, seeing how terribly Dorigen feared that whatever ship brought her husband home would crash on these rocks and sink, provided further distractions.

One day, her friends had organized a party and a dance in a beautiful garden. It was at this dance that Aurelius, a squire, danced in front of Dorigen, who was as fresh and well-dressed as the month of May. His singing and dancing were better than any man's, and he was one of the most handsome men alive. Unbeknownst to Dorigen, Aurelius had been in love with her for two years, but had never dared tell her how he felt. It was during the dancing, then, that Aurelius addressed Dorigen, wishing that he, and not her husband, had been sent across the sea, before begging her to have mercy on him and revealing his love.

Dorigen responded by sternly rebuking Aurelius, telling him that she would never be an untrue wife, and had no intention of cuckolding her husband. And then, "in pley" (playfully, flirtily, in fun), Dorigen added that she would be Aurelius' love on the day that all of the rocks were removed from the coast. This made Aurelius sigh heavily: "Madame", he said "this were an inpossible!" (an impossibility). The dance ended and the guests went home, except for poor, sorrowful Aurelius, who fell to his knees, and holding his hands to heaven, prayed to the gods for mercy.

Arviragus then returned from abroad, and Dorigen was delighted to have him back. Two years passed, and Aurelius lay in torment, and without comfort–except, that is for his brother, a clerk, who suggested that he meet a student of law at Orleans who was versed in the sciences of illusion and "magyk". Heading toward Orleans, the two came across a young clerk, roaming by himself, who greeted them in Latin, and claimed to know why they came. And before they went a step further, he told them exactly what they were travelling to achieve.

Task What is the theme of the Franklin's tale?

Aurelius leapt down from his horse, and went with this man to his house, where he fed them and showed them wondrous illusions of various kinds. The man eventually agreed to remove the rocks from the coast for a thousand pounds; "Fy on a thousand pound!" responded Aurelius, "This wyde world… I wolde it yeve" ("Never mind a thousand pounds! I'd give you the wide world!"), and promised to pay the man.

The next morning, having stayed at the man's house, they travelled to Brittany, where, by illusion, the man made it so that, for a week or two, it would appear that the rocks had vanished. Aurelius, who now knew that there was no obstacle to his deal with Dorigen, said grateful prayers, and eventually came to his lady and explained to her, in courtly, formal terms, how he had fulfilled their bargain. She stood astonished, entirely white, never thinking that such an occasion could arise, and went home, despairing.

Arvigarus was out of town, and Dorigen was overcome with grief, realizing that she must forfeit either her body or her reputation. She thought about the numerous instances in which a faithful wife or a maiden destroyed herself rather than submitting herself to another. She cited the maidens of Lacedaemon who chose to be slain rather than defiled, Hasdrubal's wife, who committed suicide during the siege of Carthage, and Lucrece, who did the same when Tarquin took her by force.

When Arviragus returned home and Dorigen told him the truth of what had happened, he told that he will bear the shame of her actions, and that adhering to her promise is the most important thing. He therefore sent her to submit to Aurelius. When Aurelius learned how well Arviragus had accepted his wife's promise, Aurelius decided to let Dorigen's promise go unfulfilled, refusing to break the married couple's "trouthe". He claimed that a squire can indeed be as honorable as a knight. Aurelius then went to pay the law student, even though his affair remained unconsummated, and the man forgave Aurelius' debt, proving himself honorable. The narrator ends the tale by posing the question to the assembled company "Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" "Who was the most generous/noble, do you think?"

Notes

Analysis

The Franklin's Tale is, as the narrator acknowledges at the start, a Breton lay, a brief romance supposedly descending from Celtic origins, and usually dealing with themes of romance, love and usually containing some sort of supernatural ingredient. Chaucer took the story from Boccaccio's Decameron though the tale weaves well into many of the other Tales, including the Merchant's Tale, which is echoed in many of the Franklin's descriptions.

The tale seems to offer the solution to the problem raised and complicated in the other "Marriage Group" tales in its initial comments that "maistrie" has no place in love. Dorigen and Arvigarus are among the few happy couples in Chaucer's Tales, and yet one suspects that the problem of "maistrie" is sidelined so as to focus on an entirely different problem, and one close to the heart of the Tales: the problem of language, words, and keeping one's word.

"Trouthe" is a central word in the tale, meaning "fidelity", and "truth", as well as "keeping one's word", and the idea of pledging troth (an Elizabethanism)–giving one's word as a binding promise–is central to the agreements between Dorigen and Aurelius. What the Franklin's Tale shows us is not dissimilar from the Friar's Tale-that we have to watch what we say because, like Dorigen's promise made "in pley", we never quite know how things are going to work out. The word becomes the marker of the deed, and, not to break her word, Dorigen is almost forced to perform the deed. In a work so concerned with stories and tale-telling, it is significant that Chaucer (as in the Friar's and Manciple's Tales) takes time to remind us of the value of each individual word we speak, and write.

The tale itself, of course, also bequeaths a word to both of its audiences (that is, the pilgrim audience of characters and the real-world audience reading or listening to Chaucer) and asks us to evaluate it in relation to what we have heard. "Fre", the root of our modern word "free", can mean generous (*i.e.* to give freely) but also has overtones of nobleness, "good behavior". Who, then, is the most generous and noble at the end of the tale?

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

5. In what literary genre is this story written?
6. What is the effect on Aurelius when Dorigen rebuffs him?
7. Who stands by Aurelius during all of his trials?
8. What does the magician do in response?

Arviragus, Jill Mann argues, by being noble enough to become a cuckold to preserve his wife's reputation, sparks off a chain of passivity, which she thinks is an extremely positive thing. Arviragus giving up his rights in Dorigen leads to Aurelius giving up his which in turn leads to the law student giving up his. When one person backs down, Mann interprets, so will the rest of the world.

Mann's is an interesting reading, but it does not quash entirely the thought that Arviragus' priorities might be in the wrong order-is it really more important that his wife holds to a bargain (made only in jest) rather than she sleeps with someone she does not want to sleep with?

Or at least, so she says. It is worth noting that, on Aurelius' first appearance, the tale stresses his good looks and charm, and one wonders precisely what motivates Dorigen, even in jest (and Freud has much to say about the meaning of jokes) to make the bargain. For surely Dorigen is the person who, were the bargain to go ahead, gets the best deal-not only is her husband safely home (and the rocks, for the moment, vanished) but she gets to sleep with both (extremely handsome, so the tale says) men. How, in fact, has Dorigen been generous or free at all?

Is Aurelius perhaps the most generous: willingly giving up the thing he most desired? Perhaps – but we might perhaps also argue that the thing he gave up, he had no real right to have anyway, considering that the "thing" was sex with another man's wife. The same might be said of the law

student, who foregoes only money: a lot of money, but still only money. The question of nobility and generousness completely depends from which perspective you read the tale.

Interestingly, we are never told that Dorigen goes to check whether the rocks have in fact vanished or not. Of course, they only exist as a plot twist within a tale–though one of the things the tale's final question reminds us of is that an existence in words, like the rash promise that Dorigen made, is an existence we dismiss at our peril.

7.3 The Physician's Tale

7.3.1 The Physician's Tale Text

As Titus Livius tells us, there was once a knight called Virginius who had many friends, much wealth, and a loving wife and daughter. The daughter possessed a beauty so great that even Pygmalion could not have created her equal. She was also humble in speech and avoided events which might compromise her virtue. The narrator then breaks off to address governesses and parents, telling them to bring up their children to be virtuous.

The maid one day went into the town, toward a temple, with her mother, where a judge who governed the town, saw the knight's daughter, and lusted after her. He was so caught by the maid's beauty that he concluded "This mayde shal be myn". At that, the devil ran into his heart, and taught him how he, by trickery, could have the maid for his own. He sent after a churl, who he knew was clever and brave, and told him the plan, giving him precious, expensive gifts for his complicity.

The judge's name was Appius, the narrator now tells us, before asserting "So was his name, for this is no fable", but a "historial thyng notable" (a notable historical event). The false churl, Claudius, made a complaint against Virginius, and the judge summoned him to hear the charge against him. Claudius, in short, claimed that Virginius was holding one of his servants, a beautiful young girl, against his will, and pretending she was his daughter.

Did u know? The judge did not listen to Virginius' argument in his own defense, but ordered that the girl be taken as a ward of the court.

Virginius returned home, and called his daughter, with an ashen face. He explained to her that now there were only two avenues open to her: either death or shame. Virginius decided, in a long, mournful speech to his daughter, to kill her, and, although she begged for mercy and another solution, eventually she asked for a little leisure to contemplate her death. She then fell into a swoon, and when she awoke, she blessed God that she could die a virgin. Virginius then took his sword and cut off her head, and took it to the judge.

When the judge saw the head, he tried to escape and hang himself, but soon a thousand people thrust in, knowing of the false iniquity, took Appius and threw him into prison. Claudius was sentenced to be hanged upon a tree–except that Virginius pleaded on his behalf, succeeding in reducing the sentence to exile.

Here, the narrator says, may men see that sin has no reward – even if it is so private that no-one knows of it other than God and the sinner. The last counsel the tale presents us with: "Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake".

Task On what source is the Physician's tale based?

Notes

Analysis

After the Physician's Tale has finished, in the prologue to the Pardoner's Tale, the Host claims that he has almost "caught a cardynacle" – almost had a heart attack, and it is not difficult to see why. This is a tale which takes no prisoners: with no prologue to ease us in, this brutal, harsh, violent and uncompromising tale refuses to be read as a fable ("this is no fable") or allegory, but insists that we view its cruel and unpleasant events as things which happen in the real world. One rather wonders why the Physician thinks it will win him the prize at the end of the tale-telling.

Moreover, the tale rushes towards its unpleasant conclusion, even at the expense of plausibility. Why doesn't Virginius try to argue with the judge, or call upon the mob of thousand people who, only a little later, burst through the doors to deliver justice? Why doesn't Virginius hide his daughter, or jump on his knightly steed and escape to another land? Again, as in the Knight's Tale and the Franklin's Tale, there seems to be some interrogation of ideas of chivalry: this is a man who, without any need for reflection, would rather preserve his daughter's nobility and honor than keep her alive. Chaucer again casts a negative light across the codes of honor to which men adhere.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

9. How does Virginia, though pagan, fit into the medieval christian concept of virtuous womanhood?
10. What is the theme of the Physician's tale?

Critics have not devoted much attention to the tale, except to say that it provides, perhaps, the first significant "death's head" in the Canterbury Tales: what hitherto has been a fun, "game"-some party, a well-meaning competition, despite its squabbles, is suddenly presented with a tale entirely without good-naturedness or comedy. It is the beginning of a turn toward darkness which entirely changes the tone and tenor of the Tales as a whole, and–although in its criticism of hypocrisy, defense of religion and beauty, and painful, final justice, it has much in common thematically with some of the other tales–it is a tale which seems decidedly set apart from its predecessors.

7.4 Summary

- This knight saluted the king and queen, and all the lords, in order, so reverently and nobly that even Gawain could not have bettered him.
- Since the Squire's Tale exists only in a fragmentary form, it is difficult to determine precisely how we are supposed to read it.
- The old Bretons, in their time, made songs, and the Franklin's Tale, the narrator says, is to be one of those songs.
- The Franklin's Tale begins with the courtship of the Breton knight Arviragus and Dorigen, who came to be married happily.
- Arvigarus was out of town, and Dorigen was overcome with grief, realizing that she must forfeit either her body or her reputation.

7.5 Keywords

Anguish **:** Severe mental or physical pain.

Colossal **:** Extremely large.

Foe : An enemy.

Fidelity : Continuing loyalty to a person.

7.6 Review Questions

1. Describe the magical properties of each of the gifts.
2. Why does the Host invite the squire to tell a love story?
3. From what sources did Chaucer borrow in creating the Franklin's tale?
4. In what way does virginius represent true justice and how does Appius represent justice corrupted?
5. What trumped up charges put Virginia under the control of the evil judge?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. This tale has oriental or exotic qualities.
2. Ideal love prevails.
3. The Falcon's story imitates a beast fable.
4. The king of Arabia and India has sent the knight.
5. Romance is this tale's genre.
6. He falls desperately ill for two years.
7. His brother takes care of Aurelius.
8. He cancels Aurelius debt.
9. She accepts death rather than sexual soiling.
10. She is accused of being a runway slave girl belonging to the judge's co-conspirator.

7.7 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

Notes

Unit 8: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-VII

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

8.1 The Pardoner's Tale

8.1.1 Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale

8.1.2 The Pardoner's Prologue

8.1.3 The Pardoner's Tale Text

8.2 The Shipman's Tale

8.2.1 The Shipman's Tale Text

8.3 Summary

8.4 Keywords

8.5 Review Questions

8.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and text of the Pardoner's and Shipman's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of the tales.

Introduction

The wicked practices of the pardoner were, unfortunately, widespread in the medieval Catholic Church. However, the Pardoner is so openly and gleefully and unashamedly wicked that he himself serves a sermon against these practices. His tale is totally in keeping with his character. The form of The Pardoner's Tale, an allegory, is one with which medieval audiences would have been completely familiar. In an allegory, the characters personify abstract qualities; the plot is meant to teach a moral lesson. In this case, Avarice, Gluttony, and Sloth meet Death at their own hands, in other words, these vices lead invariably to spiritual death. This particular allegory had many versions in Eastern and in Western literature and was frequently enacted as a morality play. Therefore, it is not attributed to any single source. Chaucer's version is the one that has survived. It has become one of the most widely read and best loved of *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Shipman is clearly bored with morality. He wants nothing of a sermonizing nature in his tale; its only purpose is to entertain. His tale is another example of fabliau, with its emphasis on trickery and sex. Like many of the other tales, this one centers on a theme of marriage. The beautiful wife in this story manages both her husband and Don John by bestowing her sexual favors with enthusiasm to

achieve her own ends. Because so much of this story is presented from a female perspective, and because the Wife of Bath was said to be so skilled in all the arts of love, many critics believe that Chaucer originally intended for this tale to be told by the earthy Wife of Bath. However, The Shipman is a very worldly and a very nonreligious man, thus having him tell the story is not out of keeping with his character as it is described in the General Prologue.

8.1 The Pardoner's Tale

8.1.1 Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale

Following the Physician's Tale, the Host began to swear as if he were mad, wishing a shameful death on the judge and his advocates, and concluding that the cause of the maiden's death was her "beautee". The Host pronounced the tale a piteous one to listen to, and prayed to God that he protect the Physician's body.

The Host, concluding that he has almost "caught a cardynacle" (had a heart attack) after the brutality of the Physician's Tale, decides that he must have medicine in the form of a merry tale, in order to restore his heart. Turning to the Pardoner, he asks for some "myrthe or japes right anon", and the Pardoner agrees, though, before he begins, he stops at an alehouse to "drynke and eten of a cake".

Did u know? The company protests that the Pardoner not be allowed to tell them a ribald tale, but insists instead on "som moral thyng" - a request which the Pardoner also grants.

8.1.2 The Pardoner's Prologue

Radix malorum est Cupiditas (Greed is the root of all evil)

The Pardoner begins by addressing the company, explaining to them that, when he preaches in churches, his voice booms out impressively like a bell, and his theme is always that greed is the root of all evil. First, the Pardoner says, he explains where has come from, and shows his papal bulls, indulgences, and glass cases crammed full of rags and bones, which he claims (to the congregation, at least) are holy relics with magical properties.

Then, the Pardoner invites anyone who has sinned to come and offer money to his relics, and therefore to be absolved by the Pardoner's power. This trick, the Pardoner says, has earned him at least a hundred marks since he was made a pardoner-and when the "lewd peple" are seated, he continues to tell them false trickeries and lies. His intention, he says, is simply "for to wynne" (to profit), and "nothyng for correccioun of synne" (and nothing to do with the correction of sin); the Pardoner doesn't care whether, after burial, his congregation's souls go blackberry picking. Thus, the Pardoner says, he spits out his venom under the pretense of holiness, seeming holy, pious, and "trewe". "Greed is the root of all evils", the Pardoner quotes again, explaining that he preaches against the same vice which he himself is guilty of. Yet, although he knows he is guilty of the sin, he can still make other people turn away from it.

Next, the Pardoner tells the company how he tells his congregation "olde stories" from long ago, "for lewed peple loven tales olde". He will not, he says, work with hands and make baskets, but get money, wool, cheese and wheat for himself, even if it is from the poorest page or poorest widow in a village. He will drink "licour of the vyne", and have a "joly wenche" in every town. "Now hold your pees!" he shouts to the company, and begins his tale.

Notes

8.1.3 The Pardoner's Tale Text

There once lived in Flanders a company of three rioters who did nothing but engage in irresponsible and sinful behavior. At this point, the narrator interrupts the tale itself to launch a lengthy diatribe against drunkenness-mentioning Herod, Seneca, Adam, Sampson, Attila the Hun and St. Paul as either sources or famed drunkards. This in turn oddly becomes a diatribe against people whose stomachs are their gods (their end, we are told, is death), and then a diatribe against the stomach, called, at one point a "stynkyng cod, fulfilled of dong and of corrupcioun" (a stinking bag, full of dung and decayed matter). This distraction from the story itself ends with an attack on dice-playing (dice here called "bicched bones", or cursed dice).

The three drunkards were in a tavern one night, and, hearing a bell ring, looked outside to see men carrying a corpse to its grave. One of them called to his slave to go and ask who the corpse was: he was told by a boy that the corpse was an old fellow whose heart was smashed in two by a secret thief called Death. This drunkard agreed, and discussed with his companions how this "Death" had indeed slain many people, of all ranks, of both sexes, that very year. The three then made a vow (by "Goddes digne bones") to find Death and slay him.

When they had gone not even half a mile, they met an old, poor man at a style, who greeted them courteously. The proudest of the drunkards responded rudely, asking the man why he was still alive at such a ripe age. The old man answered that he was alive, because he could not find anyone who would exchange their youth for his age-and, although he knocked on the ground, begging it to let him in, he still did not die. Moreover, the old man added, it was not courteous of the drunkards to speak so rudely to an old man.

One of the other drunkards responded still more rudely that the old man was to tell them where Death was, or regret not telling them dearly. The old man, still polite, told the drunkards they could find Death up the crooked way and underneath an oak tree.

The drunkards ran until they came to the tree, and, underneath it, they found eight bushels of gold coins. The worst one of them spoke first, arguing that Fortune had given them the treasure to live their life in happiness-but realizing that they could not carry the gold home without people seeing them and thinking them thieves. Therefore, he suggested, they should draw lots, and one of them should run back to the town to fetch bread and wine, while the other two protected the treasure. Then, at night, they could agree where to take the treasure and carry it safety. This was agreed, and lots were drawn: the youngest of them was picked to go to the town.

However, as soon as he had gone to the town, the two remaining drunkards plotted amongst themselves to stab him upon his return, and then split the gold between them. While he was in the town, the youngest thought of the beauty of the gold coins, and decided to buy some poison in order to kill the other two, keeping the gold for himself. Thus, he went to an apothecary, bought some "strong and violent" poison, poured it into two of three wine bottles (the third was for him to drink from), topped them up with wine, and returned to his fellows.

Task How does the youngest die?

Exactly as the other two had planned it, it befell. They killed him on his return, and sat down to enjoy the wine before burying his body–and, as it happened, drank the poison and died. The tale ends with a short sermon against sin, asking God to forgive the trespass of good men, and warning them against the sin of avarice, before (this, we can presume narrated in the Pardoner's voice) inviting the congregation to "come up" and offer their wool in return for pardons.

The tale finished, the Pardoner suddenly remembers that he has forgotten one thing - that he is carrying relics and pardons in his "male" (pouch, bag) and begins to invite the pilgrims forward to

receive pardon, inciting the Host to be the first to receive his pardon. "Unbokele anon thy purs", he says to the Host, who responds that the Pardoner is trying to make him kiss "thyn old breech" (your old pants), swearing it is a relic, when actually it is just painted with his shit. I wish, the Host says, I had your "coillons" (testicles) in my hand, to shrine them in a hog's turd.

Notes The Pardoner is so angry with this response, he cannot speak a word, and, just in time, the Knight steps in, bringing the Pardoner and the Host together and making them again friends. This done, the company continues on its way.

Analysis

The Pardoner has–in recent years–become one of the most critically discussed of the Canterbury pilgrims. His tale is in many ways the exemplar of the contradiction which the structure of the Tales themselves can so easily exploit, and a good touchstone for highlighting precisely how Chaucer can complicate an issue without ever giving his own opinion.

Thus the Pardoner embodies precisely the textual conundrum of the Tales themselves-he utters words which have absolutely no correlation with his actions. His voice, in other words, is entirely at odds with his behavior. The Pardoner's voice, at the beginning of his tale, rings out "as round as gooth a belle", summoning his congregation: and yet his church is one of extreme bad faith. There is a genuine issue here about whether the Pardoner's tale, being told by the Pardoner, can actually be the "moral" tale it claims to be. For, while the tale does indeed demonstrate that money is the root of all evil, does it still count when he is preaching "agayn that same vice / Which that I use, and that is avarice" (against the very vice I commit: avarice"). How far, in other words, can the teller negate his own moral?

Yet the real problem is that the Pardoner is a successful preacher, and his profits point to several people who do learn from his speeches and repent their sin. His Tale too is an accurate demonstration of the way greed and avarice lead to evil. Hollow execution nevertheless, the Pardoner is an excellent preacher against greed. His voice, in short, operates regardless of his actions. Hollow sentiments produce real results.

This is also reflected in the imagery of the tale itself. The Pardoner hates full stomachs, preferring empty vessels, and, though his "wallet" may well be "bretful of pardoun comen from Rome" but the moral worth of this paper is nil: the wallet, therefore, is full and empty at the same time–exactly like the Pardoner's sermon.

In just the same way Chaucer himself in the Tales can ventriloquize the sentiments of the pilgrim–the Reeve, the Pardoner, and the Merchant–and so on, without actually committing to it. Because the Tales themselves, in supposedly reproducing the "telling" of a certain pilgrim, actually do enact precisely the disembodied voice which the Pardoner represents. The moral paradox of the Pardoner himself is precisely the paradox of the Tales and their series of Chaucer-ventriloquized disembodied voices.

There is a doubleness, a shifting evasiveness, about the Pardoner's double audience: the imaginary congregation he describes, and the assembled company to whom he preaches, and tells his "lewed tales", even calling them forth to pardon at the end. The point is clear: even though they know it is insincere, the Pardoner's shtick might still work on the assembled company.

The imagery of the Pardoner's Tale also reflects this fundamental hollowness. The tale itself is strewn with bones, whether in the oath sworn "by Goddes digne bones", whether in the word for cursed dice ("bones") or whether in the bones which the Pardoner stuffs into his glass cases, pretending

Notes

they are relics. The literary landscape is strewn with body parts, and missing, absent bodies: beginning with the anonymous corpse carried past at the beginning of his tale. Bones, stomachs, coillons– words for body parts cover the page, almost as a grim reminder of the omnipresence of death in this tale.

The General Prologue, suggesting that the Pardoner resembles a "gelding or a mare", hints that the Pardoner may be a congenital eunuch or, taken less literally, a homosexual, and, as the Host seems to suggest at the end, might well be without his "coillons", a Middle English word meaning both "relics" and "testicles". All of the "relics" in this Tale, including the Pardoner's, evade the grasp of the hand. The Pardoner thus can be categorized along with the other bizarrely feminized males in the Tales, including Absolon, Sir Thopas, and, if we believe the Host, Chaucer (the character).

And of course, at the center of the tale, there is a search for somebody called "Death" which, naturally, does not find the person "Death", but death itself. It is a successful–but ultimately unsuccessful– search. All that is left over at the center of the Tales is the bushels of gold, sitting under a tree unclaimed. The root of the tale, as its moral similarly suggests about the root of evil, is money: and money was, to a medieval reader, known to be a spiritual "death". Notably, moreover, in the tale, both "gold" and "death" shift from metaphor to reality and back again; a neat reminder of the ability of the Tales to evade our grasp, raising difficult questions without ever answering them.

8.2 The Shipman's Tale

8.2.1 The Shipman's Tale Text

A rich merchant, who lived at St. Denis, foolishly took a beautiful woman for his wife. She drained his income by demanding clothes and other fine array to make her appear even more beautiful. There was also a fair, bold young monk, perhaps only thirty years old, who was always at the merchant's house. Indeed, he was as welcome there as it is possible for any friend to be. The monk was generous with his money, and always brought gifts for his lord and for the servants, according to their degree.

One day, as he was going to make a journey to Bruges, the merchant invited John to visit him and his wife before he departed. The monk and the merchant had a merry time together, eating and drinking for two days. On the third day, on which the merchant was ready to depart for Bruges, he awoke early and went to his counting-house to balance his books. John was also awake early and went into the garden to pray. The wife went into the garden, worried that something was bothering the monk. He in turn worries about her; he thinks that she did not sleep well, for the merchant kept her up all night having sex–and she admits, in turn, that in fact she has no lust for her husband. John realizes that there is more to this, and promises to keep everything she tells him secret.

The wife complains that her husband is the "worste man that ever was sith that the world bigan" (the worst man ever to have existed since the world began"). She also tells him that she owes a debt of one hundred franks, which, if she does not pay (and her husband finds out about it) will disgrace her. The wife begs the monk to lend her the money.

The noble monk tells the wife that he pities her, and promises to "deliver" the wife "out of this care", and bring her one hundred franks. With that, he caught her by the thighs, embraced her hard, and kissed her many times. The two then parted, and the wife went to her husband in his counting-house, begging him to leave his accounts. The merchant refused, explaining to her that it was essential that he managed his business carefully, as many merchants went bankrupt.

The three dined together that evenings, and after dinner, the monk took the merchant to one side, and asked him to lend him one hundred franks–and the merchant humbly and generously agreed, telling him to pay it again when he could afford to. He fetched the sum and took it to the monk, and no-one in the world but the two of them knew of the loan. That evening, the monk returned to the abbey, and, the next morning, the merchant travelled to Bruges to conduct his business.

The next Sunday, the monk returned to St. Denis, with head and beard all clean and freshly shaved, and–to get to the point–the wife agreed with the monk that, in exchange for the hundred franks, the monk could have sex with the wife all night, a promise which the two of them eagerly fulfilled. The next morning, the monk rode home to his abbey, or wherever pleased him.

The merchant returned home, and, delighted to see his wife, told her about his business transactions-and, when he came into town, he went straight to see his friend, the monk. The monk was delighted to see him, and, after talking about his business trip, the monk told the merchant that he had left his thousand franks with his wife. The merchant went home happy, and his wife met him at the gates–and the two of them had a happy night in bed, until the wife waylaid him, teasing him wantonly. Finally, the merchant told her he was a little angry with her because she had not told him she had received his money from the monk.

However, the wife was not frightened or taken aback by this, but said quickly and boldly that she had indeed received gold from the monk. The wife then argued that she should be allowed to keep the gold, to pay for good hospitality and to do with as she pleased; and, in return for him giving her his money, she would give him her body: "I wol nat paye yow but abedde". And the merchant saw that there was no other option but to agree.

The merry words of the Host to the Shipman and to the lady Prioress

"Wel seyd", the Host compliments the Shipman, cursing the monk, and warning the men in the company to beware of similar tricks. The monk, the Host interprets, tricked both the man and his wife. Moving forward, the Host then looks for the next tale-teller, and courteously asks the Prioress whether she might tell the next tale: "Gladly", she assents, and begins her tale.

Analysis

Despite its relative brevity, the Shipman's Tale interrogates and complicates several key issues raised in earlier tales. After the darker reaches of the Physician's and Pardoner's Tales, the Shipman's Tale returns to fabliau origins, presenting a reasonably simple "trick" story, complicated by Chaucer in the telling.

Primarily, the tale continues the idea, previously raised in The Wife of Bath's tale, that money, sex, and women are closely inter-connected. It is interesting that, in the second fragment, the Shipman promises to tell his tale, mentioning his "joly body" (attractive figure). Scholars have argued that, in fact, the lines about the Shipman's "joly body" were intended to be adapted into the mouth of the Wife of Bath, and it is the Wife of Bath's Tale which immediately follows the Shipman's promise.

Notes The bawdy fabliau of the Shipman's Tale is usually assumed to have been intended to be The Wife of Bath's tale before the version we currently have was composed.

Moreover, the Shipman's would not be an unlikely tale for the Wife to have told. At the end, when the Host concludes that the monk tricked both the merchant and his wife, he seems not to have realized the victor at the very end of the tale. Rather like in the Miller's and the Franklin's Tales, we are asked to consider each of the participants at the very close of the tale, and decide who we think has come off best. It is clearly not the merchant, though he has made huge profits in his business dealings, and had his loan repaid, and, though (as the Host argues) the monk has had sex with the wife, remained friends with the merchant, and got off scot-free, it is the wife herself who seems to triumph. Not only has she had enjoyable sex with both the merchant and the monk, but she is one hundred franks better off; and she coerces her husband into agreeing to "pay" in return for sleeping with her.

Notes

Task What makes the monk Don John unattractive as a person?

Like the Wife of Bath, this wife has realized the inherent value of her sexual attractiveness: and in a way that seems to a modern reader uncomfortably close to prostitution, she bears out the Wife's dictum that the "bele chose" is in fact an excellent bargaining tool for women to get what they want from men. As the Man of Law's Tale suggested, the female is a pawn in business transactions, and yet, what the Wives (of bath, and of the Merchant in this tale) realize that Constance never even considers, is their own potential profitability. If women's bodies are valuable, these two women seem to say, then why shouldn't we be the ones to profit from our bodies?

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. How doe the youngest reveler plan to kill the other two?
2. What characteristics does the Pardoner reveal in his prologue?
3. How is Don John's loan actually repaid and by whom?
4. Does the Merchant learn of the arrangement between his wife and Don John?
5. Does the husband, who is a Merchant, appear to be miserly or just careful?

One also notices the importance attached in these business dealings to giving one's word, to agreements sealed with kisses and with handshakes, and of one thing being verbally exchanged for another before the words become actions–a reminder, perhaps, of the issues of contracts raised by the Franklin's Tale.

Chaucer ties up these concerns, as so often, in a single pun: "taillynge", which means "credit" (and which the narrator wishes upon the company at the end of the tale) is a close relation to "telling" (*i.e*. telling a tale) but also punningly relates to "tail", Middle English slang for the female genitals. A woman's "tail" becomes an endless credit note: she will pay her husband, she says, in bed. Women, in this tale, and in the Wife of Bath's are playing by patriarchal rules in order to beat the men; and the fact that they do beat the men might have been an uncomfortable shift of powers to many of Chaucer's medieval readers.

8.3 Summary

- The Host pronounced the tale a piteous one to listen to, and prayed to God that he protect the Physician's body.
- The company protests that the Pardoner not be allowed to tell them a ribald tale, but insists instead on "som moral thyng" - a request which the Pardoner also grants.
- Next, the Pardoner tells the company how he tells his congregation "olde stories" from long ago, "for lewed peple loven tales olde".
- The Pardoner has–in recent years–become one of the most critically discussed of the Canterbury pilgrims.
- The monk was generous with his money, and always brought gifts for his lord and for the servants, according to their degree.
- Despite its relative brevity, the Shipman's Tale interrogates and complicates several key issues raised in earlier tales.

Notes

8.4 Keywords

Piteous : Arousing pity.

Vow : A solemn promise.

Relic : An object of interest surviving from an earlier time.

Genital : Relating to the human or animal reproductive organs.

8.5 Review Questions

1. What is an allegory?
2. Why would medivial audience have been familiar with the Pardoner's tale?
3. What is the moral lesson of the Pardoner's tale?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. He poisons the wine that he buys for them to drink.
2. He himself is totally motivated by greed and seems to have no virtue at all.
3. The wife spends the night making love to Don John. That is the repayment.
4. The Merchant never learns nor suspects the arrangement.
5. He is care ful.

8.6 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

Unit 9: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-VIII

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

9.1 The Prioress's Tale

9.1.1 Prologue of the Prioress's Tale

9.1.2 The Prioress's Tale Text

9.2 Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas

9.2.1 Prologue to the Sir Thopas

9.2.2 The Tale of Sir Thopas Text

9.3 Chaucer's Tale of Melibee

9.3.1 The Tale of Melibee Text

9.4 Summary

9.5 Keywords

9.6 Review Questions

9.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the text and prologue of the Prioress's and Sir Thopas tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of the tales.

Introduction

After jesting rather coarsely about the monk in the Shipman's Tale—and monks in general—the Host switches to a tone of exaggerated politeness in inviting the Prioress to tell her tale. A very young schoolboy learns a difficult Latin hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary because of his deep devotion to her. Every day, on the way to school and on the way home, he passes through the Jewish ghetto of the town singing the hymn.

True to her perfectionist, sentimental nature, the Prioress begins with a long apologetic prayer to the Virgin Mary. Her story of the martyred child resembles popular saints' stories of the day. It has a very preachy and morbid tone. Though they appear to the modern reader as very negative aspects of this story, her reverence for chastity and her harsh judgment of the Jews are both reflections of common

medieval Catholic beliefs. The violent nature of the events in the story seem to be in contradiction to a personality as sensitive as the Prioress's is supposed to be, suggesting that she may be much tougher than she wishes to reveal. She is, after all, in a position of great authority over others. After the sobering miracle story, the Host calls on the Narrator to give a lively, amusing story. Apologetically, with tongue in cheek, the Narrator says he knows only one old story in rhyme-doggerel. Chaucer's two stories are actually a joke on the Host with his impossible pretentions to being a literary critic. The Tale of Sir Thopas, which Harry Bailley totally rejects, is actually a brilliant parody of the popular courtly romances. Sir Thopas, vain and empty-headed, is going off to slay a dragon in response to his love longing and not in defense of any ladylove. He is behaving in exaggerated knightly fashion, but the absence of any ideals makes him completely ludicrous.

The literal-minded Host cannot see this; he is merely disgusted by the use of such a low form of versification for what is supposed to be a courtly story. Harry is not disappointed, however, by the narrator's long, ponderous telling of a rather boring and highly moralistic story. Harry fully approves when the Narrator deliberately loads the narrative with proverbs, maxims, clich's and literary allusions, tripling its length in the process. To the Host, this makes the story of Melibeus properly serious. The Narrator's joke escapes him completely.

9.1 The Prioress' Tale

9.1.1 Prologue of the Prioress' Tale

The Prioress' prologue is simply a prayer to the Virgin Mary, worshipping God, and asking her to help the narrator properly to tell of God's reverence and to guide the tale as it is told.

9.1.2 The Prioress' Tale Text

Once in an Asian town, there was a Jewish ghetto at the end of a street, in which usury and other things hateful to Christ occurred. The Christian minority in the town opened a school for their children in this city at the other end of the same street. Among the children attending this school was a widow's son, an angelic seven year old who was, even at his young age, deeply devoted to his faith. At school he learned songs in Latin, and could sing his Ave Marie and Alma redemptoris, a song giving praise to the Virgin Mary, and pay due reverence to Christ.

As he was walking home from school one day singing his Alma redemptoris, he provoked the anger of the Jews of the city, whose hearts were wasps' nests made by Satan. They hired a murderer who slit the boys' throat and threw the body into a cesspit.

The widow searched all night for her missing child, begging the Jews to tell her where her child might be found, but they refused to help her or give her any information. Jesus, however, gave her the idea to sing in the place where her son had been cast into the pit: and as she called out to him, the child, although his throat was slit, began to sing his Alma redemptoris. The other Christians of the city ran to the pit, amazed at what was happening, and sent for the provost.

The provost praised Christ and his mother, Mary, and had the Jews tied up. The child was taken up and carried, in a great and honorable procession to the nearest abbey, his corpse singing all the while. The local provost cursed the Jews, and ordered their death by hanging. Before the child was buried, holy water was sprinkled onto him, and he began to speak. The abbot of the abbey questioned him as to how he could sing, and the child answered that the Virgin Mary had placed a grain on his tongue that allowed him to speak. The abbot took this grain from his tongue, allowing him to die, and finally pass on to heaven. The child was buried in a marble tomb as a martyr, and the tale ends with a lament for the young child, but also for "Hugh of Lyncoln" (a real child martyr, allegedly slain by Jews in Chaucer's day).

Analysis

The Prioress' Tale is overtly a "Miracle of the Virgin", a reasonably common Christian genre of literature which represents a tale centered around Christian principles and a devotion to the Virgin Mary, but within the warm affection that the Prioress shows for her Christian faith is a disquieting anti-Semitism immediately obvious to the modern reader in our post-Holocaust times.

The tale is an unabashed celebration of motherhood, and an unapologetic argument for the virtue of Christianity over Judaism, and in most critics' readings, it partly serves as a grim reminder that anti-Semitism by no means began with Hitler in the Second World War. The guiding figure of the tale is the Virgin Mary, addressed directly in its prologue, who serves both as the exemplar for Christian values and as the intervening spirit who sustains the murdered child before he passes on to heaven. Her mortal parallel is the mother of the murdered boy, who dearly loves her son and struggles to find the boy when he is lost.

The Tale itself, as Seth Lerer has pointed out is "a nightmare of performance..." which "dramatizes just what happens when a performer faces a hostile audience". The little clergeoun of the tale (the child) is an unsuspecting victim, murdered solely because of his eagerness to sing: one of many tales which seems to take as its theme the danger of speaking, the potential danger of words and language, and a warning about what happens to people who open their mouths at the wrong moment (other such tales include those of the Manciple and the Nun's Priest).

Task What miraculous circumstance attends the findings of the murdered boy?

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Who is the central character in the Prioress's tale?
2. What is his special mark of devotion to the Virgin Mary?
3. Describe the grim nature of the boy murder.
4. How do the catholics interpret the child amazing singing?
5. What happen to the Jews in the Prioress's tale?

Despite its interest in song and performance, the key question still seems to be whether we are to read the tale as an outdated example of anti-Semitism, acceptable to a medieval audience but acceptable no longer or whether there is another option. If there is, it probably lies in the sentimental presentation of the Prioress' Tale, and the juxtaposition of the extremely angelic singing seven year old, and the extremely cruel and horrible Jews (who even go to the lengths of throwing the child's corpse into a cesspit). If we remember that the Prioress is a woman so sentimental that she even cries over a dead mouse, it's quite a contrast in her personality that she expends such vitriol over the Jews. Perhaps there is some sort of contrast; perhaps the Prioress is intended to be held at arm's length from Chaucer. The bottom line with this tale is that it entirely depends on your reading of the details.

9.2 Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas

9.2.1 Prologue to the Sir Thopas

When the Prioress' Tale was done, every man in the company looks serious, having heard of the miracle she described. Until the Host, beginning to joke, turns to Chaucer himself ("he looked upon me") and asks him what sort of man he is, as he is always looking at the ground. "Looke up murily", the Host tells Chaucer, calling him a doll ("popet") and describing him as elvish-faced.

Notes

Did u know? The Host then demands that Chaucer tells a "tale of myrthe", and "that anon" (do it soon). Chaucer replies to the Host that he only knows one tale: a rhyme that he learned many years before.

9.2.2 The Tale of Sir Thopas Text

(I) Asking the "lords" to listen, the tale announces itself as being "of myrthe and of solas" (fun and seriousness). It then introduces Thopas, a fair knight with a white face, rose-red lips, blond hair and beard, and a seemly nose. Thopas was very well dressed and he could hunt for deer, go hawking, and he was a good archer. Many maidens were brought in for him to sleep with, but he was chaste, and no lecher.

One day Thopas went out riding on his gray horse, carrying a launcegay and a longsword, and passed through a forest which had many wild beasts in it (buck as well as hares). Thopas heard the birdsong and fell into a love-sickness, and rode so fast that his horse sweated. Thopas therefore lay down to give him and his horse a rest, deciding that he would be in love with an elf-queen.

Thopas then climbed back into his saddle to find an elf-queen, but he came across a great giant called "Sire Olifaunt", who threatened Thopas that, if he left his territory, he would kill his horse. Thopas (described as "the child") said that he would meet with the giant tomorrow, as he had forgotten his armor, and travelled in the opposite direction very fast. This giant threw stones at him, but he got away.

(II) "Yet listeth" (keep listening) to my tale, the narrator continues, because Thopas has again come to town. He commanded his merry men, as he had to fight a giant with three heads. They gave him sweet wine and gingerbread and licorice, and then Thopas got dressed in his armour. The end of this fit tells the company that if they "wol any moore of it" (want to hear any more) then the narrator will try to oblige them.

(III) "Now holde youre mouth, par charitee" (Now shut up, for charity's sake) begins the third fit, before explaining that Thopas is of royal chivalry. Thopas drank water from the well with the knight Sir Percivel, until one day…

Here the Host "stynteth" [stops] Chaucer's Tale of Thopas

No more of this, for God's sake, says the Host, criticizing the "rym dogerel" which Chaucer uses. Chaucer asks why he has had his tale stopped when it is the best rhyme he knows – and the Host replies that his crappy rhymes are not worth a turd, advising him rather to tell something in prose. Chaucer obliges, promising "a litel thyng in prose", finally asking the Host to let him tell "al my tale, I preye".

Analysis

Sir Thopas offers up one of the funniest moments in the Canterbury Tales. Written in ridiculously bouncy tail rhyme, the poem is a hilarious parody of Middle English verse romances packed full of bizarre pastoral details. Thopas, for example, is hugely effeminized, well-dressed, and with a girl's name (Thopas was usually a woman's name in the medieval period). Thopas falls in love, in the manner of the courtly knight, before he has decided who he will be in love with (an elf-queen, in the end) and runs away from his climactic battle at the end of the first fit because he has forgotten his armour.

In the Ellesmere manuscript, the setting of Sir Thopas has the tale ever vanishing into the margin, and close readers will note the way each fit is half the length of its predecessor - there is, as well as

Notes

its "dogerel" parody of verse romance, a definite sense that Chaucer the character has definitely run out of things to say. Note the number of times Chaucer has to ask the company to listen or to be quiet (implying perhaps the jeers and responses of a less-than-impressed pilgrim audience) and note too the way that details from the prologue seem to echo in the Tales: an effeminized, antisocial Chaucer becomes an effeminized, entirely chaste Thopas, the Host's comment that Chaucer looks like he would find a "hare" becomes a forest with hares for wild beasts, an "elvish" looking-Chaucer inspires the "elf-queen who is to be Thopas' lover. To that, we might add, a storyteller Chaucer reluctant to tell a tale (but pushed into the spotlight) becomes a knightly Thopas desperate to escape knightly combat. The apparent purposeless of the narrative, packed with pointless details, might well reflect a narrator who is making the tale up as he goes along.

There are several interpretable jokes hidden in the fabric of the tale. Chaucer is parodying his own endless inventiveness, celebrating his own skill at creating varied voices, by presenting himself as someone who cannot even come up with a single bearable story – and, silenced by his own characters, the abortion of Chaucer's tale actually points to a remark about the strength of his characterization. Chaucer's characters, it seems, are so well written that they give advice about tale-telling to their writer. Sir Thopas, vanishing fit by fit as it does, also demonstrates Chaucer's awareness of his own elusiveness, the self-vanishing quality which enacts the invisibility of the writer's point of view – which we have already mentioned in several other tales. The Chaucer sent into the fiction to represent the author is, we and he know all too well, a poor imitation of the real thing - but it is the nearest thing to an omniscient author we are going to get.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

6. On what ancient form of literature is the tale of Melibee based?
7. Why does he approve of the tale of Melibee?
8. What kind of wife is prudence in the story of Melibee?
9. What does the Narrator call the divisions in the tale of Sir Thopas?
10. What is rhyme-doggerel?

9.3 Chaucer's Tale of Melibee

9.3.1 The Tale of Melibee Text

There was once a young man named Melibee, mighty and rich, who had with his wife Prudence, a daughter called Sophie. One day he took a walk into the fields, leaving his wife and daughter inside his house, with the doors shut fast. Three of his old enemies saw it, and, setting ladders to the wall of his house, entered, beating his wife, and giving his daughter mortal wounds in five places: "in hir feet, in hire handes, in hir erys, in hir nose, and in hir mouth".

When Melibee returned and saw what had happened, he was like a madman, tearing his clothes, weeping and crying. Prudence, his wife, stopped his tears, and gave him some useful advice from various authorities. Prudence eventually advised him to call a group of people to come to him, to explain to them what had happened, and listen to their counsel.

As per his wife's instructions, Melibee took counsel from "the grete congregacioun of folk", and the advice falls into two camps. The surgeons, physicians, lawyers, and the old urge caution, and a considered reaction, but his neighbors and "yonge folk" urge war.

Melibee wants to wage war, and Prudence urges haste-there follows an argument about who should prevail, and Prudence, eventually, triumphs. She tells Melibee that he should choose his counselors carefully, and to set their advice against their–apparent and hidden - motives. Prudence then, at length, goes through all of the advice that Melibee has been given and shows him that open war is not a good option, for a variety of moral, ethical, and practical reasons.

Notes

Notes Prudence interprets the attack on Sophie as the damage done to her because of man's vulnerability to the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Her remedy: negotiate peace and leave all to God's grace and forgiveness.

The three enemies who have performed the deed are found and brought before Prudence, who suggests forgiving them; Melibee again argues for a fine, which she again argues him out of. Melibee forgives them, and, delighted with himself, praises at length his own generosity.

Analysis

Don't worry if you've never read Melibee in full-a very famous academic (who I shall leave nameless) studying at one of the world's most renowned universities once admitted to me that she'd never made it right through either. Melibee, first and foremost, seems to be a punishment for cutting Chaucer off mid-flight with Sir Thopas; before beginning it, he promises a "litel thyng in prose", asks that he is not interrupted, and then delivers a hugely lengthy tale of almost unsurpassed dullness. If one saw in Thopas running from the giant the figure of Chaucer trying to escape the Host's demand, Melibee seems to represent him coming back with the armor.

Some critics have also argued that an omission Chaucer deliberately makes from its source, Renaud de Louens' Livre de Melibee et de Dame Prudence [after 1336] (itself a translation of Albertanus of Brescia, Liber consolationis et consilii) [1246]) points to Melibee as a separate composition intended for the recently-crowned Richard II. Among Melibee's many pieces of advice, Chaucer omits, significantly for a child-king, "Woe to the land that has a child as king". Is this, perhaps a manual for a king?

Melibee is also rather self-consciously a construction; a patchwork of proverbs, sayings and wise words, some of which have already appeared in the tales, and none of which are likely to be entirely original. Part of the reason for its length is that its characters constantly cite authority after authority to justify their opinion–and this academic arguing inflates the thin plot of the tale into page after page of citation and quotation. So keen is everyone to get their favorite authority into the argument that we never even find out what happens to mortally-wounded Sophie.

Melibee is, like Thopas (improvised from its situation), a text made up of text – and it proves (particularly if the Parson's tale, the only other tale in prose, was a late addition to the Canterbury project) Chaucer's mastery of genre, if nothing else. Prose tracts, full of academic discussion rather than dramatic, narrative progression, are not without of his ability.

Within the tale itself, Prudence is another example of the patient and long-suffering wife who demonstrates her virtue through stoicism, and, like Constance, her name is an obvious signifier of one of her prominent qualities (Sophie, the daughter, has a name meaning "wisdom"). Her role in the story is not as an active agent, she is a passive influence on the other characters; and she is a good example to consider in examining the issue of "female counsel", raised hitherto but particularly in the Nun's Priest's Tale. Melibee suggests, above all, that women are worthy counselors and interpreters, and, although the tale celebrates Prudence, its title is apt - it points to Melibee himself, a man able to learn from his wife, whose name means "sweet learning" or "sweet knowledge".

9.4 Summary

- The Christian minority in the town opened a school for their children in this city at the other end of the same street.
- The provost praised Christ and his mother, Mary, and had the Jews tied up.

Notes

- Sir Thopas offers up one of the funniest moments in the Canterbury Tales.
- Prudence, his wife, stopped his tears, and gave him some useful advice from various authorities.
- Melibee is also rather self-consciously a construction; a patchwork of proverbs, sayings and wise words.

9.5 Keywords

Usury : Interest at such rates.

Maxims : A short statement expressing a general truth.

Apologetic : Constituting a formal justification of a theory.

Miracle : A remarkable and very welcome occurrence.

9.6 Review Questions

1. Why do the Jews in the story hate the boy so much?
2. How is the abbot able to release the boy's soul?
3. What lead the reader to understand that the story is a parody?
4. What causes Harry Bailley to disapprove of the tale of Sir Thopas?
5. Explain how the tale of Sir Thopas is a joke on the Host.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. The protagonist is a very young school boy.
2. He sings a hymn to the Blessed Virgin.
3. His throat is slit and his body is thrown on a dung heap.
4. The singing represent a miracle.
5. The Jews are tortured and killed.
6. The tale of Melibee is based upon ancient Greek and Roman myths.
7. It is sober, serious and long.
8. Prudence is wise and patient.
9. He calls them "fits".
10. A low, base form of poetry with forced rhyme.

9.7 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

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Unit 10: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-IX

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

10.1 The Monk's Tale

10.1.1 Prologue to the Monk's Tale

10.1.2 The Monk's Tale Text

10.2 The Nun's Priest's Tale

10.2.1 Prologue of the Nun's Priest's Tale

10.2.2 Nun's Priest's Tale Text

10.2.3 Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

10.3 The Second Nun's Tale

10.3.1 The Second Nun's Prologue

10.3.2 The Second Nun's Tale Text

10.4 Summary

10.5 Keywords

10.6 Review Questions

10.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and text of the Monk's tale
- Explain the prologue and text of the Nun's Priest tale
- Explain the prologue and text of the Second Nun's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of all tales.

Introduction

The Host's scorn for the clergy is evident in this prologue. He is not really eager to increase the population by having the clergy marry; he is rather implying that all monks are lecherous scoundrels. The Monk's Tale contradicts the Host's lewd jests. It is very serious and sorrowful and gives a typical clerical admonition that Man must not trust fame and fortune, for they are fleeting and temporal.

Notes

The Host is greatly relieved when the Monk is prevented by the Knight from recounting any more of his ponderous recital. When the Priest agrees to tell a merry tale, the entire company is delighted. The Nun's Priest's Tale of Chanticleer is one of the finest beast fables in the English language. In this format, beasts personify humans and exaggerate Man's characteristics, usually for the purpose of teaching a lesson. The characters, as in this case with Chanticleer, often make use of classical learning to solidify their moral instruction. The tale is suitable to the teller when one considers the position of the Nun's Priest. He is the servant of the Prioress who appears to be silly and sentimental. His work forces him to live in a community of women drawn by her to the convent; it is likely that they are as silly as their mistress, in which case, the Priest would naturally have a somewhat low opinion of women. In the Epilogue to the tale, the Host is once again in high good humor and full of bawdy teasing for the Priest. He next invites the Wife of Bath to tell her story.

There are no conversational links either before or after The Second Nun's Tale, a possible indication that this narrative is intended to be taken with complete seriousness. The tale itself is exactly what it appears to be, the life of a saint. It is taken directly from a former work by Chaucer, The Legend of Good Women. The listeners are getting the straight "facts" as they are related by an anonymous sister whose reverence for St. Cecilia is completely appropriate to one of her station.

10.1 The Monk's Tale

10.1.1 Prologue to the Monk's Tale

When Chaucer's tale of Melibee has finished, the Host says (for the second time) that he wishes his wife could hear the tale of Prudence and her patience and wise counsel: his wife, he goes on to extrapolate, is an ill-tempered shrew. Turning to address the Monk, he bids him be 'myrie of cheere', and asks whether his name is John, Thomas or Albon, asking which house he is of. Admiring the Monk's skin and stature, the Host jokes that he could be a good breeding fowl, if only he were allowed to breed! Religion, the Host goes on, has taken up all the best breeding people, and left just the puny creatures to populate the world.

The Monk takes all this joking well, and promises a tale (or two, or three) of the life of Edward the Confessor, but first, announces he will tell some tragedies, of which he has a hundred stored up. Tragedy, as the Monk defines it, is a story from an old book of someone who fell from high degree and great prosperity into misery, and ended wretchedly; tragedies are also usually presented in hexameters, he thinks.

10.1.2 The Monk's Tale Text

The Monk's tale is a collection of tragedies, designed to advise men not to trust in blind prosperity but be aware that Fortune is fickle and ever-changing.

Lucifer is the first tragedy told, who fell from an angelic heaven down to Hell. Adam is next, the one man not born of original sin, who was driven from Paradise.

Sampson's tale is told at greater length, explaining how he fell from grace when he admitted his secret to his wife, who betrayed it to his enemies and then took another lover. The story is that Samson slew one thousand men with an ass's jawbone, then prayed for God to quench his thirst. From the jawbone's tooth sprung a well. He would have conquered the world if he had not told Delilah that his strength came from his refusal to cut his hair. Without this strength his enemies cut out Samson's eyes and imprisoned him. In the temple where Samson was kept he knocked down two of the pillars, killing himself and everyone else in the temple.

Notes Hercules' tragedy is next. Hercules' strength was unparalleled, but he was finally defeated when Deianera sent Hercules a poisoned shirt made by Nessus.

Nabugodonosor, was the king of Babylon who had twice defeated Israel. The proud king constructed a large gold statue that he demanded his subjects pray to or else be cast into a pit of flames. Yet when Daniel disobeyed the king, Nebuchadnezzar lost all dignity, acting like a great beast until God relieved him of his insanity.

The next tragedy is about Balthasar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, who also worshipped false idols. He had a feast for a thousand lords in which they drank wine out of sacred vessels, but during his feast he saw an armless hand writing on a wall. Daniel warned Balthasar of his father's fate. Daniel warned him that his kingdom would be divided by Medes and the Persians. Balthasar, according to the Monk, exemplifies the way that Fortune makes friends with people before making enemies with them.

Cenobia or Zenobia, who was beautiful and victorious in war, is the next tragic hero of the tale. The queen of Palmyra refused the duties of women and refused to marry, until she was forced to wed Odenathus. She permitted him to have sex with her only so that she could get pregnant, but no more. Yet the proud woman, once Odenathus was dead, was defeated by the Romans and paraded through Rome bound in chains.

King Pedro of Spain, subject of the next story, was cast from his kingdom by his brother. When attempting to regain his throne, Pedro was murdered by this brother.

Peter, King of Cyprus, is the next subject; he brought ruin on his kingdom and was thus murdered.

Other tragedies include Bernabo Visconti, who wrongly imprisoned his nephew. Ugolino of Pisa, a count, was imprisoned in a tower in Pisa with his three young children after Ruggieri, the bishop of Pisa, had led a rebellion against him. His youngest son died of starvation, and out of his misery Ugolini gnawed on his own arms. The two children that remained thought that Ugolini was chewing himself out of hunger, and offered themselves as meals for him. They all eventually starved. Nero did nothing but satisfy his own lusts and even cut open his own mother to see the womb from which he came. He had Seneca murdered for stating that an emperor should be virtuous. When it appeared that Nero would be assassinated for his cruelty, he killed himself. Holofernes ordered his subjects to renounce every law and worship Nebuchadnezzar. For this sin Judith cut off Holofernes' head as he was sleeping.

The Monk next tells of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was punished by God for attacks on the Jews. God made Antiochus infested with loathsome maggots. The Monk then admits that most have heard of Alexander the Great, poisoned by his very own offspring. He follows with the tale of Julius Caesar, who had Pompey murdered but was himself assassinated by Brutus. The final story is of Croesus, King of Lydia, the proud and wealthy king who was hanged.

Did u know? All of these tales are simply re-tellings of the popularly known stories: all focus on the same theme of people of high degree falling into misery or death. Finally the Monk's Tale is interrupted.

Analysis

The Monk provides one of the first-known definitions of tragedy in English literature, and, though his tale might have been fascinating to Chaucer's medieval audience, many of whom would not know the classical stories it largely details, it does not receive a huge amount of attention or adoration from modern readers and critics.

The Monk's tragedies are drawn from a variety of sources: Biblical, classical, historical and even some that, in Chaucer's time, would have been within reasonably recent folklore and memory. Yet the model of tragedy that the Monk offers is not, in fact, a classical model as such, but a Boethian

Notes

one-a reminder of the mutability of life itself, and the tendency of fickle, feminine Fortune to spin her wheel and bring those at the top crashing down to the ground. It is, on one level, simply a series of car-crash narratives-an unrelenting dark, Boethian reminder that the high-status end miserably.

Some more recent studies have tried to locate the Monk's tale, with its emphasis on the stories told about the history, and its focus on the writers from whom the Monk has drawn the stories, as a response to Boccaccio's De casibus tragedies and a comment on the involvement of writing, poets and poetry in the support of tyrants and despots.

Yet neither of these readings of the Tale really explains what it is doing within its context. Louise Fradenburg argues very persuasively in her book that the Monk is a death's head at the feast-a sudden explosion of misery and death into the festive fun of the Canterbury project. The Monk's own solid physical reality, good for breeding (so the Host jokes - and breeding is the opposite of dying) is juxtaposed with his tales, precisely about the end of the body and its death, rather than life and strength.

Task How does the Monk respond to the teasing of the Host?

Moreover, the numbers that the Monk quotes-he has a hundred tragedies in his cell, of which he manages to fit in seventeen before he is interrupted-suggest a painfully dismal repetition of the fall from fortune to misery, fortune to misery, fortune to misery. It is rather as if the Monk himself becomes a sort of anti-Canterbury Tales all of his own: each of his mini-tales progressively darkening the horizon.

It is no wonder then that the Knight sees fit to interrupt the Monk and halt his tale-particularly as the Monk tells tales largely about the demise of high-status characters (and the Knight, of course, is the pilgrimage's highest-ranking pilgrim). The Monk himself presents a threat to the fun of the tale: he is all 'ernest' and no 'game', as the Host points out to him, and - beginning a trend which arises more and more as these final tales progress - when he is interrupted, he refuses to speak any further. One of the tellers has his mouth firmly closed.

10.2 The Nun's Priest's Tale

10.2.1 Prologue of the Nun's Priest's Tale

Here the Knight "stynteth" (stops) the Monk's Tale

"Hoo!" says the Knight, "good sire, namoore of this". The Knight then praises the Monk, but says that he has heard quite enough about mens' sudden falls from high status and grace, and would far rather hear about men climbing from poverty to prosperity.

The Host steps in to concur, telling the Monk that his tale is boring the company, and that his talk is worth nothing, because there is no fun to be had from it. The Host asks the Monk to tell another tale-and the Monk responds that, having no desire to play and have fun, he has said all he has to say. The Host then turns to the Nun's Priest, asking him to draw near, and asking him to be merry of heart in his tale. "Yis, sir", says the Nun's Priest–and, described as a "sweete preest" by the narrator, the Nun's Priest begins his tale.

10.2.2 The Nun's Priest's Tale Text

A poor widow, rather advanced in age, had a small cottage beside a grove, standing in a dale. This widow led a very simple life, providing for herself and her daughters from a small farm. In a yard

Notes

which she kept, enclosed all around with palings and with a ditch outside it, she had a cock called Chaunticleer, who was peerless in his crowing. Chaunticleer was beautifully coloured, with a comb redder than coral, and a beak as black as jet, and he had under his government seven chickens, who were his paramours, of which his favourite was Dame Pertelote.

One morning, Chaunticleer began to groan in his throat, as a man who was troubled in his dreams does, and Pertelote, aghast, asked him what the matter was. Chaunticleer replied that he had had a bad dream, and prayed to God to help him to correctly interpret it. He had dreamt that he, roaming around the yard, saw an animal "lyk an hound" which tried to seize his body and have him dead. The "hound's" colour was somewhere between yellow and red, and his tail and both his ears were tipped with black.

Pertelote mocked him, telling him that he was a coward. Pertelore then argues that dreams are meaningless visions, caused simply by ill humors (bad substances in the body) – and quotes Cato at length to demonstrate her point. Her solution is that she will pick herbs from the yard in order to bring his humors back to normal.

Chaunticleer disagreed, arguing that while Cato is certainly an authority, there are many more authorities available to be read who argue that dreams are significations – of good things and bad things to come. He stated the example of one man who, lying in his bed, dreamt that his friend was being murdered for his gold in an ox's stall, and that his body was hidden in a dung cart. Remembering his dream, this man went to a dung cart at the west gate of the town, and found the murdered body of his friend. Chaunticleer then described the story of two men, who were preparing to cross the sea. One of them dreamed that, if he crossed the sea the next day, he would be drowned - he told his companion, who laughed at him, and resolved to go anyway. The ship's bottom tore, and his companion was drowned. Chaunticleer also cited the examples of Macrobius, Croesus and Andromache, who each had prophecies in their dreams.

Then, however, Chaunticleer praised Pertelote, asking her to speak of "mirth", and stop all this talk of prophecy-the beauty of her face, he says, makes him feel fearless. He then quoted the proverb "Mulier est hominis confusio", translating it as "Woman is man's joy and all his bliss", when it actually translates "Woman is man's ruin". Chaunticleer then flew down from his beam, called all of his hens to him, and revealed that he'd found a grain lying in the yard. He then clasped Pertelote to him with his wings, and copulated with her until morning.

When the month of March was over, Chaunticleer was walking in full pride, all of his wives around him, when a coal fox (a fox with black-tipped feet, ears and tail) broke through the hedges and into the yard. He bode his time for a while. The narrator then goes off into an aside, addressing Chaunticleer, and wishing that he had taken "wommennes conseils" (woman's counsel)–before he moves back into the tale, reminding us that his tale "is of a cok".

Chaunticleer sang merrily in the yard, and, casting his eyes among the cabbages, caught sight of the fox–and would have fled, but the fox addressed him, asking where he was going, and claiming to be his friend. The fox claimed to have met Chaunticleer's mother and father, and talked of his father's excellent singing voice, and the way his father used to stretch out his neck and stand on his tiptoes before singing. The fox then asked whether Chaunticleer can sing like his father–and Chaunticleer stood on his tiptoes, stretched out his neck, closed his eyes, and, as he began to sing, the fox grabbed him by the throat and ran off to the wood with him.

Task How has the Monk revenged himself on Harry Bailley?

The poor widow and her two daughters, hearing the cry of the chickens, ran after the fox toward the crove, and many other men and animals ran after them. Chaunticleer managed to speak to the fox, and encouraged him to turn to his pursuers and curse them, telling him that he was going to eat the

Notes

cock. The fox agreed–but as he opened his mouth to agree, the cock broke from his mouth suddenly and flew high up into a tree. The fox tried to persuade him down, saying that he had been misinterpreted, and that Chaunticleer should fly down in order that he might "seye sooth" (tell the truth) about what he had meant, but Chaunticleer knew better this time. The fox finally cursed all those who "jangleth whan he sholde holde his pees" (chatters when he should hold his peace).

Did u know? The narrator then addresses everyone who thinks the tale is mere foolery, asking them to take the moral of the tale, rather than the tale itself: taking the fruit, and letting the chaff remain. Thus ends the Nun's Priest's Tale.

10.2.3 Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

The Host, praises the tale as "myrie", and then, as he did with the Monk, suggests that the Nun's Priest would be an excellent breeding man (trede-foul) if only he were allowed to breed-for the Nun's Priest, the Host continues, is brawny, with a great neck and large chest.

Analysis

The Nun's Priest's Tale is one of the best-loved and best-known of all of the Tales, and one whose genre, in Chaucer's time and now, is instantly recognizable. It is a beast fable, just like Aesop's fable, and as one of Chaucer's successors, the medieval Scots poet Robert Henryson, would go on to explore in great detail, its key relationship is that between human and animal. The key question of the genre is addressed at the end by the narrator himself: telling those who find a tale about animals a folly to take the moral from the tale, disregarding the tale itself. But can we take a human moral from a tale about animals? Can an animal represent–even just in a tale–a human in any useful way?

For a start, it is important to notice that the animal-human boundary is blurred even before the tale begins, when the Host mocks the Nun's Priest (who, being a religious man, would have been celibate) and suggesting that he would have made excellent breeding stock (a "tredefowl", or breeding-fowl, is the word he uses). The thought is an interesting one – because if we can think of the Nun's Priest himself as potentially useful in breeding, animalistic terms, then can we think of his tale in potentially useful in human terms?

The question frames the other themes of the tale. The issue of woman's counsel is raised again (last foregrounded in Chaucer's tale of Melibee) explicitly–should Chaunticleer take Pertelote's advice about how to interpret his dreams? Should he disregard his dreams, and get on with his life? He does, of course, looking among the cabbages (perhaps even to find herbs), when he sees the fox – and at that point, the tale seems to suggest, he should never have listened to his wife in the first place: his fears were valid.

That is, until we remember what the narrator tells us anyway at a crucial point, that his tale is "of a cok"–about a chicken. It is hardly as if we need a prophetic dream to tell us that foxes like eating chickens: its what we might call animal instinct. This is doubly highlighted when, after quoting Cato and discussing the various textual politics of dream interpretation, Chaunticleer calls his wives excitedly to him because he has found a grain of corn–and then has uncomplicated animal sex with Pertelote all night. It is a contradiction, Chaucer seems to imply, to expect unchicken-like behavior from a chicken: yet the contradiction is one which fuels the whole genre of beast fable. If the Nun's Priest had too much human dignity and restraint to be a breeding fowl, Cato-quoting Chaunticleer has animal urges too strong to be a viable auctour.

Except that, of course, with the possible exception of Arviragus and Dorigen in the Franklin's Tale, there is no more stable and robust "marriage" in the Canterbury Tales than Chanticleer and

Pertelote's. The two fowl have a fulfilling sexual relationship-and the sex occurs as a pleasurable, uncomplicated end in itself, a stark contrast with the sexual transactions of the Franklin and the Wife of Bath's tales. In one sense, then, the animals are not so bestial.

Interpreting dreams, incidentally, is a favorite theme of Middle English literature, and it frames a whole genre of poetry, known as "dream poems", of which Chaucer himself wrote several (including the Book of the Duchess and the House of Fame). Dreams and text are closely intertwined, and–even in this tale–the way in which a dream poem juxtaposes the text of the dream with the text of the story is clear. Is a dream any more or less real than a tale? If we can take a moral from a tale, can we take one from a dream?

This tale is in many ways a return to the ground, a return to basics. We start with a poor widow, and a dusty yard-a setting far removed from the high-culture classical tragedies of the Monk. Moreover, the tale keeps emphasizing anality and bottoms - in Chaunticleer's two examples of dreams-coming-true, a dung cart and a breaking ship's "bottom" are the hinge of the story, and Pertelote's advice to Chaunticleer is to take some "laxatyf" to clear out his humours. There is a good-natured sense of groundedness about this tale, a return – after the dark run of Monk (interrupted), before him the punishing Melibee (and interrupted Sir Thopas) and bitter Prioress–to the humour and warmth of the early tales. Yet its theme also darkly foreshadows the end of the tale-telling project itself.

If the tale, taken simplistically, does endorse prophetic dreams (though, as mentioned above, a look at the animal nature of its characters might be seen as parodying the whole concept!) then what is the "moral" that the narrator wants us to take away at the end? As ever, this isn't totally clear. Yet one thing it might be is the importance of speaking or not speaking.

One of the things that makes Chaunticleer the morally-representative chicken a problem is the fact that he can speak and argue with his wife on the one hand, yet cry "cok! Cok!" when he sees a grain on the floor. He is both chicken and human, rather like Chaucer writes as both himself and as Nun's Priest. The tale, however, is structured by people knowing when to speak and not knowing when to speak: Pertelote speaks out to wake Chaunticleer from his dream, Chaunticleer foolishly opens his mouth to sing for the fox when he is captured, and it is Chaunticleer's final visitation of the trap that he himself fell into on the fox which causes him in turn to open his mouth–and let Chaunticleer go. Know when you should "jangle" (chatter) and know when to hold your peace.

It is a theme of course which points a sharp finger at the whole idea of a beast fable-the whole genre, we might argue, resting on the writer precisely ignoring the correct moments to have a character speak or not speak; and it also is a dangerous moral for the Tales as a whole. In a work of literature that constantly apes orality, the injunction to shut up is a serious one–and, as a comparison of the Nun's Priest's Tale to the Manciple's Tale reveals–one very much in Chaucer's mind at the very end of the Canterbury project.

10.3 The Second Nun's Tale

10.3.1 The Second Nun's Prologue

The tale, written in rime royal, begins with an invocation for people to avoid sin and avoid the devil, and then a formal invocation to the Virgin Mary.

There then follows an interpretation of the name of St. Cecilia, the subject of the Second Nun's Tale: in English, the narrator tells us, her name might be expounded as "heaven's lily". The lily might represent the chasteness of Cecilia, or indeed, her white honesty. Or, perhaps her name would be best read as "the way toward understanding", because she was an excellent teacher, or perhaps a conjoined version of "heaven" and "Lia". Cecilia, the prologue concludes, was swift and busy forever in doing good works.

Notes

10.3.2 The Second Nun's Tale Text

Saint Cecilia was by birth a Roman and tutored in the ways of Christ. She dreaded the day that she must marry and give up her virginity. However, she came to be engaged to Valerian. On the day of their wedding, underneath her golden robes, she wore a hairshirt, praying to God that she might remain undefiled.

On their wedding night she told a secret to Valerian: she had an angel lover who, if he believed that Valerian touched her vulgarly, would slay him. Valerian said he would believe her if he could see this angel, and she told him to go to the Via Appia and find Pope Urban among the poor people. Once Urban purged him of his sins, Valerian would be able to see the angel. When he reached Via Appia, Urban suddenly appeared to Valerian and read from the Bible. Another old man, clad in bright white clothes, with a gold-lettered book appeared before Valerian, asking him whether he believed what Cecilia had told him. When he said he did, Pope Urban baptized Valerian and sent him back home.

Returning home, he found the angel with Cecilia. This angel had brought two crowns of flowers from Paradise that will never wilt, and gave one to Cecilia and one to Valerian. The angel claimed that only the pure and chaste would be able to see this crown. Valerian then asked for the angel to bless his brother and make him pure.

This brother, Tibertius, came and can smell, but not see the flowers. Valerian explained his new faith, and eventually tried to persuade his brother to be baptized. Tibertius, however, did not like the idea of being baptized by Urban, whom, he said, would be burnt if people ever found him. Valerian told his brother not to fear death, because there was a better life elsewhere. Cecilia explains the Holy Trinity and other key tenets of Christianity to him, and afterwards, Tibertius agrees to accompany the couple to Pope Urban.

Task From what cause does St. Cecilia finally die?

Tibertius was baptized and became a perfect Christian–and for some time the three lived happily, God granting their every request. However, the sergeants of the town of Rome sought them, and brought them before Almachius the prefect, who ordered their death. During their execution, one of the sergeants, Maximus, claimed that he saw the spirits of Valerian and Tibertius ascend to heaven. Upon hearing this, many of the witnesses converted to Christianity. For this Almachius had him beaten to death, so Cecilia had him buried alongside Valerian and Tibertius.

Almachius summoned Cecilia, but she refused to appear frightened of him, or bow to his power; and when she was given the choice of forego Christianity or perform a sacrifice, she refused both of her options. She refused to admit any guilt and condemned Almachius for praising false idols. He ordered that she be boiled to death, but she, despite being left all day and night in a bath with fire underneath it, stayed cold – she did not even break a sweat.

Almachius then commanded his servant to slay her in the bath, and, though he struck her three strokes in the neck, he could not decapitate her, and she lay there half-dead. Christians stopped the blood with sheets, and, although she lay there for three days in agony, she never stopped teaching them the Christian faith. She even preached to them, giving them her property and her things, and–after three days–she died, and her body was taken to Pope Urban. He buried her by night among the other saints, and consecrated her church, still worshipped to this day as the church of St. Cecilia.

Analysis

The Second Nun's Tale is a conventional religious biography, a "saint's life", as the medieval genre it belongs to is often called. Written in rime royal, it is very likely that Chaucer composed the tale

previous to and separate from the Canterbury project, and only adapted it to fit within the Tales later. The Second Nun tells the story of Saint Cecilia in a dry, sanctimonious fashion that exalts her suffering and patient adherence to her faith, and, in a fashion that might be compared to the Prioress' and the Clerk's tales, stresses the patent inhumanity and saintliness of Cecilia from the first moment.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. In what genre is the Nun's Priest's tale written?
2. What is the obvious moral theme?
3. What is the more subtle theme of the story?
4. What is Chanticleer's great fault?
5. Against what is the Monk warning the listeners?
6. Why must the listners not trust in these things?
7. For what specific refusal is Cecilia condemned to death?
8. Why doesn't the raging fire burn the young wife?

Like the "litel clergeoun" of the Prioress' tale, Cecilia transcends the horrors of the mortal world: she stands against paganism, against false idols, and even against death, and is rewarded by being translated into a saint at the end of the tale. Some critics have recently begun to compare this tale to the Canon Yeoman's tale which follows it, wondering whether Cecilia herself might undergo some sort of transformational alchemical process: though she, unlike the false Canon's trick-coals, is entirely unchanged when heated up.

The tale points to the mythological nature of medieval Christianity. The metaphor of the angelic floral coronets, which only Christians can see, for example, is a physical manifestation of the idea that Christians belong to a City of God, a distinct community with shared values that exists within a secular and often hostile environment. There is perhaps also an interesting thought lurking in the tale about the problematic contradiction (highlighted by the Host in his words to the Monk and the Nun's Priest) that human ministers of God are not allowed to be sexual beings: Cecilia, of course, sets herself apart from the earthlier women of the Tales (the Wife of Bath is the key example) by, right at the start of the tale, professing her distaste for sex.

10.4 Summary

- The Monk's tale is a collection of tragedies, designed to advise men not to trust in blind prosperity but be aware that Fortune is fickle and ever-changing.
- The story is that Samson slew one thousand men with an ass's jawbone, then prayed for God to quench his thirst.
- The Monk next tells of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was punished by God for attacks on the Jews.
- The "hound's" colour was somewhere between yellow and red, and his tail and both his ears were tipped with black.
- The lily might represent the chasteness of Cecilia, or indeed, her white honesty.
- Cecilia, the prologue concludes, was swift and busy forever in doing good works.

10.5 Keywords

Injunction : An authoritative warning.

Swift : Happening quickly or promptly.

Valerian : A plant bearing clusters of small pink, red or white flowers.

Misery : Great physical or mental distress.

10.6 Review Questions

1. How does the description of Harry Bailley's married state fit in with the theme of many of the tales?
2. What is the Host's opinion of the clergy?
3. How has Chaucer altered the traditional plot of this tale?
4. How does Cecilia maintain her virginity in marriage?
5. When do angels appear in the Second Nun's tale?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. It is written as a beast fable.
2. Do not listen to or act upon flattery.
3. Beware the advice of women.
4. He is vain.
5. He warns against trusting in fame and fortune.
6. They are fleeting, they will lost only a short time.
7. She will not sacrifice to Jupiter.
8. Cecilia was protected by either divine intervention or a miracle.

10.7 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

Gowher Ahmad Naik, Lovely Professional University

Unit 11: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-X

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

11.1 The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

11.1.1 Prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale

11.1.2 The Canon Yeoman's Tale Text

11.1.3 Et Sequitur Pars Secunda

11.2 The Manciple's Tale

11.2.1 Prologue to the Manciple's Tale

11.2.2 The Manciple's Tale Text

11.3 The Parson's Tale and Chaucer's Retraction

11.3.1 The Parson's Prologue

11.3.2 The Parson's Tale Text

11.4 Summary

11.5 Keywords

11.6 Review Questions

11.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and text to the Canon's Yeoman's tale
- Explain the prologue and text to the Manciple tale
- Explain the prologue and text to the Parson's tale
- Describe briefly the analysis of all tales.

Introduction

In this prologue, for the first time in the links between the tales, something besides conversation actually transpires. New characters come riding in; one stays; the other leaves. The Canon's Yeoman, who remains, reveals himself and his master to be outlaws of sorts, as well as complete shams. Yet, he

Notes

is congenial and anixous to participate in the fun. He tells a biographical tale which appears to be about the Canon. The Canon's Yeoman's Tale is not a typical medieval story. It seems to be a combination of the learning of the day about alchemy, preaching against alchemy, and biography/ autobiography about the teller and his master. It is certain that alchemy was widely practiced in England at the time of *The Canterbury Tales* and that the church was strongly opposed to this pseudo-science. Ironically, alchemy was practiced almoste xclusively by monks, the only ones with an adequate education in Latin to decipher the ancient texts on the subject.

Unlike the Miller and the Reeve, or the Friar and the Summoner, the Manciple and the Cook do not take their feud beyond the prologue itself. This segment functions merely as an amusing interlude. The story of Phoebus, his unfaithful wife, and the transformation of the crow comes from an ancient origin myth Chaucer must have encountered in the writings of Ovid. As in most myths, the central character is divine. The origin of the modern crow is explained by the god's actions upon the crow of the myth, changing him from white to black.

The theme of the story as it originated dealt with the terrible consequences of marital infidelity; but as in so many of the tales, Chaucer makes a profound change here. As the Manciple concludes, the theme of the tale becomes the foolishness to revealing all and the wisdom of keeping silent. It is appropriate to convey this theme from the mouth of the Manciple when one remembers that the Manciple stopped taunting the Cook for fear of what the Cook could reveal about him.

11.1 The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

11.1.1 Prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale

With the story of Saint Cecilia finished, the company continues on its journey until two men overtake them. One was clad all in black but with a white gown underneath–a Canon-and his horse sweated as if it ridden for three miles. The horse that rides underneath the Canon's Yeoman similarly sweated so much that it could hardly go further. The Canon (the first man) greets the company warmly, and explains that he had hoped to join them; his Yeoman too is extremely courteous.

The Host asks if the Canon can tell a tale, and his Yeoman responds that he knows more than enough about mirth and jollity–and adds that, if the Host knew the Canon as well as he does, he would wonder how he could do some of the things he can. The Canon is, the Yeoman says, a "passyng man" (an outstanding, [or sur-passyng man). The Host guesses that his master is a clerk, but the Yeoman says that he is something greater, telling him that he could pave all of the ground from here to Canterbury in silver and gold.

The Host is quite amazed, but then asks why–if the Canon is so important-he cares so little for his honor, and dresses so shabbily. The Yeoman seems initially horrified at the question, but then adds in secret that the Canon believes that overdone dress-sense is a vice. The Host asks where the Canon lives, and the Yeoman tells him that it is in hiding places and the back lanes of the suburbs of a town. The Host then turns to the Yeoman himself, asking why his face is so discolored. The Yeoman explains that is because he spends his time blowing in the fire–and then reveals that the Canon and he spend most of their time doing "illusioun", borrowing money, promising profit and then slipping away.

While the Yeoman was talking, the Canon drew near and heard everything–and chastised him, telling him to hold his peace, and warning him that he was revealing things that should not be revealed. The Host bids the Yeoman to tell on, and when the Canon realized that the Yeoman would not be silenced, he fled. Since his lord is gone, the Yeoman concludes, he will tell the company everything he knows.

11.1.2 The Canon Yeoman's Tale Text

With this Canon, the narrator begins, I have lived for seven years, and yet I am no closer to understanding his science. The "slidynge science", as he calls it, has made him only poor–and, so he argues, it will do to anyone who applies himself to it. The narrator then expounds in detail the processes of alchemy, with reams of scientific terminology, rehearsing an inventory of vessels made of pottery and glass, apparatus like curcurbites and alembics, and minerals like arsenic and brimstone.

The narrator then recites the four spirits (volatile substances–which are easily evaporated by heat) and the seven bodies (metals) which, in medieval alchemy, were an almost forerunner to the periodic table. No-one who practices alchemy, the narrator concludes, will profit: he will lose everything he puts into it. No matter how long he sits and learns the terms, he will never gain from it.

Notes The narrator then turns on God, saying that though God had given them hope and they had worked hard to discover the philosopher's stone, they had had no luck.

Alchemists, the narrator continues, are liars. The narrator then tells of the reactions some of the metals produce-shattering pots, sinking into the ground, and leaping into the roof; and, he says, when a pot explodes, his master just throws away the elements (even when someone points out that some of the metal has survived) and starts again, despite the money that people have spent to buy the goods. The narrator reveals that–despite any arguments about why the pot might have shattered– the alchemists always seem to get it wrong. Finally, the narrator claims that nothing is what it themes: apples which look nice are not good, men that seem the wisest are the most foolish, and the man who seems most trustworthy is a thief.

11.1.3 Et Sequitur Pars Secunda

This is the tale proper of the Canon's Yeoman, and it tells of a Canon whose infinite falsehood and slyness cannot be written. He makes anyone he communicates with behave foolishly, and yet people ride for miles to make his acquaintance, not knowing or suspecting that he is a charlatan.

The narrator then makes a slight aside to apologise to canons in general, claiming that his tale is of one bad canon, but is not representative of all canons, just as Judas was the one traitor among the apostles.

In London, there lived a priest who sung masses for the dead – and one day he was visited by the false Canon, who begged him to lend him a certain amount of gold. The priest obliged him, and, three days later, the Canon returned to pay him back. Expressing gratitude that the Canon has paid him back on time, the priest prompts a speech from the Canon about the importance of "trouthe" and keeping one's word. The Canon then promises to show the priest some of his "maistrie" before he goes. The narrator then comments on the falsehood and dissimulation of the Canon, before apparently addressing the audience of the pilgrimage: "This chanon was my lord, ye wolden weene?" (This canon was my master, you think?). No–this Canon, the narrator tells us, is another Canon, and, even in describing him, the Yeoman's cheeks blush red.

The Canon sent the priest's servant to bring quicksilver and coals, and then took a crucible and showed it to the priest, telling him to put an ounce of quicksilver in there. The priest did as he asked, and they put the crucible into the fire. Yet the false Canon took a fake coal, unseen, which had a hole in it, stopped with wax, which held silver filings. While the priest was wiping the sweat from his face, laid the coal in the furnace just above the crucible. Naturally, the wax melted and the silver filings ran out over the crucible.

Notes

Next, the Canon told the priest to bring him a chalk stone, promising to make a gold ingot of the same shape. The Canon slyly inserted a metal rod into the chalk, and, when he threw into a bowl of water, the chalk melted away leaving only the silver rod. The priest was delighted, but the Canon decided to prove himself once more. Taking another ounce of quicksilver, the Canon took up a hollow stick, filled at one end with silver filings, and, putting it above the bowl of quicksilver, made it seem as if the silver (from the stick) had been translated from the quicksilver.

Task What physical disfigurement have the experiments caused the Canon's Yeoman?

Thus by various tricks and schemes, the Canon filches the money from his unsuspecting audience, and charges them huge amounts for his wisdom and his trickery. Moreover, by telling the priest that, if he (the Canon) were caught, he would be killed as a sorcerer, the Canon secured still higher prices for his services.

It is easy, the narrator concludes, for men to take the gold they have and turn it into nothing. Moreover, after cataloguing some authorities (including Arnaldus of Villanova, Hermes Trismegistus, and Plato) who wrote of the philosopher's stone, the narrator firmly concludes that God does not want men to know how to get it–and therefore, we should "let it goon". If God does not want it discovered, so it should remain.

Analysis

The Second Nun's Tale is hardly over, when two new characters arrive on the pilgrimage, sweatily riding up behind the pilgrimage and eventually overtaking them. The arrival of the Canon and his Yeoman is such an unusual event–particularly at this point of the Canterbury Tales–that the compiler of the Hengwrt manuscript (see "The texts of the Tales" for more information on the manuscripts) actually left it out altogether. It is an unusual construction, and one with "transformation" and "change" as its central themes-not surprisingly, then, it pins down a change already starting to occur within the fabric of the Tales as a whole.

Alchemy is the subject of the Canon Yeoman's tale, as he calls it, the "sliding" science: and alchemy argues that all things are in a state of perpetual change, slipping from one thing to another. Coals can become the philosopher's stone, metal melts to become a false covering for a crucifix, and thanks to the trickery of the tale's false Canon, we are never quite sure what substance it is we are examining. Can we ever tell what it is we are looking at–can we ever know the difference between true and false?

The Canon himself is a mysterious, imposing and peripheral figure, and one who, at the very moment his falsehood appears to be rumbled, runs away from the company, and from the Tales–for good. He is almost silent, and yet his silence is not (like Chaucer's) from shyness, or from high-status-clad in a hooded black robe, with a glimpse of white underneath, he even physically appears shrouded and covered up. Moreover, we never actually ascertain whether the Yeoman's tale is about this Canon, or–as he claims–about another Canon. It seems hugely improbable, even to take the Yeoman's words at face value (and the tale offers other warnings about doing that!), that the Yeoman would have this amount of knowledge about an entirely different Canon. The Canon then is a liminal figure, sitting somewhere on the border between reality and fiction, between true and false.

His Yeoman too starts his literary life as his advocate: praising the Canon as an extraordinary, wonderful, skilled man, before immediately retracting all that praise (almost without any provocation) to unmask his master as the tricky charlatan he is. Yet this casts huge doubt on the veracity of what the Yeoman actually utters-there is a big difference between his initial claim that the Canon could pave the way to Canterbury with gold, and the portrait of the Canon built up in his tale. Moreover, the sweating arrival of the pair (their horses are so wet that they can hardly move),

combined with the all-black Canon and blushing-red Yeoman suggests that even the characters within the frame narrative of the Tales are undergoing some sort of alchemical transformation. There is a sliding transformation in what the characters actually say and think–but this is backed up in the visual metaphor of them being physically "slydinge".

The central image of the Canon Yeoman's tale is the devilish furnace at the center of their back-street workshop, and (rather like the alchemical/furnace imagery in Jonson's The Alchemist) it is a complex metaphor: for hell, for devilish behavior–and falseness, but also for money. As the Pardoner argued in his tale, money is the root of all evil: and yet, unlike the slight comeuppance the Pardoner is served with by the Host at the end of his tale, justice is entirely absent from the denouement of the Canon Yeoman's tale. The last furnace we saw in the Tales was Gervays' in The Miller's Tale–a timely reminder, perhaps, of the neat interclicking justice of Absolon's branding Nicholas. Neither the Canon nor his Yeoman receives any sort of narrative punishment.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. In what way is the prologue to the Canon's tale different from others in the Canterbury tales?
2. What is alchemy?
3. What is always the outcome of alchemy?
4. According to the Canon's Yeoman, what keeps people involved in the practice of alchemy?

Yet the way that this timely reminder of the profitability of falsehood intrudes upon the Tale also points to the complex narrative problem of the Pardoner's tale: just in the way that the Pardoner's hollow words and empty bones could bring people to salvation, so too can the Canon's trickery actually make him money–and, moreover, the Canon's Yeoman can supposedly turn this experience into a moral tale for the company to listen to. Of what substance is a tale made? Can a tale acknowledge the desire for gold and the ingenuity of the misdemeanors of those who pursue gold without endorsing them? As it is reaching its conclusion, the pilgrimage is waylaid by another pertinent reminder of the tale-telling project and its questionable substance.

Did u know? Tales, as Chaucer will admit in the retraction, and language, are not always innocent.

11.2 The Manciple's Tale

11.2.1 Prologue to the Manciple's Tale

The Host turns to the sleeping cook, and asks whether any man might be able to wake him. Awaking, pale and unalert, the Cook proclaims that he would rather sleep than have some of the best wine in Cheapside. The Manciple steps in courteously, excusing the cook, and then mocking him – his open mouth, which the devil could put his foot in, his stinking breath – to his face for his drunkenness. The Cook is furious, but too drunk to speak, and promptly falls off his horse. Everyone lifts him up out of the mud, and the Host addresses the Manciple, telling him that the Cook is too drunk to tell a tale, and has more than enough to do keeping himself out of the mud and on his horse.

However, adds the Host, it is a folly to openly mock the Cook to his face, for one day he might have his revenge, and "quit" the Manciple's words. "No", says the Manciple, and produces a draught of

Notes

wine, which he gives to the Cook to drink, with the result that the Cook thanks him generously. Everyone is much amused, and the Host comments that good drink turns rancor into love, blessing Bacchus, god of wine. He then asks the Manciple to tell his tale.

11.2.2 The Manciple's Tale Text

When Phoebus, god of poetry, lived on earth, he was the lustiest of bachelors, a superior archer and the envy of all for his singing and playing on his musical instruments. Phoebus kept in his house a white crow, which could imitate the speech of any man, and who could sing more beautifully than a nightingale.

Phebus also had a wife, whom he loved more than his own life, and did his best to please her and treat her courteously–except that he was extremely jealous, and so would watch her suspiciously. Guarding a wife so closely, the narrator reminds us cynically, is pointless-if she is faithful, there is no need to do so, but if she is unfaithful no amount of monitoring will keep her faithful. Take any bird, he says, and put it in a cage–and no matter how gilded the cage and how good the treatment, the bird would still twenty thousand times rather go and eat worms in a forest. Animals, the narrator insists, can never be trained to be unanimalistic. So do men, the logic continues, always have a lecherous appetite to sleep with someone socially lower than their wives. Flesh is fond of novelty.

Task Why is it appropriate for the Manciple to tell this particular tale?

This Phoebus, though he had no idea of it, was deceived: his wife had another man, "of litel reputacioun", hardly worth comparing with Phoebus himself. One day when Pheobus was away, she sent for her "lemman" (lover–a word the narrator takes some pains to reject having said). The white crow saw their "working" together, and said nothing until Phoebus returned home, when the crow sang "Cokkow! Cokkow!" (Cuckold! Cuckold!).

Notes Pheobus initially thought the bird sang a song he did not recognize, but the crow clarified that his wife had had sex with a man of little reputation on his bed.

Phoebus thought his heart burst in two–he took his bow, set an arrow to it and murdered his wife, and for sorrow of that, destroyed his harp, lute, cithern and psaltry, snapping too his arrows and his bow. Then he turned to the crow, calling it a traitor, mourning his wife, and accused the crow of lying to him - and then, to "quite anon thy false tale", pulled out every one of the crow's white feathers, made him black and took away his song and his speech, slinging him out of the door and leaving him to the devil. It is for this reason that all crows are black.

The narrator turns to his audience, and tells them to be aware of what they say-never tell a man that he is a cuckold because he will hate the messenger. One must think on the crow and hold one's tongue.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

5. Into what genre does the Manciple's tale fall?
6. How does the Cook calmed and persuaded not to argue further with the Manciple?
7. How does the behavior of Phoebus wife relate her to other women in the tales?

Analysis

There is something hugely destructive–and self-destructive–about this tale, and particularly the way it takes the god of poetry, himself a plausible representative for the whole idea of the Tales themselves, and turns him into a petty, jealous murderer. The Manciple's Tale is almost painfully brief-not given to flights of fancy, we are given the simple information–jealous husband, unfaithful wife, talking crow, and then destruction, of wife, of crow, and of poetry.

The Manciple's Tale is also a cousin, though a darker cousin, of the Nun's Priest's Tale, and it seems likely, at least, at first, that a tale about a talking crow and the mythical god of poetry will be another fantastical beast fable–the genre leads us to expect the happily ending exploits of another Chaunticleer. Yet what actually happens is a bitter shift in tone-the happy, metaphorical beginning of the tale falls through into a painful reality. The god of poetry is a jealous human, and the white-feathered beautiful-voiced talking crow becomes the black, hollow-voiced harbinger of doom of reality. The tale brings the reader back to earth with a bump, and its reminder is clear: know when to fall silent. Know when not to speak, when not to tell.

And "tell" is an appropriate verb to raise-like Chaucer himself, the crow can counterfeit the speech of every man. The crow, in other words, is a veritable Canterbury poet himself-and what this tale teaches him, through physical suffering, is that some subjects are simply not to be told. Chaucer, in the Retraction, raises the worry that the Tales are sinful or blasphemous, and the moral "hold your tongue" could not simply be the message of the final Tales, but a thought a nervously religious Chaucer was increasingly coming to find in his own mind. Telling, in other words, has its limits-and it is better to stop before there are real consequences to it. As the final real "tale" (discounting the Parson's sermon) of the Tales, it makes for a bleak, but unmistakable end.

11.3 The Parson's Tale and Chaucer's Retraction

11.3.1 The Parson's Prologue

By the time the Manciple's tale had finished, the sun had set low in the sky. The Host, pronouncing his initial degree fulfilled, turns to the Parson to "knytte up wel a greet mateere" (conclude a huge matter) and tell the final tale. The Parson answered that he would tell no fable–for Paul, writing to Timothy, reproved people who turned aside from the truth and told fables and other such wretchedness.

What the Parson promises is morality and virtuous matters-and jokes that he does not know of the alliterative poetry tradition of the South. He leaves his tale, he says, to clerks, for he himself is not "textueel". Everyone agreed that it was the best way to end the project, and asked the Host to give the Parson the instruction to tell the final tale. The Host did so, hasting the Parson to tell his tale before the sun went down.

11.3.2 The Parson's Tale Text

The Parson's tale is not actually a tale as such, but a lengthy medieval sermon on the subject of penitence. The first part of his sermon defines the three parts of penitence–contrition, confession and satisfaction, and expounds at length (with several biblical examples) the causes of the contrition.

The second part of the sermon considers confession, which is the truthful revelation of the sinner's sin to the priest. Sin is then explained as the eventual product of a struggle between the body and soul for dominance of a person–and therefore there are two types of sin: venial (minor, smaller sins) and deadly (serious sins).

The third part of the sermon considers each of the seven deadly sins as branches of a tree of which Pride is the trunk. Pride is the worst of the sins, because the other sins (Ire, Envy, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lechery) all stem from Pride. Each sin's description is followed by its spiritual remedy–and the Parson states the rules for oral confession.

Notes

There are a number of conditions to penitence, including the intensity of the sin committed, the haste to contrition and the number of times the sin was committed. The fruit of this penitence is goodness and redemption in Christ. Following this short return to the subjects of penitence (and satisfaction), the final lines seem to suggest, by way of images of the sun and the morning, a vision of Paradise: bodies which were foul and dark become brighter than the sun, the body, formerly sick and feeble, becomes immortal and whole, and in a place where no-one feels hunger, thirst or cold, but is replenished by the perfect knowledge of God. This paradise, the final lines of the tale conclude, is only attainable through spiritual poverty and by avoiding sin.

Retraction: "Heere taketh the makere of this book his leve"

The narrator, speaking in the first person, prays to everyone that reads this "litel tretys" (little treatise – probably the Parson's tale) that, if they like anything they read in it, they thank Jesus Christ. If they find anything that displeases them, moreover, they are to put it down to the narrator's ignorance, and not to his will–he would have written better, if only he had the cunning.

Task At what stage of the journey is the parson's tale presented?

The narrator then asks the reader to pray for him that Christ has mercy on his sins and forgives him in his trespasses, and particularly of his translations of worldly vanities: the book of Troilus, the book of Fame, the book of the twenty-five ladies, the book of the Duchess, the book of the Parliament of Birds, and the tales of Canterbury–those that "sownen into synne" (tend toward sin).

However, the narrator thanks Christ for his translation of the Boece and other books of saint's legends and homilies, hoping that Christ will grant him grace of penitence, confession and satisfaction, through the benign grace of the King of Kings, so that he may be "oon of hem at the day of doom that shulle be saved" (one of them at the day of doom who shall be saved).

Did u know? The book ends with a short Latin prayer and Amen, before announcing that the book "of the tales of Caunterbury, compiled by Geffrey Chaucer" has ended, adding "of whos soule Jhesu Crist have mercy".

Analysis

One of the biggest questions about the Tales as a whole is precisely how they end. Throughout his works, and even within the Tales (look, for example, at the interruptions of Sir Thopas and the Monk's tales) Chaucer proves that he knows how to create a false ending, a trick ending, which ends by not ending, by not concluding. The Canterbury Tales ends on a decidedly pious and religious note, first with the Parson's lengthy sermon, and then with a retraction written as "Chaucer". The Parson's sermon, a translation from a medieval work designed to advise clergy in the salvation of souls, would be a plausible medieval sermon–there seems nothing in it that is ironic: it is a perfect example of its genre.

Self Assessment

Short Answer Type Questions:

8. What kind of story were the Host and the pilgrims expecting from the Parson?
9. Why does the Parson refuse to tell a fable?
10. In what genre is the Parson's tale written?

Yet can the Parson's sermon seem anything other than just another genre? In a work which has anthologized genres–we have already read beast fables, saint's lives, fabliaux, Breton lays, and all manner of other stories–and problematised them, drawing attention to their speaker's voice as something (as the Pardoner points out) ventriloquized, can we really be expected to take the Parson's voice seriously?

Critics disagree wildly about the answer to this question. The same problem applies to Chaucer's retraction–which, as in the Man of Law's prologue, blurs the line between the Chaucer writing the Tales (who has also written the Book of the Duchess, Troilus and Criseyde, and so on) and the fictional Chaucer who is a character within the pilgrimage. Is the Chaucer who writes these tales just another constructed voice?

Or, perhaps, is the Retraction of the tales a genuine one? Chaucer, in this theory, genuinely was dying and was unable to finish the work–or for some reason, felt the need to immediately retract it, as he genuinely believed that it did come too close to sin. Thus, before the Host's plan was complete, he concluded the tale with a pious sermon and then a Retraction: no-one could therefore accuse the Tales of being unchristian. Is it a death-bed confession?

A Retraction is a fairly usual way for a medieval work to end, and perhaps that points us to the aforementioned effect: its very normality is perhaps a clue that Chaucer's intention is not pure and simple. For it could be read simply as another "funny voice"–the voice of the Chaucer who told Sir Thopas: could be read as comedy rather than penance. Moreover, as E.T. Donaldson has firmly stated, the use of the Parson's Tale as an interpretative key to unlock the whole of the Tales is problematic, particularly when you consider the deliberate religious provocation of tales like the Miller's, the Wife of Bath's and the Merchant's. The tales by no means seem to be written to a purely Christian agenda-though Christianity is undoubtedly a key theme.

End-points in Chaucer are difficult to definitively interpret, and perhaps this dichotomy was intended by Chaucer himself. Perhaps this ending is simply one way of closing down the Tales–the Manciple's tale, of course, has been only the most recent in a line of tales which reiterate the advice of these final fragments to hold one's peace, and know when to fall silent. Is this Chaucer, on an imaginary, real or literary deathbed, punningly, holding his peace, but also being "at peace"? One thing is for sure: understanding the ending of the Tales seems a fitting encapsulation of the complex problem of interpreting the work as a whole.

11.4 Summary

- The Host is quite amazed, but then asks why–if the Canon is so important-he cares so little for his honor, and dresses so shabbily.
- The Host then turns to the Yeoman himself, asking why his face is so discolored.
- In London, there lived a priest who sung masses for the dead – and one day he was visited by the false Canon, who begged him to lend him a certain amount of gold.
- Next, the Canon told the priest to bring him a chalk stone, promising to make a gold ingot of the same shape.
- The Host did so, hasting the Parson to tell his tale before the sun went down.

11.5 Keywords

Horrified **:** Full with horror.

Shabbily **:** Dressed in old or worn clothes.

Ingot **:** A rectangular block of steel, gold or other metal.

Sling **:** A sweetened drink of spirits, especially gin and water.

Notes

11.6 Review Questions

1. By whom was alchemy practiced and why was its practice confined to this group?
2. What angers the pilgrim Canon? What does he do because of his anger?
3. Describe the two tricks the alchemist employs to dupe the priest in the Canon's Yeoman's tale.
4. What did phoebus crow look like before he was cursed?
5. What requirement necessitated the clergy to instruct the laity about penitence?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. It contains action, the Canon and his Yeoman ride up to join the travelers.
2. The attempt to transmute base metals into gold.
3. Alchemy always fails.
4. They keep hoping that the next time they will be successful.
5. It is based in myth.
6. He is given more wine.
7. There are several unfaithful wives in the various tales.
8. They were expecting a merry tale.
9. He says he will not hide his message in a lowly fable.
10. It is a sermon.

11.7 Further Readings

Books

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales — Geoffrey Chaucer
Geoffrey Chaucer — Harold Bloom

Online links

http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmCanterbury02.asp
http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ct/index.html

Unit 12: John Milton—Paradise Lost

Notes

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

12.1 Paradise Lost-I: Introduction to the Author and the Text

12.1.1 Introduction to the Text

12.1.2 Introduction to the Author

12.2 Paradise Lost-I: Importance of Prologue

12.2.1 Prologue and Invocation

12.3 Summary

12.4 Keywords

12.5 Review Questions

12.6 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about the text and author of Paradise Lost
- Explain the prologue and invocation of Paradise Lost.

Introduction

Paradise Lost is an epic poem in blank verse by the 17th-century English poet John Milton. It was originally published in 1667 (though written nearly ten years earlier) in ten books, with a total of over ten thousand individual lines of verse. A second edition followed in 1674, redivided into twelve books (in the manner of the division of Virgil's Aeneid) with minor revisions throughout and a note on the versification; most of the poem was written while Milton was blind, and was transcribed for him.

The poem concerns the Christian story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Milton's purpose, stated in Book I, is to "justify the ways of God to men" and elucidate the conflict between God's eternal foresight and free will. Although the primary event in the epic is about the Fall of Man, the character Satan serves as an anti-hero and as a prominent driving force in the plot.

Notes Milton depiction has fascinated critics, some of which have interpreted Paradise Lost as a poem questioning the church's power rather than only a description of the fall of Adam and Eve.

Notes

Milton incorporates Paganism, classical mythology, and Christianity into the poem. While Milton's principal goal in the work is to give a compelling Theodicy, he nevertheless deals with a range of topics, from marriage to politics (Milton was politically active during the time of the English Civil War). Many difficult theological issues are deliberately addressed, including fate, predestination, the Trinity, the introduction of sin and death into the world, as well as the nature of angels, fallen angels, Satan and the war in heaven. Milton draws on his knowledge of languages, and diverse sources—primarily Genesis, much of the New Testament, the deuterocanonical Book of Enoch, and other parts of the Old Testament. Milton's epic is often considered one of the greatest literary works in the English language, along with those of Shakespeare.

12.1 Paradise Lost-I: Introduction to the Author and the Text

12.1.1 Introduction to the Text

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, around the time Shakespeare began writing his romance plays (Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest) and John Smith established his colony at Jamestown. Milton's father was a scrivener and, perhaps more importantly, a devout Puritan, who had been disinherited by his Roman Catholic family when he turned Protestant. In April 1625, just after the accession of Charles I, he matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge. During these years, Milton considered entering the ministry, but his poetic ambitions always seemed to take precedence over his ministerial aspirations.

Milton composed his early verse in Latin, in the fashion of a classically educated person. As soon as his third year at Cambridge, however, he expressed his desire to abandon such fashionable poetry in order to write in his native tongue. Unlike the learned classicists of his day, who imitated Greek and Latin versification, Milton sought to rehabilitate the English poetic tradition by establishing it as an extension or flowering of the classical tradition. He saw himself as a poet whose lineage extended, through the Romans, back to the Greeks. Like Homer and Virgil before him, Milton would be the epic poet of the English nation.

The poetic vocation to which Milton was heir is both nationalistic and religious in character. The epic poet chronicles the religious history of a people; he plays the role of prophet-historian. Hence, as Milton wrote in a letter to Charles Diodati, "the bard is sacred to the gods; he is their priest, and both his heart and lips mysteriously breathe the indwelling Jove." A sense of religiosity and patriotism drive Milton's work. On the one hand, he felt that he could best serve God by following his vocation as a poet. His poetry would, on the other hand, serve England by putting before it noble and religious ideas in the highest poetic form. In other words, Milton sought to write poetry which, if not directly or overtly didactic, would serve to teach delightfully. The body of work emerging from these twin impulses - one religious, the other political-witnesses his development as (or into) a Christian poet and a national bard. Finally, it is in Paradise Lost that Milton harmonizes his two voices as a poet and becomes the Christian singer, as it were, of epic English poems.

Task Write a note on the poem, Paradise Lost.

It should be noted, then, that in Paradise Lost Milton was not only justifying God's ways to humans in general; he was justifying His ways to the English people between 1640 and 1660. That is, he was telling them why they had failed to establish the good society by deposing the king, and why they had welcomed back the monarchy. Like Adam and Eve, they had failed through their own weaknesses, their own lack of faith, their own passions and greed, their own sin. God was not to blame for humanity's expulsion from Eden, nor was he to blame for the trials and corruption that befell England during the time of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. The failure of the

Puritan revolution was tantamount, for Milton, to the people's failure to govern themselves according to the will of God, rather than of a royal despot. England had had the opportunity to become an instrument of God's plan, but ultimately failed to realize itself as the New Israel. Paradise Lost was more than a work of art. Indeed, it was a moral and political treatise, a poetic explanation for the course that English history had taken.

Milton began Paradise Lost in 1658 and finished in 1667. He wrote very little of the poem in his own hand, for he was blind throughout much of the project. Instead, Milton would dictate the poem to an amanuensis, who would read it back to him so that he could make necessary revisions. Milton's daughters later described their father being like a cow ready for milking, pacing about his room until the amanuensis arrived to "unburden" him of the verse he had stored in his mind.

Milton claimed to have dreamed much of Paradise Lost through the nighttime agency of angelic muses. Besides lending itself to mythologization, his blindness accounts for at least one troubling aspect of the poem: its occasional inconsistencies of plot. Because he could not read the poem back to himself, Milton had to rely on his memory of previous events in the narrative, which sometimes proved faulty.

Putting its infrequent (and certainly minor) plot defects aside, Paradise Lost is nothing short of a poetic masterpiece. Along with Shakespeare's plays, Milton's Paradise Lost is the most influential poem in English literature as well as being a basis for or prooftext of modern poetic theory.

12.1.2 Introduction to the Author

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, a studious boy, 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, were the key to his genius.

Notes

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 Spencer'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.

12.2 Paradise Lost-I: Importance of Prologue

12.2.1 Prologue and Invocation

Milton opens Paradise Lost by formally declaring his poem's subject: humankind's first act of disobedience toward God, and the consequences that followed from it. The act is Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, as told in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In the first line, Milton refers to the outcome of Adam and Eve's sin as the "fruit" of the forbidden tree, punning on the actual apple and the figurative fruits of their actions. Milton asserts that this original sin brought death to human beings for the first time, causing us to lose our home in paradise until Jesus comes to restore humankind to its former position of purity.

Milton's speaker invokes the muse, a mystical source of poetic inspiration, to sing about these subjects through him, but he makes it clear that he refers to a different muse from the muses who traditionally inspired classical poets by specifying that his muse inspired Moses to receive the Ten Commandments and write Genesis. Milton's muse is the Holy Spirit, which inspired the Christian Bible, not one of the nine classical muses who reside on Mount Helicon—the "Aonian mount" of I.15. He says that his poem, like his muse, will fly above those of the Classical poets and accomplish things never attempted before, because his source of inspiration is greater than theirs. Then he invokes the Holy Spirit, asking it to fill him with knowledge of the beginning of the world, because the Holy Spirit was the active force in creating the universe.

Milton's speaker announces that he wants to be inspired with this sacred knowledge because he wants to show his fellow man that the fall of humankind into sin and death was part of God's greater plan, and that God's plan is justified.

Analysis

The beginning of Paradise Lost is similar in gravity and seriousness to the book from which Milton takes much of his story: the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The Bible begins with the story of the world's creation, and Milton's epic begins in a similar vein, alluding to the creation of the world by the Holy Spirit. The first two sentences, or twenty-six lines, of Paradise Lost are extremely compressed, containing a great deal of information about Milton's reasons for writing his epic, his subject matter, and his attitudes toward his subject. In these two sentences, Milton invokes his muse, which is actually the Holy Spirit rather than one of the nine muses. By invoking a muse, but differentiating it from traditional muses, Milton manages to tell us quite a lot about how he sees his project. In the first place, an invocation of the muse at the beginning of an epic is conventional, so Milton is acknowledging his awareness of Homer, Virgil, and later poets, and signaling that he has mastered their format and wants to be part of their tradition. But by identifying his muse as the divine spirit that inspired the Bible and created the world, he shows that his ambitions go far beyond joining the club of Homer and Virgil. Milton's epic will surpass theirs, drawing on a more fundamental source of truth and dealing with matters of more fundamental importance to human beings. At the same time, however, Milton's invocation is extremely humble, expressing his utter dependence on God's grace in speaking through him. Milton thus begins his poem with a mixture of towering ambition and humble self-effacement, simultaneously tipping his hat to his poetic forebears and promising to soar above them for God's glorification.

Self Assessment

Notes

State the following sentences are True or False:

1. William Shakespeare was the author of the poem, Paradise Lost.
2. The poem concerns the Christian story of the fall of woman.
3. Milton was politically active during the time of the English civil war.
4. Grotius would be the epic poet of the English nation.
5. John Milton was born on December 7, 1608.
6. Milton was met many of the great Renaissance minds including Galileo and Grotius during his tour in 1638-39.
7. Paradise Lost was published in 1667.
8. The Iliad and the Aeneid are the great epic poems of Greek and Latin.

Milton's approach to the invocation of the muse, in which he takes a classical literary convention and reinvents it from a Christian perspective, sets the pattern for all of Paradise Lost. For example, when he catalogs the prominent devils in Hell and explains the various names they are known by and which cults worshipped them, he makes devils of many gods whom the Greeks, Ammonites, and other ancient peoples worshipped. In other words, the great gods of the classical world have become—according to Milton—fallen angels. His poem purports to tell of these gods' original natures, before they infected humankind in the form of false gods. Through such comparisons with the classical epic poems, Milton is quick to demonstrate that the scope of his epic poem is much greater than those of the classical poets, and that his worldview and inspiration is more fundamentally true and all-encompassing than theirs. The setting, or world, of Milton's epic is large enough to include those smaller, classical worlds. Milton also displays his world's superiority while reducing those classical epics to the level of old, nearly forgotten stories. For example, the nine muses of classical epics still exist on Mount Helicon in the world of Paradise Lost, but Milton's muse haunts other areas and has the ability to fly above those other, less-powerful classical Muses.

Did u know? Milton both makes himself the authority on antiquity and subordinates it to his Christian worldview.

The Iliad and the Aeneid are the great epic poems of Greek and Latin, respectively, and Milton emulates them because he intends Paradise Lost to be the first English epic. Milton wants to make glorious art out of the English language the way the other epics had done for their languages. Not only must a great epic be long and poetically well-constructed, its subject must be significant and original, its form strict and serious, and its aims noble and heroic. In Milton's view, the story he will tell is the most original story known to man, as it is the first story of the world and of the first human beings. Also, while Homer and Virgil only chronicled the journey of heroic men, like Achilles or Aeneas, Milton chronicles the tragic journey of all men—the result of humankind's disobedience. Milton goes so far as to say that he hopes to "justify," or explain, God's mysterious plan for humankind. Homer and Virgil describe great wars between men, but Milton tells the story of the most epic battle possible: the battle between God and Satan, good and evil.

12.3 Summary

- Paradise Lost is an epic poem in blank verse by the 17th-century English poet John Milton.
- The poem concerns the Christian story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Notes

- Milton composed his early verse in Latin, in the fashion of a classically educated person.
- The epic poet chronicles the religious history of a people; he plays the role of prophet-historian.
- Milton toured the European continent in 1638-1639 and met many of the great Renaissance minds, including Galileo and Grotius.
- Milton opens Paradise Lost by formally declaring his poem's subject: humankind's first act of disobedience toward God, and the consequences that followed from it.

12.4 Keywords

Epic **:** A long poem narrating the deeds of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation.

Paganism **:** A person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religious.

Gout **:** A disease in which defective metabolism of uric acid causes arthritis, especially in the smaller bones of the feet.

Spirit **:** The non-physical part of a person which is the seat of emotions and character.

12.5 Review Questions

1. Write an essay on the biography of John Milton.
2. Discuss the introduction to the text of Paradise Lost-I.
3. Describe the importance of prologue-Paradise Lost-I.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. False	2. False	3. True
4. False	5. False	6. True
7. True	8. True	

12.6 Further Readings

Books

Paradise Lost I (Non-detailed study) — John Milton
John Milton Paradise Lost — John Milton
John Milton: a short Introduction — Roy Flannagan

Online links

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/pl/index.html
http://pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barrons/paradis02.asp

Notes

Unit 13: Paradise Lost-I (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis–I

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

13.1 Book–I

13.1.1 Summary: Lines 1–26: Prologue and Invocation

13.1.2 Summary: Lines 27–722: Satan and Hell

13.2 Book–II

13.2.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

13.3 Book–III

13.3.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

13.4 Book–IV

13.4.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

13.5 Summary

13.6 Keywords

13.7 Review Questions

13.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain prologue and invocation of Paradise Lost Book I–IV
- Describe briefly summary and analysis of Book I–IV.

Introduction

Book I of *Paradise Lost* begins with a prologue in which Milton performs the traditional epic task of invoking the Muse and stating his purpose. He invokes the classical muse, Urania but also refers to her as the "Heavnly muse" implying the christian nature of this work. He also says that the poem will deal with man's disobedience toward God and the results of that disobedience. He concludes the prologue by saying he will attempt to justify God's ways to men.

Book II divides into two large sections. The first is the debate among the devils concerning the proper course of action. The second section deals with Satan's voyage out of Hell with Sin and Death—the only extended allegory in *Paradise Lost*. The council of demons that begins Book II recalls

Notes

the many assemblies of heroes in both the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. Further the debates also seem based on the many meetings that Milton attended in his various official capacities. In his speech, each devil reveals both the characteristics of his personality and the type of evil he represents. For example, Moloch, the first to speak, is the unthinking man of action. Like Diomedes in the *Iliad*, he is not adept in speech, but he does know how to fight. He is for continued war and unconcerned about the consequences.

Book III opens with a prologue, often called "The Prologue to Light," that is addressed to the "holy light" of God and Heaven. In this prologue, Milton asks for God's light to shine inwardly so that he can reveal what no man has seen. The scene of Book III now shifts from heaven to Satan who has landed on the border between Earth and Chaos. From this seat in darkness, Satan sees a light and moves toward it. The light is a golden stairway leading to heaven. From this new vantage point, Satan views the magnificence of the Earth and of the beautiful sun that illumines it. As Satan moves toward the sun, he sees the archangel Uriel and quickly transforms himself into a cherub. Satan deceives Uriel and asks where Man may be found. Uriel directs Satan toward Earth.

In the opening section of Book IV, Satan talks to himself, and for the first time, the reader is allowed to hear the inner workings of the demon's mind. This opening passage is very similar to a soliloquy in a Shakespearean drama, and Milton uses it for the same effect. Traditionally, the soliloquy was a speech given by a character alone on the stage in which his innermost thoughts are revealed. Thoughts expressed in a soliloquy were accepted as true because the speaker has no motive to lie to himself. The soliloquy then provided the dramatist a means to explain the precise motivations and mental processes of a character. Milton uses Satan's opening soliloquy in Book IV for the same purpose.

13.1 Book – I

13.1.1 Summary: Lines 1–26: Prologue and Invocation

Milton opens Paradise Lost by formally declaring his poem's subject: humankind's first act of disobedience toward God, and the consequences that followed from it. The act is Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, as told in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In the first line, Milton refers to the outcome of Adam and Eve's sin as the "fruit" of the forbidden tree, punning on the actual apple and the figurative fruits of their actions. Milton asserts that this original sin brought death to human beings for the first time, causing us to lose our home in paradise until Jesus comes to restore humankind to its former position of purity.

Milton's speaker invokes the muse, a mystical source of poetic inspiration, to sing about these subjects through him, but he makes it clear that he refers to a different muse from the muses who traditionally inspired classical poets by specifying that his muse inspired Moses to receive the Ten Commandments and write Genesis. Milton's muse is the Holy Spirit, which inspired the Christian Bible, not one of the nine classical muses who reside on Mount Helicon—the "Aonian mount" of I.15. He says that his poem, like his muse, will fly above those of the Classical poets and accomplish things never attempted before, because his source of inspiration is greater than theirs. Then he invokes the Holy Spirit, asking it to fill him with knowledge of the beginning of the world, because the Holy Spirit was the active force in creating the universe.

Notes Milton's speaker announces that he wants to be inspired with this sacred knowledge because he wants to show his fellow man that the fall of humankind into sin and death was part of God's greater plan, and that God's plan is justified.

Analysis

The beginning of Paradise Lost is similar in gravity and seriousness to the book from which Milton takes much of his story: the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The Bible begins with the story of the world's creation, and Milton's epic begins in a similar vein, alluding to the creation of the world by the Holy Spirit. The first two sentences, or twenty-six lines, of Paradise Lost are extremely compressed, containing a great deal of information about Milton's reasons for writing his epic, his subject matter, and his attitudes toward his subject. In these two sentences, Milton invokes his muse, which is actually the Holy Spirit rather than one of the nine muses. By invoking a muse, but differentiating it from traditional muses, Milton manages to tell us quite a lot about how he sees his project. In the first place, an invocation of the muse at the beginning of an epic is conventional, so Milton is acknowledging his awareness of Homer, Virgil, and later poets, and signaling that he has mastered their format and wants to be part of their tradition. But by identifying his muse as the divine spirit that inspired the Bible and created the world, he shows that his ambitions go far beyond joining the club of Homer and Virgil. Milton's epic will surpass theirs, drawing on a more fundamental source of truth and dealing with matters of more fundamental importance to human beings. At the same time, however, Milton's invocation is extremely humble, expressing his utter dependence on God's grace in speaking through him. Milton thus begins his poem with a mixture of towering ambition and humble self-effacement, simultaneously tipping his hat to his poetic forebears and promising to soar above them for God's glorification.

Milton's approach to the invocation of the muse, in which he takes a classical literary convention and reinvents it from a Christian perspective, sets the pattern for all of Paradise Lost. For example, when he catalogs the prominent devils in Hell and explains the various names they are known by and which cults worshipped them, he makes devils of many gods whom the Greeks, Ammonites, and other ancient peoples worshipped. In other words, the great gods of the classical world have become—according to Milton—fallen angels. His poem purports to tell of these gods' original natures, before they infected humankind in the form of false gods. Through such comparisons with the classical epic poems, Milton is quick to demonstrate that the scope of his epic poem is much greater than those of the classical poets, and that his worldview and inspiration is more fundamentally true and all-encompassing than theirs. The setting, or world, of Milton's epic is large enough to include those smaller, classical worlds. Milton also displays his world's superiority while reducing those classical epics to the level of old, nearly forgotten stories. For example, the nine muses of classical epics still exist on Mount Helicon in the world of Paradise Lost, but Milton's muse haunts other areas and has the ability to fly above those other, less-powerful classical Muses. Thus Milton both makes himself the authority on antiquity and subordinates it to his Christian worldview.

The Iliad and the Aeneid are the great epic poems of Greek and Latin, respectively, and Milton emulates them because he intends Paradise Lost to be the first English epic. Milton wants to make glorious art out of the English language the way the other epics had done for their languages. Not only must a great epic be long and poetically well-constructed, its subject must be significant and original, its form strict and serious, and its aims noble and heroic. In Milton's view, the story he will tell is the most original story known to man, as it is the first story of the world and of the first human beings. Also, while Homer and Virgil only chronicled the journey of heroic men, like Achilles or Aeneas, Milton chronicles the tragic journey of all men—the result of humankind's disobedience. Milton goes so far as to say that he hopes to "justify," or explain, God's mysterious plan for humankind. Homer and Virgil describe great wars between men, but Milton tells the story of the most epic battle possible: the battle between God and Satan, good and evil.

13.1.2 Summary: Lines 27–722: Satan and Hell

Immediately after the prologue, Milton raises the question of how Adam and Eve's disobedience occurred and explains that their actions were partly due to a serpent's deception. This serpent is Satan, and the poem joins him and his followers in Hell, where they have just been cast after being defeated by God in Heaven.

Notes

Satan lies stunned beside his second-in-command, Beelzebub, in a lake of fire that gives off darkness instead of light. Breaking the awful silence, Satan bemoans their terrible position, but does not repent of his rebellion against God, suggesting that they might gather their forces for another attack. Beelzebub is doubtful; he now believes that God cannot be overpowered. Satan does not fully contradict this assessment, but suggests that they could at least pervert God's good works to evil purposes. The two devils then rise up and, spreading their wings, fly over to the dry land next to the flaming lake. But they can undertake this action only because God has allowed them to loose their chains. All of the devils were formerly angels who chose to follow Satan in his rebellion, and God still intends to turn their evil deeds toward the good.

Once out of the lake, Satan becomes more optimistic about their situation. He calls the rest of the fallen angels, his legions, to join him on land. They immediately obey and, despite their wounds and suffering, fly up to gather on the plain. Milton lists some of the more notable of the angels whose names have been erased from the books of Heaven, noting that later, in the time of man, many of these devils come to be worshipped as gods.

Among these are Moloch, who is later known as a god requiring human sacrifices, and Belial, a lewd and lustful god. Still in war gear, these fallen angels have thousands of banners raised and their shields and spears in hand. Even in defeat, they are an awesome army to behold.

Satan's unrepentant evil nature is unwavering. Even cast down in defeat, he does not consider changing his ways: he insists to his fellow devils that their delight will be in doing evil, not good. In particular, as he explains to Beelzebub, he wishes to pervert God's will and find a way to make evil out of good. It is not easy for Satan to maintain this determination; the battle has just demonstrated God's overwhelming power, and the devils could not even have lifted themselves off the lake of fire unless God had allowed it. God allows it precisely because he intends to turn their evil designs toward a greater good in the end. Satan's envy of the Son's chosen status led him to rebel and consequently to be condemned. His continued envy and search for freedom leads him to believe that he would rather be a king in Hell than a servant in Heaven. Satan's pride has caused him to believe that his own free intellect is as great as God's will.

Did u know? Satan remarks that the mind can make its own Hell out of Heaven, or in his case, its own Heaven out of Hell.

Satan addresses his comrades and acknowledges their shame in falling to the heavenly forces, but urges them to gather in order to consider whether another war is feasible. Instantly, the legions of devils dig into the bowels of the ground, unearthing gold and other minerals. With their inhuman powers they construct a great temple in a short time. It is called Pandemonium (which means "all the demons" in Greek), and the hundreds of thousands of demonic troops gather there to hold a summit. Being spirits, they can easily shrink from huge winged creatures to the smallest size. Compacting themselves, they enter Pandemonium, and the debate begins.

Analysis

Throughout the first two or three books of Paradise Lost, Satan seems as if he's the hero of the poem. This is partly because the focus of the poem is all on him, but it is also because the first books establish his struggle—he finds himself defeated and banished from Heaven, and sets about establishing a new course for himself and those he leads. Typically, the hero or protagonist of any narrative, epic poem or otherwise, is a person who struggles to accomplish something. Milton plays against our expectations by spending the first quarter of his epic telling us about the antagonist rather than the protagonist, so that when we meet Adam and Eve, we will have a more profound sense of what they are up against. But even when the focus of the poem shifts to Adam and Eve, Satan remains the most active force in the story.

One important way in which the narrator develops our picture of Satan—and gives us the impression that he is a hero—is through epic similes, lengthy and developed comparisons that tell us how big and powerful Satan is. For example, when Satan is lying on the burning lake, Milton compares him to the titans who waged war upon Jove in Greek mythology. Then, at greater length, he compares him to a Leviathan, or whale, that is so huge that sailors mistake it for an island and fix their anchor to it. In other epics, these sorts of similes are used to establish the great size or strength of characters, and on the surface these similes seem to do the same thing. At the same time, however, the effect of these similes is to unsettle us, making us aware that we really do not know how big Satan is at all. No one knows how big the titans were, because they were defeated before the age of man. The image of the Leviathan does not give us a well-defined sense of his size, because the whole point of the image is that the Leviathan's size generates deception and confusion.

Task What is Satan's attitude in the beginning of the poem?

More than anything, the similes used to describe Satan make us aware of the fact that size is relative, and that we don't know how big anything in Hell is—the burning lake, the hill, Pandemonium, etc. Milton drives this fact home at the end of Book I with a tautology: while most of the devils shrink in size to enter Pandemonium, the important ones sit "far within / And in their own dimensions like themselves" (I.792–793). In other words, they were however big they were, but we have no way of knowing how big that was. Finally, it is important to note that the first description of Satan's size is the biggest we will ever see him. From that point on, Satan assumes many shapes and is compared to numerous creatures, but his size and stature steadily diminishes. The uncertainty created by these similes creates a sense of irony—perhaps Satan isn't so great after all.

The devils in Paradise Lost are introduced to the story here in Book I in almost a parody of how Homer introduces great warriors in the Iliad. The irony of these descriptions lies in the fact that while these devils seem heroic and noteworthy in certain ways, they just lost the war in Heaven. As frightening and vividly presented as these creatures are, they did not succeed in killing a single angel.

In Book I, Milton presents Satan primarily as a military hero, and the council of devils as a council of war. In doing so, he makes Paradise Lost resonate with earlier epics, which all center around military heroes and their exploits. At the same time, Milton presents an implicit critique of a literary culture that glorifies war and warriors. Satan displays all of the virtues of a great warrior such as Achilles or Odysseus. He is courageous, undaunted, refusing to yield in the face of impossible odds, and able to stir his followers to follow him in brave and violent exploits. Milton is clearly aware of what he's doing in making Satan somewhat appealing in the early chapters. By drawing us into sympathizing with and admiring Satan, Milton forces us to question why we admire martial prowess and pride in literary characters. Ultimately he attempts to show that the Christian virtues of obedience, humility, and forbearance are more important.

13.2 Book – II

13.2.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Satan opens the debate in Pandemonium by claiming that Heaven is not yet lost, and that the fallen angels (or devils) might rise up stronger in another battle if they work together. He opens the floor, and the pro-war devil Moloch speaks first. Moloch was one of the fiercest fighters in the war in Heaven, and he anxiously pleads for another open war, this time armed with the weapons of Hell. He reasons that nothing, even their destruction, could be worse than Hell, and so they have nothing

Notes

to lose by another attack. Belial speaks up to contradict him. He eloquently offers calm reason to counter Moloch's fiery temper, and claims that God has not yet punished them as fiercely as he might if they went to war with him again. After all, they are no longer chained to the fiery lake, which was their previous and worse punishment; since God may one day forgive them, it is better that they live with what they now have. But peace is not really what he advocates; rather, Belial uses his considerable intelligence to find excuses to prevent further war and to advocate lassitude and inaction. Mammon speaks up next, and refuses to ever bow down to God again. He prefers to peacefully advance their freedom and asks the devils to be industrious in Hell. Through hard work, the devils can make Hell their own kingdom to mimic Heaven. This argument meets with the greatest support among the legions of the fallen, who receive his suggestion with applause.

Quiet falls upon the crowd as the respected Beelzebub begins to speak. He also prefers freedom to servitude under God, but counsels a different course of action than those previously advocated. Apparently, he says, rumors have been circulating in Heaven about a new world that is to be created, to be filled with a race called Man, whom God will favor more than the angels. Beelzebub advises, at Satan's secret behest, that they seek their revenge by destroying or corrupting this new beloved race. The rest of the devils agree and vote unanimously in favor of this plan. They must now send a scout to find out about this new world, and in a feat of staged heroics, Satan volunteers himself.

While the other devils break into groups to discuss the outcome of the debate and to build other structures, Satan flies off to find Hell's gate. When he approaches, he sees that it is actually nine gates—three each of brass, iron, and adamantine—and that two strange shapes stand guard in front. One looks like a woman down to her waist, but below has the form of a serpent, with a pack of howling dogs around her waist. The other is only a dark shape. Satan chooses to confront the shape, demanding passage through the gates. They are about to do battle when the woman-beast cries out. She explains to Satan who she and her companion are and how they came to be, claiming that they are in fact Satan's own offspring. While Satan was still an angel, she sprang forth from his head, and was named Sin. Satan then incestuously impregnated her, and she gave birth to a ghostly son named Death. Death in turn raped his mother Sin, begetting the dogs that now torment her. Sin and Death were then assigned to guard the gate of Hell and hold its keys.

Apparently, Satan had forgotten these events. Now he speaks less violently to them and explains his plot against God. After Satan's persuasion, they are more than eager to help him. Sin unlocks the great gates, which open into the vast dark abyss of night. Satan flies out but then begins to fall, until a cloud of fire catches and carries him. He hears a great tumult of noise and makes his way toward it; it is Chaos, ruler of the abyss. Chaos is joined by his consort Night, with Confusion, Discord and others at their side. Satan explains his plan to Chaos as well. He asks for help, saying that in return he will reclaim the territory of the new world, thus returning more of the universe to disorder. Chaos agrees and points out the way to where the Earth has recently been created. With great difficulty, Satan moves onward, and Sin and Death follow far behind, building a bridge from Hell to Earth on which evil spirits can travel to tempt mortals.

Analysis

Just as Book I may be seen as a parody of military heroism, the devils' debate in Book II can be read as a parody of political debate. Their nonviolent and democratic decisions to wreak the destruction of humankind shows the corruption of fallen reason, which can make evil appear as good. Milton depicts the devils' organization ironically, as if he were commending it. Satan, for example, diplomatically urges others "to union, and firm faith, and firm accord," making Hell's newly formed government sound legitimate and powerful when it is in fact grossly illegitimate and powerless (II.36). It is possible that Milton here satirizes politicians and political debates in general, not just corrupt politicians. Certainly, Milton had witnessed enough violent political struggles in his time to give him cause to demonize politicians as a species. Clearly, the debate in Hell weighs only different evils, rather than bringing its participants closer to truth.

This scene also demonstrates Milton's cynicism about political institutions and organizations. The devils' behavior suggests that political power tends to corrupt individuals who possess it. Even learned politicians, as Belial is here in Book II, who possesses great powers of reason and intellectual discourse, have the power to deceive the less-educated public. In his other writings, Milton argues that political and religious organizations have the potential to do evil things in the name of order and union. After the debate in Hell is concluded, the object of parody shifts to philosophers and religious thinkers. Following the debate, the devils break into groups, some of which continue to speak and argue without any resolution or amenable conclusion. Similar debates over the sources of evil and of political authority were fiercely contested in Milton's time. Milton calls the devils' discussions "vain wisdom all, and false philosophy," a criticism which he extends in his other writings to the words of the religious leaders of his time.

Task Who is Beelzebub, and what does he propose?

After Beelzebub takes the floor, it becomes clear that the caucus has been a foregone conclusion. Satan lets the sides rhetorically engage each other before he announces through Beelzebub the plan he had all along. Satan and Beelzebub conspire to win the argument, and do, without any of the other devils recognizing the fraud. Satan's volunteering to be the scout then silences all possible dissent, since he is heralded as the leader of Hell. Here again is a parody of Hell mimicking Heaven: Satan offers to sacrifice himself for the good of the other devils, in a twisted imitation of Christ. The parallel is made even more blatant when Sin cries out to Satan at the gate of Hell: "O father, what intends thy hand . . . against thy only son?" (II.727–728). Sin's statement foreshadows how God will send his only Son to die, for the good of the humankind. Satan believes he is free, and both Belial and Mammon celebrate the freedom of the devils even in Hell, and yet we see that they have no power to do anything except distort Heavenly things, twisting them into evil, empty imitations.

Satan's encounter with Sin and Death is an allegory, in which the three characters and their relationships represent abstract ideas. Sin is the first child of Satan, brought to life by Satan's disobedience. Since Satan is the first of God's creations to disobey, he personifies disobedience, and the fact that Sin is his daughter suggests that all sins arise from disobedience and ingratitude toward God. To those who behold her birth, she is first frightening but then seems strangely attractive, suggesting the seductive allure of sin to the ordinary individual. Sin dwells alone and in utter torment, representing the ultimate fate of the sinner. That Death is Sin's offspring indicates Milton's belief that death is not simply a biological fact of life but rather a punishment for sin and disobedience, a punishment that nobody escapes.

13.3 Book – III

13.3.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Book III opens with a second invocation to his muse, this time addressed to "holy light" (III.1). Milton asks that the heavenly light shine inside him and illuminate his mind with divine knowledge so that he can share this knowledge with his readers.

The scene shifts to Heaven, where God has been watching all of the events in Hell with his Son sitting at his right hand. He sees Satan flying up toward the new Earth and the parents of mankind. At the same time, he sees everything that will happen because of it, perceiving past, present, and future simultaneously. He sees that man will fall, of his own fault, because God gave him free will—yet without that will, man would not be capable of sincere love. Man would merely go through the motions. While it would be just to punish man for his own actions, God determines that he will

Notes

act primarily out of love and mercy. The Son, full of compassion, praises God for his kindness toward man, but asks how mercy can be given without destroying justice. God answers that a suitable sacrifice must be made: someone worthy must offer to die to pay for man's sin. The angelic choirs are silent, but the Son immediately offers himself. He will become mortal so that God can yield to Death and conquer Hell. God is overjoyed, even though he will be giving up his son, because he knows that it is good to sacrifice his son for the salvation of the human race, in order for justice and mercy to be served. Those that have faith in the Son will be redeemed, but those who do not accept grace will still be doomed to Hell. The choirs of angels now break into a song of praise extolling the goodness of both Father and Son, which will turn a sorrowful deed into greater glory for both God and man.

The story returns to Satan, who lands on Earth in what is now China. There are not yet any living things there, or any of the works of man that will eventually distract man's mind from God. At length, Satan sees a high-reaching structure in the distance, an enormous kingly gate in the sky with stairs leading all the way down to Earth. This gate guards Heaven, which was at that time visible from Earth. Flying over to it, Satan climbs up a few steps to get a better view. He sees the new creation in all its glory, but can only feel jealousy. He does not stay put for long, though: he is drawn by the golden sun, hanging above the green and lush land, and flies toward it. There he sees an angel standing on a hill. To deceive him, Satan changes to a cherub, or low-ranking angel. Recognizing the other angel as the Archangel Uriel, Satan approaches and addresses him. Satan claims to have just come down from Heaven, full of curiosity about the new world he has been hearing so much about, and curious about its inhabitants. Satan's transformation and his speech are so flawless that even Uriel cannot see through the subterfuge. The Archangel is pleased that a young angel is showing so much zeal to find out about the world that God brought out of the Chaos from earth, air, wind and fire. He happily points out the way to Paradise, where Adam lives. After giving his due respects, Satan flies off with dark intentions.

Analysis

As the narrative of Paradise Lost shifts from its sustained focus on Hell and Satan and begins to present glimpses of Heaven and God, we may feel that the story loses some of the intense interest and appeal that it began with. The discussion in Heaven is moving and theologically interesting, but the parts of the poem treating the evil designs of Satan are written with more potency and rhetorical vigor. The characters in Heaven play a relatively passive role, watching the story unfold, while Satan actively and endlessly devises his evil machinations. Moreover, the sinful, evil characters hold our attention more easily than the pure and virtuous ones. Satan appears to be the active hero, struggling for his personal desires, and God may seem rather dull. These observations, however, are beside the point that Milton hopes to prove to his readers: God's reason and grace rule the universe and control all of those who live there.

The encounter between Satan and Uriel demonstrates Satan's capacity for deception and fraud, as he subverts Uriel's role as a guardian by disguising himself as a cherub. Uriel is unable to recognize Satan in part because he does not believe it possible that Satan would be lurking around. As a devout and virtuous angel, Uriel is unable to recognize evil even when it presents itself right in front of him. Through Satan's deception of Uriel, Milton shows the significance of the sin of fraud, or hypocrisy. Fraud is an especially damaging sin because it is invisible to others, hurting them in ways they are not even aware of. In the Inferno, Dante maintains that fraud is the worst of all man's sins. Milton goes almost as far in showing that leading innocent people to evil is much worse than leading yourself to evil.

Milton reveals his own personal theological positions in Book III. Through God's initial speech, for example, Milton discards the orthodox Calvinist position of predestination. Omniscient God, seeing the fall in the future, says that men cannot blame God for their fate, or for acts of evil or bad luck,

insisting that man possesses free will, even though God can foresee what they will do. God's speech here contradicts the Calvinist belief, held by most of Milton's fellow Puritans, that the fate of every man's soul is decided before birth.

Did u know? Milton refuses to abandon his belief in free will, insisting that man must have free will in order to prove his sincere love for God. This balance between free will and virtue is a paradox—man is free to choose, but only truly free when he chooses the good.

Milton had to confront certain problems inherent in any attempt to represent beings and events outside of time and human understanding. To have God and the Son appear as separate characters in a work of fiction poses particular problems and risks in terms of logical consistency. There may not be a completely coherent way to represent God and the Son as characters who are both independent and human-like, but at the same time consubstantial, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. It was extremely ambitious of Milton to risk heresy by putting words in God's mouth, and he lessens this risk by incorporating numerous biblical allusions into the speeches of God and the Son.

By making God and the Son two different characters, Milton asserts that they are essentially separate but equal entities. Milton did not believe in the Holy Trinity completely, and believed that the Son was created after God, not coeternally. The relationship between God and the Son is not fully revealed. Appearing as separate characters with separate comments, they may still share a mind. Some actions, like God's plea for a volunteer, and the Son's subsequent volunteering, argue that they do not share a single mind. God asks for a volunteer, yet he must know ahead of time that his Son will be the only volunteer. The precise nature of the relationship between the two remains mysterious.

13.4 Book – IV

13.4.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Satan lands atop Mount Niphates, just north of Paradise, the Garden of Eden. He becomes gripped with doubt about the task in front of him; seeing the beauty and innocence of Earth has reminded him of what he once was. He even briefly considers whether he could be forgiven if he repented. But Hell follows him wherever he goes—Satan is actually the embodiment of Hell. If he asks the Father for forgiveness, he knows it would be a false confession; he reasons that if he returned to Heaven, he still could not bear to bow down. Knowing redemption or salvation cannot be granted to him, he resolves to continue to commit acts of sin and evil. He does not notice that during his internal debate, he has inadvertently revealed his devilish nature. He is observed by Uriel, the archangel he tricked into pointing the way. Uriel notices his conflicting facial expressions, and since all cherubs have permanent looks of joy on their faces, Uriel concludes that Satan cannot be a cherub.

Satan now approaches Eden, which is surrounded by a great thicket wall. He easily leaps over it like a wolf entering a sheep's pen. Inside he sees an idyllic world, with all varieties of animals and trees. He can see the tallest of the trees, the Tree of Life—and next to it, the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. He perches himself on the Tree of Life, disguised as a cormorant, a large sea bird. Finally, he notices two creatures walking erect among the other animals. They walk naked without shame, and work pleasantly, tending the garden. Satan's pain and envy intensifies as he sees this new beautiful race, created after he and his legions fell. He could have loved them, but now, his damnation will be revenged through their destruction. He continues to watch them, and the man,

Notes

Adam, speaks. He tells Eve not to complain of the work they have to do but to be obedient to God, since God has given them so many blessings, and only one constraint: they must not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Eve agrees wholeheartedly, and they embrace.

Eve tells Adam of her first awakening as she came to life and how she wondered who and where she was. She found a river and followed it upstream to its source. Her path led to a clear, smooth lake, and Eve looked into the lake, seeing an image in its surface, which she soon discovers is her own. She hears a voice explaining to her that she was made out of Adam, and with him she will become the mother of the human race. Overlooking Adam and Eve, Satan sees his opportunity. If the Father has given them a rule to follow, then they might be persuaded to break it. He leaves the two for a while, going off to learn more from other angels.

Meanwhile, Uriel comes before the Archangel Gabriel, at the gate of Eden, and tells him about the shape-changing spirit that he saw from the hilltop. They both suspect that it might be one of the fallen ones. Gabriel promises that if the spirit is in the garden, they will find it by morning. Around this time, Adam and Eve finish their day's work. They go to their leafy bower, praising God and each other for their blissful life, and after a short prayer, they lie together—making love without sin, because lust had not yet tainted their natures.

Task What does Satan feel is his greatest fault?

Night falls, and Gabriel sends search parties into the Garden. Two of his angels find Satan, disguised as a toad, whispering into the ear of Eve as she sleeps. They pull him before Gabriel, who recognizes him, and demands to know what he is doing in Paradise. Satan at first feigns innocence, as they have no proof that he means harm. But Gabriel knows him to be a liar, and threatens to drag him back to Hell. Enraged by this threat, Satan prepares to fight him. The two square off for a decisive battle, but a sign from Heaven—the appearance in the sky of a pair of golden scales—stops them. Satan recognizes the sign as meaning he could not win, and flies off.

Analysis

As Book IV opens, Milton presents Satan as a character deeply affected by envy and despair. Earlier in the poem, Satan seems perfectly confident in his rebellion and evil plans. His feeling of despair at the beauty of Paradise temporarily impairs this confidence. While in Hell, Satan tells himself that his mind could make its own Heaven out of Hell, but now he realizes that the reverse is true. As close to Heaven, as he is, he cannot help but feel out of place, because he brings Hell with him wherever he goes. For Satan, Hell is not simply a place, but rather a state of mind brought on by a lack of connection with God. Satan's despondent recognition of this fact corresponds with what Milton sees as the worst sin of all: despair. If even this beautiful new world cannot make Satan forget Hell, then he can never hope to seek forgiveness and return to Heaven. As the Bible says, the one sin that cannot be forgiven is despairing of forgiveness; if one cannot even ask for mercy, it cannot be granted. Satan realizes this, and decides that the only course of action is to enjoy his own wickedness, and pursue it with all his strength. Milton preempts the crucial question of whether Satan could have successfully repented back in Book III. There, God said that he would give grace to humankind because Satan would prompt humankind's sin. But he would not help the fallen angels, and especially Satan, because their sin came out of themselves and from no other source.

Satan's continuing process of degradation is reflected in his use of progressively despicable, lowly disguises. Through these first three books of Paradise Lost, Satan's physical presence takes many different forms. In Book I, he is a monumental figure so large that the largest tree would seem a paltry wand in his hand. In Book III, he disguises himself as a cherub, but his inner turmoil ultimately ruins this benign-seeming appearance. Satan is later described as leaping over Eden's fence like a

Notes

wolf into a sheep's pen. While he does not exactly take the form of a wolf, he continues to be compared to and associated with wild, predatory animals. He takes the shape of a bird atop the Tree of Life, and then morphs into a toad to whisper temptation into Eve's ear. Satan's shapes become progressively less impressive and stately. Once an imposing figures, he shrinks himself to become a lesser angel, then a mere bird, and finally a much less appealing animal: a toad.

In this book, we are presented with Eve's first memories of awakening to consciousness, though we have to wait until Book VIII to see Adam's first memories. Eve's account subtly underscores her distance from God and need for guidance. She awakens in shade rather than daylight, suggesting her separation from the light of God's truth. Almost immediately, she finds herself captivated and deceived by an image—her reflection in the water, which she does not recognize as merely an image. She admits that she would probably still be by the water's edge, fixated there in vain desire, if it wasn't for God's calling her away. This image recalls the story of Narcissus from Ovid's Metamorphoses, a story that Renaissance poets such as Petrarch used to show that erotic desire is based on visual images that are inherently vain and deceptive. Milton's allusion to Narcissus makes a similar point: human beings, especially women, need God's help to escape the trap of desire based on images. Significantly, it is the voice rather than the visual image of God that calls her away. Also noteworthy in this context is the fact that in his first speech to Eve, God says that Eve is herself an image—the reflection of Adam.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which angel does Satan trick by disguising himself as a cherub?
   (a) Michale (b) Uriel
   (c) Raphael (d) Abdiel
2. Which of the following forms does Satan not take?
   (a) Angel (b) Toad
   (c) Cormorant (d) All of these
3. In which book of the Bible does the story of Adam and Eve occur?
   (a) Leviticus (b) Exodus
   (c) Genesis (d) Deuteronomy
4. Which devil advocates a renewal of all-out war against God?
   (a) Belial (b) Moloch
   (c) Mammon (d) Beelzebub
5. Which angel wields a large sword in the battle and wounds Satan?
   (a) Michael (b) Abdiel
   (c) Uriel (d) None of these
6. Which of the following is not found in Hell?
   (a) Gems (b) Gold
   (c) Oil (d) Minerals
7. Which devil is the main architect of Pandemonium?
   (a) Mulciber (b) Mammon
   (c) Moloch (d) Belial
8. How many times does Milton invoke a muse?
   (a) One (b) Two
   (c) Three (d) Four

Notes

9. Who leads Adam and Eve out of paradise?
   - (a) God
   - (b) The son
   - (c) Michael
   - (d) Raphael
10. Which of the following poets does Milton emulate?
   - (a) Virgil
   - (b) Homer
   - (c) Both Virgil and Homer
   - (d) None of these.

After God leads Eve away from her reflection, she first encounters Adam under a platan tree. Platan is the Greek name for plane tree, and by giving the name of the tree in Greek rather than English, Milton alludes to Plato, the Greek philosopher, whose name is etymologically linked with that of the plane tree. The most well-known of Plato's arguments is the thesis that reality consists of ideal forms that can only be perceived by the intellect, in contrast with the deceptive shades or reflections of these ideal forms that human beings perceive in everyday life. Milton associates the platan tree, or Plato, with Adam, suggesting that he is closer to the ideal forms or essences of things, whereas Eve is more part of the world of images, shade, and illusion, and is led away from illusions only reluctantly.

Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve was controversial in his time. Milton paints an idyllic picture of an innocent, strong, and intelligent Adam, whereas Christian tradition more typically emphasizes Adam's basically sinful nature. The Puritans, like many other Christians, viewed the sexual act as inherently sinful—a necessary evil that cannot be avoided precisely because man has fallen. Milton, in contrast, makes a point of noting that Adam and Eve enjoy pure, virtuous sexual pleasure without sin: they love, but do not lust. Milton implies that not only is sex not evil, but that demonizing it goes against God's will. He persuasively argues that God mandates procreation, and that anyone who would advocate complete abstinence (as St. Paul does in the New Testament) would be an enemy to God and God's magnificent creation. Furthermore, Eve's story about seeing her reflection in the water hints that her vanity may become a serious flaw—and weakness—later on. Her curiosity is sparked by her lack of understanding about who she is and where she is. She traces the river back to its source just as she wishes to trace herself to her source, through emotional self-reflection, in search of answers to her difficult questions. Also, her willingness to listen and believe the voice she hears, which tells her about her identity, also foreshadows that she will trust another voice she will hear later—Satan's.

Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve is controversial in our own time because the discourse between Adam and Eve strikes many modern audiences as misogynistic. Milton portrays Adam as her superior because he has a closer relationship to God. The idea that Adam was created to serve God only, and Eve is created to serve both God and Adam, illustrates Milton's belief that women were created to serve men. The narrator remarks of Adam and Eve that their difference in quality was apparent—"their sex not equal seemed" (IV.296). Milton implies that she is weaker in mind as well as body than Adam. Eve herself freely admits her secondary and subordinate role. When she explains her dependence on him she explains to Adam that she is created because of him and is lost without him. Having Eve herself possess and verbalize these misogynistic, submissive views adds a peculiar and somewhat disturbing power to the conversation. Milton's views on the relations between men and women were certainly common, if not dogmatic, in his time. Milton's reading of the Bible dictated that in marriage the woman is to obey the man, and that he is her ruler. The relationship between Adam and Eve, though unequal, remains perfectly happy, because they both in the end live in praise of God. Eve accepts her role as Adam does his own, and God loves both equally.

13.5 Summary

- The beginning of Paradise Lost is similar in gravity and seriousness to the book from which Milton takes much of his story: the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

- The Iliad and the Aeneid are the great epic poems of Greek and Latin, respectively, and Milton emulates them because he intends Paradise Lost to be the first English epic.
- Satan lies stunned beside his second-in-command, Beelzebub, in a lake of fire that gives off darkness instead of light.
- God allows it precisely because he intends to turn their evil designs toward a greater good in the end.
- Sin dwells alone and in utter torment, representing the ultimate fate of the sinner.
- Uriel comes before the Archangel Gabriel, at the gate of Eden, and tells him about the shape-changing spirit that he saw from the hilltop.

13.6 Keywords

Capivate : Charm.

Incestuously : Involving or guilty of incest.

Torment : Serve physical or mental suffering.

13.7 Review Questions

1. Who leads the fallen angels to dig for gold in Hell? Why?
2. Who volunteers to go alone to spy on God's new creation?
3. What is Jacob's ladder in the biblical account?
4. Who is Uriel? What does Satan ask of him?
5. How does Satan feel about his own free will?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (b)	2. (d)	3. (c)
4. (b)	5. (a)	6. (c)
7. (a)	8. (c)	9. (c)
10. (c)		

13.8 Further Readings

Books

Paradise Lost I (Non-detailed study) — John Milton

John Milton Paradise Lost — John Milton

John Milton: a short Introduction — Roy Flannagan

Online links

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/pl/index.html

http://pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barrons/paradis02.asp

Notes

Unit 14: Paradise Lost-I (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis–II

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

14.1 Book–V

14.1.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

14.2 Book–VI

14.2.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

14.3 Book–VII

14.3.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

14.4 Book–VIII

14.4.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

14.5 Summary

14.6 Keywords

14.7 Review Questions

14.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain prologue and invocation of Book V-VIII
- Discuss the analysis of Book V-VIII.

Introduction

Eve's dream at the start of Book V is an obvious foreshadowing of the actual temptation scene in Book IX. This foreshadowing, however, is also ironic in that the reader already knows that Eve and Adam will yield to the temptation of Satan. Thus, rather than being simply an instance of foreshadowing, Eve's dream is confirmation and emphasis on what the eader knows must and will happen. Further, by bringing up the dream at this point in the text, Milton makes the reader analogous to God. Both God and the reader know that Adam and Eve will fall, but neither the reader nor God is the cause of that fall. Consequently, when Adam tells Eve that the dream will not come true, that it is bred of fear rather than reason, the reader, once again like God, knows that Adam is wrong but can do nothing to help him.

In Book VI, Milton presents his description of epic warfare. He follows many of the conventions of the great classic epics, such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid,* by giving graphic descriptions of battles and wounds, highlighting the boasting give and take in individual battles, and developing massive scenes of chaotic violence. However, Milton goes beyond his classical models and, in a sense, mocks the nature of the warfare he describes. The reasons that lie behind this sense of mockery in Book VI have been frequently discussed and disputed by critics and commentators. The general sense of those who see a kind of mocking humor in the battle scenes is that Milton was dealing with two difficulties. First, the combat in Heaven is between combatants who cannot be killed, and second there is no doubt as to the outcome of the battle.

The prologue to Book VII is especially interesting on two counts. First, the Muse Milton invokes in again Urania, the classical Muse of Astronomy, who is appropriate since the focus of this book is on the creation of Earth and the heavens, and Book VIII will deal with planetary motions. But, once again, just as he did in Book I, Milton disassociates Urania from the classical tradition and equates her with Christian inspiration, literally (in Book I) with the Holy Spirit. This treatment of Urania epitomizes one of Milton's goals in *Paradise Lost* — to compose a Christian epic. He brings together the pagan classical tradition with Christian doctrine; the invocation and transmutation of Urania provides an emblematic image of this goal.

Adam continues his conversation with Raphael in Book VIII. He asks Raphael about the movement of the stars and planets. The angel says that it doesn't matter whether Earth moves or the heavens. God has made some things unknowable. Ultimately, Raphael adds, the complexities of the universe are beyond Man's comprehension and Man should be satisfied with what God allows him to know. Then Adam tells Raphael, who was on a mission to guard Hell when God made Adam, the story of how Man was created.

14.1 Book–V

14.1.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Adam awakes from a peaceful sleep, but Eve appears to have been restless during the night. She relates to him the disturbing dream she has had. She explains that in the dream she hears a voice and follows it to the Tree of Knowledge. There, a creature who looks like an angel appears, takes a fruit from the forbidden tree and tastes it. The angel tells Eve that she could be like the gods if she eats too, but before she can try it, he vanishes and she returns to dreamless sleep. Adam is troubled by the dream, but assures her that it is not necessarily a prediction of what will happen in the future, because she still has the faculty of reason to control her actions. Comforted, they return to their work and praise of God.

Meanwhile, in Heaven, God calls the Archangel Raphael to his side. He does not want Adam and Eve to claim that the devil took them by surprise if they are lured into disobedience, so he instructs Raphael to tell Adam about the danger in store for him. When Raphael arrives in Paradise, the couple warmly welcomes him. They eat together, and Raphael explains the differences between heavenly food and earthly food. After the meal, Eve leaves the scene and allows Raphael to speak to Adam.

Raphael first describes the composition of the things God created on Earth. God gave different kinds of substance to all living things. The highest substance is spirit, which God put into humankind. Below humans are animals, which have living flesh but no spirit, followed by plants and then inanimate objects. Each group possesses the attributes of the groups below it; for instance, whereas animals have physical senses, humankind possesses all of the same senses plus the ability to reason. Raphael says that man is the highest being on Earth because of his God-given ability to reason, and warns Adam to always choose obedience to God. Adam wonders how any being created by God

Notes

could choose to be disobedient, but Raphael explains that Adam was created as perfect yet mutable, endowed with the power to maintain his perfection but also the power to lose it. Adam desires to know more, and asks how disobedience first came into Heaven. To answer, Raphael relates the story of Satan's fall.

When Heaven was still at peace, Raphael explains, all the hierarchies of angels were obedient to God. One day the Father announced to them that he had begotten a son, who was to rule at his right hand. While God's announcement pleased most of the angels, one of them was angry. That angry angel lost his heavenly name, and is now called Satan. Proud to be one of the highest archangels, Satan felt that he deserved the same powers as God. Jealous of the Son, he persuaded one third of the other angels in Heaven to join him. Satan erected his own throne in heaven, and told his followers that they should not allow themselves to be unjustly ruled. One of these followers, however, disagreed. He was named Abdiel, and after arguing with Satan he faithfully returned to the side of God, braving the scorn of the other rebellious angels.

Analysis

Eve's dream, created by Satan's whispering in her ear as she sleeps, foreshadows her ultimate temptation and downfall. God's decision to send Raphael to warn Adam about the dangers ahead also foreshadows their fall, although the fact that it does so is paradoxical. After all, the ostensible purpose of sending Raphael is to arm Adam and Eve with knowledge, so that they won't fall from sheer ignorance. We might expect Raphael's visit to give Adam and Eve a fighting chance, creating more suspense and doubt as to the outcome, but this is not the case. Every Christian reader already knows that Adam and Eve will fall, so instead of creating suspense, Raphael's words of instruction only heighten our sense of the gravity of their sin and the tragedy of their disobedience.

There is a further paradox in the fact that even as Milton foreshadows the fall and makes it seem inevitable and predestined, he strives to prove that the fall was anything but inevitable. Paradise Lost insists that Adam and Eve had free will and were protected by adequate knowledge and understanding. In fact, Milton's poem goes much further in this regard than the Bible, which does not include Raphael's warning visit or God's own assurance that Adam and Eve have free will. These parts of the story are Milton's invention, and his insistence on humankind's free will flew in the face of what most Puritans believed. Since we know the end of the story from the first line of the poem, this emphasis on free will does not generate an impression of greater possibility, but rather informs our understanding of what Adam and Eve's sin means.

When Raphael begins to tell Adam about the war in Heaven, he first admits that explaining these events presents a challenge, because the spiritual beings involved are beyond human comprehension, and it may even be unlawful for him to tell of these things. Raphael here describes problems that Milton himself has to confront in Paradise Lost, including how to narrate religious mysteries in a form that will be understood, but also the problem of what authorizes Milton to explain these mysteries at all. Much of Paradise Lost is based on the Book of Genesis, but much of it is Milton's invention. Moreover, Milton presents his epic not as a fiction based on Christian scripture, but as a divinely inspired Christian document. We may well wonder why Milton, a devout Christian, thought he could presume to explain such matters as the origins of Christ and Satan and the details of life in Paradise. Part of the answer probably is that Milton truly believes that his poem is divinely inspired, and that the Holy Spirit, as the source of all creativity, speaks through him. Another part of the answer may be that Milton does present Paradise Lost as a fiction that conveys truths not literally but allegorically. Thus, he adapts his subject matter to the conventional expectations of an epic poem, thereby using a literary form that his audience was already familiar with. The truth of his poem lies in its interpretation rather than in its plot.

One way in which Milton follows the conventions of epic poetry is by having Raphael narrate the long background story of the origin and course of the war in Heaven. The great Greek and Latin epics begin by situating their characters in the middle of the story and then turning backward to

recount events that occurred before the story began. This style of narration, referred to as in medias res (Latin for "in the middle of things"), allows the epic poem to begin with engaging scenes and action to immediately engage our interest and attention. When the story is underway, the narrator can confidently return to fill in the gaps in our knowledge and give us further context about the story we are reading. Milton uses a similar tactic in Book V, throwing both Adam and us, the readers, in the middle of the story. We, like Adam, have heard only about Heaven's side of the war in Heaven and about Adam and Eve's early days. Raphael then informs us of the world's creation and its structures and hierarchies.

Task What does Eve's dream foreshadow?

Milton uses Raphael's story to present another of his unorthodox religious views. Milton believed that the Son had an origin and was thus not eternal. This notion challenged traditional Christian belief, which holds that the Son (Jesus) is coeternal with the Father —although they relate as father and son, there was no "birth" or starting point for the divine relationship or for either of them. Since they are two parts of the same eternal God, they must both have existed for eternity. Milton rejects this idea with his assertion that there was a specific time when the Father begat the Son. Milton certainly did not deny the divinity of Jesus, but his challenging belief in Jesus' separate origin reminds us that he was never afraid to distance himself from conventional religion, and that he trusted his own interpretations more than those of any institution.

14.2 Book–VI

14.2.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Raphael continues his story of the first conflict between Satan and the Father. Again, Raphael gestures that he must find a way to relate the war in terms that Adam will understand. Raphael returns to his story with Abdiel, who confronts Satan and the other rebel angels and tells them that their defeat is imminent. He leaves the followers of Satan and is welcomed back into the ranks of God. He is forgiven by God and praised for his loyalty, obedience, and resistance of evil. God appoints Gabriel and Michael the leaders of Heaven's army, which is justly made up of only as many angels as Satan's army.

Shortly thereafter, the two sides prepare their armies. The two armies line up in full view of each other, waiting for the signal to attack. Satan and Abdiel square off in the middle; they exchange insults, and then blows, and the battle begins. Both sides fight fiercely and evenly until Michael, the co-leader of the good angels, deals Satan a blow with an unusually large and intimidating sword. The sword slices through Satan's entire right side, and the rebellious angels then retreat with their wounded leader. But because angels have no bodies, says Milton, they can only be wounded temporarily, and Satan is able to regroup for the next day of fighting. Satan easily rouses himself and his followers for a second day of battle arguing that better weapons must yield better results. He plans to use a secret weapon, cannons, which the rebels spend the entire night building.

Satan's army unveils the cannons the next day and bombards the good angels. The good angels find themselves at a disadvantage as their armor becomes a hindrance to their escape. Michael finally provides a solution: the good angels pick up mountains and move them across the battlefield to bury the rebel angels and their artillery. The rebel angels must slowly dig themselves out from underneath the mountains and reassemble. Night falls, and God decides that there will be no fighting on the third day, and that the war must now end. He sends out his Son the next day, who charges through the enemy ranks on a great chariot and drives them from the battlefield. The Son, endowed

Notes

with the power of God, surrounds the rebel angels, Satan included, and drives them out of the Gate of Heaven through a hole in Heaven's ground. They fall for nine days through Chaos, before landing in Hell.

Raphael warns Adam that Satan has begun to plot the doom of mankind. Raphael hypothesizes that Satan, in order to get revenge, wishes to make them commit sin to tarnish God's beloved creation. Raphael adds that Satan may also want others to rebel against God and suffer a similar fate. Raphael explains to Adam that they must fear Satan and must not yield to his evil plot.

Analysis

The war in Heaven is probably intended to be read as a metaphor, encapsulating spiritual lessons in an epic scenario so that we (and Adam) can understand what Raphael is talking about. The story certainly contains lessons that Raphael wants Adam to learn from. One of the morals of the war in Heaven is that disobedience leads to a person's becoming blind to the truth. Satan and the rebel angels feel empowered by their new decision not to submit, yet their opposition to God actually renders them powerless. Satan and his army never seem to realize the futility of their rebellion. Satan rouses himself and his troops to more and more disobedience, but their continued failure and continued hope of victory demonstrate the blinding effect that their pride and vanity have wrought. Thus blinded, they are easily overcome in battle each day, by only a small portion of God's angels actually fighting against them. Adam tries to learn the parallel between the battle between good and evil that occurred in Heaven and the battle that will occur subtly on Earth. In similar fashion, we are supposed to envision the parallel of Adam's struggle in our own lives, as we strive to ward off evil and attain virtue.

Task Who is the leader of God's angels in the war in Heaven?

Raphael's narrative makes the war in Heaven seem unreal, and almost cartoonish. As Raphael explains, angels are exempt from death, which lessens the consequences of the battle and thus makes it seem that less is at stake. Satan, for instance, is grievously wounded by Michael's sword—he is almost hacked in two—but he is ready to fight the next day. The good angels pick up entire mountains and sling them at the rebel angels. Unable to die or even be seriously wounded, the rebel angels can dig themselves out from under the mountainous rubble, dust themselves off, and plan for their next strike. The entire war comes to seem rather silly because it lacks drama. The outcome is never in doubt.

The style of battle does not resemble the warfare of Milton's day, but rather the feudal warfare of earlier epics. Milton presents the warring factions each lining up with their spears and shields across a battlefield. The battlefield discussions between the two sides before battle are reminiscent of scenes in Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aeneid. Then, amid classical style warfare, the rebel angels employ what was in Milton's time a relatively new and dangerous weapon of war: a gunpowder cannon. Milton introduces this discrepancy in modes of warfare to allude to his society's advancements over those of the classical age. Satan's invention of the cannon is an unexpected development, signaling Milton's belief that gunpowder is a demonic invention and that so-called advancements in war are futile and worthless.

14.3 Book–VII

14.3.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

At the halfway point of the twelve books of Paradise Lost, Milton once more invokes a muse, but this time it is Urania, the Muse of Astronomy. Milton refers to her in Christian terms, as a source of

inspiration much like the Holy Spirit. He asks Urania to insure his safe transition from relating the story of the war in Heaven back to Raphael and Adam's conversation on Earth.

Notes Milton asks that the muse inspire him through the rest of Raphael's speech and protect him from the troublesome beliefs of others who do not have access to her wisdom.

Back on Earth, Adam asks Raphael about how and why the world was created, as well as about his own creation. Adam initially believes that he may not be allowed to hear the story of creation, so he asks cautiously, although his curiosity is overwhelming. Raphael agrees to tell him, explaining that the story of creation is not a secret to be kept from human beings. Raphael begins by picking up where he left off, with the fall of Satan and his rebel followers. He explains that shortly after the fall, the Father wished to forge a new race, partly to erase the memory of the rebellion and partly to make up for the rebels' absence from the ranks of God's loyal creations. Raphael believes that by replacing the fallen angels, God renders Satan unable to claim that he diminished God's creation. By creating Earth and mankind in a nearly empty part of the universe, God shows the fallen angels that his glorious kingdom can be expanded indefinitely. For all these reasons, God decides to create Earth and humans, with the idea that Earth and Heaven will eventually be joined together as one kingdom through mankind's obedience to God's divine will.

Raphael says that God sends the Son down into Chaos to create Earth. The Earth is first formed out of Chaos and given light and dark, or night and day, in equal measure. Land is separated from water, and animals are created to populate both land and sea. The creation takes six days, and Adam and Eve are created last. The entire act of creation is done through the Son, who makes man in his image and gives him authority over all the animals on Earth. God gives Adam one command: he must not eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, which gives knowledge of good and evil. The Son, finishing with his work, hangs Earth beneath Heaven by a chain. He reascends to Heaven as the angels sing hymns and praise his work. Pleased with his work, God rests on the seventh day, which then becomes known as the Sabbath.

Analysis

In the same manner as the two previous invocations of the muse, Milton's invocation of Urania fuses classical allusion with Christian belief. Milton reconfigures Urania and likens her to the Holy Spirit, placing a corrective, Christian spin on an old mythological figure. The cumulative effect of Milton's allusions to and corrections of classical culture is to convey the impression that Greek and Roman civilization was indeed great, but misled in its philosophy and religion. Thus Milton can claim to build upon the achievements of classical authors while replacing their religious beliefs with Christian ones. Being born before Christ, most classical authors do have a good excuse for not professing Christian beliefs.

Did u know? Milton's stance toward antiquity is not unlike that of earlier Christian poets such as Dante or Spenser, who were similarly steeped in classical literary culture.

Raphael's account of the world's creation closely follows the biblical account of creation in the first few chapters of Genesis. Milton takes some of his language directly from popular English translations of the Bible. By using biblical language, Milton gives Raphael's account more authority and renders the invented details of his story more credible as well. Raphael's extended explanations about the world and about God and Satan are lengthy, but their length demonstrates Milton's beliefs concerning the absolute importance of conversation, knowledge, and thought. Book VII presents a curious

Adam who seeks knowledge and an agreeable Raphael who disposes his knowledge in human terms. Their evolving interaction in this book differs from their interaction in earlier books, as Adam becomes more aggressive in his attempts to gain wisdom from Raphael. Throughout their conversation, the desire for knowledge is expressed through metaphors of hunger, eating, and digestion.

Did u know? Adam's craving for knowledge begins to surface in this book and foreshadows his potential temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

The Son is given a more significant role in Book VII than he has in previous books, illustrating that he is the instrument through which God acts. Milton actually departs from the Bible in having the Son create the world, as Genesis says nothing about the Son. But according to Christian teaching, God and the Son are manifestations of the same entity. Milton begins with the orthodox Christian premise of a three-part God and then elaborates on the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. By having God send the Son to defeat Satan and create the universe, Milton shows how God and the Son can work separately yet still work as one God. Even though they appear as separate characters, Milton believed that the Son represents the living, active, almost human likeness of God.

14.4 Book–VIII

14.4.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

After Raphael finishes the story of creation, Adam asks him about the motions of the stars, sun, and planets. Eve decides to leave them alone to converse, not because she is bored or unable to grasp the discussion, but because she prefers to hear about the conversation afterward from Adam. Adam assumes from his observations that the other planets orbit the earth, but Raphael explains how it is possible (though not certain) that it only appears this way because of the turning of the Earth on its axis. Raphael mentions to Adam that it does not matter whether the Earth moves or the universe moves around the Earth. Such broad questions often have no possible answers, he explains, because God does not intend human beings to comprehend everything about his creation. Furthermore, Raphael warns Adam that he should be satisfied with the knowledge that God has made available and to resist the urge to gain further understanding outside of the limits he has set.

After listening to Raphael, Adam tells him what he knows about his own creation. He remembers first awakening to consciousness, wondering who and where he was. He quickly realized that he could walk, run, jump, and even speak. Then God came to him and explained how and why he was created, giving him dominion over all the rest of creation, and asking in return only that he not eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Adam surveyed his environment and met the animals of Earth in pairs of two. He had never seen these creatures before, but when God asked him to name the animals, he realized that he already knew each of their names, as God had given him this knowledge beforehand. Adam explains that he soon longed for a companion more equal to himself than the animals, a person with whom he could share his thoughts. To fulfill Adam's desire, God created Eve from a rib in Adam's side while he slept.

Notes Adam remembers this fact because God allowed his mind to remain aware of what was happening even while he slept. Upon seeing Eve, Adam fell instantly in love.

Task How did God create Eve?

Raphael talks to Adam about love, recommending that he refrain from carnal passion and search for a pure love that rejuvenates and expands his mind and body. Yet Adam is worried about his physical attraction to Eve, since she is noticeably less pure than he. Raphael says that while Eve is more beautiful on the outside, she is less worthy than Adam on the inside. Her spirituality is weaker than Adam's, her intellect is slightly less developed, and her vanity is a serious weakness. Raphael tells Adam that his love for Eve must transcend her sexual attractiveness. Adam responds by admitting his physical attraction to Eve while asserting that his love comes from her emotional and spiritual companionship. Raphael reiterates to Adam the danger that he faces with Eve and the need for both of them to avoid Satan's temptations. Afterward, Raphael takes his leave to return to Heaven and Adam goes to sleep.

Analysis

Adam's memory of first awakening to consciousness presents significant differences from Eve's first memories, which we see in Book IV. Whereas Eve awakens in shade, Adam does so in broad sunlight —"happy Light," as he calls it (VIII.285). Eve is quickly drawn in by reflections and images, coming to desire an illusion of herself, and only gradually drawn by God toward Adam and the wisdom represented by the platan tree. Adam, in contrast, looks toward the sky and toward God immediately upon waking up. He quickly discovers that he knows the true names of things, so he is not deceived by mere appearances and shadows. God appears to him as a visible presence rather than merely a voice, and entrusts Adam with his commandments, all of which suggests that Adam is closer to God and to the truth than Eve. When God asks Adam why he wants a companion, given that God himself is solitary and without peer, Adam shows that he understands his own nature, arguing that he is deficient and defective, unlike God.

Adam's account of his first meeting with Eve is somewhat different from the version Eve gives in Book IV. There, Eve says that she turned away from Adam at first because he did not seem as attractive as her own reflection. Although Adam has heard Eve's explanation, in his explanation to Raphael he says that her turning away from him seemed to him to be intentionally designed to make her more attractive to him (whether the intention was Eve's or God's), as it is natural for him to pursue her rather than the other way around. This discrepancy could point to Adam's tendency to deceive himself where Eve is concerned.

Adam and Raphael's description of Eve illustrates Milton's view of the inequality of men and women. Eve's decision to leave Raphael and Adam alone, preferring to hear the conversation from Adam afterward, demonstrates her submission to Adam and her reluctance to converse with the angel herself. We get the sense that she withdraws because she acknowledges her place in God's hierarchy. Moreover, Milton tells us that she prefers to hear the story mingled with Adam's caresses, indicating that intellectual stimulation by itself is not sufficient for her. Her absence allows Adam and Raphael to discuss her openly, but it also implies Milton's belief that women are either uninterested or mentally ill-equipped for intellectual pursuits. Whatever the reason, Eve's lack of knowledge or engagement with reason allows her to remain ignorant to the dangers that lie ahead for her and Adam.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the angels in considered a hero arguing against Satan?
   (a) Abdiel (b) Uriel
   (c) Michael (d) Raphael

Notes

2. In an attempt to defeat God and his angels, what do the rebel angels make?
   (a) A Fortress (b) A Catapult
   (c) A Large sword (d) A Cannon
3. According to Paradise Lost, which of the following does not created by God?
   (a) The son (b) Adam and Eve
   (c) Computers (d) He creates everything
4. Who does Milton name as his heavenly muse?
   (a) Titania (b) Urania
   (c) Virgil (d) Michael
5. What does Eve do when she first becomes conscious?
   (a) Go in search of her mate (b) Talk to the animals
   (c) Look at her reflection in a stream (d) Eat of the Tree of knowledge

Raphael's account of our solar system displays Milton's knowledge of the conflicting scientific theories and beliefs of his time. Milton was well aware that the organization of the universe was hotly disputed. Some astronomers thought that the universe revolved around the Earth, and others, including Milton's contemporary Galileo (to whom he alludes by name in Book I), felt that the Earth revolved around the sun. While Galileo's theory was widely denounced by religious authorities, Milton does not take either side of the issue in Paradise Lost, having Raphael assert that the debate is unimportant because it concerns matters that do not pertain to humankind's relationship with God.

Similarly, Raphael's message to Adam about the limits of human knowledge functions as a warning to scientists in Milton's time. Many believed that science could yield incorrect and misleading answers to questions about the universe. Milton argues that humankind should resist making theories about the universe and other incomprehensible things, and focus rather on pragmatic issues of their daily spiritual lives. Milton believed in the necessity of scientific questionings and pursuits, but he also believed that the pursuit of truth through science would yield dangerous results. Truth, according to Milton, should only be pursued through faith and religion; humans should tend to their more Earthly practical matters and have faith that God will manage the metaphysical matters of the universe.

14.5 Summary

- Raphael first describes the composition of the things God created on Earth. God gave different kinds of substance to all living things.
- Eve's dream, created by Satan's whispering in her ear as she sleeps, foreshadows her ultimate temptation and downfall.
- Milton uses Raphael's story to present another of his unorthodox religious views.
- Satan's army unveils the cannons the next day and bombards the good angels.
- The style of battle does not resemble the warfare of Milton's day, but rather the feudal warfare of earlier epics.
- Raphael's account of the world's creation closely follows the biblical account of creation in the first few chapters of Genesis.

14.6 Keywords

Feudal : According to, resembling, or denoting the system of feudalism.

Muse : Be absorbed in thought.

Rebellious : Difficult to control.

Cannon : Heavy piece of artillery formerly used in warfare.

14.7 Review Questions

1. What kind of food does Eve prepare for Raphael?
2. Why does Satan rebel against God?
3. Had the light appeared before the Sun?
4. What does God plan to do to repair the loss of Satan and his angels in Heaven?
5. What is the first thing that Adam wants to find after his creation?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (d)	3. (d)
4. (b)	5. (c)	

14.8 Further Readings

Books

Paradise Lost I (Non-detailed study) — John Milton

John Milton Paradise Lost — John Milton

John Milton: a short Introduction — Roy Flannagan

Online links

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/pl/index.html

http://pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barrons/paradis02.asp

Notes

Unit 15: Paradise Lost-I (Non-detailed Study): Discussion and Analysis-III

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

15.1 Book – IX, Lines 1—403

15.1.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

15.2 Book – IX, Lines 404—1189

15.2.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

15.3 Book – X

15.3.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

15.4 Book – XI

15.4.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

15.5 Book – XII

15.5.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

15.6 Paradise Lost-I: Grand Style and Character Portrayal of Satan

15.6.1 Character Portrayal of Satan

15.6.2 Other Characters

15.6.3 Grand Style of Paradise Lost

15.7 Summary

15.8 Keywords

15.9 Review Questions

15.10 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the prologue and invocation of Book IX-XII
- Discuss the analysis of Book IX-XII
- Explain the characters and style of Paradise Lost.

Introduction

Milton's fourth invocation differs from earlier ones in that he does not call on Urania except obliquely, and he does not mention his blindness. Rather he offers an explanation for his epic and says that the tone must now become "Tragic". The word "tragic" had two connotations for Milton. First, it carried the simple moral meaning of something terribly bad or unfortunate. Christians since the Middle Ages had always considered the falls of Lucifer and Adam tragic. But "tragic" also refers to the dramatic concept of tragedy as first defined by Aristotle and developed through the centuries to its high achievement in Elizabethan England. Milton knew the nature of dramatic tragedy from his study of the Greeks as well as from reading Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists.

The first scene of Book X takes place in Heaven, where the angels are aware of Adam's and Eve's fall. God assembles the hosts to confirm this fact and to emphasize that he knew Adam and Eve would yield to temptation but that he in no way inclined them to the deed. The act was of their own free wills. Now, however, Adam and Eve must be judged; however, God adds, justice can be tempered with mercy. God sends the Son to pronounce sentence on Adam and Eve.

Books XI and XII change the focus of *Paradise Lost*. The plot of Adam's and Eve's fall has been completed. The final scenes for most characters have occurred. A brief conclusion seems logical. Instead, Milton adds two more books that trace biblical history through Jesus. Many scholars and readers have questioned the artistic justification for these books, and, in truth, the books do seem to needlessly prolong the work. On the other hand, several solid arguments can be adduced to explain the reasons for Books XI and XII, if not their necessity.

Milton's stated purpose in the poem is to justify God's ways to Man. By the end of Book X, Milton has been able to explain his concept of what God did and why, but he has offered little in the way of justification. Can the single instance of disobedience by Eve and then Adam justify death, war, plague, famine — an endless list of evil? To truly accomplish his goal, Milton needs to show the effects of the fall on Adam and Eve over a longer period and at the same time develop the notion that some greater good than innocence and immortality in Paradise could result from the fall. Books XI and XII represent Milton's attempt at justification.

Book XII appears to be a simple continuation of Book XI, and, in fact, in the first edition of *Paradise Lost,* Books XI and XII were one book. In the second edition, Milton changed his original ten book format to twelve. One of the changes was the division that created Books XI and XII. Biblical scholars in the seventeenth century dated the Creation at 4,000 BC and the flood at 2,000 BC. So Milton divided his original Book X into two 2,000 years sections, each ending with a savior — Noah in Book XI and Jesus in Book XII. He also arranged for a slightly different presentation in each book. Book XI is presented as a series of almost scene-like visions, each complete in itself. Book XII is much more narrative. Michael says that he will now tell the story, and he presents a grand sweep of historical events rather than a scene-by-scene account.

15.1 Book – IX, Lines 1—403

15.1.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

With Raphael's departure for Heaven, the story no longer consists of conversations between heavenly beings and humankind. Milton explains that he must now turn to Adam and Eve's actual act of disobedience. The poem must now turn tragic, and Milton asserts his intention to show that the fall of humankind is more heroic than the tales of Virgil and Homer. He invokes Urania, the "Celestial Patroness" (IX.21) and muse of Christian inspiration, and asks for her to visit him in his sleep and inspire his words, because he fears he is too old and lacks the creative powers to accomplish the task himself. He hopes not to get caught up in the description of unimportant items, as Virgil and Homer did, and to remain focused on his ultimate and divine task.

Satan returns to the Garden of Eden the night after Raphael's departure. Satan's return comes eight days after he was caught and banished by Gabriel. He sneaks in over the wall, avoiding Gabriel and the other guards. After studying all the animals of the Garden, Satan considers what disguise he should assume, and chooses to become a snake. Before he can continue, however, he again hesitates—not because of doubt this time, but because of his grief at not being able to enjoy this wondrous new world. He struggles to control his thoughts. He now believes that the Earth is more beautiful than Heaven ever was, and becomes jealous of Adam and Eve and their chosen status to occupy and maintain Paradise. He gripes that the excess beauty of Earth causes him to feel more torment and anguish. Gathering his thoughts into action, he finds a sleeping serpent and enters its body.

The next morning, Adam and Eve prepare for their usual morning labors. Realizing that they have much work to do, Eve suggests that they work separately, so that they might get more work done. Adam is not keen on this idea. He fears that they will be more susceptible to Satan's temptation if they are alone. Eve, however, is eager to have her strength tested. After much resistance, Adam concedes, as Eve promises Adam that she will return to their bower soon. They go off to do their gardening independently.

Analysis

Milton begins Book IX as he began Books I and VII: with an invocation and plea for guidance, as well as a comparison of his task to that of the great Greek and Roman epics, the Iliad, Odyssey, and the Aeneid. Milton explains by way of this invocation that Adam and Eve's fall is the major event that occurs in Paradise Lost. Their fall is the poem's climax, even though it comes as no surprise. By describing the fall as tragic, Milton conveys the gravity and seriousness of this catastrophe for all of humankind, but he also situates Adam and Eve's story within the literary conventions of tragedy, in which a great man falls because of a special flaw within his otherwise larger-than-life character. The fall paves the way for humankind's ultimate redemption and salvation, and thus Milton can claim that his epic surpasses Homer's and Virgil's because it pertains to the entire human race, not one hero or even one nation.

Milton mocks the knightly romances of the Middle Ages on the grounds that they applaud merely superficial heroism. The idea of the chivalrous warrior was an oxymoron in Milton's view. Milton presents his hero as a morally powerful person—Adam's strength and martial prowess are entirely irrelevant. Milton voices doubts about whether his society will appreciate a real Christian hero, or whether he himself is still skilled enough or young enough to complete his literary task, balancing his confidence in his own ability with the humility appropriate to a Christian poet.

Satan's return to the story presents him as a changed and further degenerated character. Before the temptation of Eve, we see Satan go through another bit of soul-searching. This time, however, he does not waver in his determination to ruin humankind, but only makes a cold expression of regret for things that might have been. Milton notes that Satan is driven to action by the grief and turmoil he feels inside and by his wounded sense of pride. It is clear now that Satan's decision to corrupt humankind is final, yet he still thinks about how he would have enjoyed the beauty of Earth if he had not rebelled. Milton displays the internal agony that results from the sin of despair: Satan can clearly see, despite all his previous arguments, that it would have been better to remain good. However, he has forbidden himself from even considering the possibility of repentance. As a result, he degenerates further and further, making his mind and body his own personal Hell.

Task Why is Book IX a central part of the epic poem?

Milton has given absolute power to the reason and free will of both men and Satan, only to show that the mind can defeat itself—using reason to arrive at an unreasonable position. Satan's thoughts

are increasingly contradictory and confusing, becoming hard for us, and perhaps for himself, to follow. Satan comes to believe his own faulty logic and his own lies. In Books I and II, his ability to reason is strong, but now in Book IX he can hardly form a coherent argument. Ironically, Satan has proved the truth of his own earlier statement that the mind can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven. Satan intended to make a heaven out of Hell, where he would be an evil version of God. Instead, he has brought his torture with him, and made a hell out of the earth that, but for him, would be heavenly.

15.2 Book – IX, Lines 404—1189

15.2.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Satan, in the form of the serpent, searches for the couple. He is delighted to find Eve alone. Coiling up, he gets her attention, and begins flattering her beauty, grace, and godliness. Eve is amazed to see a creature of the Garden speak. He tells her in enticing language that he gained the gifts of speech and intellect by eating the savory fruit of one of the trees in the garden. He flatters Eve by saying that eating the apple also made him seek her out in order to worship her beauty.

Eve is amazed by the power that this fruit supposedly gives the snake. Curious to know which tree holds this fruit, Eve follows Satan until he brings her to the Tree of Knowledge. She recoils, telling him that God has forbidden them to eat from this tree, but Satan persists, arguing that God actually wants them to eat from the tree. Satan says that God forbids it only because he wants them to show their independence. Eve is now seriously tempted. The flattery has made her desire to know more. She reasons that God claimed that eating from this tree meant death, but the serpent ate (or so he claims) and not only does he still live, but can speak and think. God would have no reason to forbid the fruit unless it were powerful, Eve thinks, and seeing it right before her eyes makes all of the warnings seem exaggerated. It looks so perfect to Eve. She reaches for an apple, plucks it from the tree, and takes a bite.

Did u know? The Earth then feels wounded and nature sighs in woe, for with this act, humankind has fallen.

Eve's first fallen thought is to find Adam and to have him eat of the forbidden fruit too so that they might be equal. She finds him nearby, and in hurried words tells him that she has eaten the fruit, and that her eyes have been opened. Adam drops the wreath of flowers he made for her. He is horrified because he knows that they are now doomed, but immediately decides that he cannot possibly live without Eve. Eve does not want Adam to remain and have another woman; she wants him to suffer the same fate as she. Adam realizes that if she is to be doomed, then he must follow. He eats the fruit. He too feels invigorated at first. He turns a lustful eye on Eve, and they run off into the woods for sexual play.

Adam and Eve fall asleep briefly, but upon awakening they see the world in a new way. They recognize their sin, and realize that they have lost Paradise. At first, Adam and Eve both believe that they will gain glorious amounts of knowledge, but the knowledge that they gained by eating the apple was only of the good that they had lost and the evil that they had brought upon themselves. They now see each other's nakedness and are filled with shame. They cover themselves with leaves. Milton explains that their appetite for knowledge has been fulfilled, and their hunger for God has been quenched. Angry and confused, they continue to blame each other for committing the sin, while neither will admit any fault. Their shameful and tearful argument continues for hours.

Notes

Analysis

The ease with which Satan persuades Eve to sin paints an unflattering portrayal of woman, one that accords with Milton's portrayal throughout the poem of women as the weaker sex. Eve allows the serpent's compliments to win her over, demonstrating that she cares more about superficial things such as beauty than profound things such as God's grace. Furthermore, that Eve gives in to the serpent after only a few deceptive arguments reveals her inability to reason soundly. Not only is she herself corruptible, however, but she also seeks to corrupt others: her immediate reaction upon discovering her sin is to lure Adam into her fate. Rather than repent and take full responsibility for her actions, she moves instinctively to drag Adam down with her to make him share her suffering. Eve thus comes across as an immoral and harmful being, one whose values are skewed and who has a bad influence on others.

Satan's argument that knowledge is good because knowing what is good and evil makes it easier to do what is good wrongfully assumes that knowledge is always good. This flaw in his argument is the theological thrust of this book: though the intellect is powerful and god-like, obeying God is a higher priority than feeding the intellect. Milton believes that one cannot first obey reason and then obey God; rather one must trust God and then trust reason. Raphael's wise argument from Book VIII about the limitations of human knowledge and the need to feel comfortable with this limited knowledge, is blatantly neglected or forgotten. If Eve had stayed to listen to Raphael and Adam's discussion and had recognized the dangers of working separately, then she could have been safer from Satan's temptation. Or if Adam had relayed Raphael's warning message to Eve more thoroughly and persuasively, and if he had denied Eve's suggestion that they work separately, then the fall might have been avoidable. Eve overestimates the powers of her ability to protect herself and to resist temptation, and Adam underestimates the need to protect Eve and share his knowledge with her. Both must suffer from each other's shortfalls.

Adam sins not out of a desire to gain the knowledge from eating the fruit, but out of recognition that Eve has left him with little or no alternative. Adam needs even less persuading than Eve to eat the apple, and does so knowing that he is disobeying God. He knows that he could not be happy if Eve were banished, and his desire to stay with Eve overwhelms his desire to obey God. Adam's sin of temptation is choosing Eve over God, letting physical and emotional impulses overtake reason. The wreath of flowers he makes for Eve symbolizes his love for her. When he sees that she has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he drops the wreath, symbolizing her fallen state. The dropping of the wreath may also hint at Adam's disappointment in Eve as a spiritual lover and companion, and even his falling out of pure love with her. After Adam eats the apple, his attraction to Eve changes subtly, and he looks at her more like a connoisseur, eager to indulge. The sexuality the two displays are now perverted, their love in the dark forest more lustful and animal-like than their earlier love in the lush, bright bower. Their arguing and blaming of each other demonstrate their lack of unity and peace, and demonstrate, as does the Earth's sighing, their fallen state.

15.3 Book – X

15.3.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

The scene returns to Heaven, where God knows immediately that Adam and Eve have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. Gabriel and the other angels guarding Paradise also know, and they fly back up to Heaven. They report that they did all they could to prevent Satan from re-entering the Garden. God tells them that he allowed it himself without condoning it, and acquits his angels of any guilt. He then sends his Son down to Earth to pass judgment on the couple.

In Paradise, the Son calls to Adam, who comes forth shamefacedly along with Eve. They are embarrassed by their nakedness. Asked if they have eaten from the tree, Adam admits that Eve gave the fruit to him to eat, and Eve blames the serpent for persuading her to take it. The Son first condemns the serpent, whose body Satan possessed to tempt Eve. He ordains that all snakes now

must crawl on their bellies, never to carry themselves upright again. The Son decrees that Adam and Eve's children will bruise the serpent's head, while serpents will forever bite humans by the heel. As punishment for the couple, Eve and all women to follow will give birth in pain, and must submit to their husbands.

Notes Adam and all men after him will have to labor to hunt and harvest food in cursed ground. After passing these sentences, the Son returns to Heaven.

Meanwhile in Hell, Sin and Death remain at the gate of Hell where Satan left them. Sensing that Satan has succeeded in his task, they finish the bridge linking Hell to Earth and begin to travel toward Earth to meet him. At the edge of Paradise, Sin and Death meet Satan. They congratulate him for succeeding in his mission and promise him that they will infect the Earth. Death will corrupt all living things, causing them to die, and Sin will corrupt the thoughts and deeds of humankind. They also tell Satan that his success must have allowed them to leave Hell, proving that he has established his control over humankind and Earth. Satan thanks Sin and Death for their praises and urges them to hurry on their way to conquer Earth. Satan believes that he has in fact acquired the special powers Sin and Death spoke of, when in truth God allows them to enter Earth so that the Son can conquer them when he becomes human. Now, Satan goes back down to Hell, where his followers have been eagerly waiting his return. Satan speaks to them from Pandemonium, tells them of his triumph, and expects to hear riotous applause. Instead, he hears hisses signifying scorn for him and his devastating act. The devils have all been transformed into snakes, along with Satan, who did not understand the punishment the Son foretold. A grove of trees appears in Hell, with fruit that turns to ashes as soon as the snakes try to bite it.

Did u know? Sin and Death arrive on Earth and begin their work. From Heaven, God sees that they have come to Earth and tells his angels that he will allow Sin and Death to stay on Earth until Judgement Day. After then, they must return to Hell and be forever locked up with Satan and the other devils.

God now calls for his angels to alter the universe. They tilt the Earth's axis or alter the path of the sun (the poem allows for both interpretations). Now humankind will have to endure extreme hot and cold seasons, instead of enjoying the constant temperate climate that existed before Adam and Eve's fall from God's grace. Meanwhile, Discord follows Sin to Earth and causes animals to war with each other and with humans too. Seeing these changes, Adam is sorrowful, and laments. He knows that the rest of humankind will suffer because of his disobedience, and wishes that he could bear all of the punishment upon himself. He curses life and wishes that Death would come at once to alleviate his misery. Instead, Eve comes to him. But Adam is angry; he blames and insults Eve's female nature, wondering why God ever created her. She begs his forgiveness, and pleads with him not to leave her. She reminds him that the snake tricked her, but she fully accepts the blame for sinning against both God and him. She argues that unity and love can save them in a fallen world. She longs for death and suggests that they take their own lives, but Adam forbids it. Eve's speech affects Adam. He becomes calm, consoling her and sharing responsibility for their fall. They must stop blaming each other, he says. They must live with their mistakes and make the most out of their fallen state. Remembering the prophecy that Eve's seed would bruise the head of the serpent, he feels that there is hope for humankind and advises that they obey God and implore his mercy and forgiveness. They return to the spot where they were punished. There, they fall to their knees, confess their sins, and ask for forgiveness.

Notes

Analysis

If Book IX presents the climax of Paradise Lost, then Book X presents its resolution, as the punishments that the Son hands out restore some sort of order to the world. Satan and the other supporting characters disappear from the rest of the poem, eliminating the source of human temptation and thus focusing the poem on Adam and Eve's regret. But Adam and Eve begin to redeem humankind with their repentance at the end of Book X. As a result, these characters will disappear from the story, and humankind's predicted redemption will take precedence as the story continues, with Adam and Eve learning about their fallen future.

The devils' punishment to live as snakes forever tempted by fruit on a glorious tree echoes Satan's temptation of Eve. Now they must forever suffer the pains of desire without ever having hope of attaining their wishes, a punishment befitting their crime. To have the devils frozen in a state of perpetual desire and unattainable satisfaction is fit for a group of evildoers who continue to battle God through their disobedience.

Milton uses the concept of typology—the Christian belief that Old Testament characters symbolize and predict New Testament characters—to demonstrate the intimate relationship between the fall of humankind and the redemption of humankind. This relationship between the fall and the resurrection forms the base of the Christian interpretation of the Bible. Milton considers Mary, the mother of the Son (Jesus), to be the "second Eve." As Sin and Death came into the world through Eve, the Son would conquer Sin and Death through Mary. Likewise, Milton considers Jesus to be a "second Adam" who corrects Adam and Eve's disobedience through his resurrection. Through these comparisons between Eve and Mary, and Adam and Jesus, the fall and the resurrection become intertwined. The fall is the cause of human history; the resurrection is the result of human history.

Task What is Adam and Eve's punishment for their disobedience to God?

Although Adam and Eve are ailing at the end of Book IX, they take action in Book X and separate their fate from Satan's fate. Satan, as Milton shows, cannot allow himself to repent. His damnation is permanent since his disobedience comes from within and without repentance. On the other hand, humankind's disobedience comes from the temptation of another. This idea helps to explain Adam and Eve's actions and subsequent punishment at the end of Book X. Realizing the terrible consequences of their actions, they come dangerously close to rationalizing suicide, but Adam decides to beg God for forgiveness—the only right answer, in Milton's opinion. Though the coming of the Son and the salvation of humankind had already been foretold, the couple's decision to repent is crucial in God's willingness to forgive them. God will show mercy when asked, but as we see with Satan, there can be no mercy without repentance. In one of the most important quotations in Paradise Lost, Milton poetically demonstrates the importance of Adam and Eve's decision in the last several lines of Book X. Adam explains how their repentance and prayer will occur, and then as they pray, Milton duplicates Adam's explanation as the actual action of their prayer. As Adam explains to Eve:

What better can we do, than to the place

Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall

Before him reverent, and there confess

Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears

Watering the ground. . .

(X.1087–1090)

This moment of prayer is crucial because now humankind will not all go the way of Satan, because man produces what the devil could not: true sorrow and regret.

Milton gives Eve the ability to argue persuasively to Adam, showing her intelligence and talents after all. Eve displays a new humility and grace when she repents after the fall. Her strength lies in her ability to relate her feelings to Adam, feelings that Adam shares. Eve's contemplation of suicide is a sign of weakness, but after Eve's moving speech, Adam is able to help see—and to help her see—why they should not commit suicide. As they lose hope of Paradise, they witness the hope of their race: God's Son, Jesus. It is this hope that prevents the couple from taking their own lives when they realize the extent of their punishment. They choose hope over despair. Milton resolves their distinguished differences through a display of unity: Eve's loving and emotional arguments to stay together and Adam's rational argument to repent help them begin to save humankind together. Their similarities and teamwork, not their differences and occasional parity, allow them to obey reason and survive.

15.4 Book – XI

15.4.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

God hears the prayers of Adam and Eve, inspired by his own grace. He allows his Son to act as an advocate for humankind, and eventually pay for humankind's sins. The Father then calls all the angels of Heaven together, and announces his plans. He commands the Archangel Michael to go down to Earth and escort Adam and Eve out of Paradise. They can no longer live in a pure place now that they are impure. But through leading a good and moral life, they may be reunited with God after their death. To make the news easier on them, God allows Michael to show Adam a vision of what is to come in the future of humankind.

Adam anticipates that God has heard their prayers. He reassures Eve that she will be able to seek revenge on Satan by being the mother of humankind. She still feels ashamed for bringing Sin and Death into the world, and does not feel that she deserves to have such a role. Nevertheless, she asserts, she will try to obey God and live peacefully in Paradise. Michael then flies down from Heaven and tells them that they must leave Paradise. This news shocks and saddens them, even though their death will be delayed so that they may live for many years. Michael comforts them with the knowledge that all of the Earth, not just Paradise, has been given to them by God and is under the eye of the Father. They are saddened to leave Paradise but know they must obey God's command. Adam laments that he will never be able to speak with God again, but Michael explains that Adam can speak to God wherever he goes. The Archangel then puts Eve to sleep and takes Adam up to a high hill to show him visions of humankind's future.

From the highest hill in Paradise, Michael allows Adam to see nearly an entire hemisphere of the Earth. Adam sees two men offering sacrifices, and watches in horror as one of them kills the other. Michael explains that these men are Cain and Abel, the first sons of Adam and Eve. Adam is shocked and dismayed at his first vision of death. The angel then shows him the other ways that death will take the lives of men: disease, war, and old age. Adam asks if there is any alternative to death, woefully declaring that he could not die too soon, but Michael advises him that obeying God and living a virtuous life can allow people to live long and fruitful lives, so long as Heaven permits.

Next a vision appears of men and women enjoying dances, games, and amorous courting. Adam assumes that this vision is a good portent, but Michael informs him that they are atheists who live for pleasure, not for God, and that they will die as well. This image is followed by the appearance of great armies, slaughtering men by the thousands and plundering cities. Michael tells how war will be praised by violent men, and many terrible conquerors will be admired as heroes. One man, Michael explains, will try to prevent these wars: Enoch. The other men shun him and threaten to kill him, until God lifts him up and brings him safely to Heaven. The scene then changes to further

Notes

sins of death and dancing and sex. These scenes depict a later era in which sins of the flesh will abound. A single man can be seen, preaching to the others to repent and stop this evil way of life, but he is ignored. He goes off into the mountains and constructs a giant boat, filling it with all the animals of the Earth, and his family. A great flood then comes, wiping out all living things except those on the boat. The good man who builds the boat is Noah. Michael explains how God was angered by humankind's sinful ways, and decided to cleanse the earth of them. He finds one virtuous man, Noah, and preserves humankind through him. The flood wipes out all human life except for Noah and his family. At the end of the flood, Adam sees a rainbow appear and God's covenant with humankind that he will never again destroy the Earth by flood. Adam feels reassured by this story and its promise that virtue and obedience to God will continue on Earth through Noah.

Analysis

The visions in Books XI and XII provide a larger context to Paradise Lost and allow Milton to "justify the ways of God to men" and to conclude his epic poem with the message that one must live virtuously and be obedient to God. These stories, narrated as Adam's visions, explain why God allows sin and death into the world, and why God wants us to live a certain way. Without these visions and stories, Milton could not explain God's reasoning and his glorious plan for humankind. These visions enable Milton to transcend his focus from the first narrative in the Bible to subsequent books, so that he can discuss human history in broad terms. Part of his message is that human history should be told in terms of its sins, not its advancements in civilizations or invention. These visions expose a dangerous cycle of sins, from sloth and envy to gluttony and lust. Through these visions, Milton asserts the need for repentance and service to God.

Adam and Eve's repentance is made possible through the grace of God. The act of repentance was necessary for salvation, and since God wanted humankind to be redeemed, he planted the seeds of repentance in the souls of Adam and Eve. This realization is appropriate to the belief that humankind, after the fall, is totally depraved. Adam and Eve cannot do anything good on their own accord without God's guidance. God also now specifically reveals why he allows Death to come into the world. Humankind is now impure and unfit for Paradise, as well as for the kingdom of Heaven. The sacrifice of Jesus makes humankind worthy of Heaven: his sacrifice is humankind's final remedy.

Notes The price of Jesus' sacrifice is heavy, but the reward outweighs the cost. After death, humankind can be purified and renewed, thus restoring them to their previous position as God's obedient children.

The whole sequence of visions contains a careful emotional balance between grief at the corruption of sin and joy at the redemption of the moral soul. Michael evokes this balance through these visions to inform Adam of humankind's sins and punishments, as well as their sacrifices and rewards. Otherwise, he might have given up hope, and God does not want humankind to fall victim to the same despair that doomed Satan. On the other hand, Adam cannot fail to realize just how depraved humankind will become as a result of the fall—Adam and Eve's sins will be repeated again and again by their children and their children's children. The vision of ensuing decay through war, disease and intemperate living gives Adam a tremendous sense of worry and shame. But the figure of Enoch, the one who is saved by God, demonstrates the need to stand up for one's moral beliefs, even if other nonbelievers will kill one for such integrity. The strength and hope in Enoch's story gives Adam the confidence he needs to continue living obedient to God.

Milton presents Adam, along with other men from his vision, as prefigurations of Christ. The whole scene with Adam on the mountain prefigures an event in Jesus' life. In the Gospels, Satan takes Jesus up onto a mountain and offers him all the kingdoms of the world, if he will bow down in

worship to the devil. Adam's time on the mountain is not such a test, but it does tax his courage. Likewise, Enoch's ability to stand up for his beliefs shows the redemptive qualities of humankind. The story of Noah shows that his unwavering belief in God helps to save the virtues of humankind. Noah is given such an important place here because Milton, like many other Christian thinkers, thought of him as a Christ figure: a single man whose virtue in the face of evil saves humankind. From the stories of Enoch and Noah, Adam can recognize the power of devotion to God. These visions, and Adam himself, demonstrate the path of greatness that prefigures the salvation of humankind through Jesus' sacrifice. These visions also demonstrate Milton's belief that a true measure of a person, from Adam up until modern times, is his or her virtuous relationship with God.

15.5 Book – XII

15.5.1 Summary: Prologue and Invocation

Michael continues relating the story of the future of humankind to Adam. After the flood, humankind develops from a "second stock": Noah and his family. Humans now act more obediently to God than humans before the Flood, offering sacrifices from their flocks and fields. However, several generations later, a leader arrives with proud and ungodly ambitions. This upstart is Nimrod, a tyrant who forces many men under his rule. He constructs the Tower of Babel in an attempt to reach up to Heaven. As punishment, God decrees that men will now speak different languages and be unable to understand each other. Adam agrees with Michael that no one should have dominion over other people, who are by nature free. Michael qualifies this freedom: because of the fall, he says, men only have true liberty when they obey "right reason," or reason tempered by conscience. Still, Michael adds, it remains a great sin for one person to take away the liberty of another.

Continuing his story, Michael explains that God chooses Israel as the one nation to rise above the rest. He takes one person, Abraham, father of the Israelites, from a race that worships idols. At God's command, Abraham sets off from his native land and travels to Canaan, the Promised Land. His descendants eventually move to Egypt, and become enslaved by Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Finally, a man named Moses is born, and he eventually leads the people out of Egypt, through the plagues brought down upon the Pharaoh. Michael tells how God allowed the Israelites to pass through the Red Sea, then closed the waters around the Pharaoh's army, which had come to recapture the Israelites. The followers of Moses must travel through the desert to return to Canaan, but they survive with the help of God.

Adam is much relieved to hear that God will bless a portion of humankind, after having it cursed for so long. But he does not understand how all the laws given to these people can possibly be obeyed, or how the Israelites are to remain just before God. Michael replies that they cannot remain just, even if they obey the law, until a greater sacrifice is made. He explains that after generations, the Israelites will turn more and more to sin, until God decides to strengthen their enemies. When they repent, God will save them from these same enemies. After many different rulers, there will come a king named David, and from his descendants will eventually come a Messiah, or chosen one. This Messiah, also known as Jesus or the Son, will once again bring together Earth and Heaven. However, he will have to suffer for it: he shall be hated by many while he lives and will be distrusted, betrayed, and punished by death. However, the grave will not hold this Messiah for long, and rising up he will defeat both Sin and Death, and bruise the head of Satan. His resurrection fulfills the prophecy about the Son finally punishing Satan through his sacrifice. Adam worries that the followers of Jesus will be persecuted, and Michael confirms that they will indeed be persecuted. However, the Archangel says, from Heaven the Messiah will send down the Holy Spirit to provide spiritual protection. But after the first followers die, corrupt leaders as well as good ones will enter the church. Thus those who genuinely follow the truth will still be prosecuted, laments Michael: the world will continue to accommodate evil and make it difficult for individuals to do good deeds.

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Finally, the Messiah will return a second time, to judge all humankind and reunite Heaven and Earth.

Adam is now more than comforted. He can hardly believe that out of his evil deed so much good will come. Now, however, it is time for him and Eve to leave Paradise. He comes down from the mountain with Michael. Eve awakens from her sleep and tells Adam that she has had an educating dream. Michael then leads the couple to the gate of Eden. There he stands with other angels, brandishing a sword of flame that will forever protect the entrance to Paradise. Slowly and tearfully, Adam and Eve turn away hand in hand with Michael, and wander out into a new world.

Analysis

The discussion between Adam and Michael about Nimrod and the Tower of Babel provides Milton with an opportunity to express his fundamental ideas about political and religious freedom. Adam's admonishment of Nimrod for trying to control other men is the most extreme example of Milton's distrust of institutions and his absolute faith in the ability of the individual person to make his own decisions. Humankind's freedom has already been restricted by the fall, but humankind can still obey reason if individuals think and act separately and for God. When individuals use reason in this way, then they possess true freedom. However, because of Adam's sin, humankind will find it difficult to always follow reason; when an individual strays from God and from reason, he becomes a slave to passions and desires, and is thus not truly free at all, but becomes a slave to desire. This paradox is the reason why Milton did not feel that total individual freedom, within the Church for example, would result in anarchy. Each person can act separately with reason and obey God. The rest of Michael's discourse follows the biblical accounts closely. He progresses through the Old Testament, working his way through the most significant events until he comes to the line of King David, the line from which the Messiah would come. When Milton comes to Jesus' birth, he works more of his own personal interpretations into the biblical story. When Adam asks Michael how the Israelites could possibly follow all of the laws that God gave them, which are contained in the four books following Genesis in the Bible, Milton begins a brief discussion of the Christian view of Old Testament law. Through the vision, Milton explains that law can identify and punish wrongdoing but cannot abolish or eradicate it completely. Without a proper remedy for Adam's sin, attempts to obey God's law only emphasize humankind's sinfulness, according to Christian belief. This lack of a remedy is why the Israelites failed time and again to keep their covenant with God. When a worthy sacrifice is made, when Jesus offers himself on the cross, only then could humankind be capable of doing anything pleasing to God.

Adam brings up the pivotal concept of the fortunate fall, which asserts that the fall of humankind is fortunate for several reasons. Adam and Eve's disobedience allows God to show his mercy and temperance in their punishments and his eternal providence toward humankind. This display of love and compassion, given through the Son, is a gift to humankind. Humankind must now experience pain and death, but it can also experience mercy, salvation, and grace in ways it would not have been able to had Adam and Eve not disobeyed. While humankind has fallen from grace, it can redeem and save itself through a continued devotion and obedience to God. The salvation of humankind, in the form of the Son's (Jesus') sacrifice and resurrection, can begin to restore humankind to its former state. In other words, good will come of sin and death, and humankind will eventually be rewarded. This fortunate result justifies God's reasoning and explains his ultimate plan for humankind.

Task What becomes of Solomon's people?

Notes

Adam's ability to perceive the fall as a fortunate one is an inherent paradox in Milton's mixture of the human and the divine. Adam is to be judged according to what he did in his own time, and yet he is allowed to see all the future consequences of his actions in an instant. A mortal mind cannot readily accept this idea. Few Christian thinkers (certainly not Milton) would say that the sin of Adam and Eve was an unequivocally good thing. Rather, the fall and the resurrection are both intimate parts of God's providence—he foresees them both and sees them outside of time, existing together. Humankind, on the other hand, must do its best in a temporal world, dealing with the decisions of the present. As Adam and Eve leave Paradise, they know that obedience to God and love for his creation can help humankind toward its salvation, and lead humankind toward regaining the Paradise that has been lost.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. In what book does the fall take place?
   (a) Book VIII (b) Book X
   (c) Book IX (d) Book XII
2. What is Milton's stated purpose in Paradise Lost?
   (a) To assert his superiority to other poets
   (b) To argue against the doctrine of predestination
   (c) To justify the ways of God to men
   (d) To make his story hard to understand
3. Which of the following is not a character in Paradise Lost?
   (a) Night (b) Agony
   (c) Discord (d) Death
4. When Satan leaps over the fence into Paradise, what does Milton liken him to?
   (a) A snake slithering up a tree (b) A germ infecting a body
   (c) A wolf leaping into a sheep's pen (d) A fish leaping out of water
5. Which angel tells Adam about the future in Books XI and XII?
   (a) Uriel (b) Raphael
   (c) Michael (d) None of these
6. Which statement about the Earth is asserted as true in Paradise Lost?
   (a) It was created before God the son (b) Earth hangs from Heaven by a chain
   (c) The Earth is a Lotus flower (d) The Earth revolves around the sun
7. What is the stated subject of Paradise Lost?
   (a) The fight between good and evil (b) Heaven's battle and Satan's tragic fall
   (c) The creation of the universe (d) Adam and Eve's disobedience
8. Which devil in Satan's second-in-command?
   (a) Mammon (b) Sin
   (c) Moloch (d) Beezelbub
9. Who discusses cosmology and the battle of Heaven with Adam?
   (a) God (b) Eve
   (c) Raphael (d) Michael

Notes

10. Which scene happens first chronologically?
    (a) Satan and the devils rise up from the lake in Hell
    (b) The son is chosen as God's second-in-command
    (c) God and the son create the universe
    (d) The angels battle in Heaven

15.6 Paradise Lost-I: Grand Style and Character Portrayal of Satan

15.6.1 Character Portrayal of Satan

Some readers consider Satan to be the hero, or protagonist, of the story, because he struggles to overcome his own doubts and weaknesses and accomplishes his goal of corrupting humankind. This goal, however, is evil, and Adam and Eve are the moral heroes at the end of the story, as they help to begin humankind's slow process of redemption and salvation. Satan is far from being the story's object of admiration, as most heroes are. Nor does it make sense for readers to celebrate or emulate him, as they might with a true hero. Yet there are many compelling qualities to his character that make him intriguing to readers.

One source of Satan's fascination for us is that he is an extremely complex and subtle character. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for Milton to make perfect, infallible characters such as God the Father, God the Son, and the angels as interesting to read about as the flawed characters, such as Satan, Adam, and Eve. Satan, moreover, strikes a grand and majestic figure, apparently unafraid of being damned eternally, and uncowed by such terrifying figures as Chaos or Death. Many readers have argued that Milton deliberately makes Satan seem heroic and appealing early in the poem to draw us into sympathizing with him against our will, so that we may see how seductive evil is and learn to be more vigilant in resisting its appeal.

Milton devotes much of the poem's early books to developing Satan's character. Satan's greatest fault is his pride. He casts himself as an innocent victim, overlooked for an important promotion. But his ability to think so selfishly in Heaven, where all angels are equal and loved and happy, is surprising. His confidence in thinking that he could ever overthrow God displays tremendous vanity and pride. When Satan shares his pain and alienation as he reaches Earth in Book IV, we may feel somewhat sympathetic to him or even identify with him. But Satan continues to devote himself to evil. Every speech he gives is fraudulent and every story he tells is a lie. He works diligently to trick his fellow devils in Hell by having Beelzebub present Satan's own plan of action.

Satan's character—or our perception of his character—changes significantly from Book I to his final appearance in Book X. In Book I he is a strong, imposing figure with great abilities as a leader and public statesmen, whereas by the poem's end he slinks back to Hell in serpent form. Satan's gradual degradation is dramatized by the sequence of different shapes he assumes. He begins the poem as a just-fallen angel of enormous stature, looks like a comet or meteor as he leaves Hell, then disguises himself as a more humble cherub, then as a cormorant, a toad, and finally a snake. His ability to reason and argue also deteriorates. In Book I, he persuades the devils to agree to his plan. In Book IV, however, he reasons to himself that the Hell he feels inside of him is reason to do more evil. When he returns to Earth again, he believes that Earth is more beautiful than Heaven, and that he may be able to live on Earth after all. Satan, removed from Heaven long enough to forget its unparalleled grandeur, is completely demented, coming to believe in his own lies. He is a picture of incessant intellectual activity without the ability to think morally. Once a powerful angel, he has become blinded to God's grace, forever unable to reconcile his past with his eternal punishment.

15.6.2 Other Characters

Adam

Adam is a strong, intelligent, and rational character possessed of a remarkable relationship with God. In fact, before the fall, he is as perfect as a human being can be. He has an enormous capacity for reason, and can understand the most sophisticated ideas instantly. He can converse with Raphael as a near-equal, and understand Raphael's stories readily. But after the fall, his conversation with Michael during his visions is significantly one-sided. Also, his self-doubt and anger after the fall demonstrate his new ability to indulge in rash and irrational attitudes. As a result of the fall, he loses his pure reason and intellect.

Adam's greatest weakness is his love for Eve. He falls in love with her immediately upon seeing her, and confides to Raphael that his attraction to her is almost overwhelming. Though Raphael warns him to keep his affections in check, Adam is powerless to prevent his love from overwhelming his reason. After Eve eats from the Tree of Knowledge, he quickly does the same, realizing that if she is doomed, he must follow her into doom as well if he wants to avoid losing her. Eve has become his companion for life, and he is unwilling to part with her even if that means disobeying God.

Adam's curiosity and hunger for knowledge is another weakness. The questions he asks of Raphael about creation and the universe may suggest a growing temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. But like his physical attraction to Eve, Adam is able to partly avoid this temptation. It is only through Eve that his temptations become unavoidable.

Eve

Created to be Adam's mate, Eve is inferior to Adam, but only slightly. She surpasses Adam only in her beauty. She falls in love with her own image when she sees her reflection in a body of water. Ironically, her greatest asset produces her most serious weakness, vanity. After Satan compliments her on her beauty and godliness, he easily persuades her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

Aside from her beauty, Eve's intelligence and spiritual purity are constantly tested. She is not unintelligent, but she is not ambitious to learn, content to be guided by Adam as God intended. As a result, she does not become more intelligent or learned as the story progresses, though she does attain the beginning of wisdom by the end of the poem. Her lack of learning is partly due to her absence for most of Raphael's discussions with Adam in Books V, VI, and VII, and she also does not see the visions Michael shows Adam in Books XI and XII. Her absence from these important exchanges shows that she feels it is not her place to seek knowledge independently; she wants to hear Raphael's stories through Adam later. The one instance in which she deviates from her passive role, telling Adam to trust her on her own and then seizing the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, is disastrous.

Eve's strengths are her capacity for love, emotion, and forebearance. She persuades Adam to stay with her after the fall, and Adam in turn dissuades her from committing suicide, as they begin to work together as a powerful unit. Eve complements Adam's strengths and corrects his weaknesses. Thus, Milton does not denigrate all women through his depiction of Eve. Rather he explores the role of women in his society and the positive and important role he felt they could offer in the divine union of marriage.

God

An omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent character who knows everything before it happens. Attempting to present such an unimaginable character accurately, Milton appropriates several of God's biblical speeches into his speeches in Paradise Lost. God loves his creation and strongly defends humankind's free will. He presents his love through his Son, who performs his will justly and mercifully.

Notes

God, in Paradise Lost, is less a developed character than a personification of abstract ideas. He is unknowable to humankind and to some extent lacks emotion and depth. He has no weaknesses, embodies pure reason, and is always just. He explains why certain events happen, like Satan's decision to corrupt Adam and Eve, tells his angels what will happen next, and gives his reasoning behind his actions in theological terms. God allows evil to occur, but he will make good out of evil. His plan to save humankind by offering his Son shows his unwavering control over Satan.

The Son

For Milton, the Son is the manifestation of God in action. While God the Father stays in the realm of Heaven, the Son performs the difficult tasks of banishing Satan and his rebel angels, creating the universe and humankind, and punishing Satan, Adam and Eve with justice and mercy. The Son physically connects God the Father with his creation. Together they form a complete and perfect God.

The Son personifies love and compassion. After the fall, he pities Adam and Eve and gives them clothing to help diminish their shame. His decision to volunteer to die for humankind shows his dedication and selflessness. The final vision that Adam sees in Book XII is of the Son's (or Jesus') sacrifice on the cross—through this vision, the Son is able to calm Adam's worries for humankind and give Adam and Eve restored hope as they venture out of Paradise.

15.6.3 Grand Style of Paradise Lost

Milton's style is first of all epic; he is consciously writing an epic poem, modeling it after the great epics of the classical past. His language used is Latinate; he considered writing the poem in Latin, and adapts many terms from Latin. This makes his style seem more formal, and makes many terms more complex than if drawing on more familiar English words. It is written in blank verse, and iambic pentameter.

He uses many allusions to classical and exotic topics, adding weight and grandeur to the style. The so-called "grand" or lofty style of Milton's Paradise Lost is significant to the poem in numerous ways, chiefly because it struck Milton as by far the style most appropriate to the lofty subject matter he had chosen for his poem. Rather than choosing a "low" (that is, a common or colloquial) style or the kind of "middle" style used in much conventional poetry, Milton chose an elevated style because it seemed the only style that could do justice to the important matters he meant to discuss and depict.

Several elements of Milton's "grand style" might be listed as follows:

- A tendency to use long and complex sentences
- A tendency to employ learned allusions, especially to the Bible and to the Greek and Roman classics
- A relative absence of obvious humor, especially any crude humor
- A tendency to choose unusual words in place of simple, common words
- A tendency to construct sentences in ways that resemble sentence structures often found in Latin
- A general (but not total) tendency to avoid crudeness of any kind, especially sexual crudity
- A tendency to display the learning of the poet and to expect similar learning in the poem's readers

Many aspects of this "grand style" that illustrate its significance can be seen at the very beginning of Book 3, when Milton invokes divine inspiration by addressing a hymn to "holy Light". Here

Light is personified, so that it seems more than a mere physical fact but instead seems something living, even divine, and thus deserving of the dignity of the so-called "grand style." Another example of the "grand style" in this passage appears in line 6, when Milton uses numerous words of Latin origin to describe Light as a "Bright effluence of bright essence increate". This is not simple, plain, unadorned, Anglo-Saxon phrasing; rather, it is the kind of lofty phrasing Milton considered appropriate to his highly important topics. Milton can write very simple English, as when he refers to "The rising world of waters dark and deep", but even here there is a touch of Latin sentence structure, since the adjectives follow the noun rather than preceding it.

A different kind of writer, with different purposes, would have written, "The Almighty power hurled him . . . ." Milton, however, makes his phrasing sound like a grand or elevated kind of English by using this kind of "Latinate" sentence structure.

15.7 Summary

- Milton mocks the knightly romances of the Middle Ages on the grounds that they applaud merely superficial heroism.
- Milton explains that their appetite for knowledge has been fulfilled, and their hunger for God has been quenched.
- Adam sins not out of a desire to gain the knowledge from eating the fruit, but out of recognition that Eve has left him with little or no alternative.
- In Paradise, the Son calls to Adam, who comes forth shamefacedly along with Eve.
- Adam is much relieved to hear that God will bless a portion of humankind, after having it cursed for so long.
- The discussion between Adam and Michael about Nimrod and the Tower of Babel provides Milton with an opportunity to express his fundamental ideas about political and religious freedom.

15.8 Keywords

Temptation **:** A desire to do something.

Bruise **:** An injury appearing as an area of discoloured skin on the body, caused by a blow or impact rupturing underlying blood vessels.

Escort **:** A person who is hired or formally requested to accompany a member of the opposite sex to a social event.

Lament **:** A passionate expression of grief.

15.9 Review Questions

1. What is Adam and Eve's tragic catastrophe?
2. What does Discord do on Earth after the fall?
3. In what from does Michael appear on Earth?
4. Who baptizes the first believers after Christ's death?
5. Describe the character of God in Paradise Lost.
6. Explain the grand style of Milton.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (c)	2. (c)	3. (b)
4. (c)	5. (c)	6. (b)
7. (d)	8. (d)	9. (c)
10. (b)		

15.10 Further Readings

Books

John Milton: a short Introduction — Roy Flannagan

John Milton Paradise Lost — John Milton

Paradise Lost I (Non-detailed study) — John Milton

Online links

http://www.bookrags.com/notes/pl/index.html

http://pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barrons/paradis02.asp

Unit 16: Shakespeare's Sonnets

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

16.1 Shakespeare as a Poet

16.1.1 A Lover's Complaint

16.1.2 Venus and Adonis

16.1.3 The Rape of Lucrece

16.1.4 The Phoenix and the Turtle

16.1.5 The Passionate Pilgrim

16.2 Sonnets: Being your Slave what should I do but Tend

16.3 Thou Blind Fool, that Time of Year Thou Mayst in me Behold, what Dost Thou to Mine Eyes

16.4 Summary

16.5 Keywords

16.6 Review Questions

16.7 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Consider Shakespeare as a poet
- Describe the introduction to sonnets
- Discuss the sonnet-Being your slave what should I do but tend
- Discuss the sonnet–Thou blind fool, that time of year thou mayst in me behold, what dost thou to mine eyes.

Introduction

William Shakespeare, baptised 26 April 1564; died 23 April 1616 was an English poet and playwright, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His surviving works, including some collaborations, consist of about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and several other poems. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamlet and Judith. Between

Notes

1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, and there has been considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories, genres he raised to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the 16th century. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, and Macbeth, considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Notes Many of Shakespeare plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, two of his former theatrical colleagues published the First Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare was a respected poet and playwright in his own day, but his reputation did not rise to its present heights until the 19th century. The Romantics, in particular, acclaimed Shakespeare's genius, and the Victorians worshipped Shakespeare with a reverence that George Bernard Shaw called "bardolatry". In the 20th century, his work was repeatedly adopted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

16.1 Shakespeare as a Poet

Shakespeare's Sonnets have fascinated and puzzled readers for 400 years. They contain some of the most beautiful love poetry in English, but there is also much about them that is dark, hard-edged and harsh. There is innocence and delight in many of the poems, but there is also illusion and self-delusion, along with the ever-present awareness of time and mortality. The Sonnets present a world of glittering, punning language, but this is also a world of flesh and death.

William Shakespeare is referred to as a Literary Genius and much of this praise is due to the wonderful words of his short sonnet poems and his extended poems. He is the most widely read author in the whole of the Western World - his poems and quotes from poems are familiar to everyone. And yet when we think about Shakespeare, we immediately think of his famous plays and not his less famous poems. During the Bard's lifetime dramatists were not considered 'serious' authors with 'serious' talent - but it was highly fashionable to write poems. Plays were for entertainment poems were for the elite! There was not even such a thing as a custom built theatre until 1576! Actors were common folk. Poets of the era such as Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sydney, Sir Walter Raleigh were of the nobility and there poems are still enjoyed today. These poets had credibility and so did their poetry. William Shakespeare came from Yeoman stock - he lacked credibility - his poems would have helped with this problem! The Bard did not give permission for one of his plays or his sonnets to be published. He was, however, happy to have his poems published. William Shakespeare has been attributed with the following poems:

16.1.1 A Lover's Complaint

A Lover's Complaint is the most neglected of the Poems of William Shakespeare, assuming that it is his. It was first published in 1609, by Thomas Thorpe, under the same cover as the Sonnets; but has

seldom been reprinted. The Lover's Complaint seems to be a very early poem, but no date of composition of the poem can be assigned.

16.1.2 Venus and Adonis

Venus and Adonis, Shakespeare's narrative poem in six-line stanzas, was published by Richard Field (1561 - 1624). The poem was dedicated to Shakespeare's patron, Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton (1573-1624). This dedication refers to the author's "unpolisht lines" and contains the typically fawning language of a commoner addressing a nobleman in the hope of obtaining, or retaining, their patronage in exchange for poems dedicated to the recipient.

16.1.3 The Rape of Lucrece

On May 9, 1594, the poem was entered in the Hall Book of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, the English government's pre-publication registry. The poem was listed in the Hall Book under the title of The Ravishment of Lucrece but was published with the title Lucrece. The Rape of Lucrece was substituted as a title at a later date. The Rape of Lucrece is a narrative poem resembling a revenge tragedy with 1,855 lines.

16.1.4 The Phoenix and the Turtle

In 1601 a very fine poem subsequently titled The Phoenix and the Turtle appeared untitled as one of the Poetical Essays appended to Robert Chester's Love's Martyr: or Rosalind's Complaint. It was attributed to William, and many scholars have accepted the poem as genuine. The date of composition of the poem is unknown, but this poem must be a more mature work.

16.1.5 The Passionate Pilgrim

The Passionate Pilgrim (1599) was a poetry collection containing twenty poems by various poets. The title page to the second edition contains the ascription "By W. Shakespeare" but only five of the poems appear to be his. The poems, or Sonnets 138 and 144, despite the "never before imprinted" claim of "a Book called Shakespeares sonnettes", were included, albeit in a slightly different format, in The Passionate Pilgrim poem.

In 1593 and 1594, when the theatres were closed because of plague, Shakespeare published two narrative poems on erotic themes, Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece. He dedicated them to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. In Venus and Adonis, an innocent Adonis rejects the sexual advances of Venus; while in The Rape of Lucrece, the virtuous wife Lucrece is raped by the lustful Tarquin Influenced by Ovid's Metamorphoses, the poems show the guilt and moral confusion that result from uncontrolled lust. Both proved popular and were often reprinted during Shakespeare's lifetime. A third narrative poem, A Lover's Complaint, in which a young woman laments her seduction by a persuasive suitor, was printed in the first edition of the Sonnets in 1609. Most scholars now accept that Shakespeare wrote A Lover's Complaint. Critics consider that its fine qualities are marred by leaden effects. The Phoenix and the Turtle, printed in Robert Chester's 1601 Love's Martyr, mourns the deaths of the legendary phoenix and his lover, the faithful turtle dove. In 1599, two early drafts of sonnets 138 and 144 appeared in The Passionate Pilgrim, published under Shakespeare's name but without his permission.

Task Write about two important poems of Shakespeare.

Notes

The Sonnets were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed AND published in 1609. Scholars are not certain when each of the 154 sonnets was composed, but evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets throughout his career for a private readership. Even before the two unauthorised sonnets appeared in The Passionate Pilgrim in 1599, Francis Meres had referred in 1598 to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends". Few analysts believe that the published collection follows Shakespeare's intended sequence. He seems to have planned two contrasting series: one about uncontrollable lust for a married woman of dark complexion (the "dark lady"), and one about conflicted love for a fair young man (the "fair youth"). It remains unclear if these figures represent real individuals, or if the authorial "I" who addresses them represents Shakespeare himself, though Wordsworth believed that with the sonnets "Shakespeare unlocked his heart". The 1609 edition was dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.", credited as "the only begetter" of the poems.

It is not known whether this was written by Shakespeare himself or by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, whose initials appear at the foot of the dedication page; nor is it known who Mr. W.H. was, despite numerous theories, or whether Shakespeare even authorised the publication.

Did u know? Critics praise the Sonnets as a profound meditation on the nature of love, sexual passion, procreation, death, and time.

16.2 Sonnets: Being your Slave what should I do but Tend

Shakespeare's sonnets comprise 154 poems in sonnet form that were published in 1609 but likely written over the course of several years. Evidence for their existence long preceding publication comes from a reference in Francis Mere's 1598 Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury, where his allusion to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private frinds" might indicate that the poet preferred not to make these works public. It is unclear whether the 1609 publication, at the hands of a certain Thomas Thorpe, was from an authorized manuscript of Shakespeare's; it is possible that the sonnets were published without the author's consent, perhaps even without his knowledge.

This is but one of the mysteries of Shakespeare's sonnets. Another, which continues to spur debate among literary scholars today, is the identity of the publication's dedicatee, the collection's "onlie begetter," a Mr. W. H. Speculation largely vacillates between two main candidates: Mr. William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke; and Mr. Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton. Both possibilities are tenable, as both were men of means and of literary interest enough to be patrons to Shakespeare. In fact the poet dedicated other works to each: his First Folio to Herbert and his Venus and Adonis and Lucrece to Wriothesley. Those who favor one man or the other draw on circumstantial evidence concerning his life and character, such as the amicable terms on which Shakespeare is known to have been with Wriothesley, or events in Herbert's life that may be intimated in the exploits of the sonnets' "fair lord."

The fair lord is one of three recurring characters in the sonnets, together with the dark lady and the rival poet. The real-world referents of these persons are yet another locus of controversy. Some critics suggest that the fair lord and the collection's dedicatee are one and the same, while others disagree. Still others question the autobiographical nature of the sonnets, arguing that there is no hard proof that their content is anything but fictional.

These mysteries and others, including the ordering of the sonnets, the date of their composition, and seeming deviations from the otherwise rigid format (one sonnet has 15 lines, another only 12; sonnets 153 and 154 do not fit well in the sequence), have generated an abundance of scholarly criticism over the years, and the dialogues they provoke remain highly contentious to this day.

Did u know? The 1609 publication of Shakespeare's sonnets is today referred to as the "Quarto" and remains the authoritative source for modern editions.

Sonnet 57 - "Being your slave what should I do but tend"

Being your slave, what should I do but tend

Upon the hours and times of your desire?

I have no precious time at all to spend,

Nor services to do, till you require.

Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour

Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,

Nor think the bitterness of absence sour

When you have bid your servant once adieu;

Nor dare I question with my jealous thought

Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,

But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought

Save, where you are how happy you make those.

So true a fool is love that in your will,

Though you do any thing, he thinks no ill.

In the previous sonnet, the poet expressed his deep concern over the potential of lust to destroy his relationship with the young man, and here it appears that his fears have become reality. The poet is now alone, kept waiting while his dear young friend is out having fun with others. Unwilling to feel anger towards his friend, the poet allows in his own sadness, longing for the restoration of their relationship. However, in the final couplet we see that the poet understands completely the folly of his submissive behaviour, and his acceptance of love as a "fool" (13) is, in itself, proof that the poet is reprimanding both his lover and himself. In fact, although this poem seems to illustrate the poet's disturbing reliance on his lover, one cannot overlook the possibility that the sonnet is highly ironical and filled with sarcasm rather than self-depreciation. Actually, one could say that both voices are being heard in sonnet 57: "The friend is meant, I think, to take the poem first as an effusive and oh-so-sad compliment, and only later to do the double-take"; Did he really mean that? I don't suppose he was being sarcastic?' Precisely because the sonnet is equivocal its protest is the more effective. But, of course, the protest is largely qualified by the fact that what the poet says is quite literally true: he does hang about, watching the clock, waiting for the friend to come. Love has made him a 'sad slave', 'so true a fool'. There is in the poetry a kind of verbal shrugging of the shoulders and a rueful half-smile, especially in the couplet. It is the fact that the poet sees himself in these two ways at once that makes it possible and even essential to hear the two tones together throughout the poem" (Martin 73).

Sonnet 57 reflects two attitudes: The weak helpless poet versus the powerful prevailing lover. The speaker, the poet, is totally humiliated by his lover, he doesn't have the courage to confront his partner and express how unjust is he in leaving him for a long time waiting for him as if his beloved delights in torturing the poet by always lingering and ignoring him. The poet concludes that this is foolishness and naivety from his part to react as such towards the rough treatment of his beloved; being a slave and mere servant to his "sovereign" lover.

Sonnet 57, along with the following sonnet, reveal the fair lord to be abusive of the poet's undying devotion. In addressing this cruelty here, the speaker obviously recognizes it and is commenting upon it. It is as if he is answering a question posed by the fair lord along the lines of, "Why are you so demanding of my time?" However, in the final couplet of Sonnet 58, he resigns himself to the fate of a slave, waiting around for word from the fair lord: "I am to wait, though waiting so be hell,/Not blame your pleasure be it ill or well."

The idea of someone in love being enslaved by the beloved was common. For example, in Sir Philip Sidney's Sonnet 47 from Astrophil and Stella, the speaker asks, "What, have I thus betrayed my liberty?/Can those black beams such burning marks engrave/In my free side? or am I born a slave,/ Whose neck becomes such yoke of tyranny?" The "black beams" are Stella's eyes. This theme reappears in Shakespeare's sonnets to the dark lady, as well.

Task What is the reason for the suffering of the speaker in sonnet 57?

The theme of Sonnets 57 and 58 is reminiscent of the idea presented in Sonnet 26, which declares, "Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage/Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit." However, in Sonnet 26 the devotion is called "duty so great," and the positive attitude of the poet is reflected in words like "merit," "good," "star," "grociously," "fair," "worthy," and "sweet." However, in sonnet 57 the attitude of the speaker has changed drastically, and his position is one of desperation and resentment. This is reflected in the diction choices of "slave," "services," "bitterness," "sour," "jealous," "sad," "fool," and "ill."

The suffering of the speaker is not just in that he misses the fair lord, but in that he must pretend not to. He pretends these both to the fair lord, whom he is addressing in this and the following sonnet, as well as to himself while he waits. Lines 9-12 make this struggle obvious, since they contradict each other: "Nor dare I question with my jealous thought/Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,/But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought/Save, where you are, how happy you make those." He claims not to question the fair lord's whereabouts and actions, but he can "think of nought" else.

While the speaker pines away, waiting for the fair lord to show him some attention, it is implied that the fair lord is off being promiscuous somewhere else. Line 2 refers to the times when the fair lord is away from the poet as "times of your desire." Lines 9-10 seem a bit sarcastic: "Nor dare I question with my jealous thought/Where you may be, or your affairs suppose;" the speaker feels "jealous" for a reason, and the idea that the "affairs" of the fair lord are of questionable moral quality is furthered. In the final line of the sonnet, it is clear that whatever the fair lord is up to is distasteful to the poet: "Though you do anything, he thinks no ill."

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Sixteenth century love sonnets typically follow all but which of the following conventions?
   (a) A fair young lady is deeply in love with a man who's hesitant to court her
   (b) Exaggerated language expresses the lover's adoration
   (c) The speaker is a male lover
   (d) The female object of attention and affection is beautiful and pure.
2. The fair young man to whom the poet speaks in sonnets 1-126 demonstrates which of the following characteristics?

(a) Allegiance to lower class society
(b) An inner beauty that matches his physical appearance
(c) Good looks leaning toward the female persuasion
(d) A sense of inferiority

3. Who was not among the candidates for the identity of the Dark Lady sonnet 127-152?
(a) Shakespeare's wife, Ann Boleyn (b) Mary Fitton
(c) A Negro prostitute (d) Lady Penelope Rich

4. In sonnet 76-86, Shakespeare refers to his Rival poet as
(a) a finer spirit (b) the affable familiar ghost
(c) a worthier pen (d) so great a sum of sums

5. The major theme that Shakespeare sets forth in the first 17 of his sonnets is that
(a) Poetry has the power to conquer time
(b) Love is the only faithful from immortality
(c) Beauty and youth can be continued by producing progency
(d) Everyone's lot in life is to suffer

6. The sonnets in which Shakespeare says that the fair young man more than make up for the poet's failures in life are often referred to as the
(a) Compensation quatrains (b) Despair sonnets
(c) Odes to immortality (d) Passion poems

7. How many of Shakespeare's sonnets dwell on a religious theme?
(a) 126 (b) The first 17 and last 17
(c) Just 1 (d) All of them

8. Which of the following colours are not mentioned in sonnet 12, 73 or 99?
(a) Sable (b) Ashem
(c) Berry blue (d) Sunset

16.3 Thou Blind Fool, that Time of Year Thou Mayst in me Behold, what Dost Thou to Mine Eyes

Sonnet 137 - "Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes"

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.
If eyes, corrupt by over-partial looks,
Be anchored in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,
Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
Why should my heart think that a several plot,
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?
Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?

Notes

In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,

And to this false plague are they now transferred.

The poet reflects on his infatuation with the woman and is perplexed by what he finds. He is uncertain whether to blame his eyes or his heart, or both of them jointly. They both seem to be in error in supposing that so foul a person is in fact fair and worthy of love. The previous sonnets were far from flattering to the woman, having suggested that her sexual appetites were almost unlimited. This one is no better, and implies that she is like a common prostitute, being 'the bay where all men ride' and 'the common' where all men have free access.

Sonnets 46 & 47 describe a conflict between heart and eyes which is resolved by an alliance between the two. In this sonnet both heart and eyes are portrayed as being at fault in perverting what they perceive. But pride of place is given to the eyes, in that they are shown to lead the way and, being corrupt, they drag the heart along behind them. The distinction is only poetic and has no psychological basis, nor did it have in Shakespeare's day. He is merely elaborating a conceit which serves the purpose of illuminating the contradictions in his heart over his blind infatuation for the dark lady. The function of eyes in setting a soul on the pathway to love had been well established by Petrarch, ever since that fatal Good Friday on 6 April 1327 when he first set eyes on Laura in the Church at Avignon. Shakespeare is merely following this convention by attributing to the eyes the power to lead the way in love, and to subvert the personality. It is also entirely consistent with the blindness of Cupid, which does not however prevent Cupid from seeing with a sixth sense. As Virgil said Quis fallere possit amantem? 'Who can deceive a lover?'

The sonnet continues in the less than flattering tone of flattery which the previous three sonnets have used. His mistress is a piece of common land to which all men have access, a harbour in which all ships ride, she has a foul face which is painted to look fair, and finally she is a false plague, which has the power to infect all at random. This is far from the tradition of the Petrarchan praise of Laura which had set the precedent for all sonneteers thereafter, so that mistresses were nearly always praised as lofty, beautiful, chaste and inaccessible goddesses. It is true that a contrary tradition had been established which rebelled against this slavery and fantastic idealisation of women, an idealisation which had little basis in reality. Sir Thomas Wyatt, whose poems Shakespeare would have known, had already introduced a more down to earth approach to loving and courtship. And sonnet sequences had already been published which consisted of a main section devoted to adoration, followed by a concluding section which repudiated love, the cold beloved, and the slavery which held the lover in chains.

These poems to the dark lady are however rather different because of their psychological complexity and because the element of Petrarchan praise is replaced by straight speaking which is little short of insulting. The lady cannot have regarded it as flattery to be spoken of as a common prostitute, however much she might have enjoyed her power over men. Nor can it have been pleasing to be told that her face was foul, or that she was a 'false plague', or 'as black as hell, as dark as night'. Nothing in the sonnet literature of the time prepares us for such an onslaught on a loved one, and we have to conclude that, despite the occasional tender words to his mistress, the poet did not find the experience uplifting, certainly not spiritual, and that it was in many ways a source of revulsion and self-disgust which he found it impossible to flee from or expiate from his soul.

The unflattering tone of this sonnet and the other sonnets to the dark lady are in contrast with the Petrarchan tradition of sonneteering, in which the addressed woman is represented as lofty, chaste, and unattainable. Sir Thomas Wyatt, whose works Shakespeare would have known, had already breached this tradition with poems such as The Lady to Answer Directly with Yea or Nay. However, while other poets had represented women as less idealistic, in this sonnet Shakespeare downright insults the object of his desire, calling her "common," like a prostitute, and a "false plague." This degrading tone implies that the love affair was, for the speaker, unpleasant and even shameful.

The idea of the poet's eyes and heart distorting what they perceive is reminiscent of Sonnets 46 and 47, in which they are "at a mortal war" but end up reaching a compromise regarding the perception of the fair lord. But while those sonnets describe the eyes and heart lying to each other in order to deprive each other of basking in the fair lord's beauty, here the eyes are the main perpetrators, leading the heart behind them; Cupid has "forged hooks" out of them to this end. Thus the poet is overcome by the "blind fool, Love," who is Cupid; he becomes blind himself in his inability to see the truth.

The theme of believing one thing while seeing or knowing another to be true is carried through to the next sonnet, which begins, "When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her though I know she lies." Here, the poet admits in line 13 that, "In things right true my heart and eyes have erred." The word "things" could refer to the dark lady, whom the poet believed to be "right true," or it could be the fair lord, who actually was "true," but whom the poet abandoned in favor of the dark lady. The term "things" also carried a sexual slang meaning.

Task Describe the imagery of sea in the prescribed sonnet.

Ship imagery is employed in line 6 to suggest the woman's promiscuity. The phrase "anchored in the bay" used with "ride," implies a man having sexual intercourse; in this case, it is "all men" that are allowed to have sex with the dark lady. But the subject of this phrase is "eyes," implying that the poet is only visualizing having sex with the woman; thus, "all men" could really mean "all men's eyes," and rather than literally having sex with her, all men are just fantasizing about it like the poet does. The "forged hooks" into which Cupid makes the poet's eyes would be used to hoist sails and rigging on a ship, as well.

This imagery of the sea is foiled by imagery of the land used in lines 9-10, which compare the woman to a plot of land. The poet's heart believes the woman to be "a several plot," or a private plot of land for only him to enjoy. But in reality, that land is "the wide world's common place;" the woman is actually available to all men, either because she does not return the poet's love and remains unattached, or because she is promiscuous. The second meaning is more likely, since the word "common" is often tied to "whore;" its use here implies that the woman acts like a prostitute, and would be terribly unflattering and offensive to her.

16.4 Summary

- The Sonnets were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed AND published in 1609.
- Shakespeare's Sonnets have fascinated and puzzled readers for 400 years.
- William Shakespeare is referred to as a Literary Genius and much of this praise is due to the wonderful words of his short sonnet poems and his extended poems.
- The Sonnets were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed AND published in 1609.
- Shakespeare's sonnets comprise 154 poems in sonnet form that were published in 1609 but likely written over the course of several years.

16.5 Keywords

Sonnet : The sonnet is one of several forms of poetry originating in Europe, mainly Great Britain and Italy, and commonly has 14 lines.

Shakespearean Sonnet : Shakespeare's sonnets are 154 poems in sonnet form written by William Shakespeare, dealing with themes such as the passage of time, love, beauty and mortality.

Italian Sonnet	:	The Italian sonnet was created by Giacomo da Lentini, head of the Sicilian School under Frederick II.
Spenserian Sonnet	:	A variant on the English form is the Spenserian sonnet, named after Edmund Spenser (c.1552–1599) in which the rhyme scheme is, abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee.
English Sonnets	:	When English sonnets were introduced by Thomas Wyatt in the early 16th century, his sonnets and those of his contemporary the Earl of Surrey were chiefly translations from the Italian of Petrarch and the French of Ronsard and others.

16.6 Review Questions

1. Write an essay on "Shakespeare as a poet".
2. Describe the introduction to sonnets.
3. Explain different types of sonnets.
4. Discuss the sonnet-Being your slave what should I do but tend.
5. Discuss the Thou blind fool, that time of year thou mayst in me behold, what dost thou to mine eyes.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (c)	3. (a)
4. (c)	5. (c)	6. (b)
7. (c)	8. (c)	

16.7 Further Readings

Books

Sonnets	— William Shakespeare
Sonnets: a poem of love	— William Shakespeare
The art of Shakespeare's Sonnets	— Helen Hennessey Vendler

Online links

http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/id-169,pageNum-60.html

http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/57

Unit 17: Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock

Notes

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

17.1 Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock: Canto I–V

17.1.1 The Rape of the Lock: Canto I

17.1.2 The Rape of the Lock: Canto II

17.1.3 The Rape of the Lock: Canto III

17.1.4 The Rape of the Lock: Canto IV

17.1.5 The Rape of the Lock: Canto V

17.2 Alexander Pope: An Essay on Man: Epistle I–IV

17.2.1 An Essay on Man: Epistle I

17.2.2 An Essay on Man: Epistle II

17.2.3 An Essay on Man: Epistle III

17.2.4 An Essay on Man: Epistle IV

17.3 The use of Supernatural Machinery in the Rape of the Lock

17.4 Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock; As a Social Satire *N* as a Mock-epic

17.4.1 The Rape of the Lock—Social Satire

17.4.2 The Rape of the Lock as a Mock-epic Poem

17.5 Summary

17.6 Keywords

17.7 Review Questions

17.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the detailed analysis of Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock"
- Describe the use of supernatural machinery in Pope's poems
- Consider Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" as a social satire and as a mock epic.

Notes

Introduction

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 a form of 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.

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 supernaturals 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. When he later recommenced to write original poetry, 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.

17.1 Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock: Canto I–V

17.1.1 The Rape of the Lock: Canto I

Summary

The Rape of the Lock opens with an invocation of a muse and establishes the poem's subject matter, specifically a "dire offense from amorous causes" and the "mighty contests [rising] from trivial things" (1-2). The speaker concludes his invocation by asking the muse to explain first why a lord of good-breeding would assault a lady and, secondly, why a lady would reject a lord.

The action of the poem begins with the rising sun awakening the residents of a wealthy household. Though everyone, including the lapdogs, has risen, Belinda remains asleep. She dreams of a handsome youth who informs her that she is protected by a "thousand bright inhabitants of air:" spirits that were once human women who now protect virgins.

The youth explains that after a woman dies; her spirit returns to elemental form; namely, to fire, water, earth, and air. Each element is characterized by different types of women. Termagants or

scolds become fire spirits or Salamanders. Indecisive women become water spirits. Prudes or women who delight in rejecting men become Gnomes (earth spirits). Coquettes become Sylphs (air spirits).

The dream is sent to Belinda by Ariel, "her guardian Sylph" (20). The Sylphs are Belinda's guardians because they understand her vanity and pride, having been coquettes when they were humans. They are devoted to any woman who "rejects mankind" (68). Their role is to guide young women through the "mystic mazes" of social interaction (92).

At the end of the dream, Ariel warns Belinda of an impending "dread event," urging her to "Beware of all, but most beware of Man" (109, 114). Belinda is then awoken by her lapdog, Shock. Upon rising, she sees that a billet-doux, or a love-letter, has arrived for her, causing her to forget the details of the dream.

Now awake, Belinda begins her elaborate toilette. Pope endows every object from combs and pins to billet-doux and Bibles with significance in this ritual of dressing: "Each silver vase in mystic order laid" (122). Belinda herself is described as a "goddess," looking at her "heavenly image" in the mirror (132, 125). The elegant language and importance of such objects thus elevate the process of dressing to a sacred rite.

Notes The Sylphs assist in Belinda's dressing routine, setting her hair and straightening her gown. Fully arrayed, Belinda emerges from her chamber.

Analysis

The opening of The Rape of the Lock establishes the poem's mock-heroic tone. In the tradition of epic poetry, Pope opens the poem by invoking a muse, but rather than invoke one of the mythic Greek muses, Pope leaves the muse anonymous and instead dedicates the poem to John Caryll, the man who commissioned the poem. The first verse-paragraph also introduces Pope's epic subject matter: a war arising from "amorous causes" (1). Unlike Menelaus' fury at Paris' theft of Helen or Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon over Briseis in The Iliad, however, the poem's "mighty contests rise from trivial things" (2). Indeed, these "mighty contests" are merely flirtations and card games rather than the great battles of the Greek epic tradition.

The second verse-paragraph encapsulates Pope's subversion of the epic genre. In lines 11-12 Pope juxtaposes grand emotions with unheroic character-types, specifically "little men" and women: "In tasks so bold can little men engage, /And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage." The irony of pairing epic characteristics with lowly human characters contributes to Pope's mock-heroic style. Furthermore, the "mighty rage" of women evokes the rage of Achilles at the outset of The Iliad, foreshadowing the comic gender-reversal that characterizes the rest of the poem. Rather than distinguish the subjects of the poem as in a traditional epic, Pope uses the mock-heroic genre to elevate and ridicule his subjects simultaneously, creating a satire that chides society for its misplaced values and emphasis on trivial matters.

Belinda's dream provides the mythic structure of the poem. In this segment, Pope introduces the supernatural forces that affect the action of the poem, much the way that the gods and goddesses of The Iliad would influence the progress of the Trojan War. Just as Athena protects Diomedes and Aphrodite supports Paris during the Trojan War, Ariel is the guardian of Belinda. Unlike the Greek gods, however, Ariel possesses little power to protect his ward and preserve her chastity. In this initial canto, Belinda forgets Ariel's warnings of impending dangers upon receiving a billet-doux. Though charged with protecting Belinda's virtue, it seems that Ariel cannot fully guard her from the perils of love, unable to distract her even from a relatively harmless love letter. In the dream Ariel indicates that all women have patron sprites, depending on their personality type. Ariel explains that when women die, their spirits return "from earthly vehicles" to "their first elements" (50, 58).

Notes

Each personality type—scolds, undecided women, prudes, coquettes—becomes a Salamander, Nymph, Gnome, or Sylph, respectively. These four types are associated with both the four humors and the four elements. Having been "light coquettes" as human women, the Sylphs are most closely affiliated with Belinda. Belinda herself is a coquette, and it is this aspect of femininity with which Pope is most concerned.

Task Discuss two mock-heroic elements of the poem.

Pope explores the role of the coquette in this first canto. He demonstrates that womanly priorities are limited to personal pleasures and social aspirations. In his description of the Sylphs during the dream sequence, Pope enumerates coquettish vanities. As humans these women valued their "beauteous mold" and enjoyed frivolous diversions, which they continue to take pleasure in as sprites (48). The "joy in gilded chariots" suggests a preference for superficial grandeur and external signifiers of wealth (55). Similarly, their "love of ombre," a popular card game featuring elements of bridge and poker, indicates a desire for fashionable entertainment (56). Through this love of finery and these trivial pastimes, Pope depicts a society that emphasizes appearances rather than moral principles. This focus on appearance extends to attitudes towards honor and virtue. Society dictates that women remain chaste while enticing suitable husbands. Of course, if a woman seemed to compromise herself, society would censure her as though she had lost her virtue. This concern about female sexuality represents the underlying anxiety in The Rape of the Lock: the theft of the lock (a metonymic substitution for Belinda's chastity) creates the appearance of lost virtue.

At this point in the poem, however, Pope depicts Belinda not as a coquette but as a powerful figure, similar to the (male) heroes of epic poetry. Pope reimagines Belinda's morning routine as a hero's ritualized preparation before battle. Her toilette commences as a religious rite in praise of a goddess. Belinda's reflection in the mirror becomes the image of the goddess while her maid is the "inferior priestess," worshipping at the altar (127). These "sacred rites" perform a secondary purpose: once the sacraments are performed, the goddess should protect Belinda during her day's adventures (128). Upon completion of the morning's ceremony, Belinda begins to array herself, a scene which Pope figures within the epic paradigm as the ritualized arming of the hero. The combs, pins, "puffs, powders, patches" become the weapons and armor of this hero as the "awful Beauty [puts] on all its arms" (138, 139). This depiction of Belinda as an epic hero establishes the mock-heroic motifs that occur throughout the poem.

17.1.2 The Rape of the Lock: Canto II

Summary

Rivaling the sun in her beauty and radiance, Belinda sets off for Hampton Court Palace, traveling by boat on the River Thames. A group of fashionable ladies and gentlemen accompanies her, but "every eye was fixed on her alone" (6). Her "lovely looks" and "quick" eyes command the attention and adoration of those who see her (9, 10). Belinda's glittering raiment includes a "sparkling cross," which she wears on her "white breast," inspiring the worship of her admirers (7). Her most striking attribute is the "two locks which graceful hung" in ringlets on her "ivory neck" (20, 22). Pope describes these curls as labyrinths of love intended for the "destruction of mankind," imprisoning any hearts that get caught in their snares (19).

One of her devotees, the Baron, greatly admires her ringlets and has resolved to steal them for himself, "by force or by fraud" (32). On this particular morning he rose early to build an altar to Love at which to pray for success in this venture. He created a pyre and on it sacrificed "all the trophies of his former loves" (40). Fanning the flames with "three amorous sighs," he burned "three garters, half a pair of gloves" and "tender billet-doux" (42, 39, 41). The powers heard his prayer and chose to grant half of it.

As the boat makes its way to Hampton Court, Belinda and her companions enjoy a lighthearted journey. Ariel, however, is anxious, remembering the foretold "impending woe" (54). Concerned for Belinda's safety, he summons an army of Sylphs to protect her. The sprites assemble, their bodies incandescent in the glittering sunlight. Ariel addresses them, much the same as a general addressing his troops. He reminds them of their duties: guiding celestial bodies, regulating weather, guarding the British Throne, and "[tending] to the Fair" (91). As part of their responsibilities to the Fair, the sprites protect ladies' powders, perfumes, curls, cosmetics, and hair, working to "assist their blushes, and inspire their airs" (98).

Because "some dire disaster" looms over Belinda, Ariel charges a phalanx of Sylphs to act as her bodyguards (103). He charges Zephyretta with the care of Belinda's fan, Brillante her earrings, Momentilla her watch, and Crispissa her locks. Ariel himself will protect Shock, her lapdog. Above all, he is concerned that someone might "stain her honor" (107). He therefore chooses fifty select Sylphs to guard her petticoat, which sometimes fails to protect a woman's virtue. Ariel warns that any sprite who neglects his duties "shall feel sharp vengeance" (125). The Sylphs report to their posts and wait for the "birth of Fate" (142).

Analysis

In the second canto, Pope relies on martial language to situate his poem within the epic tradition and reinforce his satiric manipulation of the genre. Much like the combs, pins, and cosmetics that Pope assigns military value in the first canto, Belinda's physical appearance is defined within militaristic terms. The beauty of her curls attracts admirers, which Pope compares to a trap meant to ensnare enemies. Similarly, he refigures Belinda's seven-layered petticoat as a fortified wall meant to withstand the attacks of invading forces. As Pope establishes in his description of the coquette, a woman must attract a suitable husband but simultaneously refrain from so great an attraction that she compromises her virtue. Her curls thus perform the former duty, capturing the attention of men while her petticoat functions as an impediment to the loss of her chastity. Of course, as Ariel notes, "we have known that seven fold fence to fail," and he commands an army of fifty Sylphs to take defensive positions around the petticoat, ready to defend Belinda's virtue from amorous assailants (119). Pope, however, makes the Sylphs' militaristic role ironic: they are not guarding against Belinda's failure but rather protecting her from excessive success at attracting admirers. Pope thus critiques society's contradictory expectations with regard to female sexuality.

As the irony of Pope's military allusions suggests, Pope develops the poem's sexual allegory in the second canto. From the outset of the poem, the theft of Belinda's hair has sexual implications, specifically in the poem's title: The Rape of the Lock. Pope's use of the word "rape" denotes explicit sexuality in the cutting of Belinda's curls. Pope's word choice in the second canto strengthens this sexual imagery. The poem indicates that the Baron has resolved to steal the locks "by force to ravish" (32). The use of the words "force" and "ravish" emphasizes this theme of sexual violation. The phrase "by fraud betray" with regard to the Baron's desire for the curls similarly equates the theft of the lock with a man taking advantage of a woman's innocence (32).

Even Ariel suspects that the foretold "dire disaster" will take the form of a sexual assault (103). He speculates that Belinda might be fated to "break Diana's law," an allusion to the Roman goddess of chastity (105). In the following line he worries that "some frail china jar [will] receive a flaw" (106). Literary instances of broken pottery often indicate the loss of virginity. Ariel's final anxiety is that Belinda might "stain her honor or her new brocade" (107). While the staining of Belinda's honor is overtly sexual, the staining of her dress likewise has sexual implications, alluding both to female sexual maturity (menstruation) and to the tearing of the hymen (loss of virginity).

The sexual implications of The Rape of the Lock culminate with the locks themselves. Though Pope describes Belinda's ringlets as hanging down her "smooth ivory neck," the sexualized double-readings throughout the second canto suggest a more explicit secondary reading of Belinda's curls (22). A sexualized reading of Belinda's locks as pubic hairs reinforces Pope's portrayal of their theft as rape.

Notes

Did u know? The "rape" of the lock therefore represents a greater threat to Belinda's virtue than the theft of her hair would suggest.

Just as it does in the first canto, religious imagery parallels the language of force in the second canto. Much like the ritualism of Belinda's toilette in the first canto, Belinda's charms become objects of worship. Of particular note, of course, are her locks, which draw the attention of many admirers, chief among them the Baron. The rituals he performs at dawn are an act of worship. He builds an altar—a feature of both pagan and Christian worship—to celebrate Belinda's beauty. On the altar the Baron places "twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt" to honor Love, rather than gilded Bibles (38). This equation of religion and secular love echoes the presence of Bibles and billet-doux together on Belinda's dressing table in the first canto and further serves Pope's mock-heroic purposes. The ritual sacrifices performed by the Baron mimic the epic convention of sacrificing to the gods to secure their favor before a venture. The powers' decision to grant only half of the Baron's desire alludes to a common feature of the epic in which the interference of the gods is a mixed blessing. Yet Pope undercuts the traditional power of the gods. Their half-blessing does not have tragic consequences for the Baron; rather, he only succeeds at securing one of Belinda's curls. Pope further undermines the piety of prayer, replacing it with the Baron's "three amorous sighs" (42).

The poem's comic attitude towards religion implies that the worship of beauty amounts to sacrilege. Pope crystallizes this religious perversion in the cross that Belinda wears. The cross seems to serve not a religious function but rather an ornamental one, much like the equation of the Bible with billet-doux and French romances. Indeed, this central symbol of Christianity remains secular, so "Jews might kiss" and "infidels adore" it just as easily as Christians (8). Pope even sexualizes this traditionally religious object, placing it on Belinda's "white breast" and thereby suggesting that the Jews and infidels are instead admiring her breasts (7). By subverting established principles of religious worship, Pope critiques society's willingness to value appearances and other insignificant matters over a moral lifestyle.

17.1.3 The Rape of the Lock: Canto III

Summary

The third canto begins with a description of Hampton Court Palace and the amusements of life at court. The palace's towers rise up from the meadows overlooking the River Thames. Pope indicates that it is at this site that "Britain's statesmen" deal with matters at home and abroad and where Queen Anne holds court (5). Belinda and her companions arrive at Hampton Court and disembark the boat to take part in the day's activities. They first engage in gossip, discussing balls, fashion, and political matters. They punctuate their conversation with taking snuff and fluttering fans.

After the afternoon's pleasant conversation, Belinda sits down to play cards with the Baron and another man. They play ombre, a three-handed bridge with some features of poker. Pope describes the game as a battle: the three players' hands are "three bands [prepared] in arms," troops sent to "combat on the velvet plain" of the card table (29, 44). Like the commander of an army, Belinda reviews her cards, declares spades trumps, and sends her cards into combat. She meets with early success, leading with her high trumps (49-56).

The suit breaks badly (54) when "to the Baron fate inclines the field" (66). He retains the queen of spades (67) with which he trumps her king of clubs (69). The Baron then leads high diamonds until he nearly sets (beats) Belinda, who is "just in the jaws of ruin" (92). On the last trick, however, Belinda takes the Baron's ace of hearts with the king, who "spring to vengeance with an eager pace, / And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace" (97-8). By recovering the last trick, Belinda wins back the amount she bid and therefore takes the game. Thrilled at her victory, Belinda "fills with shouts the sky" (99). The speaker then interjects to remind the reader that Fate holds some disaster for Belinda.

Notes

After the game, coffee is served to the ladies and gentlemen at Hampton Court. The vapors of the coffee inspire the Baron with new strategies for stealing Belinda's locks. With the assistance of Clarissa, who presents him with her scissors, he endeavors to cut Belinda's hair. He fails three times to clip her lock from behind, without her knowledge; the Sylphs frustrate his every attempt. They intervene by blowing the hair out of danger and tugging on her earrings to make her turn around. In a last-ditch effort to protect his charge, Ariel accesses Belinda's mind with the intent to warn her, but he is shocked to find "an early lover lurking at her heart" (144). Belinda's strong attraction to the Baron places her beyond Ariel's control, and he retreats, defeated. The scissors' blades finally close on the curl. As the shears close, a Sylph gets in the way and is cut in two. As a supernatural being the Sylph is easily repaired; the curl, however, cannot be restored. The Baron celebrates his victory while Belinda's "screams of horror rend the affrighted skies" (156).

Analysis

Pope's rendering of the card game as a heroic battle advances his epic parody and foreshadows the scuffle over the lock in the fifth canto. He again figures Belinda as an epic hero, and the extended metaphor of the game as a battle reinforces her masculine approach. During the game, Belinda's strategy is aggressive and ambitious, and Pope shows Belinda's desire for the recognition that the "battle" will bring to her: "Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites, / Burns to encounter two adventurous knights / And swells her breast with conquests yet to come" (25-8). In keeping with the martial theme, Pope portrays Belinda as a cunning general: "The skillful nymph reviews her force with care" (45). He further depicts her cards—her army—as virile male characters: "Now move to war her sable Matadores / In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors" (47-8). Pope emphasizes this hyper-masculine depiction of Belinda when she wins the game. Rather than graciously acknowledge her victory with modest reserve, Belinda gloats over the losers: "The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky" (99). Unlike the ten years of violent combat over Troy in The Iliad, however this evening's card game is the pastime of young aristocrats. By elevating this trivial amusement with the language of the epic struggle between two civilizations, Pope suggests that the bravery once exhibited on the battlefield by Greek and Trojan heroes is now limited to the petty games and flirtations of the upper classes.

The heroic theme extends to the severing of the lock. The Baron's three attempts to cut Belinda's hair mirror the hero's trials before completing his quest, which Pope emphasizes at the end of the canto by comparing the Baron's victory to the conquest of Troy. Likewise Clarissa's arming of the Baron with her sewing scissors evokes the tradition of lovers' farewells before battle. Of course, the theft of Belinda's hair is an insignificant squabble in comparison to the abduction of Helen and a decade of war.

With the complicity of Clarissa in the severing of Belinda's lock, Pope introduces a criticism of the relationships between women, which he explores in the poem's sexual allegory. Clarissa's willingness to participate in the metaphoric "rape" of Belinda suggests that rather than a sisterhood united against male sexual advances, women seek to undermine each other in the competition to find a suitable husband. Belinda's sexual fall would remove her from the marriage market, ensuring less competition for rich or titled young men such as the Baron. Of course, a woman does not have to compromise her virtue to lose her honor, which Pope depicts during the gossip at the beginning of the canto: "At every word a reputation dies" (16). In this society, the loss of reputation has much the same result as sexual transgression. Pope's depiction of unkind womanly attitudes towards each other serves to criticize society's sexual double-standard in which a woman must attract a husband without compromising her virtue.

In the third canto Pope expands his social critique beyond the trivial entertainments and petty squabbles of the aristocracy. Using the structure of the heroic couplet (rhyming pairs of lines in iambic pentameter), he creates parallel constructions that expose the harsh realities of life outside of the amusements of Hampton Court Palace. He describes Hampton Court as the place where Queen Anne "dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (8). Here Pope employs a zeugma, a

rhetorical device in which a word modifies two other words or phrases in a parallel construction, modifying each according to a different sense. In this instance, "take" modifies both "counsel" and "tea," but one does not take counsel and tea in the same way. The zeugma thus reveals Hampton Court as a palace that hosts both matters of state and social diversions. Similarly, in the second verse-paragraph, some of Belinda's companions discuss balls and visits while another "speaks the glory of the British Queen, / And one describes a charming Indian screen" (13-4). While some members of the party relate stories about their social engagements, the references to the "British Queen" and "Indian screen" serve as reminders of the world outside of Hampton Court. In particular the words "British" and "Indian" evoke the British Empire, worlds away from the comfort of Hampton Court. The serving of coffee, "which makes the politician wise, / And see through all things with his half-shut eyes" likewise suggests British trade and a political world beyond the amusements of this aristocratic party (117-8). Pope's use of parallel constructions within the heroic couplet thus reveals the serious matters that exist outside of the lords' and ladies' gossip.

17.1.4 The Rape of the Lock: Canto IV

Summary

Belinda's "anxious cares" and "secret passions" at the loss of her hair eclipse the "rage, resentment, and despair" felt by captured kings, scorned virgins, tragic lovers, and unrepentant tyrants (1, 2, 9). After the Sylphs withdraw, weeping at their failure to protect Belinda, a Gnome named Umbriel descends to the center of the earth to the Cave of Spleen. (During the eighteenth century, the spleen was associated with the passions, melancholy and discontentment in particular.) During his descent, he passes "a grotto, sheltered close from air," in which Belinda reclines, afflicted by pain and a migraine (21). Two handmaidens attend to Belinda in her distress: Ill-Nature and Affectation.

Mists and vapors shroud the palace of Spleen. Grotesque figures of fiends and specters line Umbriel's path, their "bodies changed to various forms by Spleen" (48). In this splenetic world everything is upside-down or inverted: "Men prove with child" (53). Carrying a sprig of "spleenwort" for protection against these fantastic figures, Umbriel arrives safely in the depths of the cave and addresses the Goddess of Spleen. Umbriel enumerates his mischievous acts which range from causing a beautiful woman to break out in pimples to convincing men that their wives are cuckolding them. He asks the goddess to "touch Belinda with chagrin" (77). Though dismissive, the goddess grants his wish. She gives the Gnome a bag containing "sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues" and a vial with "fairing fears, / Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears (84, 85). Umbriel takes the goddess' gifts and ascends from the Cave of Spleen to Hampton Court Palace.

The Gnome returns to find Belinda in a disheveled and dejected state while being comforted by her friend Thalestris. (In Greek mythology, Thalestris was an Amazon; Pope's use of the name suggests a fierce, combative woman.) Umbriel empties the contents of the goddess' bag on the two women, fueling Belinda's ire. Now outraged, Thalestris attempts to convince Belinda to avenge the wrongs committed by the Baron. In a speech full of rhetorical flourishes, Thalestris warns Belinda that the Baron will display her hair for the amusement of others, which will thereby endanger Belinda's honor and reputation: "I / Already hear the horrid things they say, / Already see you a degraded toast, / And all your honor in a whisper lost" (107-10).

Unable to rouse Belinda, Thalestris goes in a rage to Sir Plume, her own beau, asking him to demand the return of the hair. Sir Plume addresses the Baron in an unintelligible speech filled with eighteenth-century slang. The Baron mocks his manner of speaking and haughtily refuses to honor the request. He vainly displays the honors he has won, claiming that "this hand, which won it, shall forever wear" (138).

Upon the Baron's refusal, Umbriel releases the contents of the goddess' vial. The contents of the vial cause Belinda to cry self-piteously and languish in her "beauteous grief" (143). She curses the day's events and bemoans her fate, wishing that she had never entered fashionable society but rather

"unadmired remained / In some lone isle, or distant northern land" (153-4). She articulates her regret at not having listened to the Sylph's warning or the morning's evil omens. Belinda then laments the state of the lonely curl that remains, the sister of the severed lock.

Analysis

The fourth canto opens with Belinda languishing in "rage, resentment, and despair," eclipsing the sorrows of kings imprisoned after battle, scornful women who become spinsters, lovers robbed of their happiness, medieval women refused kisses, tyrants who die without repenting, and a woman whose dress is unkempt (9). Pope places each of these individuals in their own line so that their sorrows have equal footing and none is subordinate. Of course, the despair of a captured king far outweighs the aggravation of a woman who appears disheveled. By placing all of these figures subordinate to Belinda, Pope accentuates the excess and impropriety of her grief after the theft of her hair, a minor setback. He thus chastises those who place excessive significance on trivial problems. Furthermore, by equating the disparate sorrows enumerated this first verse-paragraph, Pope emphasizes the importance of a moral code with which to evaluate the validity of these emotions.

Umbriel's descent into the Cave of Spleen evokes the journeys to the underworld made by Odysseus in The Odyssey and Aeneas in The Aeneid. This sequence perverts the traditional epic justifications for visiting the underworld. Usually the hero requires guidance for his quest and travels to the underworld to consult a deceased friend or relative. Overcome with despair, Belinda has retired to her bed, so instead of the hero's visit to the underworld, Pope depicts the descent of a trouble-making Gnome. Of course, Umbriel has no intention of assisting Belinda in recovering the lock; rather, he travels to the Cave of Spleen for methods to exacerbate Belinda's pain. The use of the "spleen" sequence also allows Pope to explore Belinda's emotional distress. In her sorrow Belinda is attended by Ill-Nature and Affectation whose presence suggests that the heroine's grief is affected rather than a true reflection of her emotion. Her anguish is thus equally as decorative as her locks, completely undermining the elevation of her misery in the first verse-paragraph.

Pope further emphasizes the epic tradition in Thalestris' speech. She figures the severing of the lock as an affront to Belinda's honor, encouraging her friend to avenge this insult. Offended honor is a common theme in epic poetry; at the outset of The Iliad, Achilles is enraged at Agamemnon for insulting him. Thalestris' attempts to rouse Belinda's anger serve as a reminder of the behavior Belinda should be demonstrating as the epic hero. In Belinda's place, Thalestris is outraged. Her presence reinforces Pope's manipulation of the epic genre, borrowing the Amazon from Greek mythology. Here Pope also draws on chivalric ideals from the romance genre. She asks Sir Plume to defend Belinda's honor by demanding that the Baron return the lock. Sir Plume fails utterly, muttering only slang terms in his confrontation with the Baron. His failure to restore Belinda's honor demonstrates the degree to which chivalry has declined.

Pope's discussion of honor in this canto reemphasizes the poem's sexual allegory. Though the poem's title figures the severing of Belinda's hair as an overt sexual violation, Thalestris intimates that Belinda's ultimate concern should be what the Baron will do with the ringlet. She worries that the Baron will display the curl to the public and thereby endanger Belinda's honor and reputation. She envisions the Baron's triumphant exhibition of the hair: "Methinks already I your tears survey, / Already hear the horrid things they say, / Already see you a degraded toast, / And all your honor in a whisper lost" (107-10). Thalestris' depiction of Belinda's humiliation demonstrates society's emphasis on the external appearance of morality (i.e., reputation). Pope reinforces this focus on appearances at the end of the canto when Belinda laments her lost curl: "Oh, hadst though, cruel! Been content to seize / hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!" (175-6). The "hairs less in sight" suggest her pubic hairs, which are more explicitly sexual than the ringlet that the Baron stole. Belinda's preference for the theft of her public hairs indicates that she would rather compromise

Notes

her virtue than suffer damage to her looks. Pope thus demonstrates the misplaced significance and value that society places on external appearances.

17.1.5 The Rape of the Lock: Canto V

Summary

Despite Belinda's tears and Thalestris' reproaches, the Baron remains unmoved, refusing to relinquish the curl. Clarissa then waves her fan to gather the attention of those present. She asks the assembled group why society places so much value on beauty when it is not tempered by good sense. She notes that men often call women angels and worship them as such without assessing their moral character. She observes that beauty is ephemeral: "Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to gray; / Since Painted, or not painted all shall fade" (26-7). Because "frail beauty must decay," women must have other qualities, good sense in particular, to guide them after beauty fades (25). Consequently Clarissa tries to convince Belinda that when tantrums ("airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding") fail to restore her looks, it is "good humor" that will win the day (32, 31). Clarissa's moralizing fails to comfort Belinda, and Thalestris calls her a prude.

Not pacified by Clarissa's speech, Belinda and Thalestris prepare the other women to launch an attack on the men to regain the curl. Umbriel sits perched on a sconce, presiding over the epic struggle with mischievous glee. The humans fight "like Gods nor dread a mortal wound" (44). The women quickly overpower many of the men: "A beau and witling perished in the throng, / One died in metaphor, and one in song" (59-60). Dapperwit falls in a faint, and Sir Fopling prays for mercy before falling as well. Sir Plume nearly overcomes Clarissa, but Chloe saves her, killing Sir Plume "with a frown" (68). When she smiles to see him fall, he quickly revives.

Belinda flies at the Baron, and the two lock in combat. She gains the upper hand, throwing snuff at his nose which causes his eyes to tear. She draws a "deadly bodkin" (here, an ornamental hairpin) and holds it at the Baron's throat (88). (This is not, however, just any hairpin but rather has a mystical history. It was once three seal rings that Belinda's great-great-grandfather wore, which were melted down after his death to make a belt buckle for his widow. The buckle was transformed into a whistle for her grandmother before it was melted into a hairpin for her mother, a hairpin which she, in turn, inherited.) Having defeated the Baron, Belinda again demands the return of her hair, her roar shaking the "vaulted roofs" (104). The lock, however, has been lost in the scuffle and cannot be found.

Though the humans cannot find Belinda's lock, the Muse saw it rise towards the sky, for "none but quick, poetic eyes" could see it (124). The curl becomes "a sudden star / And drew behind a radiant trail of hair" (127-8). The poem finally addresses Belinda, urging her not to "mourn thy ravished hair" (141). As a star, her ringlet adds "new glory to the shining sphere," and stargazers for years to come can admire it (142). Long after Belinda herself dies and "all those tresses shall be laid in dust," the star will remain a testament to her beauty (148).

Analysis

Some critics have interpreted Clarissa's moralizing as the voice of Pope, articulating the poem's moral, but this is a gross misreading of the poem. Though Clarissa's speech would certainly serve Pope's basic purpose of reconciling the families of Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre, Pope's satire achieves a broader and more complex social critique, ranging from the idleness of the upper classes to the sexual double-standard for women. Clarissa's warnings about the ephemeral nature of beauty are valid but provide an interpretive problem. Although she assumes the voice of moral superiority at this point in the poem, it was she who provided the weapon that severed Belinda's hair. She has therefore undermined Belinda's honor and is largely responsible for the present quarrel. Thus Clarissa cannot claim moral authority as she attempts to do in this speech.

Clarissa's failure to pacify Belinda creates an occasion for the poem's second epic battle. Unlike the card game in the third canto, the struggle over the lock has erotic implications, which befit the sexual allegory of the poem. The din made during the fight—rustling clothing and confused shouts—more closely resembles erotic sounds than the noises of battle: "Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack; Heroes' and heroines' shouts confusedly rise" (40-1). The postures of the combatants likewise take on sexual connotations. During the fight, Sir Plume "draw[s] Clarissa down," suggesting a sexual act rather than the striking down of an enemy (67). Similarly, Belinda basically sits on the Baron when she overcomes him, an obviously sexual position. The eroticism of the battle culminates with the sexual double meaning of the word "die." Though "die" can refer to physical death, it is clear that the men are not actually expiring during the fight. Rather, Pope uses the word "die" as a metaphor for orgasm, in the sense of la petite mort (the little death). Most significantly, the Baron, who stole Belinda's sexually-charged lock of hair, fights unafraid because he "sought no more than on his foe to die" (78). This suggests that his goal throughout the poem has been sexual gratification.

Despite its erotic overtones, the battle over the lock is also the culmination of Pope's heroic parody. Following the epic paradigm, Pope invokes the martial Greek and Roman gods: "'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms;/And all Olympus rings with loud alarms; / Jove's thunder roars / Blue Neptune storms" (47-50). Pope simultaneously undermines these lofty allusions by killing the men in rather ridiculous fashions. Dapperwit and Sir Fopling faint as the women overcome them, while Chloe kills Sir Plume "with a frown" (68). She smiles when he dies, and at her smile, Sir Plume "revive[s] again" (70). The absurdity of these deaths demonstrates the triviality of the scuffle and emphasizes Pope's mock-heroic tone. The reversal of gender roles also contributes to Pope's parody of the epic. In this battle, the women are the aggressors. Pope calls Thalestris "the fierce virago," and she easily overcomes many of the men (37). While Thalestris is the most vicious of the female combatants, Belinda remains the heroic figure, flying to her enemy "with more than usual lightning in her eyes" (76). She abandons all pretext of lady-like grace. In a shout that echoes her victorious cry at the end of the card game, Belinda demands for the return of the lock: "Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain / Roared for the handkerchief that caused his pain" (105-6). Her rage thus turns her into a swarthy warrior, and she easily overcomes the Baron. At this point, Pope diffuses the epic tone of the poem. Belinda's use of snuff trivializes the fight, causing the Baron to sneeze, a most unheroic action.

Notes Pope provides a final epic flourish by relating the history of Belinda's bodkin. He relates an elaborate tale that memorializes the bodkin's evolution from three signet rings to a buckle to a whistle and finally to an ornamental hairpin. This history imbues the hairpin with the same significance as Agamemnon's scepter or Achilles' shield in The Iliad.

Pope concludes the poem with a final compliment to Arabella Fermor, the historical inspiration for Belinda. By depicting the lost curl as a star in the firmament, he refuses to chastise Belinda's behavior and instead celebrates Miss Fermor and Belinda. The poem's conclusion indulges female vanity, immortalizing Miss Fermor's experience in verse just as the heavens become an eternal testament to Belinda's beauty. Despite the poem's social critiques, the poem ends with little moral development. Belinda's hair will grow back, and her beauty will be admired even after her death. The poem is thus an example of Horatian satire; rather than exposing the evils of the aristocracy, the poem provides a gentle critique that generally sympathizes with the characters in spite of their follies.

Notes

17.2 Alexander Pope: An Essay on Man: Epistle I–IV

17.2.1 An Essay on Man: Epistle I

Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section VI (173-206): Section VI decries the unreasonableness of man’s complaints against Providence; God is good, giving and taking equally. If man had the omniscience of God, he would be miserable: “The bliss of man / Is, not to act of think beyond mankind” (189-90).

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

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

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

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

Analysis

Notes

Pope's first epistle seems to endorse a sort of fatalism, in which all things are fated. Everything happens for the best, and man should not presume to question God's greater design, which he necessarily cannot understand because he is a part of it. He further does not possess the intellectual capability to comprehend God's order outside of his own experience. These arguments certainly support a fatalistic world view. According to Pope's thesis, everything that exists plays a role in the divine plan. God thus has a specific intention for every element of His creation, which suggests that all things are fated. Pope, however, was always greatly distressed by charges of fatalism. As a proponent of the doctrine of free will, Pope's personal opinions seem at odds with his philosophical conclusions in the first epistle. Reconciling Pope's own views with his fatalistic description of the universe represents an impossible task.

The first epistle of An Essay on Man is its most ambitious. Pope states that his task is to describe man's place in the "universal system" and to "vindicate the ways of God to man" (16). In the poem's prefatory address, Pope more specifically describes his intention to consider "man in the abstract, his Nature and his State, since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection of imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being." Pope's stated purpose of the poem further problematizes any critical reading of the first epistle. According to Pope's own conclusions, man's limited intellect can comprehend only a small portion of God's order and likewise can have knowledge of only half-truths. It therefore seems the height of hubris to presume to justify God's ways to man. His own philosophical conclusions make this impossible. As a mere component part of God's design and a member of the hierarchical middle state, Pope exists within God's design and therefore cannot perceive the greater logic of God's order. To do so would bring only misery: "The bliss of man / Is, not to act of think beyond mankind" (189-90).

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

17.2.2 An Essay on Man: Epistle II

Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

Analysis

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

The second epistle abruptly turns to focus on the principles that guide human action. The rest of this section focuses largely on "self-love," an eighteenth-century term for self-maintenance and fulfillment. It was common during Pope's lifetime to view the passions as the force determining human action. Typically instinctual, the immediate object of the passions was seen as pleasure. According to Pope's philosophy, each man has a "ruling passion" that subordinates the others. In contrast with the accepted eighteenth-century views of the passions, Pope's doctrine of the "ruling passion" is quite original. It seems clear that with this idea, Pope tries to explain why certain individual behave in distinct ways, seemingly governed by a particular desire. He does not, however, make this explicit in the poem.

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

17.2.3 An Essay on Man: Epistle III

Summary

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

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

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

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

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

Section III (109-46): Section III first demonstrates how far society can be carried by instinct, then shows how much farther society can be carried by reason. In society, creatures are instinctively united by mutual need. Reason extends that instinct into emotional connection.

Section IV (147-98): Section IV discusses the state of man at the time of creation, in particular the harmony between all elements of society. Initially bound by instinct, man looked to other creatures for instruction on how to act and develop their own forms of society, using reason to teach themselves.

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

Section VI (215-318): Section VI examines the roles of religion and government in society. According to Pope's argument, the origin of both true religion and government is the principle of love: faith is the love of God and government is the love of man. By contrast, superstition and tyranny both originate from the same principle of fear. Thus self-love, through just and unjust means, can either drive man's ambition or restrain him. Pope then describes man's efforts to restore true religion and government on their first principle. Both religion and government take many forms, but their ultimate ends are to govern the soul and to govern society.

Analysis

The third epistle treats on man's social contract with family, government, and religion, and Pope focuses on the bonds that unite man with others. While the second epistle shows that self-love governs man's actions, love governs the universe, binding its disparate elements. Modern readers might be inclined to interpret this to mean erotic or familial love, but Pope actually refers to a sort of contractual love, which forms a building-block of God's design and the chain of being. Atoms, for example, attract and are attracted to each other, which ensures that they remain in their proper place. Likewise, dirt sustains the growth of plants, and when a plant dies, it returns to dirt to nourish its fellow plants. Man's grass and flowers provide food for antelope while antelope also nourish man. All parts in the circle of life thus "relate to whole," and love "connects each being, greatest with the least / Made beast in aid of man, and man of best; / All serv'd, all serving: nothing stands alone" (21, 23-5). Love provides a convenient way for Pope to describe symbiosis in the relationship between God's creatures, indicative of God's greater design.

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

Through observations of his fellow creatures, man began to build his own cities, demonstrating sociability through government and religion. Man's early societies were patriarchal, featuring mild and natural rulers. Everyone conducted themselves virtuously and celebrated God until patriarchs directed self-love towards personal ambition and priests perverted religious worship. It was not until man redirected self-love towards its natural sociability through restraint, namely "government and laws," that man formed a social contract, which established good government and laws by rational agreement for mutual security (272). Pope's conclusion, therefore, is that private good is best achieved by preventing a conflict with public good: "Thus God and nature link'd the general frame, / And bade self-love and social be the same" (317-8).

17.2.4 An Essay on Man: Epistle IV

Summary

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

Notes

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

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

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

Section II (29-92): Section II suggests that happiness is man's end and that it can be attained by all. Happiness is therefore equal which means that it must also be social since, as Pope establishes in the third epistle, man is governed by general, not specific laws. Because happiness is social, it is necessary for the order, peace, and welfare of society. It cannot, however, be located in external goods since these can be unequal. God balances the happiness of mankind by the two passions of hope and fear.

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

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

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

Section VI (149-308): Section VI elucidates the conflict between vice and virtue. Though sometimes vice seems to prevail, it is part of God's order; man should be content to be virtuous. External goods, for example, are not the proper rewards for virtue and are often inconsistent with or destructive of virtue. All the riches, honors, nobility, greatness, fame, and superior talents cannot make man happy without likewise having virtue.

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

Analysis

Despite the significant interpretive problems of the first two epistles, the fourth epistle provides an appropriate conclusion to An Essay on Man, knitting the poem's arguments together and ostensibly demonstrating man's relation to and purpose in the universe. According to Pope's argument, happiness is man's ultimate goal and can only be attained through virtuous behavior. Of course, as he indicates earlier in the poem, the lines between virtue and vice are often blurred. It is therefore important to assign an appropriate reward for virtue: "What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy, / The soul's calm sunshine, and the heart-felt joy, / Is virtue's prize: a better would you fix? / Then give humility a coach and six" (167-70). Pope shows this reward to be a composed serenity free of earthly desires. Indeed, such serenity cannot derive from riches or fame, material goods or currencies which usually serve as an impediment to virtue anyway.

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

Notes

Although the fourth epistle provides a successful conclusion to Pope's ambitious philosophical project, this section is not without its problems. Perhaps most distressing is Pope's argument in Section IV, which dismisses man's concern that too often virtue appears to be punished while vice is rewarded. While this is addressed to an extent in Pope's discussion of material goods, Pope also asserts that God acts by general and not specific laws which apply to the whole, not individual parts. This suggests that all men are treated exactly equally by God. Experience obviously contradicts this assertion, but so does Pope himself. He declares that to satisfy God's hierarchical order as well as man's social order, there must be differences of wealth and rank. He claims that equality of wealth is opposed to God's ways because it would breed discontent among those who deserve greater wealth and status. Though Pope qualifies this by suggesting redress in Heaven, this disparity of wealth and rank—a part of reality—undermine Pope's thesis.

17.3 The Use of Supernatural Machinery in the Rape of the Lock

The Rape of the Lock is Pope's best expression of poetic and satirical genius. The 1st version of The Rape of the Lock was in two cantos, in which pope tried to reconcile two families about a quarrel. But the immense popularity of the poem inspired Pope to enlarge it in five cantos, in which he used supernatural machinery extensively.

The supernatural machinery of the poem is derived from the Rosicrucian doctrine as formulated by Le Comte in Germany in the 17th Century. According to this theory, four elements fire, water, earth and air, were inhabited by four kinds of spirits-Salamanders, Nymphs, Gnomes and sylphs. In this poem Pope does not put all these spirits to function but simply Sylphs and an evil spirit Umbrid are put in action. The sylphs are presented as tiny good spirit with wings. They can change their shape and sex can see the future can inspect the heart of the human being. They are airy and invisible to the human eyes. These good spirits try to protect Belinda. Their head sylph is Ariel.

In the 1st canto the sylph causes a dream to Belinda, the heroine of the poem. The sylph appears in the form of a handsome young man in her dream at the noon time. The guardian sylph addresses Belinda as 'Fairest of mortals' and she is told that she is protected by thousands of spirits who wanders in airy regions. The sylph has caused sleep and dream to Belinda with a special purpose as he wants to convey certain secret truths. The sylph says the Belinda should not consider herself as a common girl but she is someone special. Certain secrets are not revealed to them who are intellectual and skeptics. The secret truths are revealed to women and children who by nature are very innocent. Thousands of sylphs are protecting Belinda so she should feel proud. The first truth the sylph reveals is about the next birth of women. All sylphs before their present existence were beautiful women. When a woman dies, it is only her physical death. Her vanities interest, taste remain the same. Even after their death the interest to play the game of card, to move in decorated chariot, survive as they accompany the beautiful lady for the purpose of protecting her. The sylph further says that basically there are four kinds of women.

1. The women who are quarrelsome after their death, their soul goes to fire and such women become Salamander.
2. Those women who are polite submissive, after their death their soul returns to water and they become Nymphs.
3. Those women who are proud, serious minded, their soul go to Earth and they become Gnome.
4. Those women who are flirt and coquette, after their death, their soul go to air and they become Sylphs.

The second truth is that a woman should not reject the proposal of a man because a time comes when she falls in love with the sylph as the sylph can assume any shape. The third secret truth which the sylph reveals is that women are tempted on some occasions to part with their chastity.

Notes

When they go to the club for ball dance, masquerades, theatre with some treacherous friend on such occasions her virginity is protected by the guidance of the Sylphs but a woman thinks that her sense of honour protects her from parting with virtue. The fourth secret is that some beautiful girls reject the proposal of men and dreams of lords and noblemen imagines themselves as duchess. These women corrupt their minds and heart.

The fifth secret revealed to Belinda is that when women go astray, they are guided by the Sylphs falling from the follies by introducing new temptations to them. The Sylph introduces himself that he is also one such Sylph and he has come to warn her, protect her. The name of this Sylph is Ariel. The Sylph reveals his purpose by saying that while wandering in the air he saw governing star of Belinda, which shows the shadow of some dreadful event which will take place on that day before sunset. It has not been revealed what will happen or where will happen. As a guardian Sylph of Belinda, he gives one warning to her and vanishes from her dream.

Task What function does the poem's supernatural machinery serve?

One reason of the success of the poem is the use of supernatural machinery by Pope. The speech of the sylph echoes Satan's speeches in Paradise Lost, and the heroes speech in the classical epics. The name of the Sylph- Ariel reminds the mischievous airy spirit of Shakespeare's The Tempest. Through the speech of the Sylph Pope satirizes the fashionable women of 18th century, whose virtue seems easily assailable and the Sylph must protect them.

Ariel is not simply satisfied with this. The major function of the sylph is their meeting. The head sylph Ariel calls all sylphs from different earthly regions and first describes their original function. Then he says that they have to do a special function on that day because the virtue of one lady is in danger. To each Sylph he assigns a special job. Brillante, is asked to take care of Belinda's hair and Ariel himself will take care of her lap-dog. Through this Pope passes satire that being the head Sylph he should think of protecting her virtue but he decides to protect her lap-dog.

The presence of the Sylphs also serves the purpose of comic effect. Their attempt to create a mild blow of wind with the help of their wings sounds comic. One Sylph who is overenthusiastic comes in between when Baron is cutting the lock of hair. It gets cut into two but being an airy spirit it is reunited. They also sit on the cards of Ombre so that Belinda may win.

Pope has successfully utilized supernatural machinery not simply by incorporating good spirit but also by incorporating an evil spirit like Umbrid. If good spirit tries to protect Belinda, evil spirit harms Belinda. If Belinda is in melancholy, half of the world is in melancholy so to cause despair and melancholy to Belinda, Umbrid goes to the Cave of Spleen. Umbrid's visit to the under world serves the purpose of one important epic convention. An ideal epic should display some characters visiting either heaven or underworld. This convention is observed by Pope through this supernatural element. His visit also serves the purpose of mock element. In that cave he finds tea-pots walking and talking which is comic. His collecting sighs, sorrows, sobs, tears, and then showering all on Belinda also add to the mock-effect of the poem. The way the Sylphs sit on the cards of Belinda, Umbrid and other evil spirits sit on the weapons of women so that they can use those weapons effectively.

Did u know? The presence of the Sylphs and Umbrid make the reading of the poem interesting. Though they are supernatural, they appear as if they are human beings with flesh and blood.

17.4 Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock; As a Social Satire N as a Mock Epic

17.4.1 The Rape of the Lock–Social Satire

As Shakespeare is the poet of man, Pope is a poet of society. “The Rape of the Lock” is a social document because it mirrors contemporary society and contains a social satire, too. Pope paints about England in 18th century. The whole panorama of “The Rape of the Lock” revolves around the false standard of 18th century. Pope satirizes the young girls and boys, aristocratic women and men, their free time activities, nature of husbands and wives, the professional judges and politicians of the day.

Pope clearly depicts the absurdities and the frivolities of the fashionable circle of the 18th century England. The world of Belinda – the world of fashion is a trivial world. The whole life of Belinda is confined to sleeping, make-up, enjoyment and alluring the lords. There are no transcendental elements in her life. This life is marked by ill-nature, affection, mischievousness, coquetry, yielding and submissive nature, fierce and unruly nature, infidelity, cheapness, meanness, trivialities and frivolities etc. Belinda represents all the fashion struck women, busy in such stupidities.

The gallants of the time have not been spared by Pope. Baron not only represents Peter but also typifies the aristocratic gallants of the age.

Did u know? Pope satirizes man’s nature that is always weak at beauty. Men sacrifice everything at the altar of beauty and even the most intelligent man behaves foolishly when he fall a victim to beauty.

In order to make his satire sharper and all the more effective, Pope introduces the aerial machinery, which facilitates the satire. Through this weapon, the poet throws in contrast the weaknesses of the fashionable women of that age. He satirizes women who are interested in fashionable life and its pursuits and who go on exercising their evil influence even after their death. For the sake of worldly grandeur, they can bid farewell even to their chastity and honour. He satirizes women of fiery, coquettish mischievous and yielding nature and gives them different names. It also provides the poet with an opportunity to satirize the class consciousness of women.

All the women and beaus gather at the place where they exchange talks on trivial things e.g. visits, balls, films, motions, looks, eyes, etc. and “at every word, a reputation dies”.

“A beau and witling perished in the throng,

One died in metaphor, and one in song.”

Man’s favourite activity is to take suffered women to play with fan. There is singing, dancing, laughing, ogling, etc. and nothing else. Women are busy alluring the dukes and lords. The poet reflects the hollowness of men in the character of Sir Plume who is coward, foolish and senseless, lacking courage. Women are on the whole irresolute and they have made toyshops of their hearts. They have even illicit relations with the beaus. Women are meant only for the entertainment of men, who play toy with them.

Pope also satirizes of the husbands and wives of the day. Husbands always suspect their wives. They think that their wives have been merry making with their lovers.

Wives are also not virtuous at all. They love their lap-dogs more than their husbands. And the death of husbands is not more shocking than the death of a lap dog or the breakage of a china vessel.

Notes

So through the medium of satire, Pope paints a picture of 18th century English society. His satire is didactic and impersonal. It is not inflicted against any person or individual, rather against the society and that, too, owing to some moral faults. He is dissatisfied with the society around which he wants to reform. The society he pictured is the aristocratic group of 18th century fashionable English society. But thee are several allied subjects, too, on which he inflicts his satire. For example, he satirized the judged that make hasty decisions.

"The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,

And wretches hang that jurymen may dine"

He also satirized those friends whose friendship is but lust, those politicians who do not have a deeper insight and cannot see beyond the shows and take steps just for their own interests and ends etc.

To sum up, the poem is a reflection of this artificial and hollow life, painted with a humorous and delicate satire. Pope's satire is intellectual and full of wit and epigram. Is picture of Addison as Atticus though unjust and prompted by malice, is a brilliant piece of satire.

17.4.2 The Rape of the Lock as a Mock Epic Poem

Pope demonstrates two quite separate influences in The Rape of the Lock: mock epic and Horation satire. But since these two are quite antipodal—at least in terms of style and conventions—we shall examine not only instances of their presence, but the manner in which they are combined.

Just as history provides the most suitable material for the epic poem, Pope's use of a contemporary history—necessarily of lesser import—is equally befitting the mock epic. Accordingly, rather than depicting kings or majestic men and their distinguished deeds, intending to provoke our admiration, with perfect irony, Pope takes for his mock epic a vain female as hero, displaying her lowly trials and provoking our scorn. Here then we find our first common element, for Horace also is concerned with contemporary issues, though he certainly chooses an entirely different form for its exposition. Indeed, When Trebatius warns him away from satire, suggesting, ". . . if such great love of writing grips you, think big;/sing about unbeaten Caesar's deeds, and be rewarded," which certainly smacks of contemporary epic, Horace politely declines: "I'm insufficient; we all can't write of battle lines."

Another instance in which The Rape of the Lock makes use of epic convention and differs from Horace's Satires, is the introductory invocation of the Muse. Though this has no parallel in the Satires, Horace does begin the first epistle, in Book I of Epistles with: "My very first Muse sang of you." It's inclusion, by Pope, is not only necessitated by the mock epic form, but also by the ending of the work: Belinda wins immortality by means of the poem itself—muse related—as well as by the lock rising to form a new heavenly body: "But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,/Tho' mark'd by none but quick Poetic Eyes," which is essentially saying the same thing: her immortality is owing to poetry.

Even Horace himself acknowledges, also in the Epistles: "It is the Muse who gives immortality." Pope also uses the initial reference to the Muse to establish the presence of the supernatural, though instead of the classical gods providing the machinery, inciting to battle and protecting the mortal hero—as would be the case in epic convention—we find the Sylphs of Rosicrucian Philosophy. The Sylphs, of course, proved a perfect choice, for not only do the lack the reverence of classical gods, thus proving more suitable protectorates of our unworthy hero, but they also brought with them a literary connection with erotica, particularly in Le Comte de Gabalis.

The foulness of language, in Book I Satire 2 is in no way indicative of Horace's other satires, but it does, nevertheless, demonstrate by exaggeration—just as Book II teaches by exaggeration—that the language of Horace is the language of the street: ". . . my things are more like conversation," as well as " . . . talk is all it is." This is Horace himself speaking, in Book I, of his own work. In the final Satire of that book, written at a later date, this idea had been slightly modified:

The work must be concise . . .

The language should be grave at times, but often funny, sometimes rhetorical and poetic, sometimes urbanely smooth.

Here we see something slightly more reminiscent of The Rape of the Lock, but nevertheless, the style of language found in Horace's Satires— even in the most poetic instance, is far below that of Pope's mock epic. This is hardly surprising, for the foundation of the former is Old Greek Comedy and the latter Greek Epic. If there is no similarity in diction, the low, mundane content described by that diction, in The Rape of the Lock, is certainly reminiscent of Horace.

We might now turn to Belinda. We have already said that she is a character whose heroic propensities are a belittlement of the epic hero, and thus ideal for the mock epic, but now we shall examine her thematic importance.

"Still, false desires fool a large proportion of mankind, / they'll tell you, 'Nothing's enough. What we own we are."

Although here Horace refers to money, it seems wholly appropriate to see this as applicable to Belinda, for her lock represents not only her vanity, but the vanity of women, and so "what we own we are" clearly explains the importance of the theft. And yet, since that importance is but shallowness, the reader is witness to the irony of the affair. Likewise, those guilty of the numerous foibles exposed by Horace are often ignorant not only of their guilt but of the foibles themselves. It is this exposure which is key to Horace's method, and which we find also in The Rape of the Lock.

Certainly, Belinda—and the general woman she represents—is as much ignorant of her own guilt as of the crime itself. Indeed, the stand Pope seems to be taking is one which can be seen all through both books of Horace's Satires, namely that happiness comes not from external but internal sources—and only then when the doctrine of moderation is present: "Eating's highest pleasure lies in you,/ not in the flavour of your food." In fact, the "simple life," (moderation in all things) takes on great thematic importance for it unifies all eight satires of Book II. And it is Belinda vanity, her concern with the pleasures of the external world which ties, thematically, The Rape of the Lock with the Satires of Horace.

Another connection which Belinda brings to mind between The Rape of the Lock and the Satires is the idea that bad example teaches. This is essential to both Pope and Horace. Because of the implicit nature of the lesson in The Rape of the Lock, the poem itself must stand as testament to the above maxim. Horace though, in typical conversational and autobiographical clarity, declares: . . . if perhaps I laugh too much at people, grant me my right and your indulgence. The best of father's made me this way. By the use of bad examples he taught me how to live.

We should also bear in mind that Belinda is young, and that Pope, in the introductory letter to Mrs. Arabella Fermor—the real life Belinda— says of his poem: . . . it was intended only to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humour enough to laugh not only at their sex's unguarded follies, but at their own.

Certainly, Pope is being extremely diplomatic here, for if the young ladies had good sense, then the source of The Rape of the Lock would never have existed. The point though is that Pope speaks of "young ladies," (my italics). This satire not only targets the young as its subject, but also the young as its audience, who should learn from the work. This too is reminiscent of Horace: "if someone now decreed the tastiness of roasted gull,/Rome's youth, docile students of debauchery, would obey." Here Horace not only depicts the young as being impressionable, but logically, because of that impressionability, they are in most need of moral lesson; and Horation satire—with its aim not so much to attack vice but to present vice and thus the lesson, as well as the absence of causticity—is the perfect vehicle for that lesson, as well as for that group of people.

As we have seen, even though style and conventions separate mock epic from Horace's satires, Pope has managed, in The Rape of the Lock, to fuse the two. From epic we have high language,

Notes

supernatural machinery, battle and war, the journey to the underworld and all the rest, transported down to the level of mock epic and becoming, there, high language-low content, Sylphs, drawing room wars of the sexes and a battle of frowns, snuff and a bodkin, and a journey to the Cave of Spleen.

From Horace we have the exposing of folly not with malice or anger, but with an authorial smile: "But tell me, what law is violated if someone laughs/while speaking truth?" (S.1) Secondly, though Book I of Satires is almost obtuse in it directness, Book II, representing a more artistically mature Horace—and so best exemplifying his style, demonstrates a more indirect and more comic method of teaching. This is achieved by exaggerating the moral instruction, and by using comic sometimes absurd characters to voice those lessons. We might conclude, at risk of oversimplification, that The Rape of the Lock is composed of mock epic elements and style and the Horatian attitude.

When Pope called the poem "an heroicomical poem", he intended to mean it a mock-epic. He could assume that his eighteenth century readers, educated in the classical and knowledgeable about epic, would recognise that it was a mockery. Besides, the mock-epic, which Boileau had established as a distinctive poetic genre with his poem Le Lutrin, was well-suited to the eighteenth century. Unlike the burlesque, which lampoons the epic, it plays off a high sense of the heroic against the diminished scale of contemporary life. In this confrontation, Pope might be expected to have a clear allegiance to the classical epic poets. His veneration of the classical antiquity is on record in the Essay on Criticism, and his low opinion of the general character of contemporary life is evident in the Moral Essays and Intimations of Horace. It is worthy of remark therefore that in The Rape of the Lock Pope presents a world dominated by trivialities in terms of an epic grandeur. The fashionable society of the beaux and belles is not only allowed the defects but also the advantages of its scale. In the midst of its ironies the poem delights in the exotic preparations and instruments of Belinda's toilet and in the exquisiteness of the sylphs. It extends rapturous complimentary to Belinda and expresses genuine sympathy for the pathetic fate of the belles it mocks.

Many of Pope's jokes in the poem derive their significance from the epic tradition. Epic subjects were grand; for instance, the Trojan War (Iliad), the founding theme (Aeneid), the Fall of Man (Paradise Lost) were narrated at length in twelve or more books, each consisting of several hundred lines. The epic hero also traversed a wide geographical area encountering battles, romantic interludes, journeyed by land and sea and even descended into the underworld. From on high the gods watched the human drama, intervening when they chose at critical moments. Success for the hero was dependent upon the subplot of divine intrigue as well as his own courage and skill. The mock heroic imitated the most recognisable aspects of the epic, its form and elevated language. It used an inflated style to ridicule the pretensions and pomposity of minor quarrel. Pope also borrowed elaborate phrases and similes from the great epics of the western tradition. The joke lies in his applying this elevated language to "the life of the modern ladies in the idle town", as he deprecatingly described the subject of "The Rape of the Lock" in a letter to a lady friend.

Pope consciously imitates the epic opening in his first twelve lines, which may be called the invocation in the approved epic manner. He too will 'sing' his subject whose importance he indicates by inverted syntax and elevated language: "dire offence", "mighty contest", "tasks so bold". He addresses the muse in order to invoke inspiration. His tone does gather declamatory epic ring as he commands the goddess: "Say what strange motive…?" At some points we begin to sense that Pope is not mocking the epic form so much as laughing at his subject. Once we realise that we are reading a mock-epic, it casts a different light on the apparent solemnity and dignity of Pope's propositions and invocation. The first hint of the mock-epic comes from the third line of the poem when Pope credits a human being, Caryll, rather than the muse with inspiring his poem. The lines from five to six have the effect of an anticlimax:

"Slight is the subject, but not so the praise If she inspire and approve my lays."

As for the supernatural machinery, which neoclassical criticism considers indispensable for an epic, Pope reveals remarkable inventiveness. The sylphs of "The Rape of the Lock" are Pope's mocking recreation of the gods who watch over the heroes of epics and guide their fortune. It is nicely fitting

that Pope's supernatural beings, who are supposed to imitate Homer's deities and Milton's angels, are tiny, frail and powerless. Although they are an amalgam of epic machinery, Rosicrucian lore, an English tale…, they are essentially Pope's inventions. As for epic battles, the game of ombre at the centre of the poem is presented in terms of a mighty epic contest, catching repeated echoes of Trojan War and the war in the heavens. As for the epic underworld, there is an effective counterpart in the Cave of Speen in "The Rape of the Lock", which is contrasted with the Golden glittering beauty of Belinda's delightful environment.

Pope was also mindful of the fact that a mock-epic should have a moral just as an epic does. Clarissa's speech in "The Rape of the Lock" opens out the moral of the poem about the fashionable society. The speech can be taken as an attempt to redefine for contemporary women a concept of honour, which apply to male epic heroes. In the world of belles, honour becomes courage to face decay with humour and duty, to use the power of beauty well.

Pope's age is known as the "Augustan age," the first half of the eighteenth century saw an explosive rise in literary production. Due to the influence of Enlightenment thought, literary works during this period often focused on explicitly political and social themes, allowing for an increase in the production of political writings of all genres. Among the most popular genres were both moral works (sermons, essays, dialogues, etc.) and satire. Satire in particular flourished in a variety of forms: prose, poetry, drama. Some of the satires produced during this period commented on the general flaws of the human condition while others specifically critiqued certain individuals and policies. All, however, were transparent statements about the greater political and social environment of the eighteenth century.

During the neoclassical impulse of the period, eighteenth-century satirists described themselves as the heirs of the Roman poets Horace and Juvenal. Horatian satire tends to take a gentle and more sympathetic approach towards the satiric subject, which it identifies as folly. Augustan examples of Horatian satire include Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock (1714) and Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726). By contrast Juvenalian satire identified the object of its satire as evil, launching a contemptuous invective to ridicule it. Characterized by irony and sarcasm, this satiric mode rejected humor in favor of moral outrage. Eighteenth-century examples of Juvenalian satire include Swift's A Modest Proposal (1729) and his misogynist poems such as "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1731), "The Progress of Beauty" (1719-20), and "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1732).

One of the most popular satiric modes during the Augustan period was the mock epic, a literary form that creates a burlesque of the classical epic. The satirist imports the formula characteristic of the epic—the invocation of a deity, supernatural machinery, etc.—to discuss a trivial subject. The use of classical epic devices thereby establishes an ironic contrast between the work's structure and its content, exposing the triviality of the satirical subject. The best-known mock epics in the English language are John Dryden's MacFlecknoe (1676), an attack on Thomas Shadwell and Pope's The Rape of the Lock. Pope's The Dunciad (1728, 1742) also took mock-heroic form and drew on Dryden's satire on Shadwell to attack Lewis Theobald (1728) and, later, Colley Cibber (1742).

Several like-minded Augustan satirists formed the Scriblerus Club, founded in 1712. Its members included Jonathan Swift; Alexander Pope; John Gay; John Arbuthnot; Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke; and Thomas Parnell. Their professed object was to satirize the abuses of learning, which led to the publication of The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus (1741). Both Swift's Gulliver's Travels and Pope's The Dunciad grew out of projects for this group.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Who is Shock?

   (a) Belinda's horse
   (b) Belinda's lapdog
   (c) The Baron's horse
   (d) The poet's muse

Notes

2. At what time do "sleepless lovers" awake in this poem?
   (a) Dawn (b) Noon
   (c) Tea-time (d) Midnight
3. Who inspires Belinda's dream in the first canto?
   (a) The muse (b) The Baron
   (c) Ariel (d) Umbriel
4. To what are Belinda's eyes repeatedly compared?
   (a) The sun (b) Stars
   (c) Flames (d) Gems
5. To what do the four types of supernatural beings correspond?
   (a) Spades, hearts, clubs, and diamonds (b) Ace, king, queen, and jack
   (c) Earth, air, fire, and water (d) North, south, east, and west
6. What does Belinda wear around her neck?
   (a) A cross (b) A locket
   (c) A ribbon (d) A ruby
7. Where is the party held?
   (a) Cheapside (b) St. James Park
   (c) The Tower of London (d) Hampton Court Palace
8. Who wins the hand of ombre?
   (a) Belinda (b) The Baron
   (c) Ariel (d) The Queen
9. What beverage is served after the card game ends?
   (a) Tea (b) Coffee
   (c) Wine (d) Brandy
10. Who arms the Baron with a pair of scissors?
    (a) Belinda (b) Sir plume
    (c) Lord Petre (d) Clarissa
11. Who gets accidentally cut by the scissors?
    (a) The Baron (b) Clarissa
    (c) One of the Sylphs (d) Shock
12. Whither does Umbriel journey?
    (a) Hades (b) The Cave of Spleen
    (c) The Cave of Despair (d) The Cave of Envy
13. What does Thalestris think the Baron will do with the lock?
    (a) Show it off to all their friends (b) Have it set into a ring
    (c) Neither of the above (d) Both of the above
14. What effect does Sir Plume's speech have on the Baron?
    (a) It convinces him to return the lock
    (b) It makes him feel guilty for what he has done
    (c) It encourages him to propose to Belinda
    (d) It has no effect

15. What happens to the lock of hair at the end of the poem?
    (a) It is returned to its rightful owner
    (b) It is set into a ring
    (c) It is offered to the poet as a token of gratitude
    (d) It is turned into a constellation

17.5 Summary

- Alexander Pope was born in London in 1688. As a Roman Catholic living during a time of Protestant consolidation in England.
- The action of the poem begins with the rising sun awakening the residents of a wealthy household.
- The opening of The Rape of the Lock establishes the poem's mock-heroic tone.
- Pope relies on martial language to situate his poem within the epic tradition and reinforce his satiric manipulation of the genre.
- Pope has successfully utilized supernatural machinery not simply by incorporating good spirit but also by incorporating an evil spirit like Umbrid.
- Pope demonstrates two quite separate influences in The Rape of the Lock: mock epic and Horation satire.

17.6 Keywords

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

Amorous : Feelling sexual desire.

Anxious : Experiencing worry, nervousness or unease.

Culminate : Reach or be at the meridian.

17.7 Review Questions

1. What are some of the images that recur through the poem and what significance do they have?
2. Is pope being ironic when he treats Belinda's beauty as something almost divine?
3. To what degree can the poem be read as a sexual allegory?
4. What are the distinctive formal features of Pope's poetry?
5. How is the heroic couplet suited to Pope's subject matter, or to satire more generally?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (b)	2. (b)	3. (c)
4. (a)	5. (c)	6. (a)
7. (d)	8. (a)	9. (b)
10. (d)	11. (c)	12. (b)
13. (d)	14. (d)	15. (d)

Notes

17.8 Further Readings

Books

Alexander Pope: Selected poetry and prose	— Alexander Pope
Alexander Pope	— Paul Baines
Thomas Gray: a life	— Robert L Mack
Elegy written in a Country Church Yard	— Thomas Gray
William Blake	— G.K.Chesterton

Online links

http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/rapeofthelock/context.html

http://theotherpages.org/poems/locknote.html

Unit 18: Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Notes

CONTENTS

Objectives

Introduction

18.1 Introduction to the Author

18.2 Text of the Poem: Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

18.2.1 Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard Summary

18.3 Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Discussion and Analysis

18.4 Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Theme

18.4.1 Search for Self

18.4.2 Class Conflict

18.5 Summary

18.6 Keywords

18.7 Review Questions

18.8 Further Readings

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about the biography of Thomas Gray
- Discuss the analysis and summary part of the poem "Elegy written in a country church yard"
- Explain theme of "Elegy written in a country churchyard".

Introduction

The title *Far from the Madding Crowd* comes from Thomas Gray's famous 18th-century poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard": "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, Their sober wishes never learned to stray; Along the cool sequestered vale of life they kept the noiseless tenor of Their way." By alluding to Gray's poem, Hardy evokes the rural culture that, by Hardy's lifetime had become threatened with extinction at the hands of ruthless industrialization. His novel thematizes the importance of man's connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Gabriel Oak embodies Hardy's ideal of a life in harmony with the forces of the natural world.

The novel also contemplates the relationship between luck, or chance, and moral responsibility: Why should we live a morally upright life if tragedy strikes us all equally anyway? While some characters, like Gabriel, are always responsible and cautious, others, like Sergeant Troy, are careless

Notes

and destructive. Hardy was very much influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin, who maintained that the development of a biological species and, by extension, of human society and history is shaped by chance and not by the design of a God.

Another theme is the danger and destruction inherent in romantic love and marriage; Hardy exposes the inconsistencies, irrationalities, and betrayals that often plague romantic relationships. Bathsheba begins the novel an independent woman, but by falling in love with Troy, she nearly destroys her life. Similarly, Hardy presents us with many couples in which one partner is more in love than the other, and he shows what disastrous events result from this inequality.

18.1 Introduction to the Author

Thomas Gray (26 December 1716–30 July 1771) was a poet, letter-writer, classical scholar and professor at Cambridge University.

Thomas Gray was born in Cornhill, London, the son of an exchange broker and a milliner. He was the fifth of 12 children and the only child of Philip and Dorothy Gray to survive infancy. He lived with his mother after she left his abusive father. He was educated at Eton College where his uncle was one of the masters. He recalled his schooldays as a time of great happiness, as is evident in his Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College. Gray was a delicate and scholarly boy who spent his time reading and avoiding athletics. It was probably fortunate for the sensitive Gray that he was able to live in his uncle's household rather than at college. He made three close friends at Eton: Horace Walpole, son of Prime Minister Robert Walpole, Thomas Ashton, and Richard West. The four prided themselves on their sense of style, their sense of humour, and their appreciation of beauty.

In 1734 Gray went up to Peterhouse, Cambridge. He found the curriculum dull. He wrote letters to his friends listing all the things he disliked: the masters ("mad with Pride") and the Fellows ("sleepy, drunken, dull, illiterate Things.") Supposedly he was intended for the law, but in fact he spent his time as an undergraduate reading classical and modern literature and playing Vivaldi and Scarlatti on the harpsichord for relaxation.

In 1738 he accompanied his old school-friend Walpole on his Grand Tour of Europe, possibly at Walpole's expense. The two fell out and parted in Tuscany, because Walpole wanted to attend fashionable parties and Gray wanted to visit all the antiquities. However, they were reconciled a few years later.

Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" was first published in 1751. Gray may, however, have begun writing the poem in 1742, shortly after the death of his close friend Richard West. An elegy is a poem which laments the dead. Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is noteworthy in that it mourns the death not of great or famous people, but of common men. The speaker of this poem sees a country churchyard at sunset, which impels him to meditate on the nature of human mortality. The poem invokes the classical idea of memento mori, a Latin phrase which states plainly to all mankind, "Remember that you must die." The speaker considers the fact that in death, there is no difference between great and common people. He goes on to wonder if among the lowly people buried in the churchyard there had been any natural poets or politicians whose talent had simply never been discovered or nurtured. This thought leads him to praise the dead for the honest, simple lives that they lived.

Gray did not produce a great deal of poetry; the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," however, has earned him a respected and deserved place in literary history. The poem was written at the end of the Augustan Age and at the beginning of the Romantic period, and the poem has characteristics associated with both literary periods. On the one hand, it has the ordered, balanced phrasing and rational sentiments of neoclassical poetry. On the other hand, it tends toward the emotionalism and individualism of the Romantic poets; most importantly, it idealizes and elevates the common man.

18.2 Text of the Poem: Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Notes

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share,

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,

Notes

Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

The applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbad: nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbad to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,

Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Notes

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.

Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away,
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn;

'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high.
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove;

Notes

Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

'One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

'The next with dirges due in sad array
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne,-
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'
The Epitaph

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melacholy marked him for her own.
Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.
No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),
The bosom of his Father and his God.

18.2.1 Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard Summary

In the first stanza, the speaker observes the signs of a country day drawing to a close: a curfew bell ringing, a herd of cattle moving across the pasture, and a farm laborer returning home. The speaker is then left alone to contemplate the isolated rural scene. The first line of the poem sets a distinctly somber tone: the curfew bell does not simply ring; it "knells"—a term usually applied to bells rung at a death or funeral. From the start, then, Gray reminds us of human mortality.

Did u know? The second stanza sustains the somber tone of the first: the speaker is not mournful, but pensive, as he describes the peaceful landscape that surrounds him. Even the air is characterized as having a "solemn stillness."

The sound of an owl hooting intrudes upon the evening quiet. We are told that the owl "complains"; in this context, the word does not mean "to whine" or "grumble," but "to express sorrow." The owl's call, then, is suggestive of grief. Note that at no point in these three opening stanzas does Gray directly refer to death or a funeral; rather, he indirectly creates a funereal atmosphere by describing just a few mournful sounds.

It is in the fourth stanza that the speaker directly draws our attention to the graves in the country churchyard. We are presented with two potentially conflicting images of death. Line 14 describes the heaps of earth surrounding the graves; in order to dig a grave, the earth must necessarily be disrupted. Note that the syntax of this line is slightly confusing. We would expect this sentence to read "Where the turf heaves"—not "where heaves the turf." Gray has inverted the word order. Just as the earth has been disrupted, the syntax imitates the way in which the earth has been disrupted. But by the same token, the "rude Forefathers" buried beneath the earth seem entirely at peace: we are told that they are laid in "cells," a term which reminds us of the quiet of a monastery, and that they "sleep."

If the "Forefathers" are sleeping, however, the speaker reminds us that they will never again rise from their "beds" to hear the pleasurable sounds of country life that the living do. The term "lowly beds" describes not only the unpretentious graves in which the forefathers are buried, but the humble conditions that they endured when they were alive.

Notes The speaker then moves on to consider some of the other pleasures the dead will no longer enjoy: the happiness of home, wife, and children.

The dead will also no longer be able to enjoy the pleasures of work, of ploughing the fields each day. This stanza points to the way in which the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" contains elements of both Augustan and Romantic poetry. Poetry that describes agriculture—as this one does—is called georgic. Georgic verse was extremely popular in the eighteenth century. Note, however, that Gray closely identifies the farmers with the land that they work. This association of man and nature is suggestive of a romantic attitude. The georgic elements of the stanza almost demand that we characterize it as typical of the eighteenth century, but its tone looks forward to the Romantic period.

Task Write down the significant features of the poem, "Elegy written on a country churchyard".

The next four stanzas caution those who are wealthy and powerful not to look down on the poor. These lines warn the reader not to slight the "obscure" "destiny" of the poor—the fact that they will never be famous or have long histories, or "annals," written about them.

This stanza invokes the idea of memento mori (literally, a reminder of mortality). The speaker reminds the reader that regardless of social position, beauty, or wealth, all must eventually die.

The speaker also challenges the reader not to look down on the poor for having modest, simple graves. He suggests, moreover, that the elaborate memorials that adorn the graves of the "Proud" are somehow excessive. In this context, the word "fretted" in line 39 has a double meaning: on the one hand, it can refer to the design on a cathedral ceiling; on the other hand, it can suggest that there is something "fretful," or troublesome, about the extravagant memorials of the wealthy.

The speaker observes that nothing can bring the dead back to life, and that all the advantages that the wealthy had in life are useless in the face of death. Neither elaborate funeral monuments nor impressive honors can restore life. Nor can flattery in some way be used to change the mind of death. Note here Gray's use of personification in characterizing both "flattery" and "death"—as though death has a will or mind of its own.

Notes

18.3 Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Discussion and Analysis

The elegy is the most natural form of poetry because of its disassociation with metrical form, and lack of requirement of pattern, cadence or repetition. Within the elegy, Strand and Boland point out how the poet is permitted to express loss, mourn for the dead, and list the deceased person's virtues, while seeking consolations beyond the momentary event.

The elegy is the most natural form of poetry because it heeds to customs and is guided by laws and codes, which are part of the history and tradition of the society in which the poem has evolved. The works of Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" demonstrate how the elegy is written in a natural form because of the forces guiding this type of poetic writing.

Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is a poem clearly demonstrating the history and tradition of the society. Roberts and Jacobs express how religious, personal, political, and philosophical thought can become integrated into poetry. To begin with, these settings-religious, personal, political, and philosophical thought-become evident clearly by Gray who is able to write freely within his Elegy.

Did u know? Gray is able to express how all must die, and it does not matter if one is rich or poor, noble or a commoner, or a poet or a politician. Gray is also able to elevate the common man with the use of the elegy and freedom of wording and poetic style.

Gray gives clues within the first four stanzas of death by writing about the approaching night. Stanza one states, "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day. The Ploughman homeward plods and leaves the world to darkness and to me." Stanza two reads, "Now fades the glimmering landscape and drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds," which are more clues to the approaching darkness.

Task Define the term Elegy.

Then in stanza four Gray writes, "Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower/the moping owl does to the moon complain," which demonstrates the night approaching because owls come out into the darkness, and also signifying the wealthy people because of the ivy-mantled tower. Then within stanza four, Gray continues, "Each in his narrow cell for ever laid/The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

This undoubtedly and naturally demonstrates the death of the forefathers and the men being put to rest within their tombs. Also, the use of the term forefathers gives clues that these men were of various backgrounds-farmers, politicians, fathers, rich, and poor.

Thomas Gray (1716–1771) was born in London and studied at Eton and Cambridge. With such a scanty production, Gray holds a key position in the history of English poetry. It is universally believed that Thomas Gray is well popular because of 'Elegy.' The composition began after the death of a very close associate of him, his school friend West.

It is about a simple unnamed village people who lie buried in a quiet churchyard, in the village of Stoke Poges. Gray sums up his entire experience of life in this poem- the melancholy, the boredom, the obscurity and lack of achievement, as yet presents itself in a what which seems tolerable and appreciable too. In this poem, you will find a complete set of expressions of his personal life, his despairs and frustrations.

Stanza 1

The evening bell ringing in the church marked the departure of the day. The cattle were slowly moving to shelter, as they passed through the fields, and so did the farmers, who were walking heavily after the day's hard work. As they went home, they left the poet who was sitting in the churchyard also in the growing darkness of the advancing evening.

Curfew- In medieval times, curfew refers to- the ringing of a bell to prompt people to extinguish fires and lights. The ringing of the evening bell in the church marks the end of the day (feel the expression: the parting day).

The first paragraph sets the mood of the poem, gray leaves a cliché of romanticism blended with satire.

Stanza 2

The faintly lighted landscape is slowly fading and becoming invisible to the eye. The evening breeze has stopped and the air holds stillness, except the beetles, making a monotonous humming sound. Also one could hear the jingling sound of the bells round the neck of the sleepy cattle when they move their head.

Stanza 3

As the evening sets in, the owl complains to the moon about her inconvenience. She complained about the disturbance created as someone was passing by its nest from her ancient reign, an ivy mantled tower.

Stanza 4

Beneath the shade of the yew tree and elm tree, gnarled and knotted through the ages, lies the narrow burials of the rustic villagers of Hamlet. Each of them sleeps for an eternal period of time in their narrow grave surrounded by grassy plot and heaps of earth.

Stanza 5

The poet laments over the fact that these men and women, use to wake up by listening to the chirping of the birds, the trumpet sounds made by the cock and their echoes. But now, not even the mist of the morning breeze and the call of the birds and animals shall make them rise from their grave.

Stanza 6

No more shall one find the hearth (fireplace) burning. Those beautiful glimpses of children climbing to their father's knees to have the first kiss, the affectionate show of love and the envied kiss shall never to be seen again.

Stanza 7

These rustic men had done a lot of harvesting in their lifetime. The hard lumps of earth succumbed to heir sickle, as they merrily ploughed the fields with their strong stroke of axe.

Stanza 8

Let not Greatness and ambition mock these people by saying that they were totally useless. They were very happy and content with their 'homely joys'.

Stanza 9

Let not Grandeur (referring to grand people) look at them with contempt and smile at the petty records of life of these people.

Stanza 10

All those fame and power which great people always boast off, the beauty, the riches and the wealth they possess finally becomes the same during the last moments of life. They to die in the same were as these rustics have died. All the glories finally find its eternal way into the grave.

Notes

Stanza 11

These people are not to be blamed, if no ornamental edifice rises over their graves. Like the graves of great men, they do not possess the arch and the majestic decorations, neither thousands of people gather and praises about them.

Beautiful decoration across the graves of great men and praise worthy speeches will not bring them back to their mansions. The breath of life has left them and they are all dead, neither words of honor nor the tricks of flattery will entertain the cold ears of the dead.

Stanza 12

There must have been in this unnoticed place, amongst the myriad villagers filled with spiritual, moral and heavenly inspiration capable of ruling and Empire or write excellent poetry , only if had been patronized fully.

Stanza 13

However the intellectual capabilities of these dead rustics never had the chance to bloom. They died strange to all riches. Poverty was the reason that froze down all the noble inspirations and ambition.

Stanza 14

The dead rustics of the village are compared to the bright gems and pearls that lay hidden and unseen in the depths of ocean. They are akin to the beautiful flowers that bloom in the jungles whose fragrance gets wasted and they fade away unnoticed.

Stanza 15

The graves of this village might shelter brave heroes like Hampden, the famous parliamentarian and a martyr, who faced the tyrant King Charles I. Here may also lay, someone akin to the talent of Milton or Cromwell.

Stanza 16

Some of them might have been great legislatures, greeted with the loud cheers of the morally pure senators. Some would bring prosperity to the country by eliminating poverty and thus their great deeds would be recorded in the history of their nation.

Stanza 17

Their bad luck not only forbade their virtue or talents to grow, but also their vises and crime. They never thought of killing their brothers for the throne and keep themselves away from works of charity.

Stanza 18

These poor rustics were denied by destiny to shine in life by means of tricks. Ambitious people try to obtain great favor and praise by writing words of price or means of flattery. Thus they were escaped from 'killing their conscience" for the sake of getting patronage.

Stanza 19

The villagers led a very simple and secluded life; they kept themselves away from the bustle of city life where people compete for wealth, power and fame. They never cherished high aspirations or ambition. They lived in peace and solitude and didn't hanker after fame and prosperity.

Stanza 20

No ornamental decorations could be raised over their trophies; these memorials didn't have any rhymes of praise and lacked beautiful sculpture. Yet to protect their honor from an insult they were put forth on their graveyards so that passerby may show some respect towards their grave.

Stanza 21

The records of life that could be found on their tombs were written by some educated person of their village. Texts and sayings from Bible were scattered over their tombs which gave some spiritual consolidation to the rustics to enable them to meet death cheerfully.

Stanza 22

The poets explain the reason of memorials raised over the grave of the poor rustics. No one wishes to get an oblivion curse. Life is full of struggle, people love to life and no one wishes to die without casting a regretful look behind. Even the poor when they die wish to be remembered long after their death.

Stanza 23

Even the parting soul wants his dear ones to shed some tears. This happens to be a natural wish, the longing of man when he closes his eyes to confront death. Even when these rustics had turned into ashes they wished that their account of life and death is inscribed in their tombs.

Stanza 24

The poet who was sympathetic towards these villagers gave an account of their life. They were not honored in their life, but the poet related their entire tale of life in these lines. What would happen if someone close to the poet would inquire about him after his death?

Stanza 25

The poet visualizes that after his departure from this world some white haired peasants might say, “Often he was seen at daybreak, walking fast and sweeping the dew drops with his feet and reaching the churchyard at daybreak.

Stanza 26

At the foot of that bending tree, which has grown old with the passage of time and having its roots risen out from earth? The poet stretches himself in a lazy manner during the noon, and ponders over the dead rustic by looking at the soft murmuring brook.

Stanza 27

The poet, Thomas Gray wondered close by the woods (the he would loiter aimlessly, sad and depressed. He was lonely, as appeared from his face. He was terribly worried about the hopelessness of love which made him go crazy.

Stanza 28

Some old peasant might say some morning that he could not be found on the hills which he used to walk along, nor could he to walk along the heath. Another morning came and he was not found resting under the shade of the old tree near the brook, neither in the lawn not in the woods.

Stanza 29

On the final morning, his dead body was carried in a funeral procession with funeral lamentation, slowly leading its way to the church. Let the passerby read the epitaph on his grave stone beneath the old hawthorn tree.

Stanza 30

Here the poet lies buried upon the lap of Earth. He was neither famous nor fortunate enough to acquire wealth. He was knowledgeable although he was born in a modest family. His life was devoid of happiness as he was destined to live a life of sorrow and misery.

Stanza 31

He was indeed a sincere soul, liberal and charitable. He was well rewarded from God. He gifted and left all that he had at the disposal of the miserable and poor people. In return, he received the love and affection of God and also of his fellow friends.

Stanza 32

No one need to further inquire about his merits and faults at the same time. His merits lies in the bosom of God waiting to be rewarded with his faults and weaknesses waits for the Judgment Day when he will be punished for his treason.

Notes

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. When was Thomas Gray born?
   (a) 3 June 1688 (b) 1 January 1701
   (c) 21 July 1714 (d) 26 December 1716
2. Where was Thomas Gray born?
   (a) Bristol (b) Cardiff
   (c) Liverpool (d) London
3. Where did Thomas Gray have his education in 1725-1734?
   (a) Queen Mary School (b) Kilkenny Grammar School
   (c) Eton College (d) Holy Family School
4. Which of the following subjects did Thomas Gray dislike?
   (a) French (b) Greek
   (c) Latin (d) Mathematics
5. Which poem of Thomas Gray has the words, "where ignorance is bliss,/' Tis folly to be wise"?
   (a) Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College
   (b) Ode on the Spring
   (c) Ode to Adversity
   (d) A Long Story
6. Who was with Thomas Gray during European tour 1739–1741 and quarrelled and separated in Italy?
   (a) Richard West (b) Horace Walpole
   (c) Horace Mann (d) Thomas Ashton
7. When was Elegy Written in a country Churchyard published?
   (a) 1751 (b) 1702
   (c) 1738 (d) 1712
8. In whose praise did Thomas Gray compose Installation Ode?
   (a) King of England (b) Archbishop of Canterbury
   (c) Duke of Grafton (d) Prince of Wales
9. When did Thomas Gray die?
   (a) 9 March 1780 (b) 5 June 1778
   (c) 30 July 1771 (d) 21 October 1775
10. What caused Thomas Gray's death?
    (a) Gout (b) Drowning
    (c) Malaria (d) Pneumonia

18.4 Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Theme

Death Gray's "Elegy" is one of the best-known poems about death in all of European literature. The poem presents the reflections of an observer who, passing by a churchyard that is out in the country, stops for a moment to think about the significance of the strangers buried there. Scholars of medieval times sometimes kept human skulls on their desktops, to keep themselves conscious of the fact that

Notes

someday they, like the skulls' former occupants, would die: from this practice we get the phrase memento mori, which we say to this day to describe any token one uses to keep one's mortality in mind. In this poem, the graveyard acts as a memento mori, reminding the narrator to not place too much value on this life because someday he too will be dead and buried. The speaker of the poem is surrounded by the idea of death, and throughout the first seven stanzas there are numerous images pointing out the contrast between death and life. After mentioning the churchyard in the title, which establishes the theme of mortality, the poem itself begins with images of gloom and finality. The darkness at the end of the day, the forlorn moan of lowing cattle, the stillness of the air (highlighted by the beetle's stilted motion) and the owl's nocturnal hooting all serve to set a background for this serious meditation. However, it is not until the fourth stanza that the poem actually begins to deal with the cemetery, mentioned as the place where the village forefathers "sleep." In the following stanzas, the speaker tries to imagine what the lives of these simple men might have been like, touching upon their relations with their wives, children, and the soil that they worked. They are not defined by their possessions, because they had few, and instead are defined by their actions, which serves to contrast their lives with their quiet existence in the graveyard. This "Elegy" presents the dead in the best light: their families adored them and they were cheerful in their work, as they "hummed the woods beneath their steady stroke." The speaker openly admits that they are spoken of so well precisely because they are dead, because death is such a terrible thing that its victims deserve the respect of the living. In line 90, the poet explains, "Some pious drops the closing eye requires," explaining that the living should show their respect for death with their sorrow.

Task Enumerate the themes of Thomas Gray: The Elegy written in a Country Church yard.

18.4.1 Search for Self

The speaker of this poem goes through a process of recognizing what is important to him and choosing how to live his life (which leads to the epitaph with which he would like to be remembered). In stanza 8, the poem begins naming the attributes that are normally considered desirable but are now considered pointless when compared with the lives of the rustic dead in the country graveyard. Ambition and Grandeur, according to the speaker, should not think less of these people because of their simple accomplishments. He goes on to assert that Pride and Memory have no right to ignore them, and that Honor and Flattery will be as useless to the rich as to the poor when they are dead. The speaker, an educated person, gives much consideration to the subject of Knowledge, and whether the lack of it made the lives of these country people less significant. Their poverty blocked the way to knowledge, he decides, and the lack of knowledge separated them from vices as well as virtues, so that in the end he does not consider his education a factor in making him better or worse than them either. In the end, having eliminated all of the supposed benefits of the wealthy, educated world that he comes from, the speaker identifies himself with the graveyard inhabitants to such a degree that he winds up in this humble graveyard after his death. In contrast to the simple graves that he pondered over throughout his life, though, the speaker's grave is marked with a warm-hearted memorial, the "Epitaph" at the end of the poem. Assuming that such a thoughtful person would not have been so immodest as to write this epitaph for himself, there must have been some other literate person to remember him. He is also remembered by an illiterate member of the farm community, the "hoary-headed swain" who has to ask someone to read the epitaph. Before the death of the poem's narrator, this Swain established a nonverbal relationship with him, observing him from afar, wondering about him just as the narrator wondered about the country people buried there.

Notes

18.4.2 Class Conflict

A superficial reading of this poem might leave the impression that the author intends to present members of the lower class as being more worthy of praise than their upper-class counterparts. This would be a reasonable assumption, since so much of the poem is devoted to praising the simple virtues of the poor. In the larger scope, though, the position that Gray takes is that all people, poor or rich, are equal. This is a meditation on death, which has been called the "great equalizer" because no can avoid it. The reason that the poem seems to favor one class over the other is that it is working against the assumption that only those of the upper class are worthy of attention when they die. It is the humble condition of the country churchyard, with gravestones unmarked or possibly marked just with names by illiterate people unable to read, that draws attention to the virtues of the poor and uneducated (which society often forgets), and so much of the poem is spent praising their moral strength. The virtues of the wealthy and famous are not denied, they just are not explored in this poem because they are already so familiar. Evidence of the poem's evenhandedness about the different classes can be seen in the fact that, while praising the poor country people throughout, Gray also acknowledges that education, which may give them opportunity to develop moral excellence, may also lead them to corruption: as he says in stanza 17, the humble circumstances of the poor limited the growth not only of their virtues but also of their crimes. The poem thus leaves open the question of superiority. Society glorifies the rich, and the poem's narrator glorifies the poor, but, as he reminds us, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

18.5 Summary

- Thomas Gray was born in Cornhill, London, the son of an exchange broker and a milliner.
- In 1738 he accompanied his old school-friend Walpole on his Grand Tour of Europe, possibly at Walpole's expense.
- Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" was first published in 1751.
- Gray did not produce a great deal of poetry; the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," however, has earned him a respected and deserved place in literary history.
- Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is a poem clearly demonstrating the history and tradition of the society.
- Death Gray's "Elegy" is one of the best-known poems about death in all of European literature.

18.6 Keywords

Churchyard **:** An enclosed area surrounding a church, especially as used for burials.

Impute **:** Ascribe to someone by virtue of a similar quality in another.

Bountry **:** A reward paid for killing or capturing someone

Tribute **:** An act, statement, or gift intended to show gratitude, respect or admiration.

18.7 Review Questions

1. The poem's title implies that the poem was actually *written* in a country churchyard, not merely that it is an imaginative reconstruction of such a scene. Why is this claim significant to any interpretation of the poem's meaning?
2. How does the pastoral environment affect the narrator's emotional state?

Notes

3. The purpose of this poem is to memorialize and reflect upon the memorialization of otherwise unremarkable people. What ties still bind the living and the dead in the churchyard? What does the speaker most regret about their passing, and what lessons does he draw from that passing?
4. An Elegy is by definition about someone else, but how does the speaker fold himself into this poem, making himself as much an object of reflection as the scene and those buried in the cemetery?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (d)	2. (d)	3. (c)
4. (d)	5. (a)	6. (b)
7. (a)	8. (c)	9. (c)
10. (a)		

18.8 Further Readings

Books

Alexander Pope: Selected poetry and prose — Alexander Pope
Alexander Pope — Paul Baines
Thomas Gray: a life — Robert L Mack
Elegy written in a Country Church Yard — Thomas Gray
William Blake — G.K.Chesterton

Online links

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elegy_Written_in_a_Country_Churchyard
http://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=elcc#pagebottom