British Poetry and Drama 14th - 18th Centuries

DEENG114

Edited by:
Dr. Ajoy Batta

LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY

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CONTENTS

Unit 01: Shakespeare's Sonnets

CONTENT

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the nuances of English literature in the 16th century
- gain insight into the qualities of William Shakespeare as a poet
- understand the thematic concerns in Shakespeare's poems
- acquaint yourself with the introduction and meaning of the Shakespearean sonnet, 'When to the sessions'

Introduction

The literature in any time period is a reflection of the economic, social and political changes of that era. Literature is like a mirror to the society that highlights its chief characteristics.With a view to study the literature of the 16th century, it is imperative to gain insight into the economic conditions as well as the social and political climate in the 16th century England.Elizabethan literature refers to the body of works written during the reign of Elizabeth I of England (1558–1603), probably the most splendid age in the history of English literature, during which such writers as Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Roger Ascham, Richard Hooker, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare flourished.The epithet Elizabethan is merely a chronological reference and does not describe any special characteristic of the writing.

While William Shakespeare's reputation is based primarily on his plays, he became famous first as a poet. With the partial exception of the *Sonnets* (1609), quarried since the early 19th century for autobiographical secrets allegedly encoded in them, the non-dramatic writings have traditionally been pushed to the margins of the Shakespeare industry.

1.1 The Age of Elizabeth

In the Age of Elizabeth, all doubt seems to vanish from English history. After the reigns of Edward and Mary, with defeat and humiliation abroad and persecutions and rebellion at home, the accession of a popular sovereign was like the sunrise after a long night, and, in Milton's words, we suddenly see England, "a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep,

and shaking her invincible locks." (William J. Long, History of English literature). Elizabeth, with all her vanity and inconsistency, steadily loved England and England's greatness; and that she inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in William Shakespeare, and with the personal devotion which finds a voice in the Faery Queen written by Edmund Spencer. Under her administration, the English national life progressed by gigantic leaps rather than by slow historical process, and English literature reached the very highest point of its development. It is possible to indicate only a few general characteristics of this great age which had a direct bearing upon its literature.

1.2 Characteristics of Elizabethan Age

- The most characteristic feature of the age was the comparative religious tolerance, which was due largely to the queen's influence. The frightful excesses of the religious war known as the Thirty Years' War on the Continent found no parallel in England.
- Upon her accession Elizabeth found the whole kingdom divided against itself; the North was largely Catholic, while the southern counties were as strongly Protestant. Scotland had followed the Reformation in its own intense way, while Ireland remained true to its old religious traditions, and both countries were openly rebellious.
- The court, made up of both parties, witnessed the rival intrigues of those who sought to gain the royal favor.
- It was due partly to the intense absorption of men's minds in religious questions that the preceding century, though an age of advancing learning, produced scarcely any literature worthy of the name.
- Elizabeth favored both religious parties, and presently the world saw with amazement Catholics and Protestants acting together as trusted counselors of a great sovereign.
- The defeat of the Spanish Armada established the Reformation as a fact in England and at the same time united all Englishmen in a magnificent national enthusiasm.
- For the first time since the Reformation began, the fundamental question of religious toleration seemed to be settled, and the mind of man, freed from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity.
- It is partly from this new freedom of the mind that the Age of Elizabeth received its great literary stimulus.
- It was an age of comparative social contentment, in strong contrast with the days of Langland.
- The rapid increase of manufacturing towns gave employment to thousands who had before been idle and discontented.
- Increasing trade brought enormous wealth to England, and this wealth was shared to this extent, at least, that for the first time some systematic care for the needy was attempted.
- Parishes were made responsible for their own poor, and the wealthy were taxed to support them or give them employment.
- The increase of wealth, the improvement in living, the opportunities for labor, the new social content—these also are factors which help to account for the new literary activity.
- The increase of wealth, the improvement in living, the opportunities for labor, the new social content—these also are factors which help to account for the new literary activity.
- It is an age of dreams, of adventure, of unbounded enthusiasm springing from the new lands of fabulous riches revealed by English explorers.
- Cabot, Drake, Frobisher, Gilbert, Raleigh, Willoughby, Hawkins,—a score of explorers reveal a new earth to men's eyes, and instantly literature creates a new heaven to match it.
- The Age of Elizabeth was a time of intellectual liberty, of growing intelligence and comfort among all classes, of unbounded patriotism, and of peace at home and abroad.
- For a parallel we must go back to the Age of Pericles in Athens, or of Augustus in Rome, or go forward a little to the magnificent court of Louis XIV, when Corneille, Racine, and

Moliere brought the drama in France to the point where Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson had left it in England half a century earlier.

- Such an age of great thought and great action, appealing to the eyes as well as to the imagination and intellect, finds but one adequate literary expression; neither poetry nor the story can express the whole man,—his thought, feeling, action, and the resulting character; hence in the Age of Elizabeth literature turned instinctively to the drama and brought it rapidly to the highest stage of its development.

Notes:

- The Elizabethan age saw the flowering of poetry in the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza and the dramatic blank verse.
- The Elizabethan age was a golden age of drama (especially for the plays of Shakespeare), and inspired a wide variety of splendid prose (from historical chronicles, versions of the Holy Scriptures, pamphlets, and literary criticism to the first English novels).

For the first time, prose rose to the position of first-rate importance. "Even the development of poetical drama between 1579 A.D. -1629 A.D., is hardly more extraordinary than the sudden expansion of English prose & its adaptation to every kind of literary requirement."The deadweight of the Latin & English prose acquired a tradition & universal application. English Novel made its first proper appearance during this age.

1.3 Major writers of Elizabethan age

Amidst victories over Spain, colonization missions, moderating the religious fervor, improvement in science and technology – the theatre along with other poetry and prose flourished during the period. There were many writers and poets who made this era as the golden age with their contributions to Elizabethan literature and English literature.

George Gascoigne[1535 – 1577]

Gascoigne was the first ever poet to portray Queen Elizabeth as a deity. She is shown by him as a virgin goddess who rules over England.His most notable work is "A Discourse of the Adventures of Master FJ. Further". George Gascoigne has introduced many writing forms to English literature through his works.His most notable work is "A Discourse of the Adventures of Master FJ.

Further"George Gascoigne has introduced many writing forms to English literature through his works.

Did you know?

- 'The Supposes' is the first English comedy and fiction written in prose.
- 'The Steel Glass' is the English satire written in regular verse.
- 'Jocasta' is the first ever translation of a Greek work into English.

- 'Notes of Instruction' is the first ever critical essay.

Edmund Spenser [1552 – 1599]

The entry of Edmund Spencer through 'The Shepherd's Calendar' marked the beginning of a new era in English poetry. He produced poetry that could touch every aspect of life and interest. The above poem deals with each month of the year in the form of pastoral poems.'The Epithalamion' deals with the wedding of Spenser and is completely subjective. However, it consists of great imagination and rhythm making it appropriate for the reader. He has written eighty nine sonnets under the title 'Amoretti' and has dedicated an elegy titled 'Astrophel' for the death of his dear friend Sir Philip Sidney.Spenserian stanza is still in use and this is introduced to English literature through his most notable work –'The Faery Queen'. The rhyme scheme of Spenserian stanza is aba bbc bcc. His contributions made him the poet's poet of English poetry.

Sir Philip Sidney [1554- 1586]

No work of Sidney was published during his lifetime; yet, he has a unique place in Elizabethan literature and world literature as well. He was a free flowing poet who often followed the tradition of Petrarch. 'Astrophel and Stella' is a work that shows his poetic abilities through eleven songs of love and hundred and eight sonnets. He wrote other poems for the amusement of his sister under the title 'Arcadia'.Sidney is well known for his critical discussion of nature of poetry, its possibilities, functions and future through his works 'Defence of Poesie' and 'Apologie for Poetrie'. The many objections posed by the puritans of the Elizabethan age about imaginative poetry were analyzed and answered by Sidney through these works.

The University Wits

Elizabethan literature would have been incomplete without the contributions made by group of writers who belonged to Oxford and Cambridge. They were radical in their approach and had no intentions to follow the norms set by the Church. It resulted in ambitious works that motivated drama and other forms in a great deal.

Following writers belonged to the group of the University Wits:

- John Lyly : 'Eupheus' , 'Endimion', 'Mother Bombie', 'The Woman in the Moon', Euphuism, a literary prose style started because of John Lyly's work – Eupheus.
- George Peele : 'The Arraignment of Paris' , 'Old Wives' Tale' , 'The Battle of Alcazar'

- Robert Greene : 'A Groatsworth of Wit' , 'The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay' , 'George a green, or The Pinner of Wakefield' , 'Orlando Furioso' , 'Looking Glass for London and England'. Looking Glass for London and England was written in collaboration with Thomas Lodge.
- Robert Greene is said to have written his plays in the form of "Romantic Comedy", the first English writer to do so.

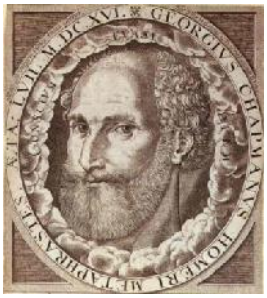
William Shakespeare [1564 – 1616]

The Bard of Avon, the greatest playwright of English literature, the man who could mirror life with few words, so on and so forth – William Shakespeare needs no introduction anywhere in the world. He has written thirty eight plays and 154 sonnets in his lifetime.Most of his works are published in Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies commonly referred to as First Folio [1623]. It was published by his colleagues John Heminges and Henry Condell. The book contained thirty six plays, which are original to the writings of Shakespeare.

William Painter [1540 – 1595]

Painter is the least known author of the Elizabethan age with little contribution to the theatre or English literature. However, his most important work is translation of tales and novels that belonged to French Italian and other classic writers. He took his sources from Boccaccio, Giovanni Battista Giraldi, Herodotus, Plutarch, Queen Marguerite de Navarre, Matteo Bandello, etc.Through his work – The Palace of Pleasure, he compiled one hundred and one tales of great writers. These tales were an inspiration to writers like William Shakespeare, John Webster, James Shirley, Beaumont and Fletcher.

George Chapman [1559-1634]



A great scholar who is known for his translations of 'Iliad' , 'Odyssey' and the 'Hymns'; he has done many other translations of the classic writers like Petrarch, Hesiod and Juvenal. He is considered as the rival poet of Shakespeare for his remarkable use of words and flow of sentences. Some of his important dramatic works are 'All Fools', 'The Gentleman Usher' and 'The Blind Beggar of Alexandria'. George Chapman has also written two tragedy plays in French – 'The Admiral of France' and 'Bussy D' Ambois'.

Sir Francis Bacon [1561 – 1626]

Bacon is a polymath who worked on philosophy, science, literature, oration, jury, etc. He is considered as the father of empiricism. During his lifetime, he has served in high ranking positions like Lord Chancellor and Attorney General. He always preached the importance of science over religion. His works, 'The Advancement of Learning' , 'The Novum Organum' and 'The New Atlantis' speak in one way of the other about the systems in the society and the requirement of change. However, his greatest achievements are his essays that are fifty eight in number. Every essay is a masterpiece reflecting human knowledge and how man fears everything.

Michael Drayton [1563 – 1631]

Drayton was gifted with versatility and he was able to penetrate into every side of poetry with ease. He started his literary life with a sacred work titled Harmony of the Church. It was a bit of a disappointment and he reappears with pastoral verse titled Shepherd's Garland. After that, he wrote on patriotism through 'Polyolbion'. It gained him great attention and applause while his masterpiece was yet to come. His Ballad of Agincourt describes about the battle fought at Agincourt during the Hundred Years War. It has wonderful elements unique to the Elizabethan age.

Thomas Heywood [1575 – 1641]

Thomas Heywood has contributed to both Elizabethan literature and Jacobean literature. He is said to have involvement in over two hundred plays and he has authored more than twenty plays. Heywood is known for his domestic comedy where normal families suffer a tragedy because of high passions and lust. Charles Lamb describes Thomas Heywood as "prose Shakespeare". Heywood is well known for his works 'A Woman Killed with Kindness', 'The Pleasant Comedy' and 'The English Traveller'.

Ben Jonson [1572 – 1637]

Jonson is a controversial figure of Elizabethan age and English literature in common. He is known to slay an actor, quarrels with other dramatists and rivalry with Shakespeare. However, all of these could not mask the fact that he remains one of the greatest playwrights of all time. Jonson is a controversial figure of Elizabethan age and English literature in common. He is known to slay an actor, quarrels with other dramatists and rivalry with Shakespeare. However, all of these could not mask the fact that he remains one of the greatest playwrights of all time.

Did you know?

- Considered the golden age of English history, the Elizabethan era saw a flowering of British culture in many different areas. Spanning the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, this period saw unprecedented peace and prosperity in England, especially when contrasted with the times just before and after it.
- In Elizabethan times, poetry, music, theater and literature dominated daily life at home while the explorations of the British abroad brought a steady stream of exotic news and influences to England's shores.
- In addition to an explosion of culture, the Elizabethan era contained many fascinating features.

1.4 William Shakespeare as a Poet

While William Shakespeare's reputation is based primarily on his plays, he became famous first as a poet. With the partial exception of the *Sonnets* (1609), quarried since the early 19th century for autobiographical secrets allegedly encoded in them, the non dramatic writings have traditionally been pushed to the margins of the Shakespeare industry. Yet the study of his non dramatic poetry can illuminate Shakespeare's activities as a poet emphatically of his own age, especially in the period of extraordinary literary ferment in the last ten or twelve years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.Shakespeare's first publication, *Venus and Adonis* (1593), was dedicated to the 18-year-old Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton. The dedication reveals a frank appeal for patronage, couched in the normal terms of such requests. Shakespeare received the Earl's patronage and went on to dedicate his next dramatic poem, '*Lucrece*', to the young lord as well. '*Venus and Adonis*' was printed by Richard Field, a professionally accomplished printer who lived in Stratford.

Themes in Shakespearean poetry:

Different Types of Romantic Love

Modern readers associate the sonnet form with romantic love and with good reason: the first sonnets written in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy celebrated the poets' feelings for their beloveds and their patrons. These sonnets were addressed to stylized, lionized women and dedicated to wealthy noblemen, who supported poets with money and other gifts, usually in return for lofty praise in print. Shakespeare dedicated his sonnets to "Mr. W. H.," and the identity of this

man remains unknown. He dedicated an earlier set of poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*, to Henry Wriothesly, Earl of Southampton, but it's not known what Wriothesly gave him for this honor. In contrast to tradition, Shakespeare addressed most of his sonnets to an unnamed young man, possibly Wriothesly. Addressing sonnets to a young man was unique in Elizabethan England. Furthermore, Shakespeare used his sonnets to explore different types of love between the young man and the speaker, the young man and the dark lady, and the dark lady and the speaker.

The Dangers of Lust and Love

In Shakespeare's sonnets, falling in love can have painful emotional and physical consequences. Sonnets 127–152, addressed to the so-called dark lady, express a more overtly erotic and physical love than the sonnets addressed to the young man. But many sonnets warn readers about the dangers of lust and love. According to some poems, lust causes us to mistake sexual desire for true love, and love itself causes us to lose our powers of perception. Several sonnets warn about the dangers of lust, claiming that it turns humans "savage, extreme, rude, cruel", as in Sonnet 129.

Real beauty vs. Clichéd Beauty

To express the depth of their feelings, poets frequently employ hyperbolic terms to describe the objects of their affections. Traditionally, sonnets transform women into the most glorious creatures to walk the earth, whereas patrons become the noblest and bravest men the world has ever known.Shakespeare makes fun of the convention by contrasting an idealized woman with a real woman. In Sonnet 130, Shakespeare directly engages—and skewers—clichéd concepts of beauty.

The responsibilities of being beautiful

Shakespeare portrays beauty as conveying a great responsibility in the sonnets addressed to the young man, Sonnets 1–126. Here the speaker urges the young man to make his beauty immortal by having children, a theme that appears repeatedly throughout the poems: as an attractive person, the young man has a responsibility to procreate. Later sonnets demonstrate the speaker, angry at being cuckolded, lashing out at the young man and accusing him of using his beauty to hide immoral acts.

The Ravages of time

Shakespeare's sonnets open with an earnest plea from the narrator to the fair lord, begging him to find a woman to bear his child so that his beauty might be preserved for posterity. In sonnet 2, the poet writes, "When forty winters shall beseige thy brow / And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field ... How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use / If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine / Shall sum my count and make my old excuse' / Proving his beauty by succession thine!"The poet is lamenting the ravages of time and its detrimental effects on the fair lord's beauty, seeking to combat the inevitable by pushing the fair lord to bequeath his exquisiteness unto a child.

1.5 Sonnet: When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

Introduction

A sonnet is a 14-line poem with a variable rhyme scheme originating in Italy and brought to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, earl of Surrey in the 16th century. Literally a "little song," the sonnet traditionally reflects upon a single sentiment, with a clarification or "turn" of thought in its concluding lines. There are many different types of sonnets.The Petrarchan sonnet, perfected by the Italian poet Petrarch, divides the 14 lines into two sections: an eight-line stanza (octave) rhyming ABBAABBA, and a six-line stanza (sestet) rhyming CDCDCD or CDECDE. John Milton's "When I Consider How my Light Is Spent" and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How Do I Love Thee" employ this form. The Italian sonnet is an English variation on the traditional

Petrarchan version. The octave's rhyme scheme is preserved, but the sestet rhymes CDDCEE. For example, Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso List to Hunt, I Know Where Is an Hind" and John Donne's "If Poisonous Minerals, and If That Tree."Wyatt and Surrey developed the English (or Shakespearean) sonnet, which condenses the 14 lines into one stanza of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, with a rhyme scheme of ABABCDCDEFEFGG. George Herbert's "Love (II)," Claude McKay's "America," and Molly Peacock's "Altruism" are English sonnets.

Text of the Sonnet

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

And with old woes new wail my dear times' waste:

Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,

For precious friends hid in death's dateless night.

And weep afresh love's long-since cancell'd woe,

And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight.

Then can I grieve at grievance foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er

The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

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

All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end.

About the sonnet

"Sonnet 30" was written by the English poet and playwright William Shakespeare. First published in 1609 as part of a sequence of 154 sonnets, "Sonnet 30" was most likely written in the early 1590s. At this time, Shakespeare was a young playwright, recently arrived in London. Despite its author's youth and inexperience, the poem broods on life's disappointments. For the speaker of the poem, even thinking about such sorrows brings them back with all their original pain and power. Only one thing offers solace and comfort in the face of such pain—the love the speaker feels for a "dear friend."

Summary of the sonnet

The lines of the sonnet can be transcribed as follows. When I'm silently reflecting on things that have happened in the past, I feel disappointed that I failed to get the things I wanted. Old sorrows feel new again, and I complain about how I wasted my precious time. Then I can weep heavily, even though I rarely cry, for dear friends who have died; I can weep again for lost loves I'd once gotten over; I can complain about things that have been destroyed. Then I get angry about old insults, and I complain about one bad thing after another: a sad tale of things I've already complained about, which feel as painful now as they did before. But, if I stop and think about you, dear friend, everything I've lost returns to me and my entire sorrows end.

Analysis

In the first quatrain of *'Sonnet 30,'* the speaker begins by dwelling on the past. He explains to the Fair Youth that he gets depressed when he thinks of the "many a thing [he] sought" that he doesn't have. His life "lack[s]" these unnamed things. These emotions are especially prevalent when he is sitting in silence. There is an example of alliteration in the last line of this quatrain with the words "woes," "wail," and "waste". He is explaining how while mourning he is adding to new grief to the

old and increasing it. In the second quatrain, he goes on to describe what he does when he gets into this depressed state. He cries or drowns his eyes, something that is unusual for him. The speaker cries for the lost friends who he can never see again. They are lost to the darkness of night and death, somewhere in the past. He also mourns for loves long since lost. These emotions hit him as though they are new.

Lastly, he adds that he grieves for all the "vanished sight[s]" that he's never going to see again. These are the places and experiences that won't ever be his again except in memory.In the final quatrain of 'Sonnet 30,' the speaker describes how after this initial period of grief he can move on to grieve about the "grievances" he has "foregone" or let go of. His tears reach into the past and relive everything that he had let go of but now confronts him as though it is fresh. The pain is new. He pays it as though he had not "paid before". Throughout this section of the poem, and the couplet, Shakespeare uses words like "account," "losses," and "pay". This creates a metaphor that connects his emotional losses to financial ones. This is an interesting use of language that helps him get to the root of his loss while also conveying the loss more clearly to the reader. In the final two lines of 'Sonnet 30' the speaker transitions into the turn, or volta. This is seen through a direct address to a "dear friend," the Fair Youth. Whenever he is as depressed as he described in the previous lines, he thinks of the youth, and his losses are restored and his "sorrows end".

Summary

The Elizabethan Period Lasted 45 Years.The reign of Queen Elizabeth I stretched from 1558 to 1603, covering an especially monumental time in British history. The church of England declared independence from the Catholic Church the same year the Elizabeth took power so the queen had absolute power over both church and state.Shakespeare Published His First Play in the Elizabethan Era. Queen Elizabeth poured money into London's arts scene, building the city's first theaters and sponsoring productions. Shakespeare himself grew up and benefited from this atmosphere and even published his first play, "Henry IV," near the end of her reign.Elizabethan Society was Class-Based. In Elizabethan times, society divided into a strict social order that included six classes: the monarchy (or the Queen herself), the nobility, the gentry, the merchant class, the yeoman class (tradesmen) and laborers. Elizabethan laws even dictated what kind and color of clothes each class could wear so that they could be immediately identified.Cuisine Exploded During the Elizabethan Period. The exploration of the New World and the South Pacific brought a slew of culinary treats into the kitchens and restaurants of England. Tomatoes, chili peppers, chocolate, cinnamon and avocados are just some of the hundreds of flavorful items that the British tasted for the first time during the Elizabethan era.

Key words

1. ***Sonnet:***It a poem of fourteen lines using any of a number of formal rhyme schemes, in English typically having ten syllables per line.
2. ***University wits***: A group of six feisty, well- educated men chose to write for the public stage, taking over native traditions in the Elizabethan age.
3. ***Spenserian Sonnet***: A sonnet in which the lines are grouped into three interlocked quatrains and a couplet and the rhyme scheme is *abab*, *bcbc*, *cdcd*, *ee*.
4. ***English Sonnet***: A sonnet comprised of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, rhyming ababcdcdefef gg

Self Assessment

1. Who brought the sonnet to England?

A. John Milton

B. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard

C. William Shakespeare

D. William Hazlitt

2. When words like 'sweet' and 'silent' are used in one line, it is an example of _____.

A. personification
B. metaphor
C. alliteration
D. simile

3. Which of the following was not introduced into poetry in the Elizabethan age?

A. Sonnet
B. Spenserian stanza
C. Dramatic Blank verse
D. Soliloquy

4. George Gascoigne was the first ever poet to portray _____ as a deity.

A. Queen Elizabeth
B. Henry IV
C. Henry VI
D. None of these

5. 'Venus and Adonis' was the first publication of _____.

A. William Shakespeare
B. G.B. Shaw
C. John Milton
D. Julius Caesar

6. The sonnet, 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought' is written in _____.

A. iambic pentameter
B. iambic tetrameter
C. iambic trimester
D. none of these

7. Which edition of sonnets has 154 sonnets?

A. The Sonnets of Shakespeare
B. The Sonnets of Milton
C. The Sonnets of Robert Frost
D. None of these

8. A sonnet is composed of _____ lines with a rhyme scheme.

A. twelve
B. fourteen
C. thirteen
D. eleven

9. Throughout his sonnets, Shakespeare clearly implies that love _____.

A. hurts
B. does not hurt
C. surrenders
D. none of these

10. Which of the following is an example of a Petrarchan Sonnet?

A. 'How do I love thee?'
B. 'Seven Ages'
C. 'The Road not taken'
D. None of these

11. All Shakespearean sonnets were written in the form of three quatrains and a _____.

A. rhyme
B. iambic pentameter
C. couplet
D. none of these

12. What does the phrase 'dateless night' mean?

A. forgettable night
B. starry night
C. unending night
D. none of these

13. When words like 'woes', 'wail' and 'waste' are used in one line, it is an example of _____.

A. personification
B. metaphor
C. alliteration
D. simile

14. Who translated 'Iliad'?

A. George Chapman
B. Thomas Heywood
C. Francis Bacon
D. None of these

15. '*Venus and Adonis*' was dedicated to the Earl of _____.

A. Southampton
B. France
C. Italy

D. None of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	B	2.	C	3.	D	4.	A	5.	A
6.	A	7.	A	8.	B	9.	A	10.	A
11.	C	12.	C	13.	C	14.	A	15.	A

Further Readings

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Unit 02: Shakespeare's Sonnets

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the meaning of the sonnet 'Let me to the marriage of true minds'
- become well versed with the thematic concerns of the sonnet
- study the literary features of this sonnet

Introduction

Text of the Sonnet:

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

Translation:

The sonnet can be translated as follows:

I hope I may never acknowledge any reason why minds that truly love each other shouldn't be joined together. Love isn't really love if it changes when it sees the beloved change or if it disappears when the beloved leaves. Oh no, love is a constant and unchanging light that shines on storms without being shaken; it is the star that guides every wandering boat.And like a star, its value is beyond measure, though its height can be measured. Love is not under time's power, though time has the power to destroy rosy lips and cheeks. Love does not alter with the passage of brief hours and weeks, but lasts until Doomsday. If I'm wrong about this and can be proven wrong, I never wrote, and no man ever loved.

2.1 Meaning

This sonnet attempts to define love, by telling both what it is and is not. In the first quatrain, the speaker says that love—"the marriage of true minds"—is perfect and unchanging; it does not "admit impediments," and it does not change when it find changes in the loved one.

In the second quatrain, the speaker tells what love is through a metaphor: a guiding star to lost ships ("wand'ring barks") that is not susceptible to storms (it "looks on tempests and is never shaken").In the third quatrain, the speaker again describes what love is not: it is not susceptible to time. Though beauty fades in time as rosy lips and cheeks come within "his bending sickle's compass," love does not change with hours and weeks: instead, it "bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom."In the couplet, the speaker attests to his certainty that love is as he says: if his statements can be proved to be error, he declares, he must never have written a word, and no man can ever have been in love. Along with Sonnets 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") and 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), Sonnet 116 is one of the most famous poems in the entire sequence. The definition of love that it provides is among the most often quoted and anthologized in the poetic canon.Essentially, this sonnet presents the extreme ideal of romantic love: it never changes, it never fades, it outlasts death and admits no flaw. What is more, it insists that this ideal is the only love that can be called "true"—if love is mortal, changing, or impermanent, the speaker writes, then no man ever loved.The basic division of this poem's argument into the various parts of the sonnet form is extremely simple: the first quatrain says what love is not (changeable), the second quatrain says what it is (a fixed guiding star unshaken by tempests), the third quatrain says more specifically what it is not ("time's fool"—that is, subject to change in the passage of time), and the couplet announces the speaker's certainty.What gives this poem its rhetorical and emotional power is not its complexity; rather, it is the force of its linguistic and emotional conviction.

2.2 Analysis

Although in former times, this sonnet was almost universally read as a paean to ideal and eternal love, with which all readers could easily identify, adding their own dream of perfection to what they found within it, modern criticism makes it possible to look beneath the idealism and to see some hints of a world which is perhaps slightly more disturbed than the poet pretends.In the first place, it is important to see that the sonnet belongs in this place, sandwiched between three which discuss the philosophical question of how love deceives both eye and mind and judgment, and is then followed by four others which attempt to excuse the poet's own unfaithfulness and betrayal of the beloved.

Set in such a context it does of course make it appear even more like a battered sea-mark which nevertheless rises above the waves of destruction, for it confronts all the vicissitudes that have afflicted the course of the love described in these sonnets, and declares that, in the final analysis, they are of no account.In addition, despite the idealism, there is an undercurrent of subversion which permeates all.

It is ironic that a poem as famous as this should be seized on by the establishment as a declaration of their view of what love should be. Does the establishment view take account of the fact that this is a love poem written by a man to another man, and that the one impediment to their marriage is precisely that, for no church of the time, or scarcely even today, permits a man to marry a man?It is useless to object that Shakespeare is here talking of the marriage of true minds, for the language

inevitably draws us to the Christian marriage service and its accompanying ceremonies, and that is a ceremony designed specifically to marry two people, not two abstract Platonic ideals which have decided to be wed.

It is almost as if the exclamation 'Oh No!' in the second quatrain is recognition of this one great impediment that overhangs all others 'and all alone stands hugely politic'. (It can be noted that the exclamation presents, among other things, 'a logically incidental example of a suitable prefatory exclamation introducing an impediment volunteered by a parishioner responding to the injunction in the marriage service').Of course it is partly due to the slow process of being drawn into the sonnets, with their continuous change and varying cycles of elation and depression, that the view is gradually inculcated into one's soul that this is a history of love which anyone might have known, a mortal and immortal love such as any two lovers in the tide of times might have experienced, or might even be experiencing now.

We tend to forget that it is also an unconventional love, even more unconventional in the Elizabethan world than it is today.But it is precisely this unconventionality that gives to the sonnets their subversive tone, and it is that tone which forces us, not so much to be on the defensive, but to question more profoundly what we mean by the word love. What is that strange attraction which draws two minds so irresistibly together?Must we classify or restrict it?Does it depend on time, or place, on beliefs, on the sex of the lovers, on the Church, or politics, life, death, change, removal, doom, eternity, the day of judgment? Or on none of these? Is human love an allegory of divine love?

2.3 Themes

Love and Change

Over the course of Sonnet 116, the speaker makes a number of passionate claims about what love is—and what it isn't. For the speaker (traditionally assumed to be Shakespeare himself, and thus a man), true love doesn't change over time: instead, it goes on with the same intensity forever.The speaker establishes this argument from the poem's opening lines, boldly declaring that love isn't really love at all if it bends or sways in response to roadblocks. Instead, he argues that love weathers all storms.It's like a star that sailors use to navigate, providing an unmoving reference point they can use to plot their course across the globe. Love, then, is something that perseveres through "impediments," obstacles, and difficulties without losing any of its passion or commitment.As the poem progresses, the speaker considers more kinds of change and extends his initial argument. In lines 9-10, he adds that true love doesn't falter even as beauty fades—represented in the poem by the image of youthful, rosy cheeks losing their vitality.Because love isn't primarily concerned with the body, it's not affected by aging. In lines 11-12, the speaker generalizes his argument even further by claiming that love doesn't change under any circumstances.

It goes on, he claims, "to the edge of doom." In other words, only when a lover dies does love finally change or end.The speaker is so confident in his argument that he's willing to issue a bet: if he's wrong, then love itself is impossible, and "no man [has] ever loved." In making this bet, he puts up his own behavior as evidence. Here, the speaker acknowledges that he isn't simply an observer of love, but himself a lover.His own relationships might be measured against the standard he's advanced here—and he offers confident assurance that his love does live up to this standard. This means that, beneath the sonnet's generalizations about what love is and isn't, the poem is itself a declaration of love.At this point it's important to note that this sonnet is part of a sequence of love poems, traditionally believed to be addressed to a young man. Their relationship, as depicted in the Sonnets as a whole, is tumultuous, full of infidelity and gusts of passion.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to whether this context should affect the interpretation of Sonnet 116.If it doesn't, the poem is a powerful statement about love, addressed to all readers in all times. But if it does, the poem comes across instead as an attempt to repair a damaged relationship, a personal plea directed to a particular person; the speaker is trying to prove to the young man that he does love him in spite of everything, and that his love won't change.For a generous reader, this will be a romantic statement of affection. For a more skeptical reader, it raises some questions. The speaker hasn't just described love as something unchanging; the poem paints a picture of love as a sort of eternal ideal far from the messy reality of real people's lives. It's a star—

unattainable and inhuman. In a way, this image of love ceases to be something that humans can actually build and instead becomes something they can only admire from a distance.

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

True love

The sonnet seems to be an argumentative essay on the topic of true love. The speaker offers an argument after argument regarding the concept of true love in the whole sonnet. He/she says that true love is not limited to the frame of physical time.It surpasses such boundaries and lies way beyond the reach of worldly forces. When the worldly forces are trying to lead the boats of our lives astray, true love stands as the North Star to guide us through. It can help us in our fight against the elements of nature.Moreover, true love is fixed and bright like a star. It does not move around like other heavenly bodies. Instead, it endures every difficulty and goes on to survive till the doomsday. True love is also a guiding star for the wandering souls. It helps the wandering souls in steering their ships in the right direction and get ashore.

Love as a guiding light

Although the dominant portion of the sonnet argues about how love is a superior force than time, the poet has also provided another quality of true love. This quality is the ability to love to lead the wandering humans in the world. There are two analogies that attribute the quality of guidance to true love.The first analogy appears in the fifth line, where love is compared with a lighthouse. A lighthouse is meant to help ships to find their way in the sea. They usually become useful when the ships are caught in the middle of the sea during a storm.In such situations, the lighthouse guides them towards the shore. Similarly, true love stands unshaken when all the reference points of one's life are lost. It is true love that guides a person to safety at such times.The second analogy is in the seventh line, where true love is compared with the North Star. The North Star helps ships in navigation during the night time. So, when the life of a person is immersed in darkness, true love helps him/her to navigate through the difficult times.

2.4 Literary Analysis

This Shakespearean sonnet exemplifies and glorifies the Elizabethan tradition of sonnet composition by incorporating all the characteristics of the English sonnet with special emphasis on its structure. In this sonnet, the speaker creates suspense in the sonnet as he/she claims his/her perfect knowledge about the nature of love.

He/she arrives with a sudden thrust and straight away declares that he/she will not let any hindrance to the communion of true minds. The speaker sounds like an orator who is confident about his knowledge and wants to convince those who are listening to him. This claim works just like the hook sentence of an essay or a speech where the author/speaker tries to get the attention of the reader/listener. Here, too, the author is faced with a surprising start, and he/she gets curious about what is to follow next. A skeptical reader, however, might start suspecting the motives of the speaker after coming across such a desperate start.The use of the epithet "true" with the word "minds" makes a big difference throughout the sonnet. The speaker wants the minds to be true to each other and true to the notion of love. There might be a lot of people who will claim that they are in love but will be true to each other.Such people do not qualify for the standards set by the speaker. The speaker says that when two persons are true to each other, they will never face any hindrance in their communion. Even if they do face some difficulties, their love will be strong enough to help them through the tricky times.Moreover, the use of the word "minds" instead of "persons" is also very suggestive. It takes away the concept of lust and physical attraction and leaves platonic love only. When we talk about a person, we mean the body and the soul both.But when we specifically say mind, it means that we are subtracting the bodily needs. The notion of true love beyond any limits is also strengthened by the technique of enjambment. The thought

moves from the first line into the second line and trespasses the limit of a line. It shows that true love can go beyond any limit.

The second sentence is another assertion where the speaker informs the reader what true love is not. He/she asserts that the love which changes under the influence of some force can be anything but love. Here the alliterative sound pattern of the line makes the reader feel the urgency of the speaker in delivering his argument.Enjambment is again employed in this line, which furthers the concept of trespassing in the first line. The word "alter" also suggests a pun on the word "altar." The speaker believes that love cannot be sacrificed no matter how sacred an altar is.The last line of the quatrain provides another instance of the same theme. Love can never be altered by anything. The forces of the world may try and try but will never succeed in bending love.The word "bend" is suggestive of the bowing down or kneeling in front of a higher authority. Love does not bow down in front of any authority as there is no authority higher than its own.The redundant images of the stern nature of love intensify the claim of the speaker.

After illustrating what love is not, the speaker turns toward describing what love really is. He/she employs a metaphor and compares true love with an ever-fixed mark. The following line drags the same metaphor and gives a hint about what the speaker means by the "ever-fixed mark."It is described as the mark which looks onto the storms and is never shaken. This tells the reader that the mark means a lighthouse. True love remains unaffected by any trouble that comes in its way, just like a lighthouse is unshaken during tempests.The next line brings another analogy where true love is compared with the North Star. The North Star serves the purpose of guiding lost ships during the time of need. Love serves humans in the same manner and helps them in surviving through bad times.The North Star is also suggestive of steadfastness. It stays in the same place throughout the year. So, the speaker is saying that true love stays firm no matter how many changes occur in its surroundings.

In the last line of the quatrain, the speaker elucidates the value of true love. He/she says that we can come to know the height of the North Star but will never be able to calculate its real worth. Similarly, one can see the outward manifestation of love, but the real worth of love is unknown to the common people. The third quatrain resembles the first quatrain in the sense that it talks about what love is not. It says that love is not the fool of time's court. This image holds time as a worldly despot who has many jesters in its court. Every jester performs according to the will of the King. However, love is not a fool. Time may well fade away the cheeks and lips of the people but will never be able to take away love from their hearts.

The speaker uses the phrase "bending sickle compass" to depict the reach of time's power. It shows that the reach of time is only limited to a small circle. The following line elaborates the same idea that the reach of time is limited to brief "hours and weeks." On the contrary, the spectrum of love is very wide. It is strong and versatile enough to thrive until the last limit of time, i.e., the doomsday.

The couplet concludes the whole poem by accepting to bet significant things. Here, Shakespeare loses his impersonal tone and goes on to say that he is ready to let go of his entire body of writings if his arguments are proved to be wrong. He also claims that he will accept that nobody has loved in the world if someone can point out any error in his arguments.

Form

The poem is written in the form of a traditional Shakespearean sonnet. It is composed of fourteen lines. The first twelve lines are divided into three quatrains, where the speaker explains what true love is not.The last two lines are in the form of a couplet, which stresses the authenticity of the arguments presented in the quatrains. The meter used in the poem is iambic pentameter. There are ten syllables and five beats in every line for the major part of the poem. The lines twelve, eight, and six are exceptions. They all have an extra beat in the end.

Speaker

The speaker of the poem is a person who talks of love in an imperial tone. By looking at the well-established arguments about the nature of true love, it can be assumed that the person is an adult who has had a first-hand experience of love.Throughout the poem, the speaker talks about the unchanging nature of true love. In the last couplet, he/she goes on to present his/her writing as an authority to confirm the argument of the sonnet.

Tone

The tone of the sonnet is imposing and majestic throughout the fourteen lines. The speaker permits no counter-argument to stand in his/her way while talking about the durable nature of love. The claims made in the poem are presented without a hint of doubt or misjudgment.

Metaphors

In the first line of the second quatrain, the speaker employs a metaphor and compares true love with an ever-fixed mark. The following line drags the same metaphor and gives a hint about what the speaker means by the "ever-fixed mark." It is described as the mark which looks onto the storms and is never shaken.This tells the reader that the mark means a lighthouse. In the third line of the second quatrain, true love is compared with the North Star. The North Star serves the purpose of guiding lost ships during the time of need. Love serves humans in the same manner and helps them in surviving through bad times. The North Star is also suggestive of steadfastness. It stays in the same place throughout the year.

2.5 Literary Devices

Alliteration

In the second and third lines of the poem, the words "love" and "love" and "alter" and "alteration" account for the alliterative sound pattern. Here the alliterative sound pattern of the line makes the reader feel the urgency of the speaker in delivering his argument.

Enjambment

Enjambment is employed in the first and third quatrain of the poem. This device furthers the concept that love trespasses every limit.

Pun

In the third line of the poem, the word "alter" also suggests a pun on the word "altar." The speaker believes that love cannot be sacrificed no matter how sacred an altar is.

Rhyme Sceme

The rhyme scheme of this sonnet is ababcdcdefefgg.

Hyperbole

The speaker of Sonnet 116 has a number of significant ideas about love—ideas that are worth taking seriously and evaluating. However, his presentation of those ideas doesn't always have the same seriousness and credibility. At several moments in the poem, the speaker lapses into hyperbole, making rather some outlandish claims. For example, in the poem's final lines, the speaker says that his ideas about love are so solid, so indisputable, that, if he's wrong, no one has ever been in love before. This is a broad and unsupported generalization—a generalization which includes the whole of human history until the present.

This would be difficult to prove in any kind of convincing fashion, but, of course, the speaker isn't particularly interested in proving anything. Rather, he wants to impress the reader/listener with the force of his passion and his rhetorical commitment—that is, with his willingness to stray into hyperbole. However, as is often the case with hyperbole, the extravagance of the speaker's words may have the opposite effect: instead of building confidence in the speaker, it may cause us to question his passion—which might sound a bit inflated, pretentious, or puffed up.

This final moment of hyperbole is in keeping with the tone of the poem so far, in that the speaker has been very rigid and idealistic in his description of love throughout. Love is "an ever-fixed mark" that "never" falters; in fact, it lasts even to the "edge of doom"—that is, until death or doomsday. One could argue that this idea of love is so unrealistic as to be meaningless; all relationships change and have the potential for disturbances, even if minor.

To say that relationships based on real love never feel even the slightest tremor of trouble seems a bit naive. Again, though, the speaker wants to impress upon the reader the sheer force of his own beliefs (and, it follows, the intensity of his own love for the potential recipient of the poem). How someone interprets this final moment of seeming exaggeration, then, reflects on their feelings about the poem as a whole: whether they think that the speaker is being sincere and genuinely romantic in his efforts to describe a transcendent love which human beings should strive for, or if he is being so dramatic that his words lose some of their power.

2.6 Symbols

Mark

When the speaker mentions a "mark" in line 5, he has in mind a specific kind of mark: a seamark, i.e. a beacon or lighthouse. These structures serve to warn sailors to avoid certain areas filled with reefs or rocky outcroppings on which they might run aground. This warning is potentially life-saving information during a bad storm or in the dark, when a ship might otherwise enter dangerous waters without realizing it. The lighthouse and the beacon are thus frequently symbols for positive forces that guide people through the dark and difficult patches of their life, showing them dangers they might not otherwise see. By associating love with such marks, then, the poem argues that love itself is a solid, guiding force in people's lives.

Star

After comparing love to a beacon or lighthouse in line 5, the speaker compares it to a star in line 7. In many ways, the two metaphors are similar. Like the lighthouse, Renaissance sailors used stars to help them navigate, measuring their own position against the height of the stars. However, there are important differences between the two symbols: a lighthouse is man-made, something you can touch. Stars, by contrast, are distant—inhuman and unreachable. In invoking the star as a metaphor for love, Shakespeare plays on an ancient philosophical tradition, which dates back to the Greek philosopher Plato. In this tradition, there are different kinds of love arranged in a hierarchy. The highest kind of love exceeds human comprehension; like the star in "Sonnet 116," its "worth's unknown." The star thus serves as a symbol for a kind of ideal, perfect love—beyond what anyone might achieve in a real relationship.

Sickle

A sickle is a sharp, hooked agricultural tool. Before the invention of mechanical reapers, it was used to harvest grains and cereals, which a farmer would bend down to cut at the root. In traditional depictions, death carries a sickle or scythe: he is the harvester of souls, who, like the farmer cuts down people at the root. The sickle is thus often used as a symbol of mortality or of the fragility of human life, which can be cut short easily and unexpectedly. This is how the sickle is being used in this poem, too. Here, time uses its sickle much as death would: it harvests youthful beauty—represented by the "rosy lips and cheeks" in line 9—and transforms the body with age, much as harvesting a lush field reduces it to a barren place. Love, according to the speaker, is immune to time and its sickle; it will not diminish or grow weak with age, and is stronger than the frail, mortal body.

2.7 Critical Analysis

Sonnet 116 is the best known of all Shakespearean sonnets. At times, it also seems to be the worst known. It is often been read more as a prayer than a poem: its solemn cadences are so familiar, its message- the absolute permanence of love in a world of change – so inviolate. Yet that very familiarity and reverence have meant that the sonnet is badly known- as with prayer, we have heard it so often that it is difficult to pay heed to every word along with its meaning. The poem, with its weighty affirmation, is more for our admiration than for our scrutiny: we apprehend its truths whole and rely on them.

Although Sonnet 116 has most often been admired from afar, as a grand and lofty affirmation of love, some critics have been struck by the complications of this sonnet. Some critics argue that it

manifests a mournful tone and it didactic in the matters of love. Some critics, most notably, Stephen Booth and Sigmund Burckhardt – have further explored the strangeness of the language in the sonnet 116. Booth demonstrates the sonnet's tendency to make its matter disembodied, non visualizing, impossible to locate in time and place. Burckhardt argues how the poet attempts to strip the language of the sonnet of its referential quality, to restrict its meaning to those the poet wishes to assign. Yet while both critics make brilliant observations about details of the sonnet, neither pursues his reading to the point of showing how these details cohere in the sonnet.

Some other critics have looked at the sonnet in a general context; they have drawn comparisons of sonnet 116 with other sonnets and also made conclusions relatively. They wonder if the poet aspires to convey what love is like; it is apparently quite opposed to the poet's own ideals of love in his other sonnets.

Summary

"Sonnet 116" was written by the English poet and playwright William Shakespeare. Most likely written in 1590s, during a craze for sonnets in English literature, it was not published until 1609. Although Shakespeare's sonnets were not popular during his lifetime, "Sonnet 116" has gone on to become one of the most universally beloved and celebrated poems in the English language. In magnificent, moving terms, the poem describes true love as an enduring, unbending commitment between people: a bond so powerful that only death can reshape it. Though the poem is moving and romantic, it risks at times falling into hyperbole or cliché: some readers may doubt the plausibility—or the sincerity—of its depiction of love.In addition to giving myriad definitions and nuances of love, William Shakespeare employs various literary devices along with many symbols to delineate into the eminence of true love. This Sonnet is like a romantic song that would continue to leave an indelible imprint on the minds of the readers. It not only scores high on the scale of literary qualities but also has a musical richness that turns love into a melody.

Key words

1. ***Impediments***: An "impediment" is an obstacle or problem. In Renaissance England, the word was strongly associated with marriage.
2. ***Alteration***: An "alteration" is a change or transformation. The word is generic: it does not refer to any specific kind of change or transformation.
3. ***Tempest:*** A tempest is a violent storm. The word is a favorite of Shakespeare's; he even titles one of his plays The Tempest. It is a particularly suggestive word here because of its etymology. Tempest comes from the Latin word tempus, meaning "time."
4. ***Remover:*** A "remover" is someone who removes something, who takes something away. It can also refer to a restless person—someone who removes themselves. The speaker uses the word in a fairly generic sense here: he does not give the reader a sense of what is being removed—or, for that matter, who is doing the removing.
5. ***Ever- fixed:*** "Ever-fixed" is a compound word, containing the two separate words "ever" and "fixed." Taken together they mean something like "constant" or "unmoving.

Self Assessment

1. Which of the following is the line that means that love's value can never truly be calculated, nor can it be measured?

A. Love's value ends when one dies.
B. Love is very difficult to calculate.
C. can we decipher love?
D. whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken…"?

2. A sonnet is a 14 line poem with a specific _____and _____.

A. voice and tone

B. diction and rhyme

C. rhyme scheme and meter

D. none of these

3. Shakespeare believes that true love is timeless in the line _____.

A. "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, but bears it out even to the edge of doom,"

B. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds"

C. "That time of year thou mayst in me behold"

D. None of these

4. _____ has often been read more as a prayer than as a poem.

A. Sonnet 116

B. Sonnet 118

C. Sonnet 106

D. Sonnet 18

5. The word 'alter' used in the sonnet also suggests a _____ on the word 'altar'.

A. metaphor

B. simile

C. personification

D. pun

6. In the second and third lines of the poem, the words 'alter' and 'altercation' account for _____ in the sonnet.

A. personification

B. blank verse

C. paradox

D. alliteration

7. Enjambment furthers the concept that _____ trespasses every limit.

A. love

B. hate

C. envy

D. lust

8. The rhyme scheme of this sonnet is_____.

A. ABAB CCDD EEGG FF

B. ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

C. AABB CDDC EFFE GG

D. None of these

9. The poet uses the metaphor of an 'ever fixed mark' to describe love. What is an ever fixed mark?

A. moon
B. stone
C. lighthouse
D. none of these

10. The tone of the sonnet is imposing and _____ throughout the fourteen lines.

A. ironic
B. majestic
C. arrogant
D. none of these

11. The speaker uses the phrase, 'bending sickle compass' to depict the reach of time's _____.

A. power
B. confidence
C. ability
D. none of these

12. The first quatrain in the sonnet tells about what _____.

A. love is not
B. love is
C. strength is
D. none of these

13. In the second quatrain, the poet tells us that love is like a _____.

A. moon
B. guiding star
C. compass
D. none of these

14. In the third quatrain, the poet tells us that love is not time's fool. What does this imply?

A. Love changes time.
B. Love does not change time.
C. Time does not affect love.
D. None of these

15. In the couplet, the speaker says, "no man has ever loved". What does Shakespeare show in this line?

A. arrogance
B. diffidence
C. confidence

D. none of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	D	2.	C	3.	A	4.	A	5.	D
6.	D	7.	A	8.	B	9.	C	10.	B
11.	A	12.	A	13.	B	14.	C	15.	C

Further Reading

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2. https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/sonnets/section7/
3. http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/116
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Unit 03: Since Brass, nor Stone

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the meaning of the sonnet 'Since Brass'
- become well versed with the thematic concerns of the sonnet
- study the literary features of this sonnet

Introduction

Text of the sonnet

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Translation

Since neither brass nor stone nor earth nor the limitless ocean is strong enough to resist the sad force of mortality, how can beauty possibly resist death's rage when beauty is no stronger than a flower? How could your beauty, which is as fragile as the sweet breath of summer, hold out against the destructive assaults of time when neither invulnerable rocks nor gates of steel are strong enough to resist its decaying power?What a frightening thing to think about! Alas, where can I put your beauty, time's most precious creation, to hide it from time itself? Whose hand is strong enough to slow time down? Who will forbid its destruction of your beauty? Oh, no one, unless this miracle proves effective: that in the black ink of my poetry, the one I love may still shine bright.

Analysis

Sonnet 65 continues the theme of the two sonnets preceding it, addressing the passage of time with the similar approach of how it destroys all earthly things.Sonnet 64 discusses the "lofty towers I see down-raz'd," the "brass" which is "eternal slave to mortal rage," or a victim to war, and the destruction of "the kingdom of the shore" by the "hungry ocean." Here again, "brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea" can escape the ravages of time.Line 3 asks, "How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea," characterizing beauty as the plaintiff in a legal dispute. Time is thus characterized as an unfair tyrant, against which delicate beauty stands no chance in court.

The legal terminology is continued in the following line with the use of the word "action."The idea of time's "rage" links Sonnet 65 to the previous sonnet. In Sonnet 64, "brass" is described as an "eternal slave to mortal rage." The term "rage" in association with time is also seen in Sonnet 13, which refers to the "barren rage of death's eternal cold."Lines 6-8 present a metaphor of the seizure of a city, which would be the final destruction of war. In line 6, "the wrackful siege of battering days," refers to ruin and destruction with the term "wrackful," while "siege" implies the taking of a city.

"Battering" calls to mind a battering ram, which is a huge beam of wood swung against the gates of a city to break them down and allow the attacking army to enter. The "rocks impregnable" in line 7 refer to the city's walls, which were thought to be impenetrable, and the "gates of steel" in line 8 are the gates of the besieged city.Lines 10-12 pose three questions, which are answered in the final couplet. In line 10, "Time's best jewel" refers to the beauty of youth, and "Time's chest" is the place where Time eventually hides all youth: a coffin.Line 11's question, "Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?" suggests that Time has a "swift foot," or moves quickly, unstopped by even a strong hand held up helplessly against it. Line 12 asks how it is possible to stop time from destroying youth.

Sonnet 63 uses the same idea of the physical quality of the black ink being transformed into something alive: "His beauty shall in these black lines be seen, / And they shall live, and he in them still green." The word "green" implies youth or newness, as in the greenness of springtime.In the final couplet of Sonnet 65, the poet hopes, "That in black ink my love may still shine bright." In this case, the hope that the love will "still shine bright" is a comparison to the sun, which time obscures with clouds.

3.1 Thematic concerns

Transience

Sonnet 65 continues Sonnet 64's theme of the ravages of time, which is perhaps the most moving of the two sonnets. The principal theme is, however, the transience of all things powerful and beautiful, threatened by Time. Shakespeare compares the ability of beauty,"no stronger than a flower," to survive that onslaught of time that destroys such powerful elements as metal, stone, earth, the sea itself. Shakespeare interestingly uses a legal construct--"hold a plea"--to describe the struggle between beauty and the powerful work of time.

In the second quatrain, Shakespeare shifts the comparison for this unavoidable battle in human affairs from beauty to the seasons, in this case, summer. Here, the metaphor of life, summer, is even more delicate than the earlier beauty--"the honeyed breath of summer"--as ephemeral as it sounds as absolutely no chance of surviving the grinding effects of "Great rocks and gates made of iron," as

well as the "battering storm of time." The image of "breath" against such adamantine powers as rocks and iron reinforces its delicate, vulnerable nature.

Given the dramatic difference between the relative strengths of the two elements at odds with each other, beauty against time and nature, the poet express his very real concern about which can survive. The poet naturally wonders--given the difference between beauty's strength and the over-powering power of earth's elements--what can possible save his lover's beauty--does he have to hide beauty from time? Shakespeare explicit refers to the Greek God Mercury when he refers to holding "his swift foot back."The couplet, providing the solution to this seemingly insurmountable problem: the poet's own verse, extolling his lover's beauty in the permanence of black ink, will effectively stop the ravages of time in its tracks. Time, unlike its power over life and beauty, has no power over the written word, and ink will preserve his love's beauty long after time has done its work.

3.2 The Immortalizing Power of Poetry

The speaker of "Sonnet 65" laments the fact that time changes all things. As time continues its merciless march forward, everything in the world dies, decays, or is lost.In the face of time's power, the speaker wonders how phenomena as delicate as beauty and love possibly might endure. The only thing that can hold back time, the speaker concludes, is poetry itself: even though the speaker will die one day, the words of the speaker's poetry, and the love those words express, will live on in "black ink."The speaker acknowledges that even the strongest substances in the world are subject to the passage of time. Everything from "brass," to "stone," to "earth," to the "sea" is eventually overcome by "sad mortality." In other words, everything breaks down sooner or later.

Brass can get tarnished, stone becomes gravel or sand, dirt gets eroded, and the "boundless sea," which appears limitless, has an end. Neither impenetrable rocks nor strong steel gates seem all that tough in the fight against time, which breaks through their defenses and "decays" them like everything else.If time can destroy even "steel" and "stone," the speaker reasons, then it follows that intangible things like love and beauty don't have a chance of sticking around for long. Such things, in this speaker's mind, are as delicate and fleeting as "summer's honey breath" or a spring "flower"—and thus even more vulnerable to time's cruel hand.

Yet the speaker also suggests that something can survive the passage of time: "this miracle"—the poem itself. If a poem has "might," or lasting power, then it can travel into the future to be read by generations of readers. And if that's true, perhaps love can also survive, since poetry can express and contain love. In other words, poetry is essentially immortal, and the love and beauty that such poetry contains will still "shine bright" in the "black ink" of the poem for years to come.

3.3 Structure of the poem

'Sonnet 65' by William Shakespeare is a fourteen-line poem that is contained within one stanza, in the form that has become synonymous with the poet's name. The English or Shakespearean sonnet (sometimes also known as the Elizabethan) is made up of three quatrains, or sets of four lines, and one concluding couplet, or set of two rhyming lines. The poem follows a consistent rhyme scheme that conforms to the pattern of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG and it is written in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter means that each line contains five sets of two beats, known as metrical feet. The first is unstressed and the second stressed. It sounds something like da-DUM, da-DUM.Iambic pentameter means that each line contains five sets of two beats, known as metrical feet. The first is unstressed and the second stressed. It sounds something like da-DUM, da-DUM.

3.4 Literary devices

Shakespeare makes use of several poetic techniques in 'Sonnet 65'. These include but are not limited to alliteration, metaphor, and personification. The first of these, alliteration, occurs when words are used in succession, or at least appear close together, and begin with the same sound. For example, "power" and "plea" in lines two and three as well as breath" and "batt'ring". (The latter is also an example of syncope.)

Metaphor

A metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things that does not use "like" or "as" is also present in the text. When using this technique a poet is saying that one thing is another thing, they aren't just similar.There is a good example in line five where the speaker refers to the youth's beauty as "summer's honey breath". This relates back to several other similes and metaphors in other sonnets where the youth is represented by warmth and the sun.

Personification

Personification occurs when a poet imbues a non-human creature or object with human characteristics. In this particular poem, as in 'Sonnet 63' and 'Sonnet 64' Shakespeare uses personification to depict "time" as something that has agency and the power to destroy at will.

3.5 Critical Analysis by Helen Vendler

Sonnet 65 reconsiders decay, and admits, with regret but with stoicism as well, that in order to combat decay the poem must leave the natural order altogether.The body of 65 demands some form of hold[ing] in the contest that it imagines beauty will have to wage against Time.How shall beauty hold a plea (Q1), how shall summer's breath hold out (Q2), what swift hand can hold back Time (Q3); the rage, the siege, the spoil must in some way be contested. Some sort of holding action by some strong hand is in order. We might expect to find the couplet playing on hold, too, somewhat as the couplet of 60 plays on stand.But the couplet abandons the physical means of holding called for by the body of the sonnet, realizing that in the natural order there is no hope for winning that future battle. Instead, the couplet departs from the natural order altogether, putting its hope in miracle.This sort of arrangement can be that of a defective key word, since Shakespeare has trained us, through his repeated construction of key word sonnets, to expect hold in C once we have found it in Q1, Q2, and Q3. (The same is true, e.g., for excuse in 51.) We are then forced to ask what, in the member missing the key word, takes the key word's place. Here it is miracle; (in 51 it is leave to go).There is a second defective key word in this sonnet: it is strong[-er].

Like hold, strong is absent in C, because it too belongs to the (mistaken) hope that Time's depredations can be prevented by opposing to them some contrary strength that exists in the inorganic or organic order. When this hope of physical survival is abandoned in favor of the virtual order of miracle, the strong hold of physical force disappears as well.After the powerlessness of organic nature has been acknowledged, the beloved cannot be said to live . . . still green organically in black lines (63); but if one leaves the realm of nature for the supernatural realm of miracle (etymologically, "that which is to be wondered at"), the beloved may still shine bright in black ink, inorganically, as a jewel or star might.

The might of the auxiliary may can be said to be the generative pun of the couplet (noted by Booth). It is not until we notice the sounds and letters held in common by miracle and black inck (Quarto spelling) that the conjunction of miracle and black in[c]k makes poetic sense.When we look at the view of the natural order that precedes the couplet's trust in miracle, we find that Time, like Proteus, has more than one form: there are two enemies to permanence. The first is sad mortality, or entropy, which is more powerful than all those inorganic forms previously named in sonnet 64, even the most architecturally enduring (brass, stone) and the most extended (earth, boundless sea).The second enemy to permanence is rage, which seems to be (as in 64) the martial version of natural destructiveness. This rage, once named, is presented again in the periphrasis the wreckful siege of batt'ring days (the word rage may be said to be the portmanteau version of wreckfulsie]ge). Rocks and gates of steel are as unable to resist wrathful Time as stone and brass were unable to outface sad mortality.

It will be observed that Time's combats with brass, stone, earth, boundless sea, rocks, and gates of steel have already happened: Time's combats with the organic flower and its honey breath are yet to come (shall), and their outcome is feared by the speaker, given Time's success against stronger opponents.The organic order, summoned up in the octave, is the chief casualty of the sestet, which must envisage beauty in inorganic terms, as a jewel which can shine in black ink. This sonnet abandons, with the poignant valedictory allusion to summer's honey breath, any hope of an organically analogous eternal summer (sonnet 18). Though Time was first entropic mortality, then martial rage, it soon becomes a force that decays; and finally it is feared as a possible de[spoil]er of beauty whose swift foot eludes restraint.

When we attempt to account for these changes of metaphor, we see that Protean Time seems to change his ways depending on his opponent, using mortality, battering, or decay as he sees fit; but

there is something disproportionate about imagining his heavy artillery being expended (as the speaker fears it will be) against the delicate and the evanescent.Precisely this disproportion causes the pathos of the envisaged ill-matched contests of Time with flowerlike beauty and summer's sweet fragrance in Q1 and Q2. In Q3, by contrast, in the wake of beauty's transformation into an inorganic jewel, Time suddenly becomes a majestic victor claiming the spoils of war—an opponent worthy of his envisaged prize (not, interestingly, the "vulgar thief" feared in sonnet 48).In the major aesthetic internal rearrangement of the poem, the speaker's hopes have shifted from the organic to the inorganic: although a flowerlike beauty may not endure the envisaged future contest with time, he hopes that a diamond like beauty-as-jewel may; and in a coordinate change, beauty (whose action is no stronger than a flower) need no longer be its own defender, but gains a champion who will dispute Time on beauty's behalf.

This champion will have to be the poet, who is at first awed by his own venture: O fearful meditation: Where?... What hand?... Who? . . . O none, unless—The final change in tone from the lament for organic fragile beauty. SONNET 65 and evanescent fragrance to the strong hope for inorganic miracle is a marked one. It entails abandoning the three organic uses of hold, one per quatrain: that flowerlike beauty hold a plea (impossible); that fragrance hold out (impossible); that a hand hold back (impossible for an organic hand; possible only if the strong hand found to work the miracle is a punning inorganic one). The mira of miracle may have appealed to Shakespeare as an anagram of rima (rhyme), as he decided to assert that human literary powers could o'ersway sad mortality, martial rage, and Time's swift foot.What is preserved in black ink is not solely the quality of beauty, however, but the poet's entire beloved—in his carbonized allomorph as jewel. The changing of beauty from organic to inorganic form enables Shakespeare to "save" the beloved, but at the cost of admitting as well the inorganic nature of writing (hand as "handwriting") and what is preserved in it.The contrast of the chiastic order of the octave (strong things : beauty :: beauty : strong things) with the linearity of the sestet once again (as in 64) exhibits the "collectedness" of chiastic philosophical meditation compared to the linearity of "presentness" in thinking. It should be noticed that of the three questions—Where? What hand? Who?—the author modestly answers only the first, but by his answer—in black ink—implies the answers to the other two: "my hand," "I."

The break between octave and Q3 here is marked by the ejaculation O, but the break does not disturb the twelve-line pattern of interrogatives constructing the body of the poem: how (twice), where, what and finally who. The chiastic Since : how :: how : when of the octave again serves to define it as a philosophical construct against the immediacy of Q3; but the increasingly shorter line-lengths of the questions (4-4-2-1-1) join the octave to Q3 in an accelerando.The effects of sound in the poem are notable—rage/wrackful/siege/battering/rocks impregnable, steel so strong, etc.—especially when contrasted with the innocent hum of summer's honey breath.The prosody too claims attention, especially in the retarding spondees of the monosyllabic or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back. (I accept the emendation "spoil of beauty.)

It's the contrast of sounds that makes the start of this Shakespeare sonnet (65 in the sequence of 154) especially arresting. The opening line's assembled concrete nouns have weight and mass: brass, stone, earth (presumably as in "planet Earth" though the added suggestion of heaped soil is effective) and "boundless sea". These words seem to embody tangibility compared with the plaintive fragile cadence of "sad mortality" – though it's the latter that has the power to "o'er-sway" them.

The memorable question, introduced in line three, is no less emotionally stirring for the legal metaphor implied by "hold a plea". It's as if the speaker had himself grown increasingly angry and distressed: "How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea, / Whose action is no stronger than a flower?" A single word, "rage", (denoting the rapacity of time) abolishes the thought that any justice will be done in such a court of appeal.

From the frail "flower" of line four, the thought expands to evoke the whole odour of summer. It's a reminder of an earlier sonnet (18) where the beloved is found "more lovely and more temperate" than a summer's day. Now, though, we're swiftly transported from fragrant fields to a war zone with "The wreckful siege of batt'ring days". This time, the sound effects reinforce images of noisy demolition.

After the crescendo, a dramatic quiet falls with the exclamation, "O fearful meditation!" There's a shift to cool rhetorical elegance in the subsequent question, "where, alack, / Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid?" Theft follows war, and the "best jewel" that "beauty" represents is now the "spoil". Some interpreters take "chest" to mean "coffin" rather than "treasure-chest" but the

syntax allows both possibilities. The line could be asking where the best jewel out of the whole treasure-chest can safely be hidden or where the best jewel can be hidden from Time's internment. The image of a hand trying to grasp the enemy by the foot reinforces the "stop thief" idea with satisfying physicality.

The concluding couplet reworks a familiar theme. The endurance of the poet's words is memorably asserted in Sonnet 18: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." Don Paterson, in an essay in Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets: A New Commentary), objects that "nothing will shine bright in black ink if there's no one to read it". That's true enough if the destruction the reader envisages is entirely realistic – and Sonnet 65 has urged us in that cataclysmic direction.

But there's room in the poem to draw back from universal annihilation, and imagine personal loss, even if there's no addressee – and the vulnerable "beauty" is attributed to no one in particular. In the broad context of the sonnets, beauty takes at times specific human forms, and the lover has an identity. In Sonnet 65 his signature can be found in the owning up to "my love" in the last line. And, after all, the poet is invoking a "miracle": there's a faint suggestion of fallibility. This inexplicable wonder might not work out. And if it does, then why shouldn't black ink retain such freshness it shines out starrily in starless, loveless space?

Summary

'Sonnet 65' by William Shakespeare is one of several poems that discuss time, aging, and what writing can and cannot do to fight against these forces. The poem is not addressed to "thee" or "you" as the majority of Shakespeare's sonnets are.Rather, the lines of 'Sonnet 65' refer obliquely to the Fair Youth and the impact that time is going to have on him. The speaker racks his brain for anyone or anything that's been able to resist time and he can't think of anything. The only way that the youth can possibly survive is to live within the poet's writings. Continuing many of the images from Sonnet 64, the poet concludes that nothing withstands time's ravages. The hardest metals and stones, the vast earth and sea — all submit to time.

In contrast to the previous sonnet, the poet once again is reassured that his sonnets will provide the youth immortality — his verse is the only thing that can withstand time's decay. Returning to the power of poetry to bestow eternal life, the poet asserts "That in black ink my love may still shine bright."He believes that his love verse can preserve the youth's beauty. Ironically, this back-and-forth thinking mirrors the movement of the waves to the shore — an image the poet uses in many of the time-themed sonnets in this sequence.

For example, in Sonnet 60, the poet says, "Each changing place with that which goes before, / In sequent toil all forwards do contend"; and in Sonnet 64, he notes, "Increasing store with loss and loss with store." Physically and emotionally separated from the young man, the poet's constantly shifting belief in the worth of his verse parallels his constantly shifting faith in the young man.

Keywords

1. ***O'ersways***: An abbreviation of the word "oversway," which means to overcome or overpower.
2. ***Wrackful*** : Destructive
3. ***Impregnable*** : Invulnerable
4. ***Siege*** :A "siege" is a persistent attack, as in a military attack.
5. ***Batt'ring***:"Batt'ring" is an abbreviation of "battering," an adjective that means violent, damaging, destructive, and relentless.

Self Assessment

1. In an iambic pentameter, the first syllable is_____ and the second_____.

A. unstressed, stressed

B. stressed, unstressed
C. important, unimportant
D. none of these

2. Which Shakespearean sonnet, brass is defined as an 'eternal slave to mortal rage'?
A. Sonnet 64
B. Sonnet 65
C. Sonnet 63
D. Sonnet 60

3. Which of the following best describes a quatrain?
A. A two-line, typically rhyming unit of verse
B. A type of metrical foot
C. A four-line, typically rhyming unit of verse
D. A poem of fourteen lines, typically featuring rhyme, meter and logical structure

4. Is there any use of personification in Sonnet 65?
A. No
B. Yes
C. May be
D. Can't say

5. Whose foot is being talked about in the expression "his swift foot"?
A. Beauty
B. Poetry
C. Time
D. None of these

6. "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a _____?"
A. flower
B. stone
C. gate
D. none of these

7. What is the rhyme scheme of the sonnet 65?
A. AABB CDCD EEFG
B. ABAB CDCD EFEF GHGH
C. ABAB CDCD EFEF GG
D. None of these

8. The theme of the Sonnet 65 is that _____.

A. time can be taken for granted.
B. everything in the world is transient against the ravages of time.
C. time can heal the wounds.
D. none of these

9. Which is the only thing that can hold back time?

A. Beauty
B. Youth
C. Poetry
D. None of these

10. Iambic pentameter means that each line contains five sets of two beats, known as _____ feet.

A. rhythmical
B. syllabic
C. rhyming
D. metrical

11. What is the meaning of 'Time's best jewel'?

A. Time's diamond
B. Time's gold
C. Time's platinum
D. Beauty of youth

12. What does the word 'chest' imply in the expression 'Time's chest'?

A. Coffin
B. Souvenir
C. Box
D. None of these

13. What do 'rocks' imply in the expression 'rocks impregnable' in the sonnet 65?

A. City's shore
B. Igneous rocks
C. City's walls
D. None of these

14. The use of the words 'power' and 'plea' in the same line is an example of _____.

A. metaphor
B. simile
C. oxymoron
D. alliteration

15. In which Shakespearean sonnet, brass is defined as an 'eternal slave to mortal rage'?

A. Sonnet 64
B. Sonnet 65
C. Sonnet 63
D. Sonnet 60

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	A	3.	C	4.	B	5.	C
6.	A	7.	C	8.	B	9.	C	10.	D
11.	D	12.	A	13.	C	14.	D	15.	A

Review Questions

1. What is the theme of the sonnet, 'Since Brass, nor stone'?
2. Does this sonnet have a musical quality?
3. Give insights into characteristics of Shakespearean sonnet by giving examples from Sonnet 65.
4. Give a brief overview of the literary devices present in the Sonnet 65.
5. Critically analyze Sonnet 65.

Further Reading

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Unit 04:John Milton: Paradise Lost

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the characteristics of 17th century English literature
- gain insight into the intriguing facts about Puritans
- understand Milton as a Puritan poet
- get an overview of the epic poem, 'Paradise Lost'

Introduction

The Puritan Age

Historical Characteristics

In its broadest sense, the Puritan movement may be regarded as a second and greater Renaissance, a rebirth of the moral nature of man following the intellectual awakening of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Italy, whose influence had been uppermost in Elizabethan literature, the Renaissance had been essentially pagan and sensuous. It had hardly touched the moral nature of man, and it brought little relief from the despotism of rulers. One can hardly read the horrible records of the Medici or the Borgias, or the political observations of Machiavelli, without marveling at the moral and political degradation of a cultured nation. In the North, especially among the German and English people, the Renaissance was accompanied by a moral awakening, and it is precisely that awakening in England, "that greatest moral and political reform which ever swept over a nation in the short space of half a century," which is meant by the Puritan movement.We shall understand it better if we remember that it had two chief objects: the first was personal righteousness; the second was civil and religious liberty. In other words, it aimed to make men honest and to make them free.Such a movement should be cleared of all the misconceptions which have clung to it since the Restoration, when the very name of Puritan was made ridiculous by the jeers of the gay courtiers of Charles II. Though the spirit of the movement was profoundly religious, the Puritans were not a religious sect; neither was the Puritan a narrow-minded and gloomy dogmatist, as he is still pictured even in the histories.

Pym and Hampden and Eliot and Milton were Puritans; and in the long struggle for human liberty there are few names more honored by freemen everywhere.Cromwell and Thomas Hooker were Puritans; yet Cromwell stood like a rock for religious tolerance; and Thomas Hooker, in Connecticut, gave to the world the first written constitution, in which freemen, before electing their officers, laid down the strict limits of the offices to which they were elected. That is a Puritan document, and it marks one of the greatest achievements in the history of government.From a religious view point Puritanism included all shades of belief. The name was first given to those who advocated certain changes in the form of worship of the reformed English Church under Elizabeth; but as the ideal of liberty rose in men's minds, and opposed to it were the king and his evil counselors and the band of intolerant churchmen of whom Laud is the great example, then Puritanism became a great national movement.It included English churchmen as well as extreme Separatists, Calvinists, Covenanters, Catholic noblemen,—all bound together in resistance to despotism in Church and State, and with a passion for liberty and righteousness such as the world has never since seen.

Naturally, such a movement had its extremes and excesses, and it is from a few zealots and fanatics that most of our misconceptions about the Puritans arise. Life was stern in those days, too stern perhaps, and the intensity of the struggle against despotism made men narrow and hard.In the triumph of Puritanism under Cromwell severe laws were passed, many simple pleasures were forbidden, and an austere standard of living was forced upon an unwilling people. So the criticism is made that the wild outbreak of immorality which followed the restoration of Charles was partly due to the unnatural restrictions of the Puritan era. The criticism is just; but we must not forget the whole spirit of the movement.That the Puritan prohibited Maypole dancing and horse racing is of small consequence beside the fact that he fought for liberty and justice, that he overthrew despotism and made a man's life and property safe from the tyranny of rulers. A great river is not judged by the foam on its surface, and certain austere laws and doctrines which we have ridiculed are but froth on the surface of the mighty Puritan current that has flowed steadily, like a river of life, through English and American history since the Age of Elizabeth.

The political upheaval of the period is summed up in the terrible struggle between the king and Parliament, which resulted in the death of Charles at the block and the establishment of the Commonwealth under Cromwell. For centuries, the English people had been wonderfully loyal to their sovereigns; but deeper than their loyalty to kings was the Old Saxon love for personal liberty.At times, as in the days of Alfred and Elizabeth, the two ideals went hand in hand; but more often they were in open strife, and a final struggle for supremacy was inevitable. The crisis came when James I, who had received the right of royalty from an act of Parliament, began, by the assumption of "divine right," to ignore the Parliament which had created him.Of the civil war which followed in the reign of Charles I, and of the triumph of English freedom, it is unnecessary to write here. The blasphemy of a man's divine right to rule his fellow-men was ended. Modern England began with the charge of Cromwell's brigade of Puritans at Naseby.Religiously, the age was one of even greater ferment than that which marked the beginning of the Reformation.A great ideal, the ideal of a national church, was pounding to pieces, like a ship in the breakers, and in the confusion of such an hour the action of the various sects was like that of frantic passengers, each striving to save his possessions from the wreck.The Catholic Church, as its name implies, has always held true to the ideal of a united church, a church which, like the great Roman government of the early centuries, can bring the splendor and authority of Rome to bear upon the humblest village church to the farthest ends of the earth. For a time that mighty ideal dazzled the German and English reformers; but the possibility of a united Protestant church perished with Elizabeth.

Then, instead of the world-wide church which was the ideal of Catholicism, came the ideal of a purely national Protestantism.This was the ideal of Laud and the reactionary bishops, no less than of the scholarly Richard Hooker, of the rugged Scotch Covenanters, and of the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay.It is intensely interesting to note that Charles called Irish rebels and Scotch Highlanders to his aid by promising to restore their national religions; and that the English Puritans, turning to Scotland for help, entered into the solemn Covenant of 1643, establishing a national Presbyterianism, whose object was to bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to uniformity in religion and government, to preserve the rights of Parliament and the liberties of the Kingdom; ... that we and our posterity may as brethren live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to live in the midst of us. In this famous Covenant we see the national, the ecclesiastical, and

the personal dream of Puritanism, side by side, in all their grandeur and simplicity. Years passed, years of bitter struggle and heartache, before the impossibility of uniting the various Protestant sects was generally recognized. The ideal of a national church died hard, and to its death is due all the religious unrest of the period.Only as we remember the national ideal, and the struggle which it caused, can we understand the amazing life and work of Bunyan, or appreciate the heroic spirit of the American colonists who left home for a wilderness in order to give the new ideal of a free church in a free state its practical demonstration.

Literary Characteristics

In literature also, the Puritan Age was one of confusion, due to the breaking up of old ideals. Mediaeval standards of chivalry, the impossible loves and romances of which Spenser furnished the types, perished no less surely than the ideal of a national church; and in the absence of any fixed standard of literary criticism, there was nothing to prevent the exaggeration of the "metaphysical" poets, who are the literary parallels to religious sects like the Anabaptists.Poetry took new and startling forms in Donne and Herbert, and prose became as somber as Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. The spiritual gloom which sooner or later fastens upon all the writers of this age, and which is unjustly attributed to Puritan influence, is due to the breaking up of accepted standards in government and religion. No people, from the Greeks to those of our own day, have suffered the loss of old ideals without causing its writers to cry, "Ichabod! the glory has departed."That is the unconscious tendency of literary men in all times, who look backward for their golden age; and it need not concern the student of literature, who, even in the break-up of cherished institutions, looks for some fore gleams of a better light which is to break upon the world.

This so-called gloomy age produced some minor poems of exquisite workmanship, and one great master of verse whose work would glorify any age or people,—John Milton, in whom the indomitable Puritan spirit finds its noblest expression.There are three main characteristics in which Puritan literature differs from that of the preceding age: Elizabethan literature, with all its diversity, had a marked unity in spirit, resulting from the patriotism of all classes and their devotion to a queen who, with all her faults, sought first the nation's welfare. Under the Stuarts all this was changed.The kings were the open enemies of the people; the country was divided by the struggle for political and religious liberty; and the literature was as divided in spirit as were the struggling parties. Elizabethan literature is generally inspiring; it throbs with youth and hope and vitality. That which follows speaks of age and sadness; even its brightest hours are followed by gloom, and by the pessimism inseparable from the passing of old standards.

Elizabethan literature is intensely romantic; the romance springs from the heart of youth, and believes all things, even the impossible. The great schoolman's credo, "I believe because it is impossible," is a better expression of Elizabethan literature than of mediaeval theology. In the literature of the Puritan period, one looks in vain for romantic ardor.Even in the lyrics and love poems, a critical, intellectual spirit takes its place, and whatever romance asserts itself is in form rather than in feeling, a fantastic and artificial adornment of speech rather than the natural utterance of a heart in which sentiment is so strong and true that poetry is its only expression.When one attempts to classify the literature of the first half of the seventeenth century, from the death of Elizabeth (1603) to the Restoration (1660), he realizes the impossibility of grouping poets by any accurate standard. The classifications attempted here have small dependence upon dates or sovereigns, and are suggestive rather than accurate.

Thus Shakespeare and Bacon wrote largely in the reign of James I, but their work is Elizabethan in spirit; and Bunyan is no less a Puritan because he happened to write after the Restoration.The name Metaphysical poets, given by Dr. Johnson, is somewhat suggestive but not descriptive of the followers of Donne; the name Caroline or Cavalier poets brings to mind the careless temper of the Royalists who followed King Charles with a devotion of which he was unworthy;The name Spenserian poets recalls the little band of dreamers who clung to Spenser's ideal, even while his romantic medieval castle was battered down by Science at the one gate and Puritanism at the other.At the beginning of this bewildering confusion of ideals expressed in literature, we note a few writers who are generally known as Jacobean poets or the Transition poets because, with the later dramatists, they show clearly the changing standards of the age.

4.1 Major Writers of 17th Century English Literature

Samuel Daniel (1562- 1619)

Daniel, who is often classed with the first Metaphysical poets, is interesting to us for two reasons,—for his use of the artificial sonnet, and for his literary desertion of Spenser as a model for poets.His Delia, a cycle of sonnets modeled, perhaps, after Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, helped to fix the custom of celebrating love or friendship by a series of sonnets, to which some pastoral pseudonym was affixed.This fling at Spenser and his followers marks the beginning of the modern and realistic school, which sees in life as it is enough poetic material, without the invention of allegories and impossible heroines. Daniel's poetry, which was forgotten soon after his death, has received probably more homage than it deserves in the praises of Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb, and Coleridge.

The Song Writers:

In strong contrast with the above are two distinct groups, the Song Writers and the Spenserian poets. The close of the reign of Elizabeth was marked by an outburst of English songs, as remarkable in its sudden development as the rise of the drama.Two causes contributed to this result,—the increasing influence of French instead of Italian verse, and the rapid development of music as an art at the close of the sixteenth century. The two song writers' best worth studying are Thomas Campion and Nicholas Breton.Like all the lyric poets of the age, they are a curious mixture of the Elizabethan and the Puritan standards. They sing of sacred and profane love with the same zest, and a careless love song is often found on the same page with a plea for divine grace.

The Spenserian Poets:

Of the Spenserian poets, Giles Fletcher and Wither are best worth studying. Giles Fletcher has at times a strong suggestion of Milton (who was also a follower of Spenser in his early years) in the noble simplicity and majesty of his lines.His best known work, "Christ's Victory and Triumph" (1610), was the greatest religious poem that had appeared in England since "Piers Plowman," and is not an unworthy predecessor of Paradise Lost.The life of George Wither (1588-1667) covers the whole period of English history from Elizabeth to the Restoration, and the enormous volume of his work covers every phase of the literature of two great ages.His life was a varied one; now as a Royalist leader against the Covenanters, and again announcing his Puritan convictions, and suffering in prison for his faith.At his best, Wither is a lyric poet of great originality, rising at times to positive genius; but the bulk of his poetry is intolerably dull.Students of this period find him interesting as an epitome of the whole age in which he lived; but the average reader is more inclined to note with interest that he published in 1623 Hymns and Songs of the Church, the first hymn book that ever appeared in the English language.

The Metaphysical Poets:

This name—which was given by Dr. Johnson in derision, because of the fantastic form of Donne's poetry—is often applied to all minor poets of the Puritan Age. We use the term here in a narrower sense, excluding the followers of Daniel and that later group known as the Cavalier poets.It includes Donne, Herbert, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Vaughan, Davenant, Marvell, and Crashaw. The advanced student finds them all worthy of study, not only for their occasional excellent poetry, but because of their influence on later literature.Thus Richard Crashaw, the Catholic mystic, is

interesting because his troubled life is singularly like Donne's, and his poetry is at times like Herbert's set on fire.Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), who blossomed young and who, at twenty-five, was proclaimed the greatest poet in England, is now scarcely known even by name, but his "Pindaric Odes"[161] set an example which influenced English poetry throughout the eighteenth century.

Abraham Cowley

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Henry Vaughan

Henry Vaughan (1622-1695) is worthy of study because he is in some respects the forerunner of Wordsworth; and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), because of his loyal friendship with Milton, and because his poetry shows the conflict between the two schools of Spenser and Donne.

Edmund Waller

Edmund Waller (1606-1687) stands between the Puritan Age and the Restoration.He was the first to use consistently the "closed" couplet which dominated our poetry for the next century. By this, and especially by his influence over Dryden, the greatest figure of the Restoration, he occupies a larger place in our literature than a reading of his rather tiresome poetry would seem to warrant. Of all these poets, each of whom has his special claim, we can consider here only Donne and Herbert, who in different ways are the types of revolt against earlier forms and standards of poetry. In feeling and imagery, both are poets of a high order, but in style and expression they are the leaders of the fantastic school whose influence largely dominated poetry during the half century of the Puritan period.

The Cavalier Poets

In the literature of any age there are generally found two distinct tendencies. The first expresses the dominant spirit of the times; the second, a secret or an open rebellion. So in this age, side by side with the serious and rational Puritan, lives the gallant and trivial Cavalier.The Puritan finds expression in the best poetry of the period, from Donne to Milton, and in the prose of Baxter and Bunyan; the Cavalier in a small group of poets,—Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling, and Carew,—who write songs generally in lighter vein, gay, trivial, often licentious, but who cannot altogether escape the tremendous seriousness of Puritanism.

4.2 Intriguing Facts about Puritans

1. They really didn't like Christmas.
2. They believed in fairies.
3. If they liked it then they should have put a thimble on it.
4. They were kind to scholar.
5. They liked a drink.
6. None of their hats had buckles on.
7. Life was so hard, the children preferred to be abducted by Native Americans.
8. Naming a child was an act of spiritual prediction.

4.3 Introduction to John Milton

Shakespeare and Milton are the two figures that tower conspicuously above the goodly fellowship of men who have made our literature famous. Each is representative of the age that produced him, and together they form a suggestive commentary upon the two forces that rule our humanity,— the force of impulse and the force of a fixed purpose.Shakespeare is the poet of impulse, of the loves, hates, fears, jealousies, and ambitions that swayed the men of his age. Milton is the poet of steadfast will and purpose, who moves like a god amid the fears and hopes and changing impulses of the world, regarding them as trivial and momentary things that can never swerve a great soul from its course.It is well to have some such comparison in mind while studying the literature of the Elizabethan and the Puritan Age.While Shakespeare and Ben Jonson and their unequaled company of wits make merry at the Mermaid Tavern, there is already growing up on the same London street a poet who shall bring a new force into literature, who shall add to the Renaissance culture and love of beauty the tremendous moral earnestness of the Puritan.

Such a poet must begin, as the Puritan always began, with his own soul, to discipline and enlighten it, before expressing its beauty in literature."He that would hope to write well hereafter in laudable things," says Milton, "ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and most honorable things."Here is a new proposition in art which suggests the lofty ideal of Fra Angelico that before one can write literature, which is the expression of the ideal, he must first develop in himself the ideal man.Because Milton is human he must know the best in humanity; therefore he studies, giving his days to music, art, and literature, his nights to profound research and meditation.But because he knows that man is more than mortal he also prays, depending, as he tells us, on "devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge."Such a poet is already in spirit far beyond the Renaissance, though he lives in the autumn of its glory and associates with its literary masters. "There is a spirit in man," says the old Hebrew poet, "and the inspiration of the Almighty gives him understanding." Here, in a word, is the secret of Milton's life and writing.Hence his long silences, years passing without a word; and when he speaks it are like the voice of a prophet who begins with the sublime announcement, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."Hence, his style, producing an impression of sublimity, which has been marked for wonder by every historian of our literature. His style was unconsciously sublime because he lived and thought consciously in a sublime atmosphere.

Milton's Early Poetry

In his early work, Milton appears as the inheritor of all that was best in Elizabethan literature, and his first work, the ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," approaches the high-water mark of lyric poetry in England.In the next six years, from 1631 to 1637, he wrote but little, scarcely more than two thousand lines, but these are among the most exquisite and the most perfectly finished in our language."L'Allegro" and "II Penseroso" are twin poems, containing many lines and short descriptive passages which linger in the mind like strains of music, and which are known and loved wherever English is spoken. "L'Allegro" (the joyous or happy man) is like an excursion into the English fields at sunrise.The air is sweet; birds are singing; a multitude of sights, sounds, fragrances, fill all the senses; and to this appeal of nature the soul of man responds by being happy, seeing in every flower and hearing in every harmony some exquisite symbol of human life."Il Penseroso" takes us over the same ground at twilight and at moonrise. The air is still fresh and fragrant; the symbolism is, if possible, more tenderly beautiful than before; but the gay mood is gone, though its memory lingers in the afterglow of the sunset.

A quiet thoughtfulness takes the place of the pure, joyous sensation of the morning, a thoughtfulness which is not sad, though like all quiet moods it is akin to sadness, and which sounds the deeps of human emotion in the presence of nature.They should be read in their entirety the same day, one at morning, the other at eventide, if one is to appreciate their beauty and suggestiveness.The "Masque of Comus" is in many respects the most perfect of Milton's poems. It was written in 1634 to be performed at Ludlow Castle before the earl of Bridgewater and his friends.There is a tradition that the earl's three children had been lost in the woods, and, whether true or not, Milton takes the simple theme of a person lost, calls in an Attendant Spirit to protect the wanderer, and out of this, with its natural action and melodious songs, makes the most exquisite pastoral drama that we possess. In form it is a masque, like those gorgeous products of the Elizabethan age of which Ben Jonson was the master.England had borrowed the idea of the masque from Italy and had used it as the chief entertainment at all festivals, until it had become to the nobles of England what the miracle play had been to the common people of a previous generation. Milton, with his strong Puritan spirit, could not be content with the mere entertainment of an idle hour.

"Comus" has the gorgeous scenic effects, the music and dancing of other masques; but its moral purpose and its ideal teachings are unmistakable. "The Triumph of Virtue" would be a better name for this perfect little masque, for its theme is that virtue and innocence can walk through any peril of this world without permanent harm.This eternal triumph of good over evil is proclaimed by the Attendant Spirit who has protected the innocent in this life and who now disappears from mortal sight to resume its life of joy.

Milton's Prose

Of Milton's prose works there are many divergent opinions, ranging from Macaulay's unbounded praise to the condemnation of some of our modern critics. From a literary view point Milton's prose would be stronger if less violent, and a modern writer would hardly be excused for using his language or his methods; but we must remember the times and the methods of his opponents. In his fiery zeal against injustice the poet is suddenly dominated by the soldier's spirit.He first musters his facts in battalions, and charges upon the enemy to crush and overpower without mercy. For Milton hates injustice and, because it is an enemy of his people, he cannot and will not spare it. When the victory is won, he exults in a paean of victory as soul-stirring as the Song of Deborah. He is the poet again, spite of himself, and his mind fills with magnificent images. Even with a subject so dull, so barren of the bare possibilities of poetry, as his "Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defense," he breaks out into an invocation, "Oh, Thou that sittest in light and glory unapproachable, parent of angels and men," which is like a chapter from the Apocalypse.In such passages Milton's prose is, as Taine suggests, "an outpouring of splendors," which suggests the noblest poetry.On account of their controversial character, these prose works are seldom read, and it is probable that Milton never thought of them as worthy of a place in literature. Of them all, Areopagitica has perhaps the most permanent interest and is best worth reading. In Milton's time there was a law forbidding the publication of books until they were endorsed by the official censor.

Needless to say, the censor, holding his office and salary by favor, was naturally more concerned with the divine right of kings and bishops than with the delights of literature, and many books were suppressed for no better reason than that they were displeasing to the authorities. Milton protested against this, as against every other form of tyranny, and his Areopagitica—so called from the Areopagus or Forum of Athens, the place of public appeal, and the Mars Hill of St. Paul's address—is the most famous plea in English for the freedom of the press.

4.4 Paradise Lost (Lines 1-16)

Text of the Epic poem (Lines 1-16)

OF Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit

Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast

Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,

With loss of Eden, till one greater Man

Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,

Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top

Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire

That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,

In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth

Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion Hill

Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd

Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence

Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,

That with no middle flight intends to soar

Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues

Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.

Introduction to the Epic Poem:

Milton first published his seminal epic poem, Paradise Lost, in 1667. A "Revised and Augmented" version, which is the one read more widely today, was published in 1674, with the introduction that we just read. In it, Milton explains why he has chosen to compose his long poem in English heroic verse without the use of rhyme, following the models of Homer and Virgil.Milton argues that rhyme is particularly unnecessary in longer poems, and that its unquestioned use by his peers, "carried away by Custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worst than they would have express them."Milton sees an inflexible application of rhyme and meter as in danger of becoming rote and mathematical, and he defends the liberty he found in releasing his poem from rhyme's limitations.In the late 17th century, after surviving the English civil wars, disgraced statesman John Milton began to write his epic poem, Paradise Lost. Earlier in his life, Milton had graduated from Christ's College, Cambridge; taken a tour of Western Europe; joined the Parliamentary cause in their civil war against the Royalists;written a pamphlet justifying the Parliamentarians' execution of King Charles I; served as the Secretary of Foreign Tongues under Oliver Cromwell's regime; and was nearly executed himself after the Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660.

Paradise Lost, first published in 1664 (with a revised, second edition in 1674) is one of the most important poems in English literary history.Milton uses the account of creation and the fall of humanity from Genesis as the skeleton of his magnum opus and then fleshes out that skeleton by creating rich back stories and complex psychologies for many of the characters involved in the story.Early in Book I, Milton professes that his mission is to "assert Eternal Providence/ And justified the ways of God to men" (25-26).

As you read the poem, reflect upon whether Milton does, in fact, deliver on this promise.Take special note of the most powerful characters in the text, and ask yourself which (if any) functions as the protagonist (and why). You may also wish to consider the motivations ascribed to especially three-dimensional characters such as Satan and Eve.In crafting Paradise Lost, Milton drew upon a vast body of theological, philosophical, and mythological texts. For this reason, the poem is full of allusions.

Translation:

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.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.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. 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.

Summary

The half century between 1625 and 1675 is called the Puritan period for two reasons: first, because Puritan standards prevailed for a time in England; and second, because the greatest literary figure during all these years was the Puritan, John Milton. Historically, the age was one of tremendous conflict. The Puritan struggled for righteousness and liberty, and because he prevailed, the age is one of moral and political revolution.In his struggle for liberty the Puritan overthrew the corrupt monarchy, beheaded Charles I, and established the Commonwealth under Cromwell. The Commonwealth lasted but a few years, and the restoration of Charles II in 1660 is often put as the end of the Puritan period.The age has no distinct limits, but overlaps the Elizabethan period on one side, and the Restoration period on the other.The age produced many writers, a few immortal books, and one of the world's great literary leaders. The literature of the age is extremely diverse in character, and the diversity is due to the breaking up of the ideals of political and religious unity.This literature differs from that of the preceding age in three marked ways: It has no unity of spirit, as in the days of Elizabeth, resulting from the patriotic enthusiasm of all classes. John Milton was born in 1608. John Milton was born in Bread Street, London on 9th December 1608. His father, also named John Milton had found success in the English capital working as a scrivener, while his mother was a woman known as Sarah Jeffrey. John Milton's most famous work is Paradise Lost John Milton published a great number of works during his life but few have had the impact that Paradise Lost had. Paradise Lost is seen as one of the most complex and beautiful poems ever written, an interesting John Milton fact.

Keywords

1. ***Puritan*** : a member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship.
2. ***Anabaptists: a*** member of a fringe, or radical, movement of the Protestant Reformation and spiritual ancestor of modern Baptists, Mennonites, and Quakers.
3. ***Epic poem***: An epic poem is a lengthy, narrative work of poetry. These long poems typically detail extraordinary feats and adventures of characters from a distant past.
4. ***Restoration literature***: English literature written after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 following the period of the Commonwealth.
5. ***Paradise:*** the abode of Adam and Eve before the Fall in the biblical account of the Creation; the Garden of Eden.

Self Assessment

1. Undoubtedly the noblest of Milton's works, written when he was blind and suffering, are Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and _____.

A. Masque of Comus
B. Samson Agonists
C. Of Man's First Disobedience
D. None of these

2. _____ was written in 1634 to be performed at Ludlow Castle before the Earl of Bridgewater.

A. Masque of Comus
B. Paradise Lost
C. Paradise Regained
D. None of these

3. _____ is famous for his use of artificial sonnet.

A. Samuel Daniel
B. John Donne
C. John Milton
D. William Shakespeare

4. Giles Fletcher and Wither are known as _____ poets.

A. Metaphysical
B. Spenserian
C. Cavalier
D. None of these

5. In which book of Paradise Lost did Milton declare the subject of the poem?

A. Book I
B. Book II
C. Book III
D. Book IV

6. God prohibits Adam and Eve to eat fruit from the tree of _____.

A. Love
B. Knowledge
C. Virtue
D. Truth

7. _____ approaches the high water mark of lyric poetry in England.

A. On the morning of Christ's nativity
B. Canonization

C. Seven Ages
D. None of these

8. Is John Bunyan a Puritan writer?

A. Yes
B. No
C. Can't say
D. May be

9. Who among the following is not a Puritan writer?

A. William Shakespeare
B. John Milton
C. Henry Vaughan
D. Edmund Waller

10. John Milton published the seminal epic poem, 'Paradise Lost' in the year _____.

A. 1669
B. 1668
C. 1664
D. 1670

11. Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of _____.

A. Knowledge
B. Patience
C. Resilience
D. Sin

12. Did Puritans like Christmas?

A. Yes, they did.
B. No, they did not.
C. Yes, they did not
D. No, they did.

13. _____ studied at Christ's College, Cambridge.

A. Henry Vaughan
B. Samuel Daniel
C. John Milton
D. None of these

14. What is the subject of the epic poem, 'Paradise Lost'?

A. Man's first punishment
B. Man's first disobedience

C. Man's last obedience
D. None of these

15. In the epic poem, 'Paradise Lost', man's sin brought _____ to the world.

A. joy
B. grief
C. death
D. none of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	B	2.	A	3.	A	4.	B	5.	A
6.	B	7.	A	8.	A	9.	A	10.	C
11.	A	12.	B	13.	C	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. Discuss the historical characteristics of 17th century English literature.
2. Explain the literary features of the Puritan Age.
3. Delineate the underlying themes of the epic poem, 'Paradise Lost'.
4. Has John Milton tried to be didactic in his approach towards writing 'Paradise Lost'?
5. Do you think that God was fair in punishing Adam and Eve? Justify.
6. Do you think Adam was right for supporting Eve? Justify.

Further Reading

1. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45718/paradise-lost-book-1-1674-version
2. https://www.yorku.ca/earmstro/text/ParadiseLostBk1.pdf
3. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/paradise-lost/book-1
4. https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2019/jan/07/poem-of-the-week-from-paradise-lost-by-john-milton
5. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/nov/28/milton-paradise-lost-epic
6. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/06/theater/paradise-lost-review-sheen-center.html

Unit 05: John Milton: Paradise Lost

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Critically analyze the epic poem Paradise Lost,
- Attempt a stylistic analysis of the epic poem 'Paradise Lost'
- Understand the tools of stylistic analysis

Introduction

Text of the poem

OF Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd

Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men.

5.1 Critical 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.

In 1667, John Milton published Paradise Lost, perhaps the greatest long poem in the English language. It was recognized as an extraordinary achievement shortly after it appeared, and has, in the three hundred and fifty years that people have been reading and thinking about it, provoked a great deal of critical debate. Despite its current canonical status, a favorable reception for Paradise Lost in the late seventeenth century was no foregone conclusion, and its reputation has fluctuated surprisingly ever since.With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Milton was out in the cold: as a staunch republican, a supporter of Cromwell and an apologist for the regicide, he was lucky to escape execution for treason. His unorthodox views on various sensitive subjects, including divorce (he was in favor) were well known: Milton was an active writer of political pamphlets as well as a poet, and he had many influential enemies.

England in 1667 was reeling from the events of the previous year, when plague and fire had swept the capital, causing a devastation many people thought was divinely inspired; a biblical epic from a blind, grim old controversialist was by no means certain of being sympathetically received, as the poet's wish that his poem might 'fit audience find, though few' (VII.31) perhaps recognizes.In spite of this unwelcoming climate, when Paradise Lost appeared, it was hailed as a work of genius, even by Milton's political opponents. The audience was not few, but was it fit?From the start, this epic poem attracted a number of disobedient readers. One of the first major responses was an adaptation for the stage by John Dryden, The State of Innocence (1671). He sought and received Milton's permission to put Paradise Lost into rhyme (unconvinced, presumably, by the comments on the 'troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming' in the note on the verse), and his version outsold the original until the end of the seventeenth century.

Dryden's political affiliation (he was a royalist) prompted him to play on a crux in Milton's poem: Satan, who disdains servitude and tries to overturn his monarch, becomes in Dryden's rewriting an unmistakable portrait of Oliver Cromwell, the king-killer.He also believed that the fallen angel, and not Adam, was the hero (in the sense of his structural position as the protagonist of the epic), and weighted his adaptation accordingly.This was not an isolated instance of wishful interpretation.Contemporary readers who thought there was a whiff of sulphur about the unrepentant republican poet were not surprised to find these sentiments in the mouth of the arch-fiend; and there were those who believed that Milton was in fact disowning his previous stance by associating it with Satan. Neither reading does justice to the complexity of Paradise Lost, but this does identify what was to become a recurrent theme in later responses to the poem: the contested interpretation of Satan, its eloquent anti-hero.

Milton's epic achieved classical status in the last years of the seventeenth century, when it was published with explanatory notes - the first poem in English to be so presented. Twenty years later, its position was consolidated by an influential series of articles written by Joseph Addison in the Spectator (a daily paper).This, however, did not protect the poem from interference: in 1732, Richard Bentley (one of the earliest textual critics in England) produced an 'emended' edition, in which he argued that the blind poet had employed an incompetent amanuensis, and that as a result many errors of wording and logic had crept into the published version.Bentley's unjustified and insensitive revisions attracted widespread ridicule - not least from Alexander Pope, who pilloried

him in the Dunciad (a satire against dull poets). These revisions reflected, however, a feeling that Paradise Lost, though a national classic, was somehow unorthodox in its theological and philosophical outlook.Pope's poem, and indeed his earlier work Rape of the Lock, show another kind of response to Milton. They are 'mock-epics', and re-deploy elements of Milton's style (and, of course, that of his classical antecedents) to comic ends. Milton's achievement was felt to be so great that no contemporary poet could rival or match it: writing a serious epic would be out of the question.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth, the complex poetic response to Paradise Lost turned once again to the figure of Satan. Milton was hugely important for the Romantic poets, for his political stance as well as the model of his writing.At the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth, the complex poetic response to Paradise Lost turned once again to the figure of Satan. Milton was hugely important for the Romantic poets, for his political stance as well as the model of his writing.As far as Coleridge was concerned, he sat, with Shakespeare, on 'one of the two glory-smitten summits of the poetic mountain'. Though some writers, notably John Keats, were uneasy under his influence, Milton was widely read and highly regarded. 'Milton!', William Wordsworth opens his sonnet on London, 'thou shoulds't be living at this hour: | England hath need of thee'.Such straightforward veneration, however, was not to be the lasting legacy of Romantic interpretations. William Blake voiced a thought that had been troubling readers almost since the poem's publication, and has dogged it ever since.

Noticing that Books I and II are rather more absorbing than Book III, Blake concluded: 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it'.

Whatever Milton's intention - and Blake here concedes that the effect was not deliberate - the power of the poetry glamorizes the figure of Satan at God's expense. Shelley went further; ignoring the theological constraints of Milton's framework, he considered the divine and the diabolic as literary characters, and decided that Satan came out rather better. 'Milton's Devil as a moral being' is, he writes, 'far superior to his God'.Satan's noble striving against immense adversity, his valorization of the individual, had greater appeal than what Shelley read as God's cold and certain execution of the preordained plan of the devils' (and Man's) destruction. Such an impression, Shelley believed, could not have been accidental: 'this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius'.Blake's and Shelley's views, corroborated by Satan's powerfully persuasive rhetoric, have enjoyed some currency with subsequent readers, though the Romantics' admiration has not always been echoed along with their interpretations. The early years of the twentieth century saw the study of English literature institutionalized as a degree subject in the universities: an enterprise to which Milton, in some ways the country's first classic poet, might have been central.

There emerged, however, a growing antipathy towards Milton's 'stifling' presence, and it expressed itself in a desire to dislodge him from the pre-eminent position he had come to occupy. F. R. Leavis, an influential Cambridge critic and teacher, had little time for Milton. T. S. Eliot objected to Milton as a man ('Milton is unsatisfactory'), as a poet ('Milton writes English like a dead language'), and as an inspiration ('Milton's bad influence may be traced much further than the eighteenth century').Milton found a passionate advocate in Christopher Ricks, whose seminal 1967 work Milton's Grand Style still, however, needed to adopt a defensive stance. Harold Bloom, writing a few years later, proposed Milton's very mastery of the language as an explanation for these responses; he is, Bloom believes, 'the great Inhibitor, the Sphinx who strangles even strong imaginations in their cradles'.Serious objections to Milton's style and his place in the canon were not generally sustained. But the years that followed saw a new iteration of the old dispute over the interpretation of Paradise Lost. The poem was accepted as a great work, but the reasons for this greatness were contested.

In Milton's God (1961), William Empson set about refuting the attempts of C. S. Lewis and others to rehabilitate the character of God and to maintain that Milton succeeded in his avowed intention to 'justify' the divine purpose. Empson concluded, after an idiosyncratic and spirited demolition of God's motives and actions, that 'the reason why the poem is so good is that it makes God so bad'The critical battle lines were firmly drawn, and no negotiation seemed possible. Either Milton

was on God's side and any attempt to suggest otherwise was unchristian and perverse, or Paradise Lost was a veiled critique of the heavenly hierarchy, and Satan's charisma and plausibility a result of Milton's sympathy for his plight.In 1967, Stanley Fish published Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost, which tried to reconcile these opposing viewpoints by arguing that the true hero of the poem is in fact the reader: seeing God as malevolent or Satan as attractive is simply an indication of a fallen state, and part of the poem's purpose.

Fish was not entirely successful (his book provoked much controversy of its own) and these disputes have not, even now, been resolved. In the last decades of the twentieth century there was a movement away from addressing the question directly, and works on Milton's theology (e.g. Robert Entzminger's Divine Word), politics (e.g. Milton and Republicanism, a collection edited by Quentin Skinner, among others) and language (e.g. John Leonard's Naming in Paradise) started to take precedence.New and important works on Milton continue to appear, and testify to the centrality in the canon of this rich and difficult epic. There is, it seems, still much to say about Paradise Lost.

5.2 Why you Should Re-read Paradise Lost

The greatest epic poem in the English language, John Milton's Paradise Lost, has divided critics – but its influence on English literature is second only to Shakespeare's, writes Benjamin Ramm.

Milton's Paradise Lost is rarely read today. But this epic poem, 354 years old, remains a work of unparalleled imaginative genius that shapes English literature even now. In more than 10,000 lines of blank verse, it tells the story of the war for heaven and of man's expulsion from Eden.Its dozen sections are an ambitious attempt to comprehend the loss of paradise – from the perspectives of the fallen angel Satan and of man, fallen from grace. Even to readers in a secular age, the poem is a powerful meditation on rebellion, longing and the desire for redemption.Despite being born into prosperity, Milton's worldview was forged by personal and political struggle. A committed republican, he rose to public prominence in the ferment of England's bloody civil war: two months after the execution of King Charles I in 1649, Milton became a diplomat for the new republic, with the title of Secretary for Foreign Tongues. (He wrote poetry in English, Greek, Latin and Italian, prose in Dutch, German, French and Spanish, and read Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac).

Milton gained a reputation in Europe for his erudition and rhetorical prowess in defense of England's radical new regime; at home he came to be regarded as a prolific advocate for the Commonwealth cause.But his deteriorating eyesight limited his diplomatic travels. By 1654, Milton was completely blind. For the final 20 years of his life, he would dictate his poetry, letters and polemical tracts to a series of amanuenses – his daughters, friends and fellow poets.In Paradise Lost, Milton draws on the classical Greek tradition to conjure the spirits of blind prophets. He invokes Homer, author of the first great epics in Western literature, and Tiresias, the oracle of Thebes who sees in his mind's eye what the physical eye cannot.As the philosopher Descartes wrote during Milton's lifetime, "it is the soul which sees, and not the eye". William Blake, the most brilliant interpreter of Milton, later wrote of how "the Eye of Imagination" saw beyond the narrow confines of "Single vision", creating works that outlasted "mortal vegetated Eyes".

When Milton began Paradise Lost in 1658, he was in mourning. It was a year of public and private grief, marked by the deaths of his second wife, memorialized in his beautiful Sonnet 23, and of England's Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, which precipitated the gradual disintegration of the republic. Paradise Lost is an attempt to make sense of a fallen world: to "justify the ways of God to men", and no doubt to Milton himself.Milton's religious lexicon – which sought to explain a 'fallen' world – itself has fallen from use. But these biographical aspects should not downplay the centrality of theology to the poem. As the critic Christopher Ricks wrote of Paradise Lost, "Art for art's sake? Art for God's sake. One reason why Milton is read less now is that his religious lexicon – which sought to explain a 'fallen' world – itself has fallen from use. Milton the Puritan spent his life engaged in theological disputation on subjects as diverse as toleration, divorce and salvation.

Ricks notes that Paradise Lost is "a fierce argument about God's justice" and that Milton's God has been deemed inflexible and cruel. By contrast, Satan has a dark charisma ("he pleased the ear") and a revolutionary demand for self-determination. His speech is peppered with the language of democratic governance ("free choice", "full consent", "the popular vote") – and he famously

declares, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven".Nonconformist, anti-establishment writers such as Percy Shelley found a kindred spirit in this depiction of Satan ("Milton's Devil as a moral being is… far superior to his God", he wrote). Famously, William Blake, who contested the very idea of the Fall, remarked that "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it".

Like Cromwell, Milton believed his mission was to usher in the kingdom of God on earth. While he loathed the concept of the 'divine right of kings', Milton was willing to submit himself to God in the belief, in Benjamin Franklin's words, that "Rebellion to Tyrants Is Obedience to God".Although discussion of Paradise Lost often is dominated by political and theological arguments, the poem also contains a tender celebration of love. In Milton's version, Eve surrenders to temptation in part to be closer to Adam, "the more to draw his love". She wishes for the freedom to err ("What is faith, love, virtue unassayed?").

When Paradise Lost was published in London in 1667, Milton had fallen out of favour. Just months before the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in May 1660, he had published a pamphlet denouncing kingship. Now Milton was scorned, his writings were burned, and he was imprisoned in the Tower of London – only narrowly escaping execution after the intercession of a fellow poet, Andrew Marvell.Yet Paradise Lost gained immediate acclaim even among royalists. The poet laureate John Dryden reworked Milton's epic, casting Cromwell – a regicide with dictatorial tendencies – in the role of Satan. Samuel Johnson ranked Paradise Lost among the highest "productions of the human mind".

Milton's style was suggestive and free from what he called 'the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.'Romantic writers celebrated Milton both for his stance against censorship ("Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience", Milton wrote in the pamphlet Areopagitica), and for his innovative poetic form, which was suggestive, allusive and free from what he called "the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming". Paradise Lost inspired Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, while Wordsworth began his famous sonnet London, 1802 with a plea: "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee".But not all critics were so favorable. The 20th Century brought us the 'Milton Controversy', during which his legacy was fiercely contested. His detractors included poets TS Eliot and Ezra Pound (who wrote that "Milton is the worst sort of poison"), while support came from both devout Christians (like CS Lewis) and atheists (including William Empson, for whom "The reason why the poem is so good is that it makes God so bad").Malcolm X read Paradise Lost in prison, sympathizing with Satan, while AE Housman quipped that "malt does more than Milton can / To reconcile God's ways to man".

In recent years, Paradise Lost has found new admirers. Milton is "our greatest public poet", says author Philip Pullman, whose acclaimed trilogy His Dark Materials was inspired by the poem (and takes its title from Book II, line 916).Pullman loves Milton's audacity – his declaration that he will create "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" – and his musicality: "No one, not even Shakespeare, surpasses Milton in his command of the sound, the music, the weight and taste and texture of English words". Pullman has declared: "I am of the Devil's party and know it".Milton's enemies regarded his blindness as divine retribution, but his condition enhanced his acute musical sensibility. Pullman is enchanted by the poem's "incantatory quality", and implores readers to experience it aurally: "Rolling swells and peels of sound, powerful rhythms and rich harmonies… that very form casts a spell". Paradise Lost makes an excellent audio book.It is said that Milton had fevered dreams during the writing of Paradise Lost and would wake with whole passages formulated in his mind. The first time I read the poem, I did so in a single sitting, overnight – like Jacob wrestling with the Angel until morning. Each re-reading brings intoxication, exhilaration and exhaustion, and vindicates Milton's observation: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

5.3 Stylistic Analysis

What is Stylistic Analysis?

Stylistic analysis in linguistics refers to the identification of patterns of usage in speech and writing.Stylistic analysis in literary studies is usually made for the purpose of commenting on quality and meaning in a text.In linguistics the purpose of close analysis is to identify and classify the elements of language being used. In literary studies the purpose is usually an adjunct to understanding, exegesis, and interpretation. In both cases, an extremely detailed and scrupulous attention is paid to the text.This process may now be aided by computer programs which able to analyze texts. At this point, the study of language moves into either 'stylistics' or 'literary studies'. Stylistic analysis is a normal part of literary studies. It is practiced as a part of understanding the possible meanings in a text. It is also generally assumed that the process of analysis will reveal the good qualities of the writing.

A stylistic analysis might reveal the following points:

1. the play is written in poetic blank verse
2. that is — unrhymed, iambic pentameters
3. the stresses fall as follows
4. Now /i/s the w/i/nter /o/f our d/i/scont/e/nt
5. [notice that the stress falls on vowel sounds]

In a complete analysis, the significance of these stylistic details would be related to the events of the play itself, and to Shakespeare's presentation of them.In some forms of stylistic analysis, the numerical recurrence of certain stylistic features is used to make judgments about the nature and the quality of the writing.However, it is important to recognize that the concept of style is much broader than just the 'good style' of literary prose.For instance, even casual communication such as a manner of speaking or a personal letter might have an individual style.However, to give a detailed account of this style requires the same degree of linguistic analysis as literary texts.Stylistic analysis of a non-literary text for instance means studying in detail the features of a passage from such genres as:

1. Instruction notes for programming your Video-recorder
2. Information a history text book
3. Persuasion an advertisement or a holiday

Brochure

The method of analysis can be seen as looking at the text in great detail, observing what the parts are, and saying what function they perform in the context of the passage.It is rather like taking a car-engine to pieces, looking at each component in detail, and then observing its function as the whole engine starts working.The features chosen from any text will be those which characterize the piece as to its function. They will be used by the analyst to prove the initial statement which is made about the linguistic nature of the text as a whole.This method purports to be fairly scientific. A hypothesis is stated and then proved. It is a useful discipline which encourages logical thought and can be transferred to many other areas of academic study.This is one reason why the discipline of stylistic analysis is so useful: it can be applied to a variety of subjects.In modern times, Milton's style first received general criticism from T. S. Eliot. Eliot praised Milton in "A Note on the Verse of John Milton" (Martz 12-18): "[W]hat he could do well he did better than anyone else has ever done." Then Eliot added, "Milton's poetry could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever."

The general thrust of Eliot's criticism is that Milton's purposely adopted grand style is both so difficult to accomplish and so complicated (in places) to understand that it causes a deterioration in the poetic style of those who are influenced by it and cannot meet its demands. "In fact," said Eliot, "it was an influence against which we still have to struggle."Defenders of Milton quickly appeared to answer Eliot. C. S. Lewis, in his work A Preface to Paradise Lost, and Christopher Ricks in Milton's Grand Style both mounted vigorous defenses of Milton's style. Lewis in particular argued that Milton needed this particular style for a "secondary epic," his term for an epic meant to be read rather than the "primary epic," which was presented

orally in a formal setting and meant to be heard.Lewis' basic point was that the grand style provided the formality of setting that the secondary epic, by the nature of its composition, lost.Both Lewis and Ricks offered numerous counter examples to show that Milton's style was sublime. Certainly, aside from Shakespeare, no other writer in English could manipulate the language as Milton did.

However, the questions about Milton's style cannot be answered by playing a game of bad line versus good line. The answer to the question posed by Eliot and opposed by Lewis and Ricks is of such a subjective nature that it can never be truly settled. Arguments about Milton's style will stay just as they do about the styles of Henry James, Jane Austen, even James Joyce.One man's sublimity is another's conundrum.What can be accomplished is a clear description regarding what Milton's grand style consists of and how he made use of it in the poem. With this information, the reader can at least have an objective foundation on which to base his subjective opinion.

5.4 Allusions and Vocabulary

The first aspect of the grand style that most readers notice is the number of allusions and references, many of which seem obscure, along with the arcane and archaic vocabulary. In just the first few lines of the poem references to "Oreb" (7), "That Shepherd" (8), "chosen seed" (8), "Siloa's Brook" (10), and "Aonian Mount" (15) occur. The purpose of the references is to extend the reader's understanding through comparison.Most readers will know some of the references, but few will know all. The question thus arises whether Milton achieves his effect or its opposite. Further, words such as "Adamantine" (48), "durst" (49), "Compeer" (127), "Sovran" (246) and many others, both more and less familiar, add an imposing tone to the work. Paradise Lost was not written for an uneducated audience, but in many editions the explanatory notes are almost as long as the text.

5.5 Sentence Construction

Besides the references and vocabulary, Milton also tends to use Latinate constructions. English is a syntactical language using word order in sentences to produce sense. Latin, in contrast, is an inflected language in which endings on words indicate the words' functions within a sentence, thereby making word order less important.Latin verbs, for example, often come at the end of the sentence or a direct object may precede the subject. In Paradise Lost, Milton seems purposely to strive for atypical English syntactical patterns. He almost never writes in simple sentences. Partly, this type of inverted, at times convoluted, syntax is necessary for the poetics, to maintain the correct meter, but at other times the odd syntax itself seems to be Milton's stylistic goal.Lewis, and others who admire the grand style, argue that in passages such as this, the precise meaning matters less than the impressionistic effect, that the images of drowsing, insensibility, and dissolution occurring in order show the breakdown of a conscious mind, in this case Adam's, as God produces a dream vision for him. Certainly this passage, as difficult to understand literally as it is, is not bad writing. The reader understands what Adam is experiencing. However, in the hands of lesser talents than Milton, such writing becomes nonsense.

5.6 Extended Similes

Another aspect of Milton's style is the extended simile. The use of epic similes goes back to Homer in the Iliad and Odyssey, but Milton uses more similes and with more detail. A Miltonic simile can easily become the subject of an essay, perhaps a book.Milton's similes run a gamut from those that seem forced (the comparison of Satan's arrival in Eden to the smell of fish [IV, 166]) to those that are perfect (Eden compared to the field where Proserpine gathered flowers [(IV, 268]).But, in all cases, a critical exploration of the simile reveals depths of unexpected meaning about the objects or persons being compared. Once again, Milton achieves a purpose with his highly involved language and similes. The ability to do this seems almost unique to Milton, a man of immense learning and great poetic ability.

5.7 Repeated Images

Besides extended similes, Milton also traces a number of images throughout the poem. One of the most apparent is the image of the maze or labyrinth. Over and over in the poem, there are mentions of mazes — like the tangled curls of Eve's hair — which finally culminate with the serpent confronting Eve on a "Circular base of rising folds, that tow'r'd / Fold above fold a surging maze". Other images also run throughout the poem as a kind of tour de force of imagination and organization. Each image opens up new possibilities for understanding Milton's ideas.No doubt, particular aspects of Milton's style could be presented at great length, but these are sufficient. Milton intended to write in "a grand style." That style took the form of numerous references and allusions, complex vocabulary, complicated grammatical constructions, and extended similes and images. In consciously doing these things, Milton devised a means of giving the written epic the 'bardic' grandeur of the original recited epic.In so doing, he created an artificial style that very few writers could hope to emulate though many tried. As with the unique styles of William Faulkner and James Joyce, Milton's style is inimitable, and those who try to copy it sometimes give the original a bad name.Milton's style is certainly his own. Elements of it can be criticized, but in terms of his accomplishment in Paradise Lost, it is difficult to see how such a work could be better written in some other style. Milton defined the style of the English epic and, in a real sense, with that style, ended the genre. After Milton and Paradise Lost, the English epic ends.Milton writes in a very elevated, allusive, and dense style. If we had to pick one word to sum up his style that word would be Latinate. Latinate means characteristic of the Latin language (a "dead" language used in Virgil's Aeneid and father of modern Romance languages like Spanish, French, and Italian). In Latin, word order doesn't matter (we could tell you why but it would take forever), which allows for some very cleverly structured poetry.Milton, being a lover of classical languages, attempts to emulate Virgil's style in particular, often leaving words out (and thus expecting the reader to supply them), using a funky word order (verbs are often placed in strange places), using words in older senses that play upon the word's roots (Milton refers to Satan's "ruin," playing on the Latin root ruere, to fall) and the like.

Summary

There is no denying the fact that John Milton has employed the significant literary features as well as literary devices in the epic poem, 'Paradise Lost', which were quite prevalent in the Puritan Age. Observing from a critical standpoint, one can infer that John Milton left no stone unturned in carving this epic poem into the stencil of literary genius. Milton's style in Paradise Lost has justly been described as the grand style. The grand style is one that, on account of the greatness of a conception, the exercise of a rich imagination, employment of dignified words arranged in an impressive and harmonious order, and the use of certain technical devices, produces an impression of bigness, or enormity, or vastness, or loftiness in the readers" mind". Free march of noble thoughts, consummate sound patterns, compactness of word which encapsulate the whole idea conceived, proper pauses and finish in construction, majesty in the movement of verse, order in sustained narration, clarity of definition, unfamiliar grammatical construction with syntax mostly modeled on Latin verse, structure of phrases and epithets, solemnity and sonority of the melody of syllables, grandeur of polysyllabic words, appropriate accent and stress in proportion to the theme, comprehensiveness of allusions with their power of suggestion and implication, proper names calling forth a vista of classical Humanist knowledge, epic devices like Homeric similes, incorporation of a host of genres like lyric, love-song, hymn, elegy, allegory, sardonic and mock-heroic passages, dialogic, soliloquy , and large units of flexible blank verse —all these constitute the grand style of Paradise Lost.

Keywords

1. ***Stylistics***: the study of the distinctive styles found in particular literary genres and in the works of individual writers.
2. ***Simile***: a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid (e.g. as brave as a lion).
3. ***Allusion***: an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference.

4. ***Epic poem***: An epic poem is a lengthy, narrative work of poetry. These long poems typically detail extraordinary feats and adventures of characters from a distant past. The word "epic" comes from the ancient Greek term "epos," which means "story, word, poem."
5. ***Bardic***: From the word 'bard', a title bestowed upon Shakespeare.

Self Assessment

1. In the epic poem 'Paradise Lost', Milton tells the story of the most epic battle possible, the battle between _____ and _____.

A. Men and Women
B. God and Satan
C. Adam and Eve
D. None of these

2. The nine muses of classical epics still exist on Mount _____.

A. Everest
B. Arizona
C. Azure
D. Helicon

3. What is the first book of Bible called?

A. Book of Genesis
B. Book of Procreation
C. Book of Birth
D. None of these

4. The _____ is Milton's muse for writing the epic poem 'Paradise Lost'.

A. Holy Trinity
B. Holy Spirit
C. Jesus Christ
D. None of these

5. According to Milton, the great gods of the classical world have become _____ angels.

A. mesmerizing
B. attentive
C. fallen
D. none of these

6. The Iliad and Aeneid are the great epic poems of _____ and _____, respectively.

A. Greek and Latin
B. Latin and Greek
C. English and French
D. None of these

7. Milton refers to Satan's _____, playing on the Latin root ruere.

A. Win
B. Ruin
C. Radiance
D. Vigor

8. Latinate means characteristic of _____ language.

A. Portuguese
B. Mandarin
C. Latin
D. English

9. In which language does the word order not matter?

A. Greek
B. French
C. English
D. Latin

10. 'Tangled curls of Eve's hair' represent the image of a _____.

A. Maze
B. Heaven
C. Folly
D. None of these

11. Stylistic analysis in linguistics refers to the identification of patterns of usage in _____ and writing.

A. Speech
B. Reading
C. Listening
D. None of these

12. Besides the references and vocabulary, Milton also tends to use _____constructions in Paradise lost.

A. French'
B. Latinate
C. Greek
D. None of these

13. An important aspect of Milton's writing style is the _____ simile.

A. Metaphoric
B. Allusive
C. Extended
D. None of these

14. One of the most apparent image in Paradise lost is the image of _____.

A. Sin
B. Heaven
C. Hell
D. Labyrinth

15. Milton, being a lover of classical languages, attempts to emulate _____ style in particular.

A. Virgil's
B. Shakespeare's
C. Homer's
D. Sidney's

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	B	2.	D	3.	A	4.	B	5.	C
6.	A	7.	B	8.	C	9.	D	10.	A
11.	A	12.	B	13.	C	14.	D	15.	A

Review Questions

1. Critically analyze the epic poem 'Paradise Lost'.
2. Stylistically analyze the epic poem 'Paradise Lost'.
3. Show how Milton writes in a grand style with relevant examples from the text.
4. What do you think decides the style of a poet or writer?
5. How is John Milton's style of writing different from that of his contemporaries?

Further Reading

1. https://www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/paradise-lost.html#.Ya8jWNAzY2w
2. https://www.ipl.org/essay/Critical-Analysis-Of-Paradise-Lost-P3T7A92FC486
3. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20170419-why-paradise-lost-is-one-of-the-worlds-most-important-poems
4. https://neoenglish.wordpress.com/2010/11/09/%E2%80%9Cparadise-lost-book-i-a-critical-appreciation/

Unit 06: Shakespeare: Macbeth

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- Know about William Shakespeare as a dramatist
- Gain an insight into the outline of the play 'Macbeth'
- Understand the plot construction in the play 'Macbeth'
- Undertake an in depth analysis of myriad major and minor characters in 'Macbeth
- Delineate the thematic concerns in the play 'Macbeth'

Introduction

One who reads a few of Shakespeare's great plays and then the meager story of his life is generally filled with a vague wonder. Here is an unknown country boy, poor and poorly educated according to the standards of his age, who arrives at the great city of London and goes to work at odd jobs in a theater.In a year or two he is associated with scholars and dramatists, the masters of their age, writing plays of kings and clowns, of gentlemen and heroes and noble women, all of whose lives he seems to know by intimate association.In a few years more he leads all that brilliant group of poets and dramatists who have given undying glory to the Age of Elizabeth. Play after play runs from his pen, mighty dramas of human life and character following one another so rapidly that good work seems impossible; yet they stand the test of time, and their poetry is still unrivaled in any language. For all this great work the author apparently cares little, since he makes no attempt to collect or preserve his writings.A thousand scholars have ever since been busy collecting, identifying, classifying the works which this magnificent workman tossed aside so carelessly when he abandoned the drama and retired to his native village. He has a marvelously imaginative and creative mind; but he invents few, if any, new plots or stories.

6.1 William Shakespeare as a Dramatist

He simply takes an old play or an old poem, makes it over quickly, and lo! this old familiar material glows with the deepest thoughts and the most tender feelings that ennoble our humanity; and each new generation of men finds it more wonderful than the last. How did he do it? That is still an unanswered question and the source of our wonder. There are, in general, two theories to account for Shakespeare. The romantic school of writers has always held that in him "all came from

within"; that his genius was his sufficient guide; and that to the overmastering power of his genius alone we owe all his great works. Practical, unimaginative men, on the other hand, assert that in Shakespeare "all came from without," and that we must study his environment rather than his genius, if we are to understand him.He lived in a play-loving age; he studied the crowds, gave them what they wanted, and simply reflected their own thoughts and feelings. In reflecting the English crowd about him he unconsciously reflected all crowds, which are alike in all ages; hence his continued popularity. And in being guided by public sentiment he was not singular, but followed the plain path that every good dramatist has always followed to success.Probably the truth of the matter is to be found somewhere between these two extremes. Of his great genius there can be no question; but there are other things to consider. As we have already noticed, Shakespeare was trained, like his fellow workmen, first as an actor, second as a reviser of old plays, and last as an independent dramatist. He worked with other playwrights and learned their secret.

Like them, he studied and followed the public taste, and his work indicates at least three stages, from his first somewhat crude experiments to his finished masterpieces. So it would seem that in Shakespeare we have the result of hard work and of orderly human development, quite as much as of transcendent genius.At the time of Shakespeare's death, twenty-one plays existed in manuscripts in the various theaters.

A few others had already been printed in quarto form, and the latter are the only publications that could possibly have met with the poet's own approval.This contains thirty-six of the thirty-seven plays generally attributed to Shakespeare, Pericles being omitted. This celebrated First Folio was printed from playhouse manuscripts and from printed quartos containing many notes and changes by individual actors and stage managers.Moreover, it was full of typographical errors, though the editors alleged great care and accuracy; and so, though it is the only authoritative edition we have, it is of little value in determining the dates, or the classification of the plays as they existed in Shakespeare's mind.

Notwithstanding this uncertainty, a careful reading of the plays and poems leaves us with an impression of four different periods of work, probably corresponding with the growth and experience of the poet's life. These are:

A period of early experimentation:

It is marked by youthfulness and exuberance of imagination, by extravagance of language, and by the frequent use of rimed couplets with his blank verse.The period dates from his arrival in London to 1595. Typical works of this first period are his early poems, Love's Labour's Lost, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and Richard III.

A period of rapid growth and development, from 1595 to 1600:

Such plays as The Merchant of Venice, Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and Henry IV, all written in this period, show more careful and artistic work, better plots, and a marked increase in knowledge of human nature.

A period of gloom and depression, from 1600 to 1607, which marks the full maturity of his powers:

What caused this evident sadness is unknown; but it is generally attributed to some personal experience, coupled with the political misfortunes of his friends, Essex and Southampton.

The Sonnets with their note of personal disappointment, Twelfth Night, which is Shakespeare's "farewell to mirth," and his great tragedies, Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Othello, and Julius Caesar, belong to this period.

A period of restored serenity, of calm after storm, which marked the last years of the poet's literary work:

The winter's Tale and The Tempest are the best of his later plays; but they all show a falling off from his previous work, and indicate a second period of experimentation with the taste of a fickle public.

In history, legend, and story, Shakespeare found the material for nearly all his dramas; and so they are often divided into three classes, called historical plays, like Richard III and Henry V; legendary or partly historical plays, like Macbeth, King Lear, and Julius Caesar; and fictional plays, like Romeo and Juliet and The Merchant of Venice. Shakespeare invented few, if any, of the plots or stories upon which his dramas are founded, but borrowed them freely, after the custom of his age, wherever he found them. For his legendary and historical material he depended, largely on Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and on North's translation of Plutarch's famous Live.A full half of his plays are fictional, and in these he used the most popular romances of the day, seeming to depend most on the Italian story-tellers. Only two or three of his plots, as in Love's Labour's Lost and Merry Wives of Windsor, are said to be original, and even these are doubtful.Occasionally, Shakespeare made over an older play, as in Henry VI, Comedy of Errors, and Hamlet; and in one instance at least he seized upon an incident of shipwreck in which London was greatly interested, and made out of it the original and fascinating play of The Tempest, in much the same spirit which leads our modern playwrights when they dramatize a popular novel or a war story to catch the public fancy.

Did you Know?

Shakespeare's dramas are usually divided into three classes, called tragedies, comedies, and historical plays.

Strictly speaking the drama has but two divisions, tragedy and comedy, in which are included the many subordinate forms of tragi-comedy, melodrama, lyric drama (opera), farce, etc. A tragedy is a drama in which the principal characters are involved in desperate circumstances or led by overwhelming passions. It is invariably serious and dignified. The movement is always stately, but grows more and more rapid as it approaches the climax; and the end is always calamitous, resulting in death or dire misfortune to the principals. As Chaucer's monk says, before he begins to "biwayle in maner of tragedie":

"Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie

Of him that stood in great prosperitee,

And is y-fallen out of heigh degree Into miserie,

and endeth wrecchedly"

A comedy, on the other hand, is a drama in which the characters are placed in more or less humorous situations. The movement is light and often mirthful, and the play ends in general good will and happiness.The historical drama aims to present some historical age or character, and may be either a comedy or a tragedy. The following list includes the best of Shakespeare's plays in each of the three classes; but the order indicates merely the author's personal opinion of the relative merits of the plays in each class. Thus Merchant of Venice would be the first of the comedies for the beginner to read, and Julius Caesar is an excellent introduction to the historical plays and the tragedies.

Notes: Comedies- Merchant of Venice, Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, Winter's Tale, The Tempest, Twelfth Night.

Notes: Tragedies- Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello

Notes: Historical Plays- Julius Caesar, Richard III, Henry IV, Henry V, Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra

Doubtful Plays

It is reasonably certain that some of the plays generally attributed to Shakespeare are partly the work of other dramatists. The first of these doubtful plays, often called the Pre-Shakespearian Group, are Titus Andronicus and the first part of Henry VI. Shakespeare probably worked with Marlowe in the two last parts of Henry VI and in Richard III. The three plays, Taming of the Shrew, Timon, and Pericles are only partly Shakespeare's work, but the other authors are unknown. Henry VIII is the work of Fletcher and Shakespeare, opinion being divided as to whether Shakespeare helped Fletcher, or whether it was an unfinished work of Shakespeare which was put into Fletcher's hands for completion.Two Noble Kinsmen is a play not ordinarily found in editions of Shakespeare, but it is often placed among his doubtful works.The greater part of the play is undoubtedly by Fletcher. Edward III is one of several crude plays published at first anonymously and later attributed to Shakespeare by publishers who desired to sell their wares. It contains a few passages that strongly suggest Shakespeare; but the external evidence is all against his authorship.

6.2 Macbeth

Introduction to the Play

Macbeth is among the shortest and most intense of Shakespeare's plays, as well as one of the best known and most widely recognized. The play is generally viewed as one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, in addition to Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear. The play's penetrating exploration of human nature, ambition, evil, gender, human relationships, and kingship — along with the periodic appearance of supernatural forces — has captivated audiences and critics for centuries.Like all of Shakespeare's works, Macbeth is an incredibly rich and rewarding play to read and study. It was written more than 400 years ago, so this introduction provides cultural, theatrical, and publication contexts.

Shakespeare's Tragedies

Although Shakespeare wrote many comedies and history plays, he seems to be best known for his tragedies. A tragedy usually depicts the fall of a man of high station or class, such as a king, a prince, or a general. Occasionally, as in Romeo and Juliet, it portrays the fall of a couple. Main characters in a tragedy can fall from power or fall from happiness, but they almost always die by the end of the play.In a good tragedy, such as Macbeth, readers and audience members get pulled into the play by identifying with the protagonist, who is painted as a great and admirable person wielding considerable influence in society. Having established this point of identification, Shakespeare then leads his audience through the downfall of this character, involving the audience in the hero's pain and suffering, as well as his or her mistakes.

This identification slowly separates as, through the course of the play, the audience gains more knowledge of the situation than the hero does. This distance and enlarged view allows the audience to foresee the hero's demise.Though no longer identifying with the hero, the audience is still trapped in the tension of the play and released only by the protagonist's death. In most tragedies, the decline of the character arises from circumstances of the protagonist's own creation.Though no longer identifying with the hero, the audience is still trapped in the tension of the play and released only by the protagonist's death. In most tragedies, the decline of the character arises from circumstances of the protagonist's own creation.

The Rise and Fall of Macbeth

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's fastest and most straight-forward tragedies in its portrayal of the rise and fall of Macbeth, a nobleman of Scotland who is also a successful military leader. Early in the play, he encounters three "weird sisters," usually referred to as witches. These witches refer to him by his current title, 'Thane of Glamis' ; then by a title that he is not yet aware of, 'Thane of Cawdor'; and finally by a title that he does not yet possess, King of Scotland.When Macbeth later learns that he has been named Thane of Cawdor, he begins to believe that the weird sisters have the gift of prophecy. He then must decide between waiting patiently for the prophecy to come true or killing the current king, Duncan, and forcing it to come true. Prompted by his wife (and by the announcement that Malcolm, Duncan's son, is the heir to throne), Macbeth kills Duncan and becomes the King of Scotland.Unfortunately for Macbeth, the witches' prophecy also indicated that although he would be king, his friend Banquo's descendent would establish a line of kings after

Macbeth. Threatened by Banquo's prophecy, Macbeth begins to behave like a tyrant, killing Banquo and trying to kill his son, Fleance. His paranoia takes over, and he begins to kill anyone who seems to pose a threat to his reign. Literally haunted by apparitions, Macbeth continues his horrific behavior until Malcolm returns with the help of Macduff, another Scottish nobleman, and support from England. Macbeth is killed, and at the play's end, Malcolm becomes king and restores Duncan's line to the Scottish throne. We do not see the witches' prophecy for Banquo come true, but because Fleance survives the attempt against his life, the possibility exists that Banquo's line will someday assume the throne.

Origin of the Story

Though Macbeth is not considered a history play, the title character is a Scottish historical figure. As we shall see when we look at its cultural context, this play also has intimate links with Early Modern England. Historically, Macbeth ruled as King of Scotland for 17 years, from 1040 to 1057.The accounts of this period in Scottish history vary. They all agree, however, that Macbeth gained the throne by killing King Duncan and lost the throne to Malcolm by being killed. Shakespeare relied upon these histories as well as other sources in the composition of this play. Specifically, he drew heavily from Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1587), but he may also have been familiar with George Buchanan's Rerum Scoticarum Historae (1582).Shakespeare deviates from these historical sources a great deal in his exploration of the themes of kingship, human nature, and evil. These alterations to the story include portraying the tragic hero in a more evil manner while painting Banquo (King James I's ancestor) in a more sympathetic light.For example, Holinshed's and Shakespeare's depictions of Duncan differ wildly. Historically, Duncan is described as a young, weak, and ineffective king. But Shakespeare's Duncan is an older, benevolent, influential, and virtuous king, whose murder is a crime against nature itself.Furthermore, in Holinshed's account, Banquo figures more prominently in Macbeth's ascension to the throne because he serves as Macbeth's accomplice in Duncan's murder.

Shakespeare's Banquo maintains his loyalty to Duncan, telling Macbeth that he will help as long as it does not compromise this loyalty: "So I lose none / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / My bosom franchis'd and allegiance clear, / I shall be counsell'd". In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth's descent into tyranny occurs over what seems a matter of weeks, and there is no mention of the ten years of peaceful rule that Scotland enjoyed under Macbeth. The final major alteration concerns Lady Macbeth, who figures very little in the historical accounts but is quite prominent in Shakespeare's play. Lady Macbeth appears only once in Holinshed's Chronicles, and her only action is to persuade her husband to commit regicide (the murder of a king).Critics have speculated that Shakespeare's depiction of Duncan's murder and Lady Macbeth's active and ambitious role (drugging the servants and smearing them with blood) may be borrowed from Holinshed's account of Captain Donwald and his wife's murder of King Duffe. The revisions to the historical accounts of Macbeth are more easily understood when we understand the culture in which Shakespeare was writing. Pinpointing the date of composition for this tragedy will allow us to get a better glimpse at the play's immediate context.As we can see, in addition to revising historical sources, Shakespeare frequently integrated various accounts to construct one coherent story.

The Birth of the Play

The earliest published version of Macbeth appears in the First Folio in 1623, though many critics feel that this edition of the play is modified from the lost original. The first reference to a production of Macbeth pushes the play's date back to 1611. A Jacobean playgoer named Simon Forman recorded in his Book of Plays that he saw this work performed on April 20, 1611 at the Globe theatre.Upon examining references to contemporary events and people, however, critics have concluded that Macbeth was most likely written and first performed in 1606. In the intervening 17 years, the play was revised (around 1609), most likely by dramatist Thomas Middleton, who added some of the witches' songs in Act III, Scene 5 and Act IV, Scene 1.Middleton may also be responsible for other lines in the play, though we cannot be certain. Keep in mind, as explained in the "Introduction to Early Modern England," that a play belonged to the theatre company. Therefore, revisions by other playwrights were common. Middleton's additions to Macbeth do not detract from the quality of Shakespeare's work; rather, they provide scholars and critics with opportunities to learn more about the ways in which plays were produced in Early Modern England.

Plot

A peek into the happenings

The play begins with the brief appearance of a trio of witches and then moves to a military camp, where the Scottish King Duncan hears the news that his generals, Macbeth and Banquo, have defeated two separate invading armies—one from Ireland, led by the rebel Macdonwald, and one from Norway.Following their pitched battle with these enemy forces, Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches as they cross a moor. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be made thane (a rank of Scottish nobility) of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland. They also prophesy that Macbeth's companion, Banquo, will beget a line of Scottish kings, although Banquo will never be king himself.The witches vanish, and Macbeth and Banquo treat their prophecies skeptically until some of King Duncan's men come to thank the two generals for their victories in battle and to tell Macbeth that he has indeed been named thane of Cawdor. The previous thane betrayed Scotland by fighting for the Norwegians and Duncan has condemned him to death.Macbeth is intrigued by the possibility that the remainder of the witches' prophecy—that he will be crowned king—might be true, but he is uncertain what to expect.

He visits with King Duncan, and they plan to dine together at Inverness, Macbeth's castle, that night. Macbeth writes ahead to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her all that has happened.Lady Macbeth suffers none of her husband's uncertainty. She desires the kingship for him and wants him to murder Duncan in order to obtain it. When Macbeth arrives at Inverness, she overrides all of her husband's objections and persuades him to kill the king that very night.He and Lady Macbeth plan to get Duncan's two chamberlains drunk so they will black out; the next morning they will blame the murder on the chamberlains, who will be defenseless, as they will remember nothing.While Duncan is asleep, Macbeth stabs him, despite his doubts and a number of supernatural portents, including a vision of a bloody dagger. When Duncan's death is discovered the next morning, Macbeth kills the chamberlains—ostensibly out of rage at their crime—and easily assumes the kingship. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee to England and Ireland, respectively, fearing that whoever killed Duncan desires their demise as well.

Fearful of the witches' prophecy that Banquo's heirs will seize the throne, Macbeth hires a group of murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. They ambush Banquo on his way to a royal feast, but they fail to kill Fleance, who escapes into the night. Macbeth becomes furious: as long as Fleance is alive, he fears that his power remains insecure.At the feast that night, Banquo's ghost visits Macbeth. When he sees the ghost, Macbeth raves fearfully, startling his guests, who include most of the great Scottish nobility. Lady Macbeth tries to neutralize the damage, but Macbeth's kingship incites increasing resistance from his nobles and subjects.Frightened, Macbeth goes to visit the witches in their cavern. There, they show him a sequence of demons and spirits who present him with further prophecies: he must beware of Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who opposed Macbeth's accession to the throne; he is incapable of being harmed by any man born of woman; and he will be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle.Macbeth is relieved and feels secure, because he knows that all men are born of women and that forests cannot move.

When he learns that Macduff has fled to England to join Malcolm, Macbeth orders that Macduff's castle be seized and, most cruelly, that Lady Macduff and her children be murdered.When news of his family's execution reaches Macduff in England, he is stricken with grief and vows revenge. Prince Malcolm, Duncan's son, has succeeded in raising an army in England, and Macduff joins him as he rides to Scotland to challenge Macbeth's forces.The invasion has the support of the Scottish nobles, who are appalled and frightened byMacbeth's tyrannical and murderous behavior.Lady Macbeth, meanwhile, becomes plagued with fits of sleepwalking in which she bemoans what she believes to be bloodstains on her hands. Before Macbeth's opponents arrive, Macbeth receives news that she has killed herself, causing him to sink into a deep and pessimistic despair.

Nevertheless, he awaits the English and fortifies Dunsinane, to which he seems to have withdrawn in order to defend himself, certain that the witches' prophecies guarantee his invincibility.He is struck numb with fear, however, when he learns that the English army is advancing on Dunsinane shielded with boughs cut from Birnam Wood. Birnam Wood is indeed coming to Dunsinane, fulfilling half of the witches' prophecy.In the battle, Macbeth hews violently, but the English forces

gradually overwhelm his army and castle. On the battlefield, Macbeth encounters the vengeful Macduff, who declares that he was not "of woman born" but was instead "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb (what we now call birth by cesarean section).Though he realizes that he is doomed, Macbeth continues to fight until Macduff kills and beheads him. Malcolm, now the King of Scotland, declares his benevolent intentions for the country and invites all to see him crowned at Scone.

6.3 Characterization

It is observed by Mr. Pope, that

"If ever any author deserved the name of an original, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through Egyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. His characters are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other writers have a constant resemblance, which shews that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image: each picture, like a mock rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakespeare, is as much an individual, as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such, as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. Never, perhaps, was there so comprehensive a talent for the delineation of character as Shakespeare's. It not only grasps the diversities of rank, sex, and age, down to the dawnings of infancy ; not only do the king and the beggar, the hero and the pickpocket, the sage and the idiot speak and act with equal truth ; not only does he transport himself to distant ages and foreign nations, and pourtray in the most accurate manner, with only a few apparent violations of cos- tume, the spirit of the ancient Romans, of the French in their wars with the 'English, of the English themselves during a great part of their history, of the Southern Europeans the cultivated society of that time, and the former rude and barbarous state of the North ;his human characters have not only such depth and pre- cision that they cannot be arranged under classes, and are inexhaustible, even in conception :—no—this Prometheus not merely forms men, he opens the gates of the magical world of spirits ; calls up the midnight ghost; exhibits before us his witches amidst their unhallowed mysteries ; peoples the air with sportive fairies and sylphs :— and these beings, existing only in imagination, possess such truth and consistency, that even when deformed monsters like Caliban, he extorts the conviction, that if there should be such beings, they would so conduct themselves. In a word, as he carries with him the most fruitful and daring fancy into the kingdom of nature,—on the other hand, he carries nature into the regions of fancy, lying beyond the confines of reality. We are lost in astonishment at seeing the extraordinary, the wonderful, and the unheard of, in such intimate nearness."

Macbeth

Because we first hear of Macbeth in the wounded captain's account of his battlefield valor, our initial impression is of a brave and capable warrior. This perspective is complicated, however, once we see Macbeth interact with the three witches.We realize that his physical courage is joined by a consuming ambition and a tendency to self-doubt—the prediction that he will be king brings him joy, but it also creates inner turmoil. These three attributes—bravery, ambition, and self-doubt—struggle for mastery of Macbeth throughout the play. Shakespeare uses Macbeth to show the terrible effects that ambition and guilt can have on a man who lacks strength of character. We may classify Macbeth as irrevocably evil, but his weak character separates him from Shakespeare's great villains—Iago in Othello, Richard III in Richard III, Edmund in King Lear—who are all strong enough to conquer guilt and self-doubt. Macbeth, great warrior though he is, is ill equipped for the psychic consequences of crime.Before he kills Duncan, Macbeth is plagued by worry and almost aborts the crime. It takes Lady Macbeth's steely sense of purpose to push him into the deed. After the murder, however, her powerful personality begins to disintegrate, leaving Macbeth increasingly alone.He fluctuates between fits of fevered action, in which he plots a series of murders to secure his throne, and moments of terrible guilt (as when Banquo's ghost appears) and absolute pessimism (after his wife's death, when he seems to succumb to despair). These fluctuations reflect the tragic tension within Macbeth: he is at once too ambitious to allow his conscience to stop him from murdering his way to the top and too conscientious to be happy with himself as a murderer.As things fall apart for him at the end of the play, he seems almost relieved— with the English army at his gates, he can finally return to life as a warrior, and he displays a kind of reckless bravado as his enemies surround him and drag him down. In part, this stems from his

fatal confidence in the witches' prophecies, but it also seems to derive from the fact that he has returned to the arena where he has been most successful and where his internal turmoil need not affect him—namely, the battlefield.Unlike many of Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, Macbeth never seems to contemplate suicide: "Why should I play the Roman fool," he asks, "and die / On mine own sword?." Instead, he goes down fighting, bringing the play full circle: it begins with Macbeth winning on the battlefield and ends with him dying in combat.

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most famous and frightening female characters. When we first see her, she is already plotting Duncan's murder, and she is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband. She seems fully aware of this and knows that she will have to push Macbeth into committing murder. At one point, she wishes that she were not a woman so that she could do it herself.This theme of the relationship between gender and power is key to Lady Macbeth's character: her husband implies that she is a masculine soul inhabiting a female body, which seems to link masculinity to ambition and violence. Shakespeare, however, seems to use her, and the witches, to undercut Macbeth's idea that "undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males".These crafty women use female methods of achieving power—that is, manipulation—to further their supposedly male ambitions. Women, the play implies, can be as ambitious and cruel as men, yet social constraints deny them the means to pursue these ambitions on their own.Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband with remarkable effectiveness, overriding all his objections; when he hesitates to murder; she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that he must commit murder to prove himself. Lady Macbeth's remarkable strength of will persists through the murder of the king—it is she who steadies her husband's nerves immediately after the crime has been perpetrated.Afterward, however, Lady Macbeth begins a slow slide into madness—just as ambition affects her more strongly than Macbeth before the crime, so does guilt plague her more strongly afterward. By the close of the play, she has been reduced to sleepwalking through the castle, desperately trying to wash away an invisible bloodstain.Once the sense of guilt comes home to roost, Lady Macbeth's sensitivity becomes a weakness, and she is unable to cope. Significantly, she (apparently) kills herself, signaling her total inability to deal with the legacy of their crimes.

The Three Witches

Throughout the play, the witches—referred to as the "weird sisters" by many of the characters—lurk like dark thoughts and unconscious temptations to evil. In part, the mischief they cause stems from their supernatural powers, but mainly it is the result of their understanding of the weaknesses of their specific interlocutors—they play upon Macbeth's ambition like puppeteers.The witches' beards, bizarre potions, and rhymed speech make them seem slightly ridiculous, like caricatures of the supernatural. Shakespeare has them speak in rhyming couplets throughout (their most famous line is probably "Double, double, toil and trouble, / Fire burn and cauldron bubble"), which separates them from the other characters, who mostly speak in blank verse.The witches' words seem almost comical, like malevolent nursery rhymes. Despite the absurdity of their "eye of newt and toe of frog" recipes, however, they are clearly the most dangerous characters in the play, being both tremendously powerful and utterly wicked.The audience is left to ask whether the witches are independent agents toying with human lives, or agents of fate, whose prophecies are only reports of the inevitable. The witches bear a striking and obviously intentional resemblance to the Fates, female characters in both Norse and Greek mythology who weaves the fabric of human lives and then cut the threads to end them. Some of their prophecies seem self-fulfilling.For example, it is doubtful that Macbeth would have murdered his king without the push given by the witches' predictions. In other cases, though, their prophecies are just remarkably accurate readings of the future—it is hard to see Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane as being self-fulfilling in any way. The play offers no easy answers. Instead, Shakespeare keeps the witches well outside the limits of human comprehension. They embody an unreasoning, instinctive evil.

Banquo

Banquo is Macbeth's brave and noble best friend, as well as his second victim. Banquo enters the play with Macbeth after both have fought valiantly for Duncan's side in a recent battle. Duncan acknowledges Banquo as "no less deserved" of praise as Macbeth, but from the beginning of the play, Banquo is overshadowed by Macbeth's accomplishments and ambition.Similar to Macbeth, Banquo seems unable to understand the cost of the Witches' prophecy will be his life. In Act III, murderers kill Banquo at Macbeth's command, and try to kill his young son, Fleance, who manages

to get away.Soon after his death, Banquo appears in the form of a ghost at the banquet the Macbeths give at their castle. At play's end, Banquo's greatest import remains offstage: his son, Fleance, who could come back to revenge his father's death and take the throne of Scotland, fulfilling the Witches' prophecy that Banquo's sons will one day be king.In Act 1, scene 3, Banquo muses on the events of the last few minutes: just as the Witches predicted, Macbeth has been named Thane of Cawdor. Banquo notes that just because the Witches told the truth doesn't mean that they're not evil. Banquo understands far earlier than Macbeth that the Witches don't necessarily have Macbeth's best interests in mind, and their prophecies may turn out to be less positive than Macbeth believes.In Act 3, scene 1, Banquo's soliloquy reveals that he is suspicious of Macbeth, who, in becoming king, has achieved all that the Witches promised for him. Banquo senses that Macbeth engaged in foul play in order to make the Witches' prophecy come true. While the idea that Macbeth may have murdered Duncan fills Banquo with fear, the thought also gives Banquo hope that what the Witches predicted for him will come true. He doesn't realize that in order for his sons to become king, he will have to die.In his dying breaths, Banquo urges his son, Fleance, to flee to safety, and charges him to someday revenge his father's death. This sets the stage how the play will end, when Macbeth realizes that the Witches' prophecy will come true, and Banquo's children will rule Scotland.

Macduff

Macduff stands out from a large cast of secondary characters because of the particular harm that Macbeth does to him, and the revenge Macduff takes on Macbeth in turn. At the beginning of the play, Macduff is a loyal and brave noble fighting on Duncan's side. He immediately distrusts Macbeth's claim that Duncan was killed by his servants, and refuses to go to Macbeth's coronation.Once Macbeth understands that Macduff will not be loyal to him, Macduff becomes a particular focus of Macbeth's anger, guilt, and rabid desire to protect his power. Macbeth arranges for murderers to kill Macduff's wife and children, after Macduff has already fled to England to seek help from the king for his cause against Macbeth.Macduff's decision to abandon his family is never fully explained, and seems hard to justify, given their brutal murders. But Macduff is deeply motivated by his wife and sons' deaths, and he speaks several times in the play about how he must revenge them. Thus, his mission to place Malcolm on the throne of Scotland is one that reflects his desire to have the true monarch ruling, but also shows his desire for vengeance for his wife and son's murder.

6.4 Themes

Virtue Vs Evil

Many of the major characters in this play are virtuous; the major exceptions are the Macbeths.Macbeth begins as an admirable character whose loyalty to Duncan and military prowess gain him the title of Thane of Cawdor. However, upon hearing the prophecy of the weird sisters, he begins to contemplate the murder of Duncan. His thoughts turn to "horrible imaginings".By using the word "horrible" to describe his thoughts of regicide, Macbeth alerts us that he is acutely aware of the nature of his actions. He acknowledges more than once that Duncan does not deserve to die. In his first true soliloquy, Macbeth imagines that Duncan's "virtues / Will plead like angels trumpet-tongu'd against / the deep damnation of his taking-off". After killing Duncan, Macbeth initially is haunted by the horror of his actions and regards himself with repugnance. But he soon becomes more callous as his murder of innocents continues with Macduff's family. By the end of the play, his tyranny has reached its peak as he continues to destroy anyone who opposes him, including Young Siward. Through Macbeth's descent into tyranny, Shakespeare explores the power of evil and illustrates how it can use human ambition to consume a person.Lady Macbeth presents a slightly different case study of evil. Like her husband, she clearly is not a virtuous character.

But while Macbeth becomes increasingly evil and less sympathetic as the play progresses, Lady Macbeth moves in the opposite direction. In the early stages of the play, when Macbeth hedges about whether to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth convinces her indecisive husband to follow through with his plans. Greenblatt notes, in his introduction to Macbeth, in the Norton Shakespeare that she accomplishes this in two primary ways. First, she questions his masculinity by connecting his ability to murder Duncan with his manhood. She taunts her husband by asking him if he would prefer to "live a coward in thine own esteem."

Reason Vs. Passion

During their debates over which course of action to take, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth use different persuasive strategies. Macbeth is very rational, contemplating the consequences and implications of his actions. He recognizes the political, ethical, and religious reasons why he should not commit regicide.In addition to jeopardizing his afterlife, Macbeth notes that regicide is a violation of Duncan's "double trust" that stems from Macbeth's bonds as a kinsman and as a subject.Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, has a more passionate way of examining the pros and cons of killing Duncan. She is motivated by her feelings and uses emotional arguments to persuade her husband to commit the evil act. Interestingly, though she uses her zeal to convince her husband to kill Duncan, she adopts a detached and pragmatic view of their crimes after they are committed, while Macbeth becomes emotionally gripped with horror and repugnance.Lady Macbeth even returns the daggers to the king's bedchamber and smears blood on his servants to implicate them in the crime. From her perspective, "what's done is done" and need not be regretted.Despite this initial detachment from guilt, Lady Macbeth ultimately is unequipped to deal with the consequences of their actions. Conversely, Macbeth initially reacts emotionally with repugnance and remorse but later reasons that "blood will have blood".Macbeth coldly deduces that he must continue to act villainously in order to maintain his crown. His continued villainy is accompanied by a deadening of emotions. Macbeth realizes that he will be unable to clean himself of the crime of regicide, saying that his hands could turn the green seas red.He reasons that, having chosen his course of action, "returning [would be] as tedious as go[ing] over". The deadening of his emotions culminates in Act V when Macbeth greets news of his wife's death with no outward grief, saying that "[s]he should have died hereafter."

Gender Roles

Lady Macbeth is the focus of much of the exploration of gender roles in the play. As Lady Macbeth propels her husband toward committing Duncan's murder, she indicates that she must take on masculine characteristics.Her most famous speech addresses this issue. In Act I, Scene 5, after reading Macbeth's letter in which he details the witches' prophecy and informs her of Duncan's impending visit to their castle, Lady Macbeth indicates her desire to lose her feminine qualities and gain masculine ones. She cries, "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top full / Of direst cruelty. This request is part of what David Bevington, in his introduction to Macbeth in the fourth edition of the Complete Works of Shakespeare, sees as "sexual inversion" in the play. Clearly, gender is out of its traditional order. This disruption of gender roles is also presented through Lady Macbeth's usurpation of the dominant role in the Macbeth's marriage; on many occasions, she rules her husband and dictates his actions.The disruption of gender roles is also represented in the weird sisters. Their very status as witches is a violation of how women were expected to behave in Early Modern England. The trio is perceived as violating nature, and despite their designation as sisters, the gender of these characters is also ambiguous. Upon encountering them, Banquo says, "You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so. Their facial hair symbolizes their influence in the affairs of the male-dominated warrior society of Scotland. William C. Carroll, in his Bedford Cultural edition of Macbeth, sees the witches and the question of their gender as a device Shakespeare uses to criticize the male-dominated culture, where titles are acquired through what Carroll describes as "murderous violence."

Summary

William Shakespeare has pioneered the art of writing drama ever since he started inking characters and designating roles for the British stage. His contribution to the field of dramatics remains unsurpassed and will continue to reign till eternity. The Bard has immortalized his characters in the hearts of his readers. He has explored myriad genres of drama, especially, tragedy. Besides other tragic dramas, Macbeth has also carved its niche and continues to do so. It has also been adapted into films, web series and has also supplied its concept to other types of content. The play is popular owed to how it gives an insight into the grave reality of life and moral degradation. Macbeth is blinded by his ambition and misguided by Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is dipped in greed and is oblivious to the fact that one has to pay a hefty price for all the bad deeds that one commits. Hence, they both meet disastrous repercussions which lead to their downfall.

Keywords

1. ***Tragedy:***a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.
2. ***Comedy:*** a play characterized by its humorous or satirical tone and its depiction of amusing people or incidents, in which the characters ultimately triumph over adversity.
3. ***Macbeth:*** a Scottish general who is the protagonist of Shakespeare's tragedy Macbeth.
4. ***Hamartia:*** a fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.
5. ***Tragic hero:***A tragic hero is a character in a dramatic tragedy who has virtuous and sympathetic traits but ultimately meets with suffering or defeat.

Self Assessment

1. Unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, _____ never seems to contemplate suicide.

A. Macbeth
B. Duncan
C. Banquo
D. None of these

2. "O never, shall sun that morrow see." Who has said this in the play?

A. Duncan
B. Lady Macbeth
C. Banquo
D. None of these

3. Macbeth kills _____'s wife and children.

A. Duncan
B. Banquo
C. Macduff
D. None of these

4. Where is the royal palace located?

A. Forres
B. Ireland
C. Inverness
D. None of these

5. _____ is Banquo's son in the play Macbeth.

A. Macbeth
B. Fleance
C. Donalblain
D. Malcolm

6. _____ is the Goddess of witchcraft.

A. Medusa
B. Helen

C. Hecate
D. None of these

7. In the play Macbeth, Macbeth and Banquo defeat the armies of _____.
A. Ireland
B. Austria
C. Germany
D. London

8. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be made _____.
A. King
B. Thane
C. Commander
D. General

9. What is the name of Macbeth's castle?
A. Mount View
B. Pegasus
C. Inverness
D. None of these

10. _____ is the shortest and most intense of Shakespeare's plays.
A. Macbeth
B. Hamlet
C. The Merchant of Venice
D. Othello

11. A _____ usually depicts the fall of a man of high stature or class.
A. Comedy
B. Tragedy
C. Travesty
D. Satire

12. In the play Macbeth, the protagonist encounters _____ weird sisters usually referred to as the witches.
A. Two
B. Five
C. Three
D. Four

13. "Here is an unknown country boy, poor and poorly educated according to the standards of his age, who arrives at the great city of London and goes to work at odd jobs in a theater." Who was the country boy?
A. William Shakespeare
B. Thomas Hardy

C. Samuel Taylor Coleridge
D. William Wordsworth

14. The _____ school of writers have always held that in the Bard "all came from within"
A. Puritan
B. Romantic
C. Metaphysical
D. None of these

15. The first printed collection of the Bard's plays is known as the _____.
A. Tragedy
B. Comedy
C. First Folio
D. None of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	C	4.	A	5.	B
6.	C	7.	A	8.	B	9.	C	10.	A
11.	B	12.	C	13.	A	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. Delineate the themes of the play 'Macbeth'.
2. Show how William Shakespeare is a dramatic genius.
3. Draw the character sketch of Macbeth.
4. Could you think of an alternative ending for the play 'Macbeth'?
5. Had you been in place of Macbeth, what would you have done after hearing the witches 'prophecies?

Further Reading

1. https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/macbeth/
2. https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/
3. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jul/13/is-the-word-macbeth-really-cursed
4. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/dec/29/macbeth-profile-shakespeare-michael-billington

Unit 07: Shakespeare: Macbeth

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- Delineate the thematic concerns in the play 'Macbeth'
- Analyze the play critically
- Study the views of various critics with regards to the play 'Macbeth'

Introduction

Though Macbeth may be one of Shakespeare's most topical plays, with its strong links to current events in Jacobean England, it also explores a wide variety of themes that do not necessarily relate to specific events. For instance, Shakespeare explores a great number of dichotomies — or paired opposites — such as good and evil, order and disorder, reason and emotion, and reality and illusion. Using these dichotomies, he investigates themes related to human nature, ambition, gender, and the family.

7.1 Themes

Virtue Vs Evil

Many of the major characters in this play are virtuous; the major exceptions are the Macbeths. Macbeth begins as an admirable character whose loyalty to Duncan and military prowess gain him the title of Thane of Cawdor. However, upon hearing the prophecy of the weird sisters, he begins to contemplate the murder of Duncan. His thoughts turn to "horrible imaginings".By using the word "horrible" to describe his thoughts of regicide, Macbeth alerts us that he is acutely aware of the nature of his actions. He acknowledges more than once that Duncan does not deserve to die. In his first true soliloquy, Macbeth imagines that Duncan's "virtues / Will plead like angels trumpet-tongu'd against / The deep damnation of his taking-off". After killing Duncan, Macbeth initially is haunted by the horror of his actions and regards himself with repugnance. But he soon becomes more callous as his murder of innocents continues with Macduff's family. By the end of the play, his tyranny has reached its peak as he continues to destroy anyone who opposes him, including

Young Siward. Through Macbeth's descent into tyranny, Shakespeare explores the power of evil and illustrates how it can use human ambition to consume a person.Lady Macbeth presents a slightly different case study of evil. Like her husband, she clearly is not a virtuous character. But while Macbeth becomes increasingly evil and less sympathetic as the play progresses, Lady Macbeth moves in the opposite direction. In the early stages of the play, when Macbeth hedges about whether to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth convinces her indecisive husband to follow through with his plans.

Greenblatt notes in his introduction to Macbeth in the Norton Shakespeare that she accomplishes this in two primary ways. First, she questions his masculinity by connecting his ability to murder Duncan with his manhood. She taunts her husband by asking him if he would prefer to "live a coward in thine own esteem."Second, Lady Macbeth is rhetorically much more vicious than her husband in her beliefs and her determination. In a statement that is often cited to demonstrate the evil nature of Lady Macbeth, she claims that she would willingly sacrifice her own child if she had sworn to do so. Despite their atrocity, these are only words.And despite being the primary force behind Macbeth's actions, Lady Macbeth ultimately seems to be more haunted by their deeds than Macbeth is. Unlike Macbeth, she cannot descend fully into evil.After many murders have taken place, Lady Macbeth repeatedly sleepwalks, rubbing her hands in a vain effort to wash off a spot of blood that she sees continually.

In exasperation, she asks, "[W]ill these hands ne'er be clean?". Her mental struggles escalate, and Lady Macbeth eventually commits suicide, suggesting that her conscience provides her with a sort of redemption that Macbeth could never find.

Reason Vs. Passion

During their debates over which course of action to take, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth use different persuasive strategies. Macbeth is very rational, contemplating the consequences and implications of his actions. He recognizes the political, ethical, and religious reasons why he should not commit regicide.In addition to jeopardizing his afterlife, Macbeth notes that regicide is a violationof Duncan's "double trust" that stems from Macbeth's bonds as a kinsman and as a subject. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, has a more passionate way of examining the pros and cons of killing Duncan. She is motivated by her feelings and uses emotional arguments to persuade her husband to commit the evil act. Interestingly, though she uses her zeal to convince her husband to kill Duncan, she adopts a detached and pragmatic view of their crimes after they are committed, while Macbeth becomes emotionally gripped with horror and repugnance.Lady Macbeth even returns the daggers to the king's bedchamber and smears blood on his servants to implicate them in the crime. From her perspective, "what's done is done" and need not be regretted. Despite this initial detachment from guilt, Lady Macbeth ultimately is unequipped to deal with the consequences of their actions. Conversely, Macbeth initially reacts emotionally with repugnance and remorse but later reasons that "blood will have blood".Macbeth coldly deduces that he must continue to act villainously in order to maintain his crown. His continued villainy is accompanied by a deadening of emotions. Macbeth realizes that he will be unable to clean himself of the crime of regicide, saying that his hands could turn the green seas red.He reasons that, having chosen his course of action, "returning [would be] as tedious as go[ing] over.". The deadening of his emotions culminates in Act V when Macbeth greets news of his wife's death with no outward grief, saying that "[s]he should have died hereafter."

Gender Roles

Lady Macbeth is the focus of much of the exploration of gender roles in the play. As Lady Macbeth propels her husband toward committing Duncan's murder, she indicates that she must take on masculine characteristics.Her most famous speech addresses this issue. In Act I, Scene 5, after reading Macbeth's letter in which he details the witches' prophecy and informs her of Duncan's impending visit to their castle, Lady Macbeth indicates her desire to lose her feminine qualities and gain masculine ones. She cries, "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top full / Of direst cruelty. This request is part of what David Bevington, in his introduction to Macbeth in the fourth edition of the Complete Works of Shakespeare, sees as "sexual inversion" in the play. Clearly, gender is out of its traditional order. This disruption of gender roles is also presented through Lady Macbeth's usurpation of the

dominant role in the Macbeth's marriage; on many occasions, she rules her husband and dictates his actions.The disruption of gender roles is also represented in the weird sisters. Their very status as witches is a violation of how women were expected to behave in Early Modern England. The trio is perceived as violating nature, and despite their designation as sisters, the gender of these characters is also ambiguous. Upon encountering them, Banquo says, "You should be women, / and yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so". Their facial hair symbolizes their influence in the affairs of the male-dominated warrior society of Scotland. William C. Carroll, in his Bedford Cultural edition of Macbeth, sees the witches and the question of their gender as a device Shakespeare uses to criticizes the male-dominated culture, where titles are acquired through what Carroll describes as "murderous violence."

Nature out of Order

The disorder of nature, as well as gender, is a major theme in this play. The hierarchical view of the universe is violated and disrupted at almost every turn. The unnatural and disruptive death of the monarch is paralleled by equally violent disruptions in nature itself.On the night of Duncan's death, the nobleman Lennox claims there were "Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death / And prophecying with accents terrible / Of dire combustion and confus'd events / New hatch'd to the woeful time". Many critics see this parallel between Duncan's death and disorder in nature as an affirmation of the divine right theory of kingship.As we witness in the play, Macbeth's murder of Duncan and his continued tyranny extends the disorder to the entire country.

7.2 The Corrupting Power of Unchecked Ambition

The main theme of Macbeth—the destruction wrought when ambition goes unchecked by moral constraints—finds its most powerful expression in the play's two main characters. Macbeth is a courageous Scottish general who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, yet he deeply desires power and advancement.He kills Duncan against his better judgment and afterward stews in guilt and paranoia. Toward the end of the play, he descends into a kind of frantic, boastful madness. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, pursues her goals with greater determination, yet she is less capable of withstanding the repercussions of her immoral acts.One of Shakespeare's most forcefully drawn female characters, she spurs her husband mercilessly to kill Duncan and urges him to be strong in the murder's aftermath, but she is eventually driven to distraction by the effect of Macbeth's repeated bloodshed on her conscience. In each case, ambition—helped, of course, by the malign prophecies of the witches—is what drives the couple to ever more terrible atrocities.The problem, the play suggests, is that once one decides to use violence to further one's quest for power, it is difficult to stop.There are always potential threats to the throne—Banquo, Fleance, Macduff—and it is always tempting to use violent means to dispose of them.

7.3 The Relationship between Cruelty and Masculinity

Characters in Macbeth frequently dwell on issues of gender. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband by questioning his manhood, wishes that she herself could be "unsexed," and does not contradict Macbeth when he says that a woman like her should give birth only to boys. In the same manner that Lady Macbeth goads her husband on to murder, Macbeth provokes the murderers he hires to kill Banquo by questioning their manhood.Such acts show that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth equate masculinity with naked aggression, and whenever they converse about manhood, violence soon follows. Their understanding of manhood allows the political order depicted in the play to descend into chaos.At the same time, however, the audience cannot help noticing that women are also sources of violence and evil. The witches' prophecies spark Macbeth's ambitions and then encourage his violent behavior; Lady Macbeth provides the brains and the will behind her husband's plotting; and the only divine being to appear is Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. Arguably, Macbeth traces the root of chaos and evil to women, which has led some critics to argue that this is Shakespeare's most misogynistic play.While the male characters are just as violent and prone to evil as the women, the aggression of the female characters is more striking because it goes against prevailing expectations of how women ought to behave. Lady Macbeth's behavior certainly shows that women can be as ambitious and cruel as men. Whether because of the constraints of her society or because she is not fearless enough to kill, Lady Macbeth relies on deception and manipulation rather than violence to achieve her ends.Ultimately, the play does put forth a revised

and less destructive definition of manhood. In the scene where Macduff learns of the murders of his wife and child, Malcolm consoles him by encouraging him to take the news in "manly" fashion, by seeking revenge upon Macbeth. Macduff shows the young heir apparent that he has a mistaken understanding of masculinity. To Malcolm's suggestion, "Dispute it like a man," Macduff replies, "I shall do so. But I must also feel it as a man".At the end of the play, Siward receives news of his son's death rather complacently. Malcolm responds: "He's worth more sorrow [than you have expressed] / And that I'll spend for him". Malcolm's comment shows that he has learned the lesson Macduff gave him on the sentient nature of true masculinity. It also suggests that, with Malcolm's coronation, order will be restored to the Kingdom of Scotland.

7.4 The difference between Kingship and Tyranny

In the play, Duncan is always referred to as a "king," while Macbeth soon becomes known as the "tyrant." The difference between the two types of rulers seems to be expressed in a conversation that occurs in Act 4, scene 3, when Macduff meets Malcolm in England. In order to test Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, Malcolm pretends that he would make an even worse king than Macbeth.He tells Macduff of his reproachable qualities—among them a thirst for personal power and a violent temperament, both of which seem to characterize Macbeth perfectly. On the other hand, Malcolm says, "The king-becoming graces / [are] justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness, / Bounty, perseverance, mercy, [and] lowliness". The model king, then, offers the kingdom an embodiment of order and justice, but also comfort and affection. Under him, subjects are rewarded according to their merits, as when Duncan makes Macbeth thane of Cawdor after Macbeth's victory over the invaders.Most important, the king must be loyal to Scotland above his own interests. Macbeth, by contrast, brings only chaos to Scotland—symbolized in the bad weather and bizarre supernatural events—and offers no real justice, only a habit of capriciously murdering those he sees as a threat. As the embodiment of tyranny, he must be overcome by Malcolm so that Scotland can have a true king once more.

Ambition

Although he is encouraged by the Witches, Macbeth's true downfall is his own ambition. Lady Macbeth is as ambitious as her husband, encouraging him to commit murder to achieve their goals. Both Macbeths fail to see how their ambition makes them cross moral lines and will lead to their downfall. Once Macbeth kills Duncan, his ambition to hold on to his title as king becomes intertwined with his paranoia.Rather than being able to enjoy the fruits of his ambition, he becomes obsessed with maintaining the power he's won. Macbeth's blind pursuit of power can be contrasted with other ambitious characters in the play like Banquo. Banquo also hears the Witches' prophecies, and similarly has ambition for his sons.But unlike Macbeth, Banquo's morality prevents him from pursuing his goal at any cost. At the end of the play, Macbeth has achieved all he wanted but has nothing.With his wife gone and no hope of producing a prince, Macbeth sees what his unchecked ambition has cost him: the loss of all he holds dear.

Guilt

Macbeth's guilt about murdering his king, Duncan, and ordering the murder of his friend, Banquo, causes him to have guilty hallucinations. Lady Macbeth also hallucinates and eventually goes insane from guilt over her role in Duncan's death. The fact that both characters suffer torment as a result of their actions suggests neither Macbeth nor his wife is entirely cold-blooded.Although they commit terrible crimes, they know, on some level, that what they've done is wrong. Their guilt prevents them from fully enjoying the power they craved. Lady Macbeth says "What's done/ cannot be undone" in Act Five scene one, but her guilt continues to torment her. While Macbeth's guilt causes him to commit further murders in an attempt to cover up his initial crimes, Lady Macbeth's guilt drives her to insanity, and, finally, suicide.

Children

The loss of children is a complex and intriguing theme in the play. For both Macbeth and Banquo, children represent the idea of the continuation of a family line. Macbeth has Banquo murdered in hopes of thwarting the Witches' prophecy that Banquo will sire a long line of kings. However,

Fleance is able to escape being killed, leaving open the possibility he will one day take over the throne.Macbeth and his wife have no heirs, although Lady Macbeth references having been a mother once, saying, "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. "This line suggests the Macbeths may have lost a child. Similarly, Macduff mourns the children Macbeth ordered killed and uses their memory to spur him on to victory against their killer; and Siward laments the loss of his son in the play's closing battle, but is proud to have fathered such a brave soldier who fought in a noble cause.Lady Macbeth speaks these lines when she is trying to shame Macbeth for questioning their plan. She uses the image of a child to make a graphic statement about her own ambition and capacity for violence.By describing herself as a tender and loving mother who nonetheless would have killed her own child before she would abort a plan to seize power, Lady Macbeth disrupts the typical idea of what women and mothers are like. She uses this image to make her husband that he is being unmanly by doubting their scheme.Macbeth speaks these lines when he is brooding about his worries that, as the witches have prophesied, Banquo's heirs will someday gain control of the Scottish crown. Macbeth reveals that he feels guilty about the terrible things he has done, and that he is wondering if these acts were worthwhile.Even though he currently holds power, Macbeth lacks children who will hold power after him and this makes him fear that he has committed terrible deeds for no reason. These lines speak to a strong interest in stable succession, which was a key political issue in Shakespeare's time.

7.5 Critical Analysis

Critical Analysis by Nick Moschovakis

Shakespeare probably wrote his Tragedy of Macbeth just over four centuries ago. In the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, audiences and readers in the English-speaking world and Europe became well acquainted with the play.Since then, cultures around the globe have embraced it as a well-wrought drama of action and character—even as adapters and interpreters have presented radically different views of its overarching values and its larger outlook on human experience.The play moves rapidly , climaxing in a battle. Its protagonists are alternately admired and abhorred; fortunate and miserable; self assured and terrified; gratified and tormented.Its human plot speaks directly to any society where fears of treachery are felt; where blood is shed for advantage; and where crimes against unsuspecting allies, acquaintances, and friends are supposed to lead to remorse.Macbeth joins these readily understood themes to a masque-like subplot involving conjurations, prophecies, and supernatural agency. It thus enlarges its scope beyond that of ordinary human relations. It invites speculation about the ultimate causes of pain and suffering, and may elicit our sympathy with reviled transgressors as we witness the betrayal of their extraordinary hopes.The weird sisters have been variously understood by different individuals, times, and cultures. They embody humanity's perennial failure to impose its conscious will and its ideas of order upon the unruly energies of desire, the pride of the great, and the manifold horrors of war and tyranny. Last but not least, they conspire to bring us face to face with the ultimate disappointment of death.Among the many questions Macbeth raises, one of the most encompassing is that of how to make choices in life—what the basis of our actions should be.

Recent criticism has been energized by profound disagreements over whether or not Macbeth upholds a dualistic view of morality: one which measures human actions and objectives by their worth relative to polar opposites of 'good' and 'bad.' When Macbeth first hears the witches' prophecies, he sounds problematically unable to place their promises in either category: "This supernatural soliciting/ Cannot be ill, cannot be good".His disinclination to differentiate between 'good' and 'ill' recalls his fondness for paradoxes elsewhere—"So foul and fair a day I have not seen", "nothing is,/ But what is not". Yet Shakespeare often explored such occasions for ambivalence elsewhere in his writing. We might suspect that he shared the view of the nineteenth-century American sage who proclaimed, "Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this."Is Macbeth, then, meant to throw doubt on our ability to distinguish 'good' from 'evil'? Or does it instead assure us, dualistically, that we can tell them apart (and that we must)? Does it, or does it not, illustrate the premise that men and women have an ability and an obligation to choose what is best— even when they fail to exercise this capacity? The very liveliness of recent controversies may attest to Macbeth's ambivalent stance on the issue.

Yet its characters often speak in ways that suggest a commitment to dualistic ideologies. Moreover, as we will see, a similar attachment to moral dualism consistently informed the work of both critics

and performers from the later seventeenth century until the modern period. It was not until the twentieth century that Shakespeare's interpreters began explicitly arguing that Macbeth was designed to confound dualistic categories, complicating our moral perceptions and judgments—and so substantiating the weird sisters' contention that "Fair is foul, and foul is fair". Besides Macbeth's 'ambition' and the witches' predictions, there is of course another potent force to be reckoned with in the play. This is Lady Macbeth. As performers and critics have long recognized, a key question in Macbeth is the nature of her power over Macbeth, its extent and its manner of working.If one sees Macbeth as a man unlikely to plan a regicide without help, then a proportionate share of responsibility will accrue to his wife. Conversely, Lady Macbeth may seem less implicated in the plot if Macbeth seems bent on 'evil' from the start or since before the action begins.However, the mere fact that Lady Macbeth can sway her husband's will in the persuasion scene inherently troubled generations of male interpreters. Early modern men were enjoined to 'rule' the women in their households. Macbeth lets himself be overruled instead. Davenant stressed the monstrous, 'unnatural' perversity of such negligence.In a new dialogue he added to Act 4, a briefly and repentantly lucid Lady Macbeth cast blame on Macbeth's "upsetting of the natural order . . . because he, as a man, failed to exercise his natural superiority over her". Davenant also greatly expanded Lady Macduff's role, making her an example of virtuous womanhood and so clearly delineating the difference between a "good" wife and a wayward one like Lady Macbeth.

Though nineteenth-century writers did not deny that Macbeth depicted a conflict of 'good' and 'evil,' some began to find a more confusing human experience enacted in the play: one in which bafflement and delusion are as important as recognitions of moral truth. Literary critics, especially, began reading Macbeth as a study of the imagination's ascendancy over the reason.This notion would eventually help to erode the assumption that Shakespeare's tragedy evokes clear and objective intuitions about 'good' and 'evil.' The Romantics thus anticipated the later emergence of what I am calling a 'problematic' Macbeth.Among the earlier nineteenth-century critics, it was William Hazlitt who perhaps came closest to formulating a problematic viewpoint. On the one hand, Hazlitt wrote in 1817 of Macbeth's "systematic principle of contrast. . . . It is a huddling together of fierce extremes, a war of opposite natures".On the other, Hazlitt argued that despite this dualism, Macbeth creates paradoxical conjunctions of opposite values: Lady Macbeth veers between feelings of "filial piety" and "thoughts [that] spare the blood neither of infants nor old age". If people in Macbeth are both one thing and another, both good and bad, we may well begin wondering how to separate the two.Hazlitt also hinted that Macbeth might perplex ethical analysis, undermining morality's rational structure. S.T. Coleridge posited another disconcerting separation between Macbeth's accusing conscience and his conscious mind; he saw the latter struggling to evade the former's clear perceptions of 'good' and 'evil,' seeking refuge in amoral "prudential reasoning" to avoid facing an "avenging conscience".Though Coleridge's explicit moral views were dualistic, he saw Macbeth as a dramatic illustration of the mind's ability to suppress—albeit only temporarily—the awareness of 'evil' and the claims of the 'good.'

Romantic readers developed new understandings of Shakespeare's psychological dimension, approaching Macbeth as a poetic representation of subjective experience. Thomas De Quincey, in his famous commentary on the scene following Duncan's death, wrote that its purpose was to "throw the interest on the murderer" by making us "enter into his feelings" and "understand them". In accordance with this psychology induced impulse, nineteenth-century critics—however much they reiterated dualistic judgments against ambition, murder, etc.—also began discussing a subject harder to adjudicate morally: that of mental illness. George Fletcher in 1847 called "excessive morbid irritability" a "great moral characteristic of Macbeth".The great French critic Hippolyte Taine, in his Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise (1863), regarded Macbeth as "the history of a monomania;" Macbeth suffers from a "hallucination" of "grand and terrible phantoms . . . the poetry of which indicates a generous heart, enslaved to an idea of fate".Among these hallucinations was Banquo's ghost; yet in describing it as such, Taine all but asserted that moral dualism itself is a subjective mental construct. His viewpoint attested to a creeping doubt in later nineteenth-century culture about the essential existence of 'good' and 'evil' (while social conservatives, including Taine, continued to see the outward maintenance of moral dualisms as imperative).Many critics have argued, especially in recent decades, that the 1606 Macbeth was a morally and/or ideologically problematic play. While recognizing how its characters appeal to concepts of 'good' and 'bad,' critics suggest that Macbeth ironies these appeals. It makes them seem confused, contingent, mutually contradictory, disingenuously partial and self-serving, or simply in conflict with other values and intuitions available to an early modern audience.

A first line often taken against dualistic readings is based on the perception that Macbeth's putatively 'good' characters are not necessarily so. No matter how much the characters seem to insist on the viciousness of Duncan's murder (for instance), one need not believe everything that a given individual says—even one whom others valorise, or who attains power at the play's conclusion.This point was made by William Empson, a New Critic who resisted his generation's prevalent moral and political dualisms. Empson eloquently stresses Macbeth's ambiguity, noting its evocation of "immense confusion" in a society in the throes of civil unrest, and its "general atmosphere of fog and suspicion". It is worth quoting his brisk, sceptical retort to dualistic arguments about equine cannibalism "Ross is telling lies." The characters whom dualists have labeled 'good' are now frequently criticized. Disquietingly, the play's most fulsome flattery of Malcolm is uttered by Malcolm himself. Such false modesty may sound like self mystification.Also, Duncan can seem culpable so far as practical kingship is concerned. He appears to have a weak hold on his throne at the play's outset, since military action is required to keep him there.Finally, considering what Duncan now owes Macbeth, we may think that he shows less than due gratitude in nominating Malcolm—not Macbeth—as his successor.Many new historicists note that to audience members in 1606 who knew something about medieval Scottish history, Malcolm's nomination could have appeared as a tendentious move to alter the customary principles of royal succession in his son's favour; Duncan thus could have seemed a self-serving, dynastically 'ambitious' overreacher, much like Macbeth; on Duncan and Macbeth, see the essays in this volume by Lemon.

Critical Analysis by William Hazlitt

Macbeth . . . is done upon a stronger and more systematic principle of contrast than any other of Shakespeare's plays. It moves upon the verge of an abyss, and is a constant struggle between life and death.The action is desperate and the reaction is dreadful. It is a huddling together of fierce extremes, a war of opposite natures which of them shall destroy the other. There is nothing but what has a violent end or violent beginnings. The lights and shades are laid on with a determined hand; the transitions from triumph to despair, from the height of terror to the repose of death, are sudden and startling; every passion brings in its fellow-contrary, and the thoughts pitch and jostle against each other as in the dark.The whole play is an unruly chaos of strange and forbidden things, where the ground rocks under our feet. Shakespeare's genius here took its full swing, and trod upon the farthest bounds of nature and passion.

Critical Analysis by Emma Smith

Macbeth completes William Shakespeare's great tragic quartet while expanding, echoing, and altering key elements of Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear into one of the most terrifying stage experiences. Like Hamlet, Macbeth treats the consequences of regicide, but from the perspective of the usurpers, not the dispossessed. Like Othello, Macbeth focuses its intrigue on the intimate relations of husband and wife. Like Lear, Macbeth explores female villainy, creating in Lady Macbeth one of Shakespeare's most complex, powerful, and frightening woman characters. Different from Hamlet and Othello, in which the tragic action is reserved for their climaxes and an emphasis on cause over effect, Macbeth, like Lear, locates the tragic tipping point at the play's outset to concentrate on inexorable consequences.Like Othello, Macbeth, Shakespeare's shortest tragedy, achieves an almost unbearable intensity by eliminating subplots, inessential characters, and tonal shifts to focus almost exclusively on the crime's devastating impact on husband and wife.What is singular about Macbeth, compared to the other three great Shakespearean tragedies, is its villain-hero. If Hamlet mainly executes rather than murders, if Othello is "more sinned against than sinning," and if Lear is "a very foolish fond old man" buffeted by surrounding evil, Macbeth knowingly chooses evil and becomes the bloodiest and most dehumanized of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists. Macbeth treats coldblooded, premeditated murder from the killer's perspective, anticipating the psychological dissection and guilt-ridden expressionism that Feodor Dostoevsky will employ in Crime and Punishment.

Critic Harold Bloom groups the protagonist as "the culminating figure in the sequence of what might be called Shakespeare's Grand Negations: Richard III, Iago, Edmund, Macbeth."With Macbeth, however, Shakespeare takes us further inside a villain's mind and imagination, while daringly

engaging our sympathy and identification with a murderer. "The problem Shakespeare gave himself in Macbeth was a tremendous one," Critic Wayne C. Booth has stated.Take a good man, a noble man, a man admired by all who know him and destroy him, not only physically and emotionally, as the Greeks destroyed their heroes, but also morally and intellectually. As if this were not difficult enough as a dramatic hurdle, while transforming him into one of the most despicable mortals conceivable, maintain him as a tragic hero—that is, keep him so sympathetic that, when he comes to his death, the audience will pity rather than detest him and will be relieved to see him out of his misery rather than pleased to see him destroyed.Unlike Richard III, Iago, or Edmund, Macbeth is less a virtuoso of villainy or an amoral nihilist than a man with a conscience who succumbs to evil and obliterates the humanity that he is compelled to suppress. Macbeth is Shakespeare's greatest psychological portrait of self destruction and the human capacity for evil seen from inside with an intimacy that horrifies because of our forced identification with Macbeth.Although there is no certainty in dating the composition or the first performance of Macbeth, allusions in the play to contemporary events fix the likely date of both as 1606, shortly after the completion and debut of King Lear.Scholars have suggested that Macbeth was acted before James I at Hampton Court on August 7, 1606, during the royal visit of King Christian IV of Denmark and that it may have been especially written for a royal performance.

Its subject, as well as its version of Scottish history, suggests an effort both to flatter and to avoid offending the Scottish king James. Macbeth is a chronicle play in which Shakespeare took his major plot elements from Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland (1587), but with significant modifications. The usurping Macbeth's decade-long (and largely successful) reign is abbreviated with an emphasis on the internal and external destruction caused by Macbeth's seizing the throne and trying to hold onto it.For the details of King Duncan's death, Shakespeare used Holinshed's account of the murder of an earlier king Duff by Donwald, who cast suspicion on drunken servants and whose ambitious wife played a significant role in the crime. Shakespeare also eliminated Banquo as the historical Macbeth's co-conspirator in the murder to promote Banquo's innocence and nobility in originating a kingly line from which James traced his legitimacy. Additional prominence is also given to the Weird Sisters, whom Holinshed only mentions in their initial meeting of Macbeth on the heath.

The prophetic warning "beware Macduff" is attributed to "certain wizards in whose words Macbeth put great confidence." The importance of the witches and the occult in Macbeth must have been meant to appeal to a king who produced a treatise, Daemonologie (1597), on witch-craft.The uncanny sets the tone of moral ambiguity from the play's outset as the three witches gather to encounter Macbeth "When the battle's lost and won" in an inverted world in which "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." Nothing in the play will be what it seems, and the tragedy results from the confusion and conflict between the fair—honor, nobility, duty—and the foul—rank ambition and bloody murder.Throughout the play nature reflects the disorder and violence of the action. Opening with thunder and lightning, the drama is set in a Scotland contending with the rebellion of the thane (feudal lord) of Cawdor, whom the fearless and courageous Macbeth has vanquished on the battlefield.The play, therefore, initially establishes Macbeth as a dutiful and trusted vassal of the king, Duncan of Scotland, deserving to be rewarded with the rebel's title for restoring peace and order in the realm. "What he hath lost," Duncan declares, "noble Macbeth hath won." News of this honor reaches Macbeth through the witches, who greet him both as the thane of Cawdor and "king hereafter" and his comrade-in-arms Banquo as one who "shalt get kings, though thou be none."Like the ghost in Hamlet, the Weird Sisters are left purposefully ambiguous and problematic. Are they agents of fate that determine Macbeth'sdoom, predicting and even dictating the inevitable, or do they merely signal a latency in Macbeth's ambitious character?With the decision to kill the king taken, the play accelerates unrelentingly through a succession of powerful scenes: Duncan's and Banquo's murders, the banquet scene in which Banquo's ghost appears, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, and Macbeth's final battle with Macduff, Thane of Fife.

Duncan's offstage murder contrasts Macbeth's "horrible imaginings" concerning the implications and Lady Macbeth's chilling practicality. Macbeth's question, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" is answered by his wife: "A little water clears us of this deed; / How easy is it then!" The knocking at the door of the castle, ominously signaling the revelation of the crime, prompts the play's one comic respite in the Porter's drunken foolery that he is at the door

of "Hell's Gate" controlling the entrance of the damned. With the flight of Duncan's sons, who fear for their lives, causing them to be suspected as murderers, Macbeth is named king, and the play's focus shifts to Macbeth's keeping and consolidating the power he has seized.Having gained what the witches prophesied, Macbeth next tries to prevent their prediction that Banquo's descendants will reign by setting assassins to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. The plan goes awry, and Fleance escapes, leaving Macbeth again at the mercy of the witches' prophecy. His psychic breakdown is dramatized by his seeing Banquo's ghost occupying Macbeth's place at the banquet. Pushed to the edge of mental collapse, Macbeth steels himself to meet the witches again to learn what is in store for him: "Iam in blood," he declares, "Stepp'd in so far that, should Iwade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er."The play concludes with order restored to Scotland, as Macduff presents Macbeth's severed head to Malcolm, who is hailed as king. Malcolm may assert his control and diminish Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as "this dead butcher and his fiendlike queen," but the audience knows more than that.We know what Malcolm does not, that it will not be his royal line but Banquo's that will eventually rule Scotland, and inevitably another round of rebellion and murder is to come. We also know in horrifying human terms the making of a butcher and a friend who refuse to be so easily dismissed as aberrations.

Summary

The play Macbeth is replete with myriad thematic concerns, symbols and images that strike a chord even in the twenty first century. Even though it was written a long time ago, it continues to stay relevant since it talks about the nature of humankind, its rise, its downfall and the animal instinct of greed which every human being attempts to tackle with. The theme of virtue vs. evil still rings a bell every time we come across this play as the basic human nature never changes, no matter how times change. The play also comments on how the human being never feels content with whatever he/ she has and always looks forward to hoard more, even if it asks for a compromise of the conscience. Many eminent critics have put forth their ideas and thoughts about the development of the character of Macbeth in the play, and their opinions do not always second with William Shakespeare. This is because some of the critics hoped for an alternate ending where Macbeth could have been given a chance to repent and lead a good life.

Keywords

1. ***Tyrant*** :a cruel and oppressive ruler
2. ***Prophetic:*** accurately predicting what will happen in the future
3. ***Ambivalent***: having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone
4. ***Capricious:*** given to sudden and unaccountable changes of mood or behavior
5. ***Ambitious:***having or showing a strong desire and determination to succeed

Self Assessment

1. Scholars have suggested that Macbeth was acted before _____ at Hampton Court on August 7, 1606.

A. Henry IV
B. Queen Elizabeth
C. Richard
D. James I

2. Critic _____ groups the protagonist as "the culminating figure in the sequence of what might be called Shakespeare's Grand Negations.

A. Emma Smith
B. Ben Jonson
C. Harold Bloom

D. None of these

3. William Empson eloquently stresses Macbeth's _____.

A. Ego
B. Ambiguity
C. Kindness
D. Love

4. Who called excessive morbid irritability a great moral characteristic of Macbeth?

A. George Fletcher
B. Robert Frost
C. G.B. Shaw
D. Francis Bacon

5. _____, in his famous commentary on the scene following Duncan's death, wrote that its purpose was to "throw the interest on the murderer" by making us "enter into his feelings" and "understand them.

A. William Shakespeare
B. William Wordsworth
C. P.B. Shelley
D. Thomas De Quincey

6. "This supernatural soliciting, cannot be ill, cannot be good." What does the term 'supernatural soliciting' imply?

A. Witches' prophecies
B. Banquo's murder
C. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking
D. None of these

7. The characters in the play Macbeth often speak in ways that suggest a commitment to _____ ideologies.

A. Singular
B. Dualistic
C. Particular
D. None of these

8. Who wrote Macbeth's systematic principle of contrast?

A. Christopher Marlowe
B. Thomas Dekker
C. William Hazlitt
D. None of these

9. How does Lady Macbeth convince Macbeth to kill Duncan?

A. By questioning his masculinity
B. By offering to kill Duncan herself
C. By criticizing Duncan
D. None of these

10. Can Lady Macbeth fully descend to evil?

A. Yes
B. No
C. May be
D. Can't say

11. In the play Macbeth, Lady Macbeth eventually _____.

A. Becomes remorseful
B. Kills Duncan
C. Commits suicide
D. None of these

12. Which character in the play repeatedly sleepwalks?

A. Duncan
B. Macbeth
C. Fleance
D. Lady Macbeth

13. In addition to jeopardizing his afterlife, Macbeth notes that regicide is a violation of Duncan's _____ trust.

A. Double
B. Triple
C. Complete
D. None of these

14. Who returns the daggers to the king's chamber?

A. Macbeth
B. Lady Macbeth
C. Macduff
D. Fleance

15. How does Macbeth provoke the murderers he hires to kill Banquo?

A. By bribing them
B. By challenging their ability to kill
C. By questioning their manhood
D. None of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	D	2.	C	3.	B	4.	A	5.	D
6.	A	7.	B	8.	C	9.	A	10.	B
11.	C	12.	D	13.	A	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. Critically analyze the play 'Macbeth'.
2. Delineate the themes in the play 'Macbeth'.
3. How does the play 'Macbeth' show the conflict between reason and passion?
4. Can you think of another play that highlights the same issues that of Macbeth?
5. Could this play have an alternate ending? If yes, how?

Further Reading

1. https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/macbeth/
2. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Macbeth-by-Shakespeare
3. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/oct/15/the-tragedy-of-macbeth-review-yael-farber-saoirse-ronan-almeida-theatre
4. https://literarydevices.net/macbeth-themes/

Unit 08: John Donne: Go and Catch a Falling Star

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- Knowabout John Donne
- Understand the factors responsible for Donne's content and style of writing poetry
- Delve deep into Donne's approach regarding the women in his poetry
- Get a basic idea about the poem 'Go and catch a falling star'
- Understand the thematic concerns in the poem 'Go and catch a falling star' written by John Donne

Introduction

Biographical Details

The briefest outline of Donne's life shows its intense human interest.He was born in London, the son of a rich iron merchant, at the time when the merchants of England were creating a new and higher kind of princes.On his father's side, he came from an old Welsh family, and on his mother's side, from the Heywoods and Sir Thomas More's family.Both families were Catholic, and in his early life persecution was brought near; for his brother died in prison for harboring a proscribed priest, and his own education could not be continued in Oxford and Cambridge because of his religion.Such an experience generally sets a man's religious standards for life; but presently Donne, as he studied law at Lincoln's Inn, was investigating the philosophic grounds of all faith.Gradually he left the church in which he was born, renounced all denominations, and called himself simply Christian. Meanwhile he wrote poetry and shared his wealth with needy Catholic relatives.He joined the expedition of Essex for Cadiz in 1596, and for the Azores in 1597, and on sea and in camp found time to write poetry.Two of his best poems, "The Storm" and "The Calm," belong to this period. Next, he traveled in Europe for three years, but occupied himself with study and poetry.Returning home, he became secretary to Lord Egerton, fell in love with the latter's young niece, Anne More, and married her; for which cause Donne was cast into prison. Strangely enough his poetical work at this time is not a song of youthful romance, but "The Progress of the Soul," a

study of transmigration.Years of wandering and poverty followed, until Sir George More forgave the young lovers and made an allowance to his daughter. Instead of enjoying his new comforts, Donne grew more ascetic and intellectual in his tastes.He refused also the nattering offer of entering the Church of England and of receiving a comfortable "living." By his "Pseudo Martyr" he attracted the favor of James I, who persuaded him to be ordained, yet left him without any place or employment.When his wife died her allowance ceased, and Donne was left with seven children in extreme poverty. Then he became a preacher, rose rapidly by sheer intellectual force and genius, and in four years was the greatest of English preachers and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London.There he "carried some to heaven in holy raptures and led others to amend their lives," and as he leans over the pulpit with intense earnestness is likened by Izaak Walton to "an angel leaning from a cloud."Here is variety enough to epitomize his age, and yet in all his life, stronger than any impression of outward weal or woe, is the sense of mystery that surrounds Donne.

8.1 Donne's Poetry

Donne's poetry is so uneven, at times so startling and fantastic, that few critics would care to recommend it to others. Only a few will read his works, and they must be left to their own browsing, to find what pleases them, like deer which, in the midst of plenty, take a bite here and there and wander on, tasting twenty varieties of food in an hour's feeding. One who reads much will probably bewail Donne's lack of any consistent style or literary standard.Donne threw style and all literary standards to the winds; and precisely for this reason he is forgotten, though his great intellect and his genius had marked him as one of those who should do things "worthy to be remembered."For instance, Chaucer and Milton are as different as two poets could well be; yet the work of each is marked by a distinct and consistent style, and it is the style as much as the matter which makes the Tales or the Paradise Lost a work for all time.While the tendency of literature is to exalt style at the expense of thought, the world has many men and women who exalt feeling and thought above expression; and to these Donne is good reading. Browning is of the same school, and compels attention.While Donne played havoc with Elizabethan style, he nevertheless influenced our literature in the way of boldness and originality; and the present tendency is to give him a larger place, nearer to the few great poets, than he has occupied since Ben Jonson declared that he was "the first poet of the world in some things," but likely to perish "for not being understood."

8.2 Metaphysical Poetry

Meaning

The term metaphysical or metaphysics in poetry is the fruit of renaissance tree, becoming over ripe and approaching pure science. "Meta" means "beyond" and "physics" means "physical nature". Metaphysical poetry means poetry that goes beyond the physical world of the senses and explores the spiritual world.Metaphysical poetry began early in the Jacobean age in the last stage of the age of Shakespeare.John Donne was the leader and founder of the metaphysical school of poetry.Dryden used this word at first and said that Donne "affects the metaphysics". Among other metaphysical poets are Abraham Cowley, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, George Herbert, Robert Herrick etc.

Characteristics

Dramatic manner and direct tone of speech is one of the main characteristics of metaphysical poetry. In the starting line of the poem "The Canonization" – there is given a dramatic starting – "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love."Concentration is an important quality of metaphysical poetry in general and Donne's poetry is particular. In his all poems, the reader is held to one idea or line of argument. Donne's poems are brief and closely woven.In "The Extasie", the principal argument is that the function of man as a man is being worthily performed through different acts of love.An expanded epigram would be a fitting description of a metaphysical poem. Nothing is described in detail nor is any word wasted. There is a wiry strength in the style.Though the verse forms are usually simple, they are always suitable in enforcing the sense of the poem.Fondness for conceits is a major character of metaphysical poetry. Donne often uses fantastic comparisons.The most striking and famous one used by Donne is the comparison of a man who travels and his beloved who stays at home to a pair of compasses in the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". We find another conceit in the very beginning couple of lines of "The

Extasie". Wit is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry. So, here we find various allusions and images relating to practicality all areas of nature and art and learning-- to medicine, cosmology, contemporary discoveries, ancient myth, history, law and art.For instance, in "The Extasie", Donne uses the belief of the blood containing certain spirits which acts as intermediary between soul and body.Metaphysical Poetry is a blend of passion and thought. T. S. Elliot thinks that "passionate thinking" is the chief mark of metaphysical poetry. There is an intellectual analysis of emotion in Donne's Poetry.

Though every lyric arises out of some emotional situation, the emotion is not merely expressed, rather it is analyzed.Donne's poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" proves that lovers need not mourn at parting.Metaphysical Poetry is a fusion of passionate feelings and logical arguments. For example, in "The Canonization", there is passion expressed through beautiful metaphors. But at the same time, the tone of the poem is intellectual and there is plenty of complexity involved in the conceits and allusions, such as the "Phoenix riddle. Metaphysical Poetry is the mixture of sensual and spiritual experience. This characteristic especially appears in Donne's poetry. Poems such as "The Canonization", "The Extasie" – even though they are not explicitly discussed, the great metaphysical question is the relation between the spirit and the senses. Often Donne speaks of the soul and of spiritual love. "The Extasie" speaks of the souls of the lovers which come out of their bodies negotiate with one another. Usage of satire and irony is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry. Donne also uses this in his poems. For example, in "The Canonization", there is subtle irony as he speaks of the favored pursuits of people – the lust for wealth and favors.As far as Donne is concerned, the use of colloquial speech marks the metaphysical poetry. This is especially apparent in the abrupt, dramatic and conversational opening of many of his poems.Carelessness in diction is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry. These poems reacted against the cloying sweetness and harmony of the Elizabethan Poetry. They deliberately avoided conventional poetic expression.They employed very prosaic words, if they were scientists or shopkeepers. Thus, we find, in their poetic works, rugged and unrhymed words. Their versification and their dictions are usually coarse and jerky.Affectation and hyperbolic expression is another character of metaphysical poetry. It is often hard to find natural grace in metaphysical writing, abounding in artificiality of thought and hyperbolic expression. The writer deemed to say "something unexpected and surprising.What they wanted to sublime, they endeavored to supply by hyperbole; their amplification had no limit, they left not only reason but fancy behind them and produced combination of confused magnificence. The lyrics of the metaphysical poems are very fantastic and peculiar. According to A. C. Word, "The metaphysical style is a combination of two elements, the fantastic form and style and the incongruous in matter and manner".Therefore, so far, we discussed the salient features of metaphysical poetry, it is proved that John Donne is a great metaphysical poet.

8.3 Treatment of Women in Donne's Poetry

For Donne as for us, gender matters, deeply, passionately, disturbingly. Donne is constantly writing about women and gender roles, both explicitly and indirectly through analogy and metaphor. Yet unlike his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, Donne rarely lingers over the woman's physical appearance.For this and other more theoretical or ideological reasons, twentieth-century critics generally assume that the woman in Donne's poems is a shadowy figure, the object or reflection of male desire, a pretext for self-fashioning, a metaphor for the poet's professional aspirations, a sex object to be circulated for the titillation and amusement of Donne's male coterie.In the last two decades, as feminist critics have re-examined Donne's attitudes towards women, it has become clear that it was not Donne but the critics who disembodied and disregarded the women in Donne's poems.Donne has been termed many things: a misogynist who loathed women's bodies and scorned their minds; a metaphysician less interested in emotion than intellection; an egotist and careerist who used women for his own advantage; a wit willing to say anything for the sake of the poem or a rhetorician undone by his own verbal power; and a poet/lover (I wish to stress) who was supremely attentive to the woman's point of view.

Donne's poetry and prose contain such a wide variety of genres, viewpoints, and personae, his language is so enigmatic and metaphorical, his attitudes towards women shift so quickly, sometimes within a single poem or line, that it is difficult to say exactly what Donne himself thought, all but impossible to identify an abiding or systematic view of women or gender.Donne's

poetry is obsessed with women. It both echoes and challenges the gender stereotypes of his day. Some of the Elegies and Songs and Sonnets mock or disparage women as deceitful, inconstant, ugly, or irrational: ''Hope not for minde in women''. Other poems delight in women for their emotional, intellectual, and spiritual vitality. Donne wooed a number of women in poetry, first as sexual partners and later as patrons, but he loved one woman, Anne More, abidingly and overwhelmingly.By eloping with her, Donne may also have hoped to improve his social, professional, and economic situation. Unfortunately, the marriage infuriated her father, Sir George More, alienated her uncle and Donne's boss, Sir Thomas Egerton, and ruined Donne's career as a lawyer and civil servant.Some critics argue that because Renaissance love poetry is monologist, because the male poet/lover formulates and speaks the words, he inevitably subordinates the woman to his ''masculine persuasive force.''Stanley Fish has argued that Donne was his own most important and discriminating reader, and indeed Donne often seems to be thinking to himself, moving from one dazzling, dissolving formulation to another: ''Our two soules, therefore, which are one ... If they be two, they are two so'' (''A Valediction: forbidding mourning,'').

Yet even when Donne seems to be exploring his own thoughts as a poem unfolds, he is usually engaged in a dialogue with the person whom the poem addresses: a male friend, a female patron, a lover, God, posterity.In the Latin epitaph written upon his wife's death, Donne describes her as the most important subject and reader of his poems, and it is my belief that many of his love poems were written to and for her.Most of Donne's poems circulated in manuscript, remaining within Donne's private circle for years after they were written and not appearing in print until after Donne's death.

Reading the poems today in an anthology or a collection of Donne's poetry, we may forget that we are eavesdropping on one side of a conversation that was both deeply private and culturally situated, both permeated with personal allusions and imbued with society's norms and expectations.Donne's attitude toward women and gender roles varies considerably, depending on the audience the poem envisions and the situation it inherits, comprises, or seeks to bring about. Some of Donne's poems are verse letters sent to a friend or patron knowledgeable and astute enough to understand Donne's difficult language and veiled meaning: ''darke texts need notes.''In praising the Countess of Bedford for her ''Vertue, Art, Beauty, Fortune,'' Donne invites her judgment and support of his poetry: ''These are Petitions, and not Hymnes''. Some of the elegies and lyrics are also epistolary, but most are dramatic, colloquial, conversational; they sound as if they were written to be recited or read aloud by Donne himself, and most likely they were.Most of Donne's poems are not only designed for a particular occasion and audience or audiences but also for a specific genre which had its own set of rules known both to the poet and his readers.

The epigrams, among Donne's earliest poems, provide a useful introduction to gender matters because, according to literary convention, the epigrammatic poet speaks in his own voice, addressing the world he both critiques and inhabits.Some of Donne's most intriguing and challenging poems support multiple, contradictory interpretations, meaning one thing to his mistress, something quite different to ''prophane men ... Which will no faith on this bestow, / Or, if they doe, deride''.Donne satirizes the man for failing to confront the infidelity they both pretend to conceal. He also implies that the woman's relentless nagging is driving her husband or lover to visit whores.Klockius has sworn off whores only to discover – as we ourselves discover in the witty epigrammatic turn – that his own home is little better than a bawdy house. Donne's epigrams play with words, but in a poem as in life, play can have serious consequences. The absurd mathematical ratio, combined with the wordplay on hair, heirs, and (less exactly) whores, exposes the miscalculations that give the licentious man venereal disease, threatening his life and heirs. The absurd mathematical ratio, combined with the wordplay on hair, heirs, and (less exactly) whores, exposes the miscalculations that give the licentious man venereal disease, threatening his life and heirs. According to literary convention, the epigram gives us direct access to the author's own views, so what, if anything, do these epigrams reveal about Donne's attitude toward women and gender? Who is the licentious person, the man or the woman? Who is being mocked, Klockius or his mistress?Is Donne affirming the conventional code of ethics, preaching chastity and marital fidelity? Is he endorsing antifeminist stereotypes that scorn women as shrewish, deceitful, and inconstant?Perhaps, but I doubt it, for these men are no less contemptible than the women. Donne's epigrams satirize individuals like Klockius or types like ''A licentious person,'' but they do not generalize about men or women.

The plural nouns and pronouns, the interactive diction, and densely interwoven syntax celebrate the mutuality of love which turns ''both'' into ''one,'' or which presents ''two'' paradoxically ''joyn'd'' by their ''parting.'' As these miniature love stories show, even the briefest of poems and loves can achieve abiding value, drawing the lovers together first in life, then in death, and finally in poetry and myth.As a group, the epigrams show Donne immersed in London life with its sexual temptations and sexually transmitted diseases, its vanity and self-deceptions, its antagonisms and greed; but they also show him living in a world of books where timeless truths trump earthly failings.While the first three epigrams satirize men and women who delude themselves even more than they deceive each other, the last two eternize lovers so involved in each other that whatever they do ''by themselves'' has an immediate impact on ''each other".Even as Donne's satiric, worldly wit impresses and amuses his male coterie, his incisive intellect and moral severity mocks those who are too dull or complacent to recognize and root out the lies, the self-deception, and corruption that propel their sleazy lives.Donne himself stands above it all, implying that his mistress is or will be a very different sort of woman, and that his love, when he chooses to express it, will be a very different sort of love, one that he is prepared to fight for against all odds.Like the epigrams, the Satires also show Donne deeply immersed in city life, negotiating the allures of sex, money, and power. Surprisingly, it is ''Satyre III,'' ILONA BELL 204 the search for the one true church, that makes the clearest declarations about women and gender.''Satyre III'' presents ascertainable truths about women as a way of discovering less easily ascertainable truths about the church.

The poem never determines the one true Church, but on two key points about women it leaves no room for ambiguity or doubt. First, it asserts that finding the one true mistress is vitally and undeniably important.Second, it declares that it is stupid and morally wrong to generalize about all women on the basis of particular women.By foolishly assuming all women are the same, Graccus shows himself to be both intellectually unsophisticated and morally undiscriminating. Written in the 1590s when Donne was studying at the Inns of Court or working for Sir Thomas Egerton, the Elegies, like the Satires, represent Donne as an upwardly mobile but principled lawyer and civil servant, a seductive and persuasive lover, and an increasingly authoritative poet.Some of the Elegies express revulsion for the female body: a ''grave, that's dust without, and stinke within.''Others revel in intimacy or sexual pleasure that contains its own spiritual glory and intellectual joy: ''Here take my Picture; though I bid farewell, / Thine, in my heart, where my souledwels, shall dwell."

''The Comparison'' is entirely devoted to making distinctions, not between one kind of woman and another, but between one particular woman and another." No doubt Donne's male coterie found this gross physicality amusing." No doubt some men, and even some women, still find it amusing, but ultimately Donne's language is less playful than unsettling.Donne's imagery demystifies his mistress by comparing her to ''th'earthsworthlessedurt'' but it also elevates her by comparing her to Christ's body and blood. Since these surgical wounds recall the ''ripe menstruous boils'' marring the friend's mistress, conflating face and genitals, AchsahGuibbory concludes that Donne's loathing for the female body extends to his own mistress, and betrays a misogyny that pervades the Elegies as a whole. And so it may.But the poem invites discriminations rather than generalizations, discriminations that yield an enlightening, non-judgmental account of explorative, reciprocal sexuality.

''The Comparison'' urges its lyric audience not to construe Womankind in the abstract but to look closely at each woman in all her specificity and corporeality. Making distinctions between one woman and another or one love affair and another – between rough, aggressive copulation and reciprocal, tender love-making – not only questions antifeminist stereotypes that condemn all women as shrews and whores; it also questions social norms that divide women into angels and whores.Donne's mistress is laudable and loveable precisely because she is sexually active and emotionally responsive.Petrarchan poets exalt the beloved as a heavenly, angelic creature with hair like gold and skin like alabaster, forever adored and forever unattainable. In seeking a wife, Donne argues, men are more likely to measure a woman's worth by her beauty and wealth.Yet contrary to poetic and social convention, Donne argues that it is ''the Centrique part'' (36), the sexual part, that makes women, women.From one point of view, this is critical and demeaning to women, reducing them to sex objects, or commodities to be traded among men. From another point of view, it is a matter of fact – or biology.From yet another point of view, it is liberating to women, challenging the

double standard. Early modern English homilies, sermons, and marriage manuals all insist that men and women alike are bound to chastity; in practice, however, men were allowed much more sexual freedom. Like contemporary feminist criticism, Donne's Elegies question patriarchal ideology that equates female honor with virtue and chastity, subordinating the daughter to the father, and the wife to the husband. In the elegy beginning ''Once, and but once,'' the speaker convinces a young unmarried woman to make love with him under her father's roof.In the elegy beginning ''Natures lay Ideot'' the speaker teaches a married woman to evade her husband's watchful eye and to enjoy the erotic pleasures of clandestine love.

The Elegies encourage women's sexual freedom, and challenge the patriarchal control of women by fathers and husbands. Yet they also seek to use the poet's ''masculine persuasive force'' to assert his power over his mistress.In the elegy beginning ''Come, Madam,'' Donne conducts a hot and heavy sexual seduction as if it were a military campaign. The language becomes increasingly graphic as the poem unfolds, culminating in an image of geographical exploration that is as unconventional as it is audacious.When we give Donne's ambiguous, enigmatic language the close attention it demands, his attitude towards women, sexuality, and gender becomes more multi-faceted, more complicated, and less predictable than it might at first seem.The interlamination or cross-pollination of sacred and profane, the refusal to simplify or suppress thoughts or feelings for the sake of clarity or consistency, the readiness to challenge orthodoxy and to shock the reader into a more open, inquiring, unconventional point of view – these impulses continue to disturb and unsettle any position Donne might take on love, women, and gender.

Depending on which poems or lines one chooses to quote and, even more importantly, depending on how one chooses to interpret and evaluate the women in Donne's poems and the lines one selects, one can see Donne as a witty misogynist, a great devotee of women, or a lover willing to risk everything for the woman he adores.When Donne argues that it is not virtue or honor but the ''Centrique'' part that makes women, women (''Loves Progress''), when he ''forget[s] the Hee and Shee'' (''The undertaking'') and reminds us that women like men have ''two lips, eyes, thighs'' (''Sapho to Philænis''), he is anticipating the modern conception of gender which argues – biology being one thing and gender another – that sex differences are not natural or universal but culturally constructed and constantly changing. Inevitably, the rules of the genre, the demands of the situation, and the beliefs of early modern English society shape what Donne writes about women and gender; at the same time, however, his poems, ''In cypher writ, or new made Idiome'' (''A Valediction: of the booke,''), also reconfigure poetic and social conventions.

8.4 Poem: 'Go and Catch a Falling Star

Introduction

John Donne's "Go and catch a falling star," first published in 1633, is a fantastical take on a traditional (and misogynistic) theme: women's supposedly inevitable infidelity. In the poem, a speaker tells a listener that he can look the whole world over, but finding a woman who'll be faithful to him is about as unlikely as finding a mermaid or meeting the devil.The poem's rhyme scheme, relatively steady meter, and clear hyperbole make its tone feel somewhat light-hearted and satirical, but the speaker also seems to harbor genuine melancholy, bitterness, and cynicism towards women and relationships.

Text of the Poem

Go and catch a falling star,

Get with child a mandrake root,

Tell me where all past years are,

Or who cleft the devil's foot,

Teach me to hear mermaids singing,

Or to keep off envy's stinging,

And find

What wind

Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,

Things invisible to see,

Ride ten thousand days and nights,

Till age snow white hairs on thee,

Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,

All strange wonders that befell thee,

And swear,

No where

Lives a woman true, and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,

Such a pilgrimage were sweet;

Yet do not, I would not go,

Though at next door we might meet;

Though she were true, when you met her,

And last, till you write your letter,

Yet she

Will be

False, ere I come, to two, or three.

Explanation

A number Donne's poems are formally titled Satyres. Many other poems freely employ satire and this should not surprise us given that Donne was an ambitious young man, restrained by his religion inside circles he could not quite break until he turned his back on his Catholic faith and embraced the Church of England.The poetic satire was a recognized method to draw attention to oneself. Circulated in manuscript amongst friends and potentially useful acquaintances, it was often the means to further a court career.Donne employed it in this way, and the Satyres themselves belong to the period of his twenties when he was at Lincoln's Inn and eager to find a place in the world.They are his earliest poems and exhibit clear signs of frustrated energy and ambition. Satire is naturally the preferred method of the young. It is easier to expose folly in others when one has had precious little time for folly of one's own. The Song, 'Goe, and catche a falling starre', has a relative simplicity and brevity that make it easier to deal with than the formal Satyres.A first reading may present some difficulties about vocabulary and imagery, but the central misogynistic thrust of the poem should be very evident.Donne concludes that all women are duplicitous and untrustworthy.

In the time it would take for the friend’s letter to reach him, the unit object of his pilgrimage, a woman who is both beautiful and faithful, would have been faithless, not once, but twice or even three times.It is a bleak view, for a man.Look now at the first verse and isolate the seven impossible tasks Donne instructs his reader to attempt.Most should be self-explanatory but line 2 needs some knowledge of Elizabethan folk culture.The mandrake was a plant people believed possessed strange properties.Most of these gave it human characteristics.It was, for example, meant to scream when uprooted and it is frequently depicted with forked roots like legs and had a reputation as an aphrodisiac.In this poem, Donne regards finding, or even impregnating a mandrake plant with a human child as just another absolute impossibility.And perhaps it is not too fanciful to see already , in his bitter recognition of the destructive power of envy, and the struggle for success faced by all honest men , a reflection of his own difficult situation.The purpose of these bizarre imperatives is not explained until verse two, via an imaginary quest he makes us follow.

We may be carried away to see remarkable sights, and devote our lives journeying in search of such things until old age brings us home, but when we eventually return with the news of our

discoveries, there is only one thing we will firmly assert.That the woman who is both beautiful and honest, faithful and admirable, is a myth.Characteristically, having asserted this so confidently, Donne immediately undermines it by suggesting that should we find one such, we must let him know straight away that he could meet her.'Such a pilgrimage were sweet; ' he says, before again immediately denying it because, as initially noted, she would prove worthless even in the brief time taken by the message.It is not difficult to see why we might regard this poem as a satire, but it might be harder to see what we might gain from doing so.The tone of the poem holds one route out of the dilemma.

There is something gently mournful about the abrupt change of rhythm and triple rhythm which ends each verse. It is as though the poet is yearning for something better and sighing when he can't find it.This is especially pronounced in the final verse where the last line of the poem collapses completely into sad resignation.Donne was never afraid to employ religious imagery in poem about sex.So completely immersed in religion and its contemporary conflicts was Donne, he can rarely write anything without religious imagery insinuating its way into poetry.The closing lines of the poem echo Christ's injunction to St. Peter in the Garden of Gathsemene.By cock crow, Christ tells Peter on the eve of crucifixion, he will have denied knowledge of him three times and indeed of course, Peter does.

Today, we might not even know this particular passage from the Gospel but it would have been ingrained on Donne's heart by years of attendance at Mass and celebrating Easter.For Donne, the search for a beautiful and trustworthy woman could never be merely a quest or a journey: something far more meaningful was required.So, the tone of this plaintive little lyric may redeem it from being judged unashamedly misogynistic and the religious intensity of some of the imagery should at least reassure a female reader that Donne, even when condemning them, treats women with immense respect.

8.5 Themes

The poem explores a traditional (and misogynistic) literary theme of Donne's era: women's romantic infidelity. Using vivid images of magic and mystery, the speaker insists that a faithful woman is so hard to find, she might as well be the stuff of legends!The speaker begins by commanding his listener to perform a series of impossible tasks, with the implication being that female honesty (or faithfulness) is in the same realm of impossibility. Some of the speaker's tasks sound like they're right out of a fairy tale: impregnating a mandrake root (a tuber whose roots vaguely resemble a human and are often granted magical qualities in folklore), listening to mermaids, and investigating the devil's cloven foot.These images all have transgressive and/or sexual connotations: mermaids were meant to lure sailors to their deaths, impregnating a root would take black magic, and the devil's foot—well, it belongs to the deceitful devil.The other tasks the speaker commands are more abstract and wistful. Seeking "past years" suggests a longing for lost time, while preventing "envy's stinging" makes the reader suspect that the speaker might have had some painful romantic disappointments lurking in those vanished years.The final lines, asking the listener to "find / What wind / Serves to advance an honest mind" punches the point home: rewards for the faithful are as hard to find as any legendary creature.

Expanding on this idea, the speaker says that even if his listener spent an entire lifetime searching for a faithful woman, he wouldn't find her. He imagines the listener on a visionary quest, creating a sense that the impossibilities of the first stanza might just be found somewhere. The speaker also imagines his listener has the power to see "strange sights": a magical gift that might allow him to discover the impossibilities of the first stanza. But even if such a seer were to spend his whole life looking, he'd never find "a woman true, and fair."Here, the magical things of the first stanza are presented as just within the realm of possibility: a gifted person might be able to find them. However, he'd still never be able to find a faithful woman. This makes women's fidelity even more legendary than a mermaid!The speaker concludes by imagining that, even if his listener did find a faithful woman, that woman's faithfulness would never last. The speaker wouldn't bother going to see this hypothetical woman even if she were "next door," because while she might have been faithful when the friend met her, she'd be unfaithful before the speaker could reach her.The final stanza thus moves from the magical uncertainty of the earlier part of the poem—when, after all, there's some chance that one might see the invisible—to an earthly cynicism.

The wistful romance of pilgrimages, falling stars, and magical quests is broken by the speaker's grim belief: no one will ever find a woman "true, and fair."John Donne is not a philosopher. He only shares his feelings with his readers. After analysis of materiel things, he, in "Go and Catch a Falling Star" for instance, talks about inconsistent attitude of women. Theme of the poem, thus, is the inconstancy of women.This poem is highly ironic simultaneously symbolic. A woman should not deceive a man. If she wants to do so, she should think thousand times before it. Even then, if she decides to betray, she should verify that her lover is not a poet. Otherwise, a poet will make her famous in his poetry as John Donne has did it. It seems that someone has betrayed John Donne; therefore, he does not consider many impossible tasks impossible but the task of finding a beautiful but loyal woman. He concludes the poem with the theme of unfaithfulness of women.

Summary

The speaker directs a listener to do a number of impossible things: to catch a falling star, to impregnate a mandrake root, to find what happens to time that has passed, to discover who divided the devil's hoof into two parts, to teach him to hear the songs of mermaids or to avoid ever feeling envy, and, finally, to discover the favorable wind that might push a truthful and faithful person onward.If the listener was born with power to see mysterious and invisible things, the speaker continues, then he should go on an impossibly long quest of ten thousand days, until he has become an old man and his hair has gone white. When he comes back from this journey, he'll have all kinds of stories about the magical things he saw, but he'll swear that among them all, he never saw a woman who was both faithful and beautiful.If the listener does find such a woman, he should tell the speaker: it would be wonderful to journey to meet her. But no: the speaker changes his mind. He wouldn't go to meet this imaginary woman even if she lived next door. Because even if she were faithful when the listener met her, and stayed faithful long enough for the listener to write the letter describing her to the speaker, she'd inevitably have cheated on two or three lovers by the time the speaker got to her.'Song: Go and catch a falling star' by John Donne is a three-stanza poem that is separated into sets of nine lines. The lines follow a consistent rhyme scheme, conforming to the pattern of ABABCCDDD. The lines also stick to a syllable pattern that changes within the different sets of rhyme. For example, the first four lines are the same, with seven syllables.The next two contain eight, then there are two syllable lines. Finally, the stanza ends with a seven-syllable line. This is a very unusual pattern that works best if read aloud. The fact that Donne titled this piece 'Song…' makes it clear that it was meant to be read, or sung. Throughout the poem, Donne employs a light and sometimes humorous tone. He is annoyed by the general theme of the poem, the inconstancy of women, but seems to have come to terms with it. He speaks as though this is just how things are, and one must make the best of a constantly bad situation.

Keywords

1. ***Metaphysical***: Meta" means "beyond" and "physical" means "physical nature.
2. ***Elegy***: An elegy is a sad poem, usually written to praise and express sorrow for someone who is dead.
3. ***Wistful:*** having or showing a feeling of vague or regretful longing.
4. ***Epigram:*** a pithy saying or remark expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way.
5. ***Patriarchal:*** relating to or denoting a system of society or government controlled by men.

Self Assessment

1. The speaker in the poem emphasizes that even if the listener spent his entire life searching for a loyal woman, he _____ find her.

A. Wouldn't
B. Would
C. Could
D. None of these

2. A star is a symbol of _____.

A. Dvil
B. Divinity
C. Devil
D. Envy

3. Mandrake roots often grow in_____ shapes.

A. Circular
B. Rectangular
C. Humanoid
D. None of these

4. The theme of the poem 'Go and catch a falling star' is centered on the theme of women's supposed inevitable _____.

A. Infidelity
B. Fidelity
C. Power
D. None of these

5. In the poem, the speaker tells the listener that finding a faithful woman is as unlikely as finding a _____.

A. Bird
B. Mermaid
C. Angel
D. None of these

6. The poem 'Go and catch a falling star' is a _____.

A. Ballad
B. Sonnet
C. Lyric
D. None of these

7. Which of the following is not a task that the speaker directs the listener to do?

A. To catch a falling star
B. To impregnate a mandrake root
C. To avoid feeling envy
D. To marry the faithful woman

8. How many stanzas does the poem 'Go and catch a falling star' have?

A. 3
B. 4
C. 6
D. 8

9. The rhyme scheme of this poem is_____.

A. ABCDDCBAC

B. ABABCCDDD

C. BADCCDABC

D. None of these

10. Was Donne ever labeled as a misogynist?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Can't say

D. None of these

11. To whom does Donne say, "These are petitions, not hymnes"?

A. James I

B. Countess of Bedford

C. Elizabeth

D. Anne More

12. John Donne was born in _____.

A. London

B. New York

C. Derbyshire

D. Manchester

13. Anne More was Lord Egerton's _____.

A. Daughter

B. Niece

C. Granddaughter

D. Cousin

14. In the term 'metaphysical', 'meta' means _____.

A. Within

B. Inner

C. Beyond

D. None of these

15. Which of the following is not a metaphysical poet?

A. John Donne

B. Abraham Cowley

C. Richard Crashaw

D. William Shakespeare

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	C	4.	A	5.	B
6.	C	7.	D	8.	A	9.	B	10.	A
11.	B	12.	A	13.	B	14.	C	15.	D

Review Questions

1. What is the central idea of the poem, 'Go and catch a falling store'?
2. Does John Donne incorporate all the characteristics of metaphysical poetry in the poem, 'Go and catch a falling star'?
3. Describe the characteristics of Metaphysical poetry.
4. Delineate the thematic concerns of the poem, 'Go and catch a falling star'.
5. Can you think of another poem that reiterates the same thematic concerns as seen in this poem?

Further Reading

1. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44127/song-go-and-catch-a-falling-star
2. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/john-donne/song-go-and-catch-a-falling-star
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Unit 09:John Donne: Go and Catch a Falling Star

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- Critically analyze the poem 'Go and catch a falling star'
- Stylistically analyze the poem 'Go and catch a falling star'

Introduction

The speaker directs a listener to do a number of impossible things: to catch a falling star, to impregnate a mandrake root, to find what happens to time that has passed, to discover who divided the devil's hoof into two parts, to teach him to hear the songs of mermaids or to avoid ever feeling envy, and, finally, to discover the favorable wind that might push a truthful and faithful person onward.If the listener was born with power to see mysterious and invisible things, the speaker continues, then he should go on an impossibly long quest of ten thousand days, until he has become an old man and his hair has gone white. When he comes back from this journey, he'll have all kinds of stories about the magical things he saw, but he'll swear that among them all, he never saw a woman who was both faithful and beautiful.If the listener does find such a woman, he should tell the speaker: it would be wonderful to journey to meet her. But no: the speaker changes his mind. He wouldn't go to meet this imaginary woman even if she lived next door. Because even if she were faithful when the listener met her, and stayed faithful long enough for the listener to write the letter describing her to the speaker, she'd inevitably have cheated on two or three lovers by the time the speaker got to her.'Song', often known by its first line, 'Go and catch a falling star', is an unusual poem among John Donne's work in several ways. It doesn't use the extended metaphors that we find in some of Donne's greatest poetry, and yet it remains one of his most popular and widely known works.As the short analysis of 'Song' endeavors to show, 'Go and catch a falling star' is, nevertheless, in keeping with Donne's beliefs and poetic style in many respects.Can we still enjoy a poem that seems to be so down on half the human race? (Or the beautiful section of that half, leastways: poor unattractive women can apparently be trusted to remain true, presumably because Donne's speaker thinks no one else would want them.) This aspect of Donne's poem – and the problem is not confined to 'Go and catch a falling star' – has exercised critics for a while now.

9.1 Critical Analysis

Christopher Ricks, in his Essays in Appreciation, has a good essay on what Ricks sees as the unhealthy endings to many of Donne's poems: they seem to become uncharitable as they reach conclusion.William Empson, who was heavily influenced by Donne and wrote extensively on his

poetry, said of 'Go and catch a falling star' that 'the song had aimed at being gay and flippant but turned out rather heavy and cross'.Conversely, for another great Donne critic, John Carey, 'Go and catch a falling star' is more about self-improvement than women, as we can see from that opening stanza.

The earlier sections of the poem, enjoining the listener to go out into the world and make discoveries and see strange sights, is the real core of the poem's meaning, in Carey's analysis.Certainly, such a reading connects to Donne's preoccupation with space travel and exploration (something Empson, in his essay 'Donne the Space-man', explored; the idea of discovery and exploration is also there in 'To His Mistress Going to Bed', with its reference to the woman's body as 'my America! my new-found-land').How should we view the poem? Or does it derive its vital energy from offering both the exploration motif and the complaint about women in one poem? Can we overlook the negative twist at the end? That may depend on our view of Donne's other poems.

This poem chiefly concerns the lack of constancy in women. The tone taken is one of gentle cynicism, and mocking. Donne asks the reader to do the impossible, which he compares with finding a constant woman, thus insinuating that such a woman does not exist. The title, "Song", leads us to expect certain things: a lyrical element to the words, and a musical rhythm, which are fulfilled by this neatly crafted poem. It is also very ambiguous, not hinting at the subject matter of the poem.The stanzas are slightly longer than might be expected, nine lines each, but this allows for the more complex and abstract ideas, which are archetypal of metaphysical poetry. The first stanza is the most forceful, employing the imperative to achieve a sense of command, and implying that he is talking to one specific person.The second stanza begins conditionally, "if", and continues to be directed towards the apparent listener by the repeated use of the second person singular, "thou". Both are heavy in exotic imagery, which the final stanza is completely devoid of, and the final stanza also takes on a far more conversational, monosyllabic tone.

The first sentence is a command: "Go and catch a falling star", and an impossible one, for how can one catch a star? The word "falling" suggests a gradual deterioration, rather than fallen which would be irretrievable, there is a sense that there is a chance, but it is narrow.It is interesting that Donne is using the conventionally romantic image of a star in defiance of such a traditional idea as monogamy.It could also be linked to the fourth line which references the devil, as Lucifer was a fallen angel, and the stars are often symbolic of Angels and heaven, this devil imagery perhaps is an early suggestion of the duplicity of women.Donne builds on this idea of the impossible in the second line, "Get with child a mandrake root", there is much superstition surrounding the mandrake plant, it is said to scream when pulled from the ground, and it "resembles the human form, sometimes the female form and sometimes the male, according to whether the roots are twofold or threefold".

This could again be linked to the devil who has "cleft" feet, which also resemble the fork-rooted plant through the idea of division and multiplicity.This in turn is suggestive of the inconstancy of women, suggesting their doubled relationships. Further fantastical imagery is that of the "mermaids singing". Mermaids could be seen as important in this poem as they appear to be women above the waist but are not beneath, and this could therefore suggest that women can be deceptive creatures.There is also the idea of them luring men to a watery death, it has been said that this links to the experience of Odysseus in "The Odyssey", although he encountered the sirens who dwelt on an island, not in the sea.Donne uses the word "stinging" to describe envy, finally coming to the point of the poem overtly. The word sting suggests something, which is inflicted by some external force, it shifts any blame away from the subject of the envy.It is a piquant image, suggesting intensity of feeling. There is also a slightly bitter undertone caused by the constant use of hard consonants such as "go", "get", "teach" and "tell".Then the poem seems to slow down very quickly in the final refrain, seeming to echo the sound of the wind, the speaker wonders how honesty can be gained, and we can presume that this refers to honesty in the sense of being chaste. It is necessary to point out that although "wind" does not seem as if it should rhyme with "find" and "mind", it was pronounced as such at the time, as is often seen in Shakespeare.In fact, it was rather a familiar rhyme to use, quite boring in fact, which combined with the monosyllabic beat of these last few lines, seems to mirror his boredom with women.The second stanza is full of

convoluted images and hyperbole; it is as if Donne is mocking the idea of a love poem in itself. It is interesting that Donne takes the commonly used hyphenated adjective of "snow-white" and uses it as a subjunctive verb, he is making the image fairytale like, suggesting perhaps how unlikely it would be for a woman to be faithful.

Donne also uses the paradoxical idea of things "invisible to see" which further emphasizes this idea.Again, the suggestion of time implicit in the line is surely a reference to other love poets and their impossible promises to women, to love them forever and a day etc etc.In this part of the poem it seems as if he is challenging the reader to find evidence contrary to his opinion, asserting that it simply does not exist: "Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me Lives a woman true, and fair".The final stanza begins in a sardonic manner, "if thou findst one, let me know", he appears to be expressing the opinion that a woman of character and beauty is implausible. It is comparatively colloquial, there being no images to speak of and the words are less poetic, and less apparently organized than in the previous two stanzas.It seems dismissive of women, it all seems to be a waste of time, he is saying that even if you do find the woman I'm looking for, it will take only the time of you writing a letter for her to be unfaithful to "two, or three" other men.What is odd is that here Donne seems to be saying that it is only beautiful women who will be unfaithful, does this mean that the ugly women will be?

The repeated "thou" is accusing, it seems as though the listener is in fact such a woman, beautiful and inconstant.The tone at the end of this stanza is far more personal, and the syntax more difficult; this is perhaps an indication of personal feeling, of his mistrust.However, this rhyme does add to the phonological quality of the poem, as the simplicity is perhaps more songlike than the rest of the poem. The regular rhyme and meter of the poem also help to create this feeling. There is a very tight verse structure, which consists of a sestet of ABAB rhyme preceding the rhyming triplet in each stanza.The triplet shows an insistence of opinion, it emphasizes the points being made but also creates a lilting rhythm to the end of each verse, like the refrain to a song. The two very short lines immediately precede a far longer one, thus creating contrast, which mirrors the contrasting images in the poem.

For example, there is the heavenly image of a "falling star" adjacent to the earth-bound image of the "mandrake root", then there follows the lovely image of the "mermaids singing" with the ugly apparition of the devil It would seem that light and dark are being paralleled, and it is strange imagery to use when describing love and constancy.This is continued into the second stanza where in the third line there is the contrast between day and night, which continues to express images of lightness and darkness as in the first stanza.Significant also is the idea of a "pilgrimage", this seems to tie in with the other religious elements in the poem and suggests sacrifice and religious Puritanism, but this serious image is immediately followed by a light-hearted quip, "Yet do not, I would not go, / Though at next door we might meet…".

This seems to mock the seriousness of love in other poems, he seems cynical about women, but not in a way which could be construed as misogynistic.It seems that the poem is rebuking one lady in particular as it appears to be directed specifically, and yet it is rhetoric; no answer seems to be expected. It could be said therefore that this poem is predominantly light and mocking in tone, but with an undercurrent of cynicism.This is reflected in the contrasting pairs of images such as light and dark, and of the ugly and the beautiful; and it seems that in the main, those images also relate in some way to religion.It is typical of Donne to use such mixed images and to relate love to religion, and this is evident in the poem.John Donne enforced a tight structure on his song Go and Catch a Falling Star (1630), with three stanzas each containing sestets with a rhyme scheme of ababcc and concluding with a rhyming triplet. That controlled format contrasts with the light tone used throughout, appropriate to a song about romance.However, as might be expected from Donne, the lyrical approach is undercut by a cynicism regarding the constancy of women. The speaker suggests that women who can be trusted are rare in lines Donne uses ironically to mimic the serious romance poetry of his age.The first stanza begins with an order, the imperative, Go and catch a falling star, an obviously impossible task but presented as if it could be accomplished. The second line, "Get with child a mandrake root," appears nonsensical, but Donne is probably referring to the mandrake root because of the mythology that surrounded it.In fables the mandrake took on human characteristics. Its three-to four-foot brown root mimicked the shape of a human,

was said to scream when jerked from the ground, and in medieval times was said to be used in witchcraft.Old drawings often depicted the root as male or female, depending on the number of branches it bore. The mandrake produced flowers that developed into fruit, nicknamed "Satan's apples."

The allusion to Satan connects the plant imagery with the next two lines: "Tell me where all past years are, / Or who cleft the devil's foot." The gently taunting voice continues with mythological references, "Teach me to hear mermaids singing, / Or to keep off envy's stinging."Because mermaids were believed to be half woman and half-beast and to lure sailors to their death, the theme of temptation, supported by the devil imagery, extends through those lines.Feminist critics would later find interesting the presumably male speaker's requesting that a female teach him to hear the mermaid's deadly song, "Or," conversely, teach him not to be jealous in resisting the sting of envy.That male attitude contradicts the attitude of distrust found in the remainder of the stanza. However, if the reader accepts that Donne's topic was the inconstancy of women, the idea of a dishonest female's tempting man may also be suggested through irony in the final rhyming triplet, "And find / What wind / Serves to advance an honest mind."

Things carried on the wind proved insubstantial, suffering a fleeting existence, conditions the speaker bestows on honesty in a female.In the second stanza, Donne continues his suggestion of the mystical as the speaker declares, If thou be'st born to strange sights, Things invisible to see, Ride ten thousand days and nights, Till age snow white hairs on thee. He parodies the theme of eternal love found in traditional romance poetry with the use of an enormous number to illustrate the lengths to which a true lover's dedication extends.Appropriate to the work of the metaphysical poets and poetry, Donne inserts a surprising use of words, converting the adjective and noun phrase snow white hairs to a verbal, with "hairs" becoming a verb suggesting aging over time.

The line might be paraphrased, "Until age, which is snow white, places hairs on thee." The speaker mocks his listener through repetition of the term thou in the next line, noting that when she returns, she must tell him her tale: "Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me, / All strange wonders that befell thee."He may ironically suggest that, because of her inconstancy, she is not likely to return, and if she does, she will lie about the "strange wonders" that drew her away.Donne then makes another skillful turn as the speaker concludes, "And swear / No where / Lives a woman true and fair." He suggests that out of all the wonders his listener observed over the thousand days, one of those was not a constant woman; she does not exist, even as a curiosity.

9.2 Stylistic Analysis

A man called John Donne was a living, breathing, changing, reacting being when he dipped his quill into an inkpot and first wrote these lines – lines we can read over three hundred years later.It is possible Donne had dreamed the whole poem up weeks before he wrote it down, and had thought of it, now and again, to tinker with it, as he walked or rode a horse or lay in bed. Yet at one point in its making, the latest word he scratched onto the parchment was wetter and darker and less absorbed than those preceding it, and his breath coming warmly down helped that word to dry.Books are dead, and words are inanimate, and sometimes writers make a virtue of this.Some writers want to address the reader not from the position of a fallible person but from that of a perfect text. In this poem, and in many others, Donne wants to be as humanly present as he can be. Like he's in the room with us, having an effect on us. And so, Donne keeps telling the reader what to do. He starts by telling them to:Goe,…". If the poem ended here, the reader would have received a direct order, in the imperative, and would be left wondering where exactly the poet had meant them to 'Goe,…'Here, Donne immediately establishes a living relationship between himself and the reader.'Goe,…' doesn't just demand engagement in the space the reader occupies, it commands movement away from that space. And the thing is, the living reader could obey – they could, because they are alive, go, in the moment that follows the order.But Donne is not just very bossy, he is also very mischievous. No sooner does he make a demand on the reader than he undoes it by making that demand impossible....and catche a falling starre,…' The comically super-obedient reader, halfway out the door, or mentally readying themselves for departure once they hear where they should go, is halted and a little humiliated.In terms of space and time, what Donne orders the reader to do is very complicated.Think about it. To even try 'to catche a falling starre…' would

require the reader to spend night after night looking up at clear, starry skies in hopes of seeing a falling star to then hopelessly sprint off after.Donne was alive when he wrote his poetry.

You are alive as you read it. These are the givens of the situation of a poem on the page seen by eyes looking down – as your eyes are looking across or down at this screen – at words in a language they understand. But these givens can very easily be covered up or ignored.If a poem describes a beautiful flower, it doesn't insist on anyone's being alive. The most such a poem does is say, 'If you can apply these words to a flower you've seen, feel free to do so.' What it certainly doesn't do is boss the reader about. It doesn't say, 'Goe!'Donne's next order also involves travel, and a lot more than travel:Get with child a mandrake roote,'Get with child' means impregnate. A mandrake is the root of a variety of plant. For the next lines, the reader is expected to be back in the room with Donne, having completed the research and taking time out to. Tell me, where all past years are Or who cleft the Divels foot. Then some kind of journey together, a sea voyage of poet and reader, is expected.

"Teach me to heareMermaides singing"

The next demand is more like an emotionally needy request

"Or to keep off envies stinging"

We seem to be back in the same room with Donne, but the final lines take us out to sea again:

"And finde
What winde
Serves to advance an honest Minde."

At least in anticipation, Donne is pinging his reader and himself around in time and space almost as frantically as Steven Moffat does Doctor Who.In the second stanza, Donne acknowledges that only certain people, and he doesn't know if the reader is one, would be capable of such impossibilities:

"If thou beest borne to strange sights,

Things invisible to see,

Ride ten thousand daies and nights,

Till age snow white haires on thee,

Thou, when thou retorn'st, wilt tell mee

All strange wonders that befell thee,

And sweare

No where

Lives a woman true, and faire."

In comparison to the first stanza, this transforms the reader into a fairytale figure setting off on a magical quest (a male figure, a Handsome Prince, because a Beautiful Princess could not possibly be imagined to ride that far). 10,000 days is just over 27 years, so although it sounds very long it's not beyond a human life-span.Only in the final line of the second stanza do we arrive at the real subject of the poem – the question it has been aiming for all along. Is there a woman both true and fair? This is an entirely conventional question for Elizabethan love poetry.In the third stanza, we reach the point that I – in emphasizing Donne's aliveness as he wrote and your aliveness as you read – have been aiming for along. But first there is a need to mention the third really obvious thing: some poetry, including this poem of Donne's, rhymes.Now, there have probably always, in all cultures, been bards and rappers who could spontaneously compose verses, but they tend for simplicity's sake to make these verses rhyme aa bb cc or aaaabbbb.Donne's rhyme scheme is ababccddd – probably within the capabilities of a really good rapper, but quite a stretch to do it three times in a row, and hit all the right beats.In other words, there's no way that this is an entirely spontaneous utterance. It has taken time to make the rhythm and the rhyme. I have been reading the poem as if Donne's orders came out one after the other, just so. But they are clearly crafted.He has had at the very least a few minutes to change them. So why, in the third stanza, do we come to this moment:

"If thou findst one, let mee know,

Such a Pilgrimage were sweet;

Yet doe not, I would not go,…"

The whole poem has been building energy, tending faster and faster towards a journey off to meet the woman true and fair. But Donne in three words says that even if such an impossible person exists, he isn't bothered to meet her.Bathos is the technical term.This is the moment where the poet, even in a crafted and rhyming poem, is most spontaneously alive. Because he changes his mind. With 'such a Pilgrimage were sweet' he's packed and heading off to the Holy Land. With 'I would not goe', he's sulking in his closet.

"Though at next doore wee might meet,

Though shee were true, when you met her,

And last, till you write your letter"

Compare this to the balanced, image-heavy lines of the first stanza – it really wants to seem like the most offhand thing a person could say. The lines are deliberately scrappy; two in a row begin with 'Though', 'meet' is varied only as 'met'.Every word is monosyllabic between 'Pilgrimage' and 'letter', and after that the rest of the poem is also desultory monosyllables. It also concludes by rhyming on 'eee', the easiest, laziest of all English rhymes, as every parent who's heard their child compose an 'Ode to Wee' will know.The syntax is scrabbled, self-correcting:

"Though shee were true, when you met her

is far less elegant than the obvious

Though when you met her shee were true"

Having shown he can change his living mind, Donne now changes the moment by moment meaning of what he is saying. From the very few lines left, the reader knows the poem is ending soon. He shifts his tone, becomes despairing, then sarcastic, then outrageously cynical.

"Though she were true, when you met her,

And last, till you write your letter,

Yet shee

Will bee

Falfe, ere I come, to two, or three."

Donne's living attitude has shifted, by the end of the poem, from bossiness to cynicism. By changing his own mind, on paper, he's messed with the reader's head.

Summary

Whenever we try to attempt a critical as well as a stylistic analysis of the poem, 'Go and catch a falling star', we come across many novice aspects of both types of analysis. Although the poem or song does not incorporate all the features of stylistics, yet it appeals to the readers and continues to impact the young readers and in fact, budding writers. John Donne has often been acclaimed for his contribution towards metaphysical school of writing poetry and when seen from a critical standpoint, his poetry strikes a chord with the readership since it is colloquial despite adopting embellished diction. The field of stylistics is focused on the use of language, its form, the meter and the rhyme to convey the intended meaning. In the poem, the speaker directs a listener to do a number of impossible things: to catch a falling star, to impregnate a mandrake root, to find what happens to time that has passed, to discover who divided the devil's hoof into two parts, to teach him to hear the songs of mermaids or to avoid ever feeling envy, and, finally, to discover the favorable wind that might push a truthful and faithful person onward.If the listener was born with power to see mysterious and invisible things, the speaker continues, then he should go on an impossibly long quest of ten thousand days, until he has become an old man and his hair has gone white. When he comes back from this journey, he'll have all kinds of stories about the magical

things he saw, but he'll swear that among them all, he never saw a woman who was both faithful and beautiful.

Keywords

1. ***Cleft***: split, divided, or partially divided into two
2. ***Satan***: He is also known as the Devil, and sometimes also called Lucifer in Christianity, is an entity in the Abrahamic religions that seduces humans into sin or falsehood
3. ***Thou:***The word thou is a second-person singular pronoun in English.Thou is the nominative form
4. ***Predominantly***: mainly; for the most part
5. ***Cynicism:*** an inclination to believe that people are motivated purely by self-interest; skepticism

Self Assessment

1. 'Goe,…' doesn't just demand engagement in the space the reader occupies, it commands movement _____ from that space.

A. Away
B. Sideways
C. Segregated
D. None of these

2. The phrase 'Get with a child' means _____.

A. Hold the child
B. Impregnate
C. Give something to the child
D. None of these

3. Every word is _____between the words 'pilgrimage' and 'letter'.

A. Disyllabic
B. Unique
C. Monosyllabic
D. None of these

4. Donne's living attitude has shifted, by the end of the poem, from bossiness to _____.

A. Admiration
B. Introspection
C. Kindness
D. Cynicism

5. In the final line of the second stanza do we arrive at the real subject of the poem which is _____.

A. Is there a woman both true and fair?
B. Are all women dishonest?

C. Are all men gullible?

D. Is love hard to find?

6. Donne in three words says that even if a true and fair woman exists, he isn't bothered to meet her. It is an example of _____.

A. Pathos

B. Bathos

C. Oxymoron

D. Irony

7. The poem concludes by rhyming on _____.

A. th

B. ooo

C. eee

D. ee

8. Which of the following is one of the tasks that the speaker asks the listener to do?

A. To find what happens to the time that has passed

B. To stop believing in God

C. To fall in love with a faithful woman

D. None of these

9. Does this poem use extended metaphor as is used in Donne's other poems?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Can't say

D. None of these

10. Which critic thinks that Donne's poems become uncharitable as they reach conclusion?

A. Emma Thompson

B. Thomas Drayton

C. Christopher Ricks

D. None of these

11. "The song had aimed at being gay and flippant but turned out rather heavy and cross.' Who has said this about 'Go and catch a falling star'?

A. William Shakespeare

B. C.S Lewis

C. Matthew Jones

D. William Empson

12. The critic John Carey believes that the song, 'Go and catch a falling star' is more about _____ than women.

A. Self- improvement

B. Love
C. Hate
D. Envy

13. The word 'falling' suggests a gradual _____.

A. Awakening
B. Deterioration
C. Success
D. None of these

14. Donne uses the word 'stinging' in the poem to convey _____.

A. Pain
B. Desperation
C. Envy
D. Lust

15. The final stanza of the poem is completely _____.

A. Barren
B. Formal
C. Bizarre
D. Colloquial

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	C	4.	D	5.	A
6.	B	7.	C	8.	A	9.	B	10.	C
11.	D	12.	A	13.	B	14.	C	15.	D

Review Questions

1. Critically analyze the poem, 'Go and catch a falling star.'
2. Delineate the stylistic features of this song.
3. Do you think that John Donne's use of language in this song should be termed 'flawless'?
4. What are the limitations of following the metaphysical school of poetry?
5. Can John Donne be labeled as the pioneer of Metaphysical school of poetry?

Further Reading

1. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44127/song-go-and-catch-a-falling-star
2. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/john-donne/song-go-and-catch-a-falling-star
3. https://literariness.org/2020/07/08/analysis-of-john-donnes-go-and-catch-a-falling-star/#:~:text=John%20Donne%20enforced%20a%20tight,to%20a%20song%20about%2

0romance.

4. https://interestingliterature.com/2017/05/a-short-analysis-of-john-donnes-song-go-and-catch-a-falling-star/

Unit 10: Alexander Pope: The Rape of the Lock

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Get acquainted with the social, political and economic conditions in 18th century England
- Know about the literary features of 18th century England
- Know about Alexander Pope
- Get a brief insight into the Canto 1 of the epic poem 'The Rape of the Lock'

Introduction

Historical Background

The Revolution of 1688, which banished the last of the Stuart kings and called William of Orange to the throne, marks the end of the long struggle for political freedom in England. Thereafter the Englishman spent his tremendous energy, which his forbears had largely spent in fighting for freedom, in endless political discussions and in efforts to improve his government.In order to bring about reforms, votes were now necessary; and to get votes the people of England must be approached with ideas, facts, arguments, information. So the newspaper was born, and literature in its widest sense, including the book, the newspaper, and the magazine, became the chief instrument of a nation's progress.The first half of the eighteenth century is remarkable for the rapid social development in England. Hitherto men had been more or less governed by the narrow, isolated standards of the middle Ages, and when they differed they fell speedily to blows.Now for the first time they set themselves to the task of learning the art of living together, while still holding different opinions.In a single generation, nearly two thousand public coffeehouses, each a center of sociability, sprang up in London alone, and the number of private clubs is quite as astonishing.This new social life had a marked effect in polishing men's words and manners.The typical Londoner of Queen Anne's day was still rude, and a little vulgar in his tastes; the city was still very filthy, the streets unlighted and infested at night by bands of rowdies and "Mohawks"; but outwardly men sought to refine their manners according to prevailing standards; and to be elegant, to have "good form," was a man's first duty, whether he entered society or wrote literature.One can hardly read a

book or poem of the age without feeling this superficial elegance. Government still had its opposing Tory and Whig parties, and the Church was divided into Catholics, Anglicans, and Dissenters; but the growing social life offset many antagonisms, producing at least the outward impression of peace and unity.Nearly every writer of the age busied himself with religion as well as with party politics, the scientist Newton as sincerely as the churchman Barrow, the philosophical Locke no less earnestly than the evangelical Wesley; but nearly all tempered their zeal with moderation, and argued from reason and Scripture, or used delicate satire upon their opponents, instead of denouncing them as followers of Satan.

There were exceptions, of course; but the general tendency of the age was toward toleration.Man had found himself in the long struggle for personal liberty; now he turned to the task of discovering his neighbor, of finding in Whig and Tory, in Catholic and Protestant, in Anglican and Dissenter, the same general human characteristics that he found in himself.This good work was helped, moreover, by the spread of education and by the growth of the national spirit, following the victories of Marlborough on the Continent.In the midst of heated argument, it needed only a word—Gibraltar, Blenheim, Ramillies, Malplaquet—or a poem of victory written in a garret tao tell a patriotic people that under their many differences they were all alike Englishmen.In the latter half of the century, the political and social progress is almost bewildering. The modern form of cabinet government responsible to Parliament and the people had been established under George I; and in 1757 the cynical and corrupt practices of Walpole, premier of the first Tory cabinet, were replaced by the more enlightened policies of Pitt.In the latter half of the century, the political and social progress is almost bewildering. The modern form of cabinet government responsible to Parliament and the people had been established under George I; and in 1757 the cynical and corrupt practices of Walpole, premier of the first Tory cabinet, were replaced by the more enlightened policies of Pitt.Schools were established; clubs and coffeehouses increased; books and magazines multiplied until the press was the greatest visible power in England; the modern great dailies, the Chronicle, Post, and Times, began their career of public education.Religiously, all the churches of England felt the quickening power of that tremendous spiritual revival known as Methodism, under the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield.Outside her own borders three great men—Clive in India, Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, Cook in Australia and the islands of the Pacific—were unfurling the banner of St. George over the untold wealth of new lands, and spreading the worldwide empire of the Anglo-Saxons.

10.1 Literary Characteristics

This age was about the triumph of English prose. A multitude of practical interests arising from the new social and political conditions demanded expression, not simply in books, but more especially in pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers.Poetry was inadequate for such a task; hence the development of prose, of the "unfettered word," as Dante calls it, a development which astonishes us by its rapidity and excellence.The graceful elegance of Addison's essays, the terse vigor of Swift's satires, the artistic finish of Fielding's novels, the sonorous eloquence of Gibbon's history and of Burke's orations, —these have no parallel in the poetry of the age.Indeed, poetry itself became prosaic in this respect, that it was used not for creative works of imagination, but for essays, for satire, for criticism, —for exactly the same practical ends as was prose.The poetry of the first half of the century, as typified in the work of Pope, is polished and witty enough, but artificial; it lacks fire, fine feeling, enthusiasm, the glow of the Elizabethan Age and the moral earnestness of Puritanism. In a word, it interests us as a study of life, rather than delights or inspires us by its appeal to the imagination.The variety and excellence of prose works, and the development of a serviceable prose style, which had been begun by Dryden, until it served to express clearly every human interest and emotion, —these are the chief literary glories of the eighteenth century.In the literature of the preceding age, we noted two marked tendencies, —the tendency to realism in subject-matter, and the tendency to polish and refinement of expression. Both these tendencies were continued in the Augustan Age, and are seen clearly in the poetry of Pope, who brought the couplet to perfection, and in the prose of Addison.

A third tendency is shown in the prevalence of satire, resulting from the unfortunate union of politics with literature. We have already noted the power of the press in this age, and the perpetual strife of political parties.Nearly every writer of the first half of the century was used and rewarded by Whigs or Tories for satirizing their enemies and for advancing their special political interests. Pope was a marked exception, but he nevertheless followed the prose writers in using satire too

largely in his poetry.Now satire—that is, a literary work which searches out the faults of men or institutions in order to hold them up to ridicule—is at best a destructive kind of criticism.A satirist is like a laborer who clears away the ruins and rubbish of an old house before the architect and builders begin on a new and beautiful structure. The work may sometimes be necessary, but it rarely arouses our enthusiasm.While the satires of Pope, Swift, and Addison are doubtless the best in our language, we hardly place them with our great literature, which is always constructive in spirit; and we have the feeling that all these men were capable of better things than they ever wrote.

The period we are studying is known to us by various names. It is often called the Age of Queen Anne; but, unlike Elizabeth, this "meekly stupid" queen had practically no influence upon our literature. The name Classic Age is more often heard; but in using it we should remember clearly these three different ways in which the word "classic" is applied to literature:the term "classic" refers, in general, to writers of the highest rank in any nation. As used in our literature, it was first applied to the works of the great Greek and Roman writers, like Homer and Virgil; and any English book which followed the simple and noble method of these writers was said to have a classic style.Later the term was enlarged to cover the great literary works of other ancient nations; so that the Bible and the Avestas, as well as the Iliad and the Aeneid, are called classics.Every national literature has at least one period in which an unusual number of great writers are producing books, and this is called the classic period of a nation's literature.Thus the reign of Augustus is the classic or golden age of Rome; the generation of Dante is the classic age of Italian literature; the age of Louis XIV is the French classic age; and the age of Queen Anne is often called the classic age of England.The word "classic" acquired an entirely different meaning in the period we are studying; and we shall better understand this by reference to the preceding ages.

The Elizabethan writers were led by patriotism, by enthusiasm, and, in general, by romantic emotions.They wrote in a natural style, without regard to rules; and though they exaggerated and used too many words, their works are delightful because of their vigor and freshness and fine feeling. In the following age patriotism had largely disappeared from politics and enthusiasm from literature.Poets no longer wrote naturally, but artificially, with strange and fantastic verse forms to give effect, since fine feeling was wanting.And this is the general character of the poetry of the Puritan Age.Gradually our writers rebelled against the exaggerations of both the natural and the fantastic style.They demanded that poetry should follow exact rules; and in this they were influenced by French writers, especially by Boileau and Rapin, who insisted on precise methods of writing poetry, and who professed to have discovered their rules in the classics of Horace and Aristotle.In our study of the Elizabethan drama we noted the good influence of the classic movement in insisting upon that beauty of form and definiteness of expression which characterize the dramas of Greece and Rome; and in the work of Dryden and his followers we see a revival of classicism in the effort to make English literature conform to rules established by the great writers of other nations.At first the results were excellent, especially in prose; but as the creative vigor of the Elizabethans was lacking in this age, writing by rule soon developed a kind of elegant formalism, which suggests the elaborate social code of the time.

The general tendency of literature was to look at life critically, to emphasize intellect rather than imagination, the form rather than the content of a sentence.Writers strove to repress all emotion and enthusiasm, and to use only precise and elegant methods of expression.This is what is often meant by the "classicism" of the ages of Pope and Johnson. It refers to the critical, intellectual spirit of many writers, to the fine polish of their heroic couplets or the elegance of their prose, and not to any resemblance which their work bears to true classic literature.In a word, the classic movement had become pseudo-classic, i.e. a false or sham classicism; and the latter term is now often used to designate a considerable part of eighteenth-century literature.To avoid this critical difficulty, we have adopted the term Augustan Age, a name chosen by the writers themselves, who saw in Pope, Addison, Swift, Johnson, and Burke the modern parallels to Horace, Virgil, Cicero, and all that brilliant company who made Roman literature famous in the days of Augustus.

10.2 Intriguing Facts about 18th Century England

Christmas was a Serious Thing

What comes to your mind when Christmas comes? Or how do you celebrate the Christmas day?Ideally, the Christmas of the past isn't that of today.Usually, when it's Christmas time, people

think of buying expensive and satisfying things, traveling and exploring and some even do evil things. And all this is done in one day, the 25th of every December.In the 18th Century, Christmas was a twelve-day event.During these 12 days of celebrations, people engaged in playing games, feasting, sending and receiving presents, doing parties, for 12 successive nights. Imagine how serious Christmas was during those days.No businesses were opened during the Christmas period. And after that, mid-January was the Twelfth Night holiday. There were also remarkable celebrations during this time and in fact, Twelfth Night is said to have seen huge celebrations and events than Christmas. Fascinatingly, the holiday was meant to bring people back into their normal day to day activities.

Learning was not a Difficult Thing

How much does it cost to get an education in the 21st Century? Or how long do you need to be in school to become fully educated?These days, education is not only difficult but is also expensive.Back in the 18th Century, education wasn't hard.In fact, people believed that you don't have to go to school to get an education; or perhaps that was their mentality during those times.That's why in London and the whole of Europe there were coffee shops all over where intellectuals from Oxford and Cambridge universities gathered to enjoy coffee.People could buy a cup of coffee and pay attention to the advice shared by these intellectuals. A cup of coffee was cheap by then.

These intellectuals could talk about the politics of the day as well as share knowledge on all types of subjects.

The Frankist Movement

The Frankist Movement led by Jacob Frank around 1750 is also another remarkable thing we can't give a blind eye as it is recorded in the history books.Jacob Frank was a man who claimed to be the messiah of the Jewish and Christian religions.While people thought of Frank as an insane person, many people followed his teachings. Members of his movement were meant to believe that they couldn't go to God unless they do ritualistic orgies which he did frequently himself. But this was perhaps an Orgy Cult. But who knows?

Astonishing Animal Attractions

Perhaps this will shock you.Unless it is just recorded just to make us get a picture of life in the 18th Century but around 1760, history tells us that there was a Learned Pig was trained to do the math, play cards, read your future and tell the time.All this happened in London when the city experienced all sorts of attractions year-in-year-out. In fact, during the 1700s London saw a huge growth of bearded ladies.

Soda was There

You may think that life in the 18th Century didn't have cool things but people enjoyed soda.Well, perhaps it's not similar to the soda we enjoy today that's why we have featured it in our facts about the 1800s.According to the college essay writing service, the person who invented soda in the 18th Century was known as Joseph Priestly. Joseph a philosopher and academic chemist could mix oxygen and water.Perhaps Joseph did it for fun or to make people enjoy soda but J.J. Schweppe capitalized on it seriously that it became a huge business- you must have heard of Schweppes' ginger ale.

People Enjoyed Beer

During the 18th Century, the English Parliament enacted the Beerhouse Act that permitted people to get alcohol licenses at an affordable price and sell beer in a bid to abolish public alcoholism that saw people taking dangerous spirits.The Act brought about the rise of beerhouses which saw people selling beer in their front doorways. Public intoxication became rampant and so England enacted stricter laws in a bid to stop people from drinking too much alcohol.

Bed Bug Infestation

The 18th Century was also the era of bed bug infestation. The infestation was so rampant that people got used to living with bed bugs. During that era, women used kerosene to control and kill the bed bugs as they were causing multiple health problems.

Dental and Personal Hygiene

Brushing the teeth wasn't a big deal. In fact, people could wipe their gums using a cloth or a toothpick. It was that simple.The poor and women suffered poor dental hygiene than men.Perhaps for women, it was because of the vitamins they lose during pregnancy. Thankfully, in the early 1700s Marvis, an Italian company started producing toothpaste, not sure whether the company is still in existence as of the time of writing this article.Unsurprisingly, the poor preferred to buy meat than the Italian toothpaste as they thought it wasn't an essential thing to them.While we value personal hygiene, in those days, taking a shower wasn't a priority.In fact, many said bathing could make them weak and in fact, they feared that hot water could bring disease into their bodies.

Amazing and Best-Selling Books

You will be forgiven to say that the current best-selling books are well-written but perhaps, back in the day, the best-selling books were also well-written because most of them mirrored the society and culture.Typically, most books were written about prostitution because at least that's the era when that business was rampant. In fact, it was around the 1700s when a book titled Harris's List of Convent Garden Ladies was so popular as it was written to guide people on how to choose the best prostitute.

10.3 Major Writers of 18th Century

The 18th century is the period of time of turmoil and tranquility, lots of events took place in the 18th century, and it was the time when enlightenment gave rise to French and American revolutions. Science and philosophy reached the heights.Philosophers traded the dream of brighter and prosperous age. Likewise, lots of writers, essayist and thinkers penned their experiences, views, and sentiments in books, poetry, and essays so that coming generation could benefit from them.

Jane Austen

Jane Austen was the English novelist best known for her novels i.e. Pride and prejudice (1813), Sense and Sensibility (1811), Emma (1816).Sheborn on 16th December 1775 in Steventon Rectory, Hampshire, England.She achieved success as a published writer. In most of her novels, the plot was to go deeper into issues of women and their dependence solely on marriage in order to pursue the social standing or economic stability.

Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens who's known by his pen name 'Mark Twain' was America's most famous writer, humorist, and publisher. Mark Twain was born in Hannibal, Missouri.'The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County' is the most humorous story which set the trail of popularity and success for him. He is praised as 'Greatest humorist of America. Even, William Faulkner used to call him 'The Father of American Literature'. He is one of the most prolific and legendary writers of 19th century.

Leo Tolstoy

Leo Tolstoy is one of the best authors of the 18th century and all times. He was the Russian writer who born on September 28, 1828 and died on 20th November 1910. Born to an aristocratic Russian family as Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, he became massively popular in his early twenties.Leo Tolstoy is better known for his masterpiece novels Anna Karenina and War and Peace which are

referred as Peak of realistic fiction. He was an incredible playwright and phenomenal essay writer.Leo Tolstoy first accomplished his literary acclaim with a semi-autobiographical trilogy of childhood, Boyhood, and Youth from 1852-1856 and Sevastopol sketches in 1855.

Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde was an Irish poet and most playwright of the 19th century. He is one of the best playwrights of London in 1890s. In fact, he is remembered for imprisonment, early and plays, but his novel 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' needs no introduction at all.His flamboyant dress, wit and conversational skills were traits which made him the well-known and most sought-after personality of this time. In early 1890, he had produced four society comedies that transformed him into one of the most successful playwrights of Ireland and Britain ever produced.

Charles Dickens

Charles John Huffam Dickens was the phenomenal writer and an expert social critic born on 7th February 1812 in Landport, Hampshire England.

He is the pioneer of some of the world's most popular characters. That's why; he's regarded as an all-time inspirational novelist. He was fortunate enough to enjoy huge success in his lifetime. His short stories and novels are still popular among kids and youngsters.He is a literary genius. Charles Dickens's serial publication named The Pickwick Paper of 1836 is the starting point which made him an acclaimed literary celebrity, humorist, and an amazing writer.

Victor Hugo

Victor Hugo was the most popular French novelist, poet, and the dramatist. Outside of France, he is widely known for his incredible novels- The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1831) and Les Miserable (1862).

John Clare

John Clare was the incredible English poet born in Helpston to the north of Peterborough. His book 'Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery got widespread popularity in 1820. Next year, another book of John Clare Village Minstrel was a big hit and made him one of the best poets and writers of the 18th century.He was also voracious essays whose work reached the peak of fame. Unfortunately, the only essay which received popularity in his lifetime is 'Popularity of Authorship' which is an account of predicament which he suffered in 1824.

William Blake

William Blake was an exceptionally talented and versatile person. He was an outstanding poet, magical painter, and spell-binding printmaker.In this lifetime; he was anonymous but with the start of 20th century, he became an influential figure in the history of visual arts of the Romantic Age and poetry. Notable books of 18th-century visionary William Blake are-The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, The Four Zoas and Jerusalem etc.

10.4 Introduction to the Poet

It would not be quite true to say thatAlexander Pope has proved a poet for all the ages, if only because some late Victorians thought him safely dead and buried in terms of any active presence in the poetry of their day. Even then, however, Pope refused to lie down, and for the past three hundred years he has shown surprising resilience in the face of condescension, assumed indifference, or outright hostility.Recent generations of poets and critics have joined the scholars in helping to recover some of the ground he had lost. A look at his reputation as it stood 100, 200, and 300 years ago may help to make the point.In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Pope had seen his career take off with a series of major poems: An Essay on Criticism, Windsor-Forest, The Rape of the Lock, and Eloisa to Abelard, which would all be packaged in the sumptuous collection

of the poet's Works in 1717.Scarcely anyone without a personal grudge then doubted that a poet of the highest excellence had arrived on the scene – in the view of most dispassionate observers, the greatest English writer since Milton and Dryden in the late seventeenth century.A hundred years later, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, his position had undergone serious challenge, but he remained a potent influence for Wordsworth, and earned the vehement support of Byron:

"Neither time, nor distance, nor grief, nor age, can ever diminish my veneration for him, who is the great moral poet of all times, of all climes, of all feelings, and of all stages of existence. The delight of my boyhood, the study of my manhood, perhaps (if allowed to me to attain it), he may be the consolation of my age. His poetry is the Book of Life."

This may seem hyperbolic, with its calculated reworking of a tag from the Roman moralist Cicero in the second sentence.But a similar tribute came from Byron's contemporary, the essayist Charles Lamb, when he remarked that Pope paid the finest compliments ever devised by the wit of man – "Each of them is worth an estate for life – nay an immortality."Pope's reputation reached its low point in the late 1800s. Then, just a hundred years ago, things began to look up for the poet in the first decades of the twentieth century.His admirers were not critics who set the blood raging today – figures such as Austin Dobson and George Saintsbury, whose learning and love of poetry may be disguised from us by their blimpish personae. But the tide turned between the two world wars, aspoets such as Edith Sitwell and W. H. Auden recognized Pope's outstanding technical accomplishments, and scholars such as George Sherburn began to reappraise his legacy.In the heyday of "New Criticism", around the 1940s and 1950s, Pope prospered mightily, enjoying the esteem of writers like Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt; and even the ranks of Cambridge could scarce forbear to cheer, as these were represented by influential pioneers of twentieth-century literary analysis such as F. R. Leavis and William Empson.Pope also gained in public recognition through the efforts of modern scholarship, especially the imposing Twickenham edition of his complete poems spearheaded by John Butt from the 1930s to the 1960s, and the massive contributions to Popian study of Maynard Mack right up to the late 1980s.But that was then and this is now. Against all expectations, Pope has made it into the early twenty-first century with very little, if any, loss of momentum. New approaches in the post-structuralist era have confirmed just how central a place he holds in the narrative of poetic history.

10.5 Introduction to the 'Rape of the Lock'

The Rape of the Lock had its origins in an actual, if trivial, incident in polite society: in 1711, the twenty-one-year-old Robert, Lord Petre, had, at Binfield, had surreptitiously cut a lock of hair from the head of the beautiful Arabella Fermor, whom he had been courting. Arabella took offense, and a schism developed between her family and Petre's.John Caryl, a friend of both families and an old friend of Pope's, suggested that he work up a humorous poem about the episode which would demonstrate to both sides that the whole affair had been blown out of proportion and thus effect a reconciliation between them.Pope produced his poem, and it seemed to have achieved its purpose, though Petre never married Arabella.It became obvious over the course of time, however (especially after a revised and enlarged version of the poem, which existed at first only in manuscript copies, was published in 1714) that the poem, which Pope maintained "was intended only to divert a few young Ladies," was in fact something rather more substantial, and the Fermors again took offense — this time at Pope himself, who had to placate them with a letter, usually printed before the text, which explains that Arabella and Belinda, the heroine of the poem, are not identical.

The Rape of the Lock is the finest mock-heroic or mock-epic poem in English: written on the model of Boileau's Le Lutrin, it is an exquisitely witty and balanced burlesque displaying the literary virtuosity, the perfection of poetic "judgment," and the exquisite sense of artistic propriety, which was so sought after by Ne-classical artists.Repeatedly invoking classical epic devices to establish an ironic contrast between its structure and its content, it functions at once as a satire on the trivialities of fashionable life, as a commentary on the distorted moral values of polite society, and as an implicit indictment of human pride, and a revelation of the essentially trivial nature of many of the aspects of human existence which we tend to hold very dear. The world of the beaux and belles of The Rape of the Lock is a an artificial one, a trivial realm of calm and decorum sustained by the strict observance of rigorous rules, a microcosm in which very real and very powerful human emotions and passions have been ignored or sublimated.

The narcissistic inhabitants of this world assume that they are something more than human, but Pope shows us vulnerable, how fragile, their pretended perfection and their isolation from reality makes them. The Rape of the Lock, with all of its implicit and explicit sexual and emotional implications, shatters the calm, the order, the balance, and the decorum of their artificial world. They are undone by what Pope identifies — here, as in An Essay on Man and "An Essay on Criticism" — as their most important weakness: Pride.It is obvious that the poem was written for a limited and very specialized audience: in Pope's day, literary art was the province of the upper classes; the domain of a culture which was pervasively literary. Contemporary readers of The Rape of the Lock would, in consequence, recognize and delight in the enormous number of literary allusions which the poem contains.The readers of a poem so concerned with imitation ought, obviously, to be familiar with what is being imitated, and in Pope's day, if not in our own, this was largely the case.What else, though, does this pervasive emphasis on imitation, on distortion, on satire, on parody, and on irony tell us about the cultural milieu or context within which Pope created the poem, and about his relationship with the society he is reproducing in microcosm?In his postscript to his translation of the Odyssey, Pope noted that "Tis using a vast force to lift a feather": in The Rape of the Lock, however, the feather is heavier than one might suspect.

The Rape of the Lock begins with a passage outlining the subject of the poem and invoking the aid of the muse. Then the sun ("Sol") appears to initiate the leisurely morning routines of a wealthy household. Lapdogs shake themselves awake, bells begin to ring, and although it is already noon, Belinda still sleeps.She has been dreaming, and we learn that the dream has been sent by "her guardian Sylph," Ariel. The dream is of a handsome youth who tells her that she is protected by "unnumber'd Spirits"—an army of supernatural beings who once lived on earth as human women. The youth explains that they are the invisible guardians of women's chastity, although the credit is usually mistakenly given to "Honour" rather than to their divine stewardship.Of these Spirits, one particular group—the Sylphs, who dwell in the air—serve as Belinda's personal guardians; they are devoted, lover-like, to any woman that "rejects mankind," and they understand and reward the vanities of an elegant and frivolous lady like Belinda.Ariel, the chief of all Belinda's puckish protectors, warns her in this dream that "some dread event" is going to befall her that day, though he can tell her nothing more specific than that she should "beware of Man!" Then Belinda awakes, to the licking tongue of her lapdog, Shock.Upon the delivery of a billet-doux, or love-letter, she forgets all about the dream. She then proceeds to her dressing table and goes through an elaborate ritual of dressing, in which her own image in the mirror is described as a "heavenly image," a "goddess." The Sylphs, unseen, assist their charge as she prepares herself for the day's activities.

The opening of the poem establishes its mock-heroic style. Pope introduces the conventional epic subjects of love and war and includes an invocation to the muse and a dedication to the man (the historical John Caryll) who commissioned the poem.Yet the tone already indicates that the high seriousness of these traditional topics has suffered a diminishment. The second line confirms in explicit terms what the first line already suggests: the "am'rous causes" the poem describes are not comparable to the grand love of Greek heroes but rather represent a trivialized version of that emotion.The "contests" Pope alludes to will prove to be "mighty" only in an ironic sense. They are card-games and flirtatious tussles, not the great battles of epic tradition. Belinda is not, like Helen of Troy, "the face that launched a thousand ships".The first two verse-paragraphs emphasize the comic inappropriateness of the epic style (and corresponding mind-set) to the subject at hand. Pope achieves this discrepancy at the level of the line and half-line; the reader is meant to dwell on the incompatibility between the two sides of his parallel formulations.

Thus, in this world, it is "little men" who in "tasks so bold... engage"; and "soft bosoms" are the dwelling-place for "mighty rage." In this startling juxtaposition of the petty and the grand, the former is real while the latter is ironic.In mock-epic, the high heroic style works not to dignify the subject but rather to expose and ridicule it. Therefore, the basic irony of the style supports the substance of the poem's satire, which attacks the misguided values of a society that takes small matters for serious ones while failing to attend to issues of genuine importance.With Belinda's dream, Pope introduces the "machinery" of the poem—the supernatural powers that influence the action from behind the scenes. Here, the sprites that watch over Belinda are meant to mimic the gods of the Greek and Roman traditions, who are sometimes benevolent and sometimes malicious, but always intimately involved in earthly events.The scheme also makes use of other ancient

hierarchies and systems of order. Ariel explains that women's spirits, when they die, return "to their first Elements." Each female personality type (these types correspond to the four humours) is converted into a particular kind of sprite. These gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and nymphs, in turn, are associated with the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water.

10.6 Themes

TheTriviality ofCourt Life

Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" recounts a seemingly trivial episode of 18th-century royal court life. Belinda, a beautiful and charming young woman, spends a day at court where she encounters the Baron, an aristocrat greatly taken with her beauty.The Baron snips off one of the two large curls into which Belinda has styled her hair, and this prompts her to begin a kind of courtly war, demanding the Baron return the lock of hair. From here, the narrative becomes increasingly silly, as the courtiers ultimately discover that the lock is no longer in the Baron's possession and has been transformed into a constellation in the sky above. Throughout the poem, Pope references the tradition of epic poetry—poems about serious conflict and heroism—to show, by comparison, how trivial and vain court life is.One of the most important points to note about the composition of the poem is Pope's choice of meter: heroic couplets (pairs of rhyming lines in iambic pentameter). These are traditionally associated with works in the epic tradition, such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and Virgil's Aeneid. This misleadingly suggests to the reader that the subject matter of "The Rape of the Lock" will be equally heroic, and thus the poem's meter ironically emphasizes the triviality of the narrative.

Beauty vs Poetry

Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" offers a satirical glimpse into 18th-century court life, emphasizing society's focus on beauty and appearance.Centred around the experience of a beautiful young woman, Belinda, who loses a lock of her hair to the scissors of an infatuated Baron, "The Rape of the Lock" steadily becomes sillier and sillier as it goes along and the characters descend into a kind of pretend battle over the lock. Pope mocks Belinda's fixation on her own beauty by comparing her with an epic hero about to go into battle, which makes her own process of beautifying herself for a day at court appear relatively low-stakes and insignificant.In Canto I, Pope describes Belinda's completed "toilet" as "awful Beauty" having prepared its "arms." Here, Pope compares Belinda's having finished grooming herself at her dressing table to an awe-inspiring warrior putting on all of his armour and weapons. The cliché of the hero getting dressed in his armour in preparation for battle in a commonplace of epic. So here, Pope is in effect mockingly comparing Belinda's seeking to make herself as attractive as possible with a warrior of epic preparing for battle.

Gender

Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" follows a beautiful but vain young woman named Belinda, who loses a lock of her remarkable hair to a nobleman known as the Baron. Belinda's furious reaction allows Pope to poke fun at her vanity.But it is also possible to read the poem as largely sympathetic to Belinda as a figure whose concern for her looks stems from the pressure put on her by a patriarchal society. Pope goes on to further defend the intellectual and moral authority of his female characters through the wisdom of Clarissa's speech, demonstrating female intellect and moral authority.He furthermore questions the wisdom of such a patriarchal system by critiquing the Baron's behaviour as fundamentally immoral and that of his fellow male courtiers as foolish or at least as vain as their female counterparts, allowing him to suggest that such a patriarchal society is both unfair and misguided.It is important to note that Pope was writing in a time when women were generally believed to be the intellectual and moral inferiors of men, and on the one hand the poem seems to support the idea that Belinda's only real value stems from her beauty.Traditionally, the protagonists of epic are male, with women as secondary figures who exist only to support or impede the men.

Summary

The period we are studying is known to us by various names. It is often called the Age of Queen Anne; but, unlike Elizabeth, this "meekly stupid" queen had practically no influence upon our literature. The name Classic Age is more often heard; but in using it we should remember clearly these three different ways in which the word "classic" is applied to literature:the term "classic" refers, in general, to writers of the highest rank in any nation. As used in our literature, it was first applied to the works of the great Greek and Roman writers, like Homer and Virgil; and any English book which followed the simple and noble method of these writers was said to have a classic style.The Rape of the Lock is the finest mock-heroic or mock-epic poem in English: written on the model of Boileau's Le Lutrin, it is an exquisitely witty and balanced burlesque displaying the literary virtuosity, the perfection of poetic "judgment," and the exquisite sense of artistic propriety, which was so sought after by Neo-classical artists. Repeatedly invoking classical epic devices to establish an ironic contrast between its structure and its content, it functions at once as a satire on the trivialities of fashionable life, as a commentary on the distorted moral values of polite society, and as an implicit indictment of human pride, and a revelation of the essentially trivial nature of many of the aspects of human existence which we tend to hold very dear.

Keywords

1. ***Triviality***: lack of seriousness or importance; insignificance
2. ***Lock***: a small piece of hair from someone's head
3. ***Dissenter:***a person who dissents.
4. ***Triumph***: a great victory or achievement
5. ***Eloquence***: fluent or persuasive speaking or writing

Self Assessment

1. Pope goes on to further defend the intellectual and moral authority of his female characters through the wisdom of a speech. Who has given the speech?

A. Clarissa
B. Maurice
C. Jane
D. Clara

2. Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" recounts a seemingly trivial episode of 18th-century royal _____ life.

A. Court
B. King's
C. Queen's
D. None of these

3. Whom does Belinda encounter at the court?

A. William
B. Baron
C. Smith
D. Alex

4. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) has been described variously as "a Catholic and cripple" by some of his friends, as "the Wasp of Twickenham" by his enemies, and as "_____" by himself.

A. Spider
B. Fly
C. Erudite
D. Expert

5. "If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?" Who has said this about Alexander Pope?

A. William Shakespeare
B. Samuel Johnson
C. John Milton
D. Francis Bacon

6. Pope told _____, his Boswell, that he started to write "an epic poem when about twelve."

A. Jonathan Swift
B. J.K. Rowling
C. Joseph Spence
D. None of these

7._____ remarked that Pope paid the finest compliments ever devised by the wit of man.

A. Charles Lamb
B. Charles Dickens
C. P.B Shelly
D. G.B Shaw

8. Pope was known as the _____ of Twickenham.

A. Bee
B. Wasp
C. Fly
D. None of these

9. Pope's long mock-epic_____ is a sort of comic version of Vigil's Aeneid.

A. Rape of the Lock
B. Paradise Lost
C. The Dunciad
D. None of these

10. In 18th century, Christmas was a ____ day event.

A. Twelve
B. Eleven

C. Ten
D. Five

11. The Frankist Movement was led by Jacob Frank around _____.

A. 1740
B. 1750
C. 1760
D. 1770

12. Who has written the novel 'Pride and Prejudice'?

A. Charlotte Bronte
B. Emily Bronte
C. Jane Austen
D. Elizabeth Barrette Browning

13. The 18th century saw a tremendous spiritual revival known as _____.

A. Methodism
B. Neo classicism
C. Classicism
D. Didacticism

14. This age was about the triumph of English _____.

A. Verse
B. Prose
C. Drama
D. Documentary

15. The poetry of the first half of the century, as typified in the work of Pope, is polished and witty enough, but _____.

A. Real
B. Decorative
C. Artificial
D. None of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	A	3.	B	4.	A	5.	B
6.	C	7.	A	8.	B	9.	C	10.	A
11.	B	12.	C	13.	A	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. What are the themes of the poem, 'The Rape of the Lock'?
2. Analyze the style of Alexander Pope in the mock epic.
3. Could this mock epic end differently?
4. Draw the character sketch of Belinda.
5. Comment on the usage of the word 'rape' in the title of this mock epic.

Further Reading

1. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44906/the-rape-of-the-lock-canto-1
2. https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Rape-of-the-Lock
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rape_of_the_Lock
4. https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/the-rape-of-the-lock/

Unit 11: Rape of the Lock

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- critically analyse the epic poem 'The Rape of the Lock,
- study 'A complex mock-heroic' by Ian Jack
- analyse the mock epic poem 'The Rape of the Lock' stylistically

Introduction

The Rape of the Lock originally published as The Rape of the Lock: An Heroi-Comical Poem 1712, is a mock-epic based upon an actual disagreement between two aristocratic English families during the eighteenth century.Lord Petre (the Baron in the poem) surprises the beautiful Arabella Fermor (Belinda) by clipping off a lock of hair. At the suggestion of his friend and with Arabella Fermor's approval, Alexander Pope used imagination, hyperbole, wit, and gentle satire to inflate this, trivial social slip-up into an earthshaking catastrophe of cosmic consequence.The poem is generally described as one of Pope's most brilliant satires. The poem makes serious demands upon the reader, not only because of its length, but also because it requires a background knowledge of epic literature and some understanding of the trapping of upper-crust England."The Rape of the Lock," constantly shifts between mocking silly social conventions of the aristocracy, (such as elaborate courtship rituals) and satirizing serious literary conventions of traditional epic literature (such as its lofty style, exhaustive descriptions of warriors readying for battle, and heavy doses of mythology).

With many allusions to Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Virgil's Aeneid, and John Milton's Paradise Lost, the speaker compares the loss of Belinda's hair to the great battles of classic epic literature. The speaker describes Belinda applying makeup as if she was a warrior going to battle. While playing a game of cards, the Baron sneaks up behind Belinda and perform the "tragic" snipping of the lock of hair.An army of gnomes and sprites attempts to protect Belinda to no avail. Belinda demands the restoration of her lock and another "battle" ensues. Finally, the lock ascends skyward as a new star to beautify the heavens"The Rape of the Lock" is the finest example of a mock-epic in English. The poem's 794 lines are divided into five cantos or sections.The word "canto" is derived from the Latin cantus or song; it originally signified a section of a narrative poem sung by a minstrel. "The Rape of the Lock" is written in heroic couplets, lines of iambic pentameter, rhyming aa, bb, cc, and so forth. The description "heroic" was first used in the seventeenth century because of the frequent use of such couplets in epic poems. This couplet style was first used in English by Geoffrey Chaucer in The Canterbury Tales.

Pope was the greatest master of the metrical and rhetorical possibilities of the heroic couplet; he turned this concise, restrictive form into a dynamic world of ideas and characters.Pope achieved diversity of style within the couplet by changing the position of the caesura or line break. He expertly balanced the two lines, often using a slight pause at the end of the first line and a heavy stop at the end of the second line. Moreover, he frequently balanced a statement of a thesis and antithesis somewhere within each line, as in these lines from his Essay on Criticism: "Careless of censure nor too fond of fame; Still pleased to praise, yet not afraid to blame; Averse alike to flatter, or offend; Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend."The caesura moves around within each line, sometimes coming after four syllables and sometimes after seven. Moreover, Pope balances a main idea or thesis within each line with a statement of its opposite or antithesis. He displays great ingenuity and wit in his skillful compression of ideas.

The structure of "The Rape of the Lock" roughly corresponds to that of many epics: invocation to amuse (Canto I), conference of the protective gods (Canto II), games and epic banquet (Canto III), the journey into the underworld (Canto IV), and heroic battle and climax (Canto V). Pope both satirizes and honors the elevated style of epic poetry and many of its conventions such as a formal statement of theme, division into cantos, grandiose speeches, challenges, boasts, description of warrior's battle equipment, warfare, epic similes, and supernatural elements.

However, the poem- ridicules the silly social manners of the aristocracy and deflates the elevated sense of importance in the affairs of wealthy ladies and gentlemen. Yet, the poem also displays some fondness for the grace and beauty of that world. Pope enjoys all the ivory and tortoiseshell, cosmetics and diamonds, expensive furniture, silver coffee service, fancy china, and light conversation— this was the world in which he moved attempting to find patronage for his poetry.If the Moderns have excelled the Ancients in any species of writing, it seems to be in satire: and, particularly in that kind of satire, which is conveyed in the form of the epopee. . . . As the poet disappears in this way of writing, and does not deliver the intended censure in his own proper person, the satire becomes more delicate, because more oblique.

Add to this, that a tale or story more strongly engages and interests the reader, than a series of precepts or reproofs, or even of characters themselves, however lively and natural. An heroi- comic poem may therefore be justly esteemed the most excellent kind of satire."The first principle of Criticism," Pope wrote in the postscript to his translation of the Odyssey, "is to consider the nature of the piece, and the intent of its author." In The Rape of the Lock, neither is in doubt. The incident on which the poem is founded had caused a breach between the two families of the Petres and the Fermors, and it was suggested to Pope that he should help "to make a jest of it, and laugh them together again."The writing of a witty narrative poem was one of the most obvious methods; and no species of narrative was more eligible than the mock-heroic, so highly praised by Dryden. It was a genre which had much to recommend it. It had been evolved for the very purpose of "diminishing" petty quarrels, and combined the two sorts of writing in which the age was most interested: epic and satire.

And there was still a spice of novelty about it. Rowe had even questioned "if it can be call'd a Kind, that is so new in the World, and of which we have had so few Instances."While Le Lutrin and The Dispensary (whose composition Pope had followed with keen interest) were suitable models, neither of them was so brilliant as to be discouraging. Pope may well have aspired to write a consummate example of the mock-heroic genre before Lord Petre stole the lock: it may be that in the quarrel of the Petres and the Fermors he merely found matter and opportunity for the attempt. While modern critics often think of a mock-heroic poem primarily as a satire on the epic, the Augustans laid the emphasis elsewhere. The technical brilliance of The Rape of the Lock is largely due to the care with which Pope had studied the great epics and the remarks of the critics with a view to writing an epic of his own. Nor did the success of his mock-epic make a heroic poem seem a less worthy ambition; for he was planning an epic until the last days of his life. The writers who did ridicule the epic in the Augustan age were the authors of burlesques and travesties; and Dennis was not alone in thinking their object "a very scurvy one." In mock-epic a dignified genre is turned to witty use without being cheapened in any way.The poet has an opportunity of ridiculing through incongruity, and of affording his reader the sophisticated pleasure of recognizing ironical

parallels to familiar passages in Homer and Virgil. A mock-heroic poem is a "parody" of the epic, but a parody in the Augustan sense, not in the modern.

The "new purpose" of the frequent "allusions" throughout The Rape of the Lock is not the ridicule of a literary form but the setting of a lovers' tiff in true perspective.The fact that the 1712 version of The Rape of the Lock consists of no more than 334 lines and takes over only a few of the characteristics of the epic makes it clear that Pope's concern was less with Homer and Virgil than with Miss Fermor and Lord Petre. The style is heroic; but the invocation, the proposition of the subject, the descriptions, the moralizing asides, the speeches and the battle are practically the only structural features modeled on the epic. Clearly the poet's purpose at this stage was neither to ridicule the heroic genre nor to provide a humorous parallel to all the principal ingredients of epic, but to "diminish" the affair of the lock of hair. This remains true in the version, in which Pope increased the length of the poem from two cantos to five (totaling 794 lines) and added such further "allusions" to the epic as the visit to the Cave of Spleen (parodying the epic visit to the underworld), the game of ombre (parodying the heroic games), the adorning of Belinda (which parallels the arming of Achilles), and above all the extensive "machinery" of Ariel and the sylphs.

11.1 Stylistic Analysis

Stylistic analysis describes how does a language user enhance the impact of the text and discourse with the help of hidden and indirect clues. Now, this type of analysis is widely applied to literary and non-literary text.

Concepts in Stylistic Analysis

Poetic License

Leech (1969) uses a term of poetic license for the poetic traditions. These traditions, usually, manifest themselves in lexis, syntax, and unusual way of twisting meanings.The phonetic, morphemic, syntactic structures which might look funny or absurd in ordinary language become acceptable in poems. They might have been constrained by the metrical or thematic requirements, but they are identified as the part of the poetic tradition. We anticipate them when we are about to read a poem.

Foregrounding

The poets catch the attention of the reader by detaching. Stylistic theorists use an alternative term for this process which is foregrounding.It consists of deviation and parallelism. ZzThe examples of the former are: graphological deviation, lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, semantic deviation, phonological deviation, discourse deviation.

Graphological Deviation

This refers to the unusual use of punctuation item. Cumming's poetry displays this deviation quite often. For example, view the following lines of E. E. Cumming: anyone lived in a pretty how town (with up so floating many bells down) spring summer autumn winter he sang his didn't he danced his did. In the above stanza, each line, even the very first line of the poem, begins with letters in lower hand. In the above lines, 'anyone' is synonymous with 'a man'.This expression has been used to foreground generality of 'the man' referred to. Using the lower case in beginning of the first line of the poem further emphasizes the man's 'no manliness'.

Lexical Deviation

Lexical deviation refers to nonce-formation or neologism. It means use of new words. New words are coined either by introducing a/the new morpheme/s or by affixing two known morphemes in an unprecedented combination.The example of the former is 'pandemonium' (Milton, 2005); and that of the latter is 'manunkind' (c\Cumming). Usually, the latter are more frequently used in poetry. Leech quotes a line: The unchilding, unfathering, widow-making deep In the above-quoted

line, lexical deviation occurs in three ways: by adding an unexpected prefix un- to two nouns, by transforming the nouns into verbs, by making an unexpected combination of the two free morphemes.

Syntactic Deviation

Sometimes, the sentence structure of a poetic line deviates from the rules of grammar. This may be because of two reasons: to maintain metrical rhythm;to shift the theme rhyme structure.

Read the following poem

John Gilpin was a citizen (SVC)

Of credit and renown,

A train-band captain eke was he (CVS)

Of famous London town.

John Gilpin was a citizen (SVC)

Of credit and renown,

A train-band captain eke was he (CVS)

Of famous London town.

John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear, 'Though wedded we have been (CSV)

These twice ten tedious years;

yet we No holiday have seen.' (SVO)

The underlined text of the poem displays deviation from the usual syntactic order i.e. SVO/C. The purpose of this deviation, in addition to the need of ordering the text in metrical pattern, may be avoiding the alternative structures which are ordinary and uninteresting. If these lines are put straight; they will instantly lose the charm. Semantic Deviation Semantic deviation refers to the use of metaphor and other figures of speech. The images used in the figure of speech suggest two layers of meanings: superficial meanings and actual meanings.Leech (1969) describes the former as either absurd or redundant. The contrast between the apparent absurdity or redundancy and the hidden wit surprises the reader; as a result, the related text becomes fore grounded.

Parallelism

The deliberate repetition of an item for an artistic effect is called parallelism.

They are of three types:

1. Phonological Parallelism
2. Syntactic Parallelism
3. Lexical Parallelism (Verbal Repetition)

Phonological Parallelism

The core concepts of the phonological parallelism are based on the stressed syllable. Leech has described the stressed syllables with the help of the following formula: (C0-3) V (C 0-4). C represents the consonant cluster ;V represents the vowel; the post scripted digits 0-3 and 0-4 represent the strength of the cluster; and the parentheses represent the option of the enclosed items.Now, it turns out that an English stressed syllable consists of an obligatory vowel nucleus, and two optional consonant clusters whose strengths may vary from zero to three in the onset position, and zero to four in the coda position. The stressed syllable may consist of three fragments.Leech (1969) and Short (1996) calls the deliberate, artistic repetition of any one or two of them phonological parallelism; if all the three fragments are repeated, Leech calls them the example of verbal repetition (also lexical parallelism).

The examples of the phonological parallelism are:

Alliteration:

dream /dr i: m/ C V C

drink /drɪŋk/ C V C

Assonance:

Dream /dr i: m/ C V C

feel /f i: l/ C V C

Consonance:

dream /dr i: m/ C V C

roam /r əʊ m/ C V C

Rhyme:

dream /dr i: m/ C V C

Beam /b i: m/ C V C

Reverse Rhyme:

grieve /gr i: v/ C V C

green /gr i: n/ C V C

Para Rhyme:

dream /dr i: m/ C V C

drum /drʌ m/ C V C

Syntactic Parallelism

The repetition of the same sentence structure but not the same wording is called syntactic parallelism. For example, He came; he saw; he conquered. In the above sentence, three clauses are written in the same mood.The repetition of the sentence structure or that of the phrase structure is termed as syntactic parallelism. Such repetitions foreground the text and the idea contained in it.

Lexical Parallelism

This refers to the repetition of a word, phrase, or a clause in a regular pattern.

Leech (1969) describes these patterns as follows:

Anaphora: (a……..…) (a……..……)

Epistrophe: (…….a) (…….a)

Symploce: (a……..…..b) (a……..…..b)

Anadiplosis: (…….a) (a……...…)

Epanalepsis: (a……a) (b……..…b)

Antistrophe: (….a…b…..) (….b…a….)

Polyptoton.

'The repetition of a word with varying grammatical inflections. For example, 'And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.'

Homoioteleuton

'It refers to the repetition of the same derivational or inflectional ending on different words'.

For example, 'The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes'

Discourse Verdonk describes discourse as 'the process of the activation of text by relating it to a context of use'. The term 'discourse' has been defined variously; but the present concept of discourse has sustained in Stylistics from Widdowson (1975) who took it as the communicative use of language.The above definition of discourse suggests that part of the meaning of a message is contributed by its linguistics features, and part by the context.

Text

A text may be meaningful in the absence of a context, but it will not carry any message. For example, a sign board with the text 'No Parking' will carry no message if you find it lying in a store, though it shall have some meanings. If the same sign board is installed on a road side, it will carry a message. So, an 'intended message' is discourse; while a text, without context, may be meaningful but it carries no message. In Stylistic study, the work is analysed on two levels: as an example of discourse; and as an example of text.The title of the poem is the combination of a striking and a trivial image i.e., 'rape' and 'lock'. The same contrast continues in the coming lines. WHAT dire offence from am'rous causes springs,.

Cognitive Meanings. To how dreadful consequences romantic gestures may lead! To say that the paraphrase of the above line communicates its fullest meaning would be unjust.The paraphrase contains only surface and literal meanings. It does not express the impressions left by the indirect clues. Those clues have been analyzed one by one:

Graphological Deviation:

'WHAT'. All letters are in upper case.

This Graphological deviation foregrounds the meaning of 'what'.

It has been fore grounded because the answer to this 'what' is the theme of the present poem.

Syncope. In another instance, /ə/ has been dropped from 'am'rous'.

This reduces the number of syllables from three to two; and one of two unstressed syllables is dropped. This technique is called Syncope.

Syntactic Deviation: Hyperbaton: SAV

The Adjunct 'from am'rous causes' has been preposed. This provides a contrast of 'dire' and 'am'rous' and humour is created. This combination agrees with the title of the poem.

Phonological Parallelism

Consonance

Loose consonance of /s/ in 'offence' and 'am'rous', and /z/ in 'causes' and 'springs' creates a musical effect which foregrounds the contents and, as a result, it catches the attention of the reader more effectively.Line 2 What mighty contests rise from trivial things,

Cognitive meaning:

How much fuss is created from ordinary disputes! Verbal Repetition: Anaphora: What. This pattern of verbal repetition is called anaphor. This repetition strengthens effect of Exclamation produced by

the first 'WHAT'. Its psychological impact on the minds of the readers is that it does not let them change their focus. In this way, it creates a cohesive effect in the text.

Assonance

Two examples of assonance can be noted in the line: (1) /m aɪtɪ …… r aɪ z/ (2) /tr ɪvɪəl θ ɪŋz/ These two occurrences seem to be coincidental because no idea has been fore grounded.

Syntactic Parallelism

Line 1 and 2 raise two questions in the interrogative mood of the present simple tense. The parallel structure sustains the tone and enhances cohesion. Line 3 I sing—This verse to Caryll, muse! is due: Cognitive meaning Oh muse, I dedicate this poem to Caryll.

Discourse Style

Coherence: The main clause of the poem is 'I sing'. This is the meaning continuation of first two lines. This is the answer to the 'What' of the first two lines.

Graphological Deviation: 'muse'

In line 7, the mark of exclamation follows 'Goddess!' Here the poet addresses the muse.This analogy helps us to suppose that the poet addresses the 'muse!' in this line. Semantic Deviation: Parody.The lexical items 'sing' and 'muse' are traditional to epic poetry. In paradise lost, and in every other epic poem, they can be seen on the first page. Line 3 creates humor by adopting a very serious tone to narrate a trivial incident.

Semantic Deviation: Antithesis

The modifying clause stays as the antithesis of that of the first two lines. The light comedy of this line becomes intensified in contrast with the seriousness aroused by the first two lines.

Line 4: "This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view"

Cognitive meaning. Even Belinda may be kind enough to read it. Tenor: Lexis. The lexical items 'may' and 'vouchsafe' suggest the high status of Belinda. Placing Belinda next to 'muse' also suggests the former's importance in the poem.Actually, here the muse foregrounds the importance of Belinda.

Lines 5, 6 Slight is the subject, but not so the praise If she inspire, and he approve my lays.

Cognitive meaning. Though the subject matter of the poem is based on an ordinary incident; yet by the support and encouragement of Caryll and Belinda I hope to transform it into a masterpiece.

Now, to shed the comic effect of the previous lines, the poet adopts the serious tone and gives his justification of selecting a trivial theme.The plural verbs 'inspire' and 'approve' follow the singular subjects 'he' and 'she'. This suggests the princely status of the two characters.

Phonological Parallelism

Alliteration

The repetition of /s/ sound in 'subject' after 'Slight' further strengthens the collocation between the two. Moreover, the repetition of /p/ sound in the stressed syllables of 'inspire' and 'approve' further consolidates the semantic field created by this combination.

Rhyme

The rhyme between the line endings 'praise' and 'lays' is a traditional mode of ornamentation; but it serves an additional purpose, too.The missing singularity marker 's' in 'inspire' and 'approve'

becomes psychologically compensated, though not grammatically, by its presence in 'lays'. Lines 7, 8 Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel A well-bred Lord t' assault a gentle Belle?

Cognitive meaning

Oh Goddess! Tell me what extraordinary reasons forced a well-mannered lord to offend a tender, beautiful girl.Discourse Deviation: Second person addressee. By introducing the second person addressee 'Goddess', the poet creates a sense of immediacy. The reader feels as if he were overhearing a conversation.

Deviation

Goddess! The mark of exclamation on 'Goddess' gives the line life-like effect. It enhances the reader's feeling of overhearing a conversation. Tenor: Cliches. The words like 'lord', 'Belle', 'assault' are almost the currency of epic poetry.'Belle', instead of 'a girl' has a more powerful impression.The components of beautifulness and romance are traditionally associated with it.

Semantic Deviation:

Parody: 'Say….. Goddess!'.

This is the most frequently occurring combination in epic poetry.Actually, an epic poem is incomplete without it.

Syntactic Deviation

'Goddess' is inserted between the subject and verb of the embedded clause. It is a clever example of information packaging. Both the subject and predicate have been fore grounded: the former by the precedence of 'Say' and the latter by that of 'Goddess'.

Summary

Pope was the greatest master of the metrical and rhetorical possibilities of the heroic couplet; he turned this concise, restrictive form into a dynamic world of ideas and characters.Pope achieved diversity of style within the couplet by changing the position of the caesura or line break. He expertly balanced the two lines, often using a slight pause at the end of the first line and a heavy stop at the end of the second line. Moreover, he frequently balanced a statement of a thesis and antithesis somewhere within each line, as in these lines from his Essay on Criticism: "Careless of censure nor too fond of fame; Still pleased to praise, yet not afraid to blame; Averse alike to flatter, or offend; Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend."The caesura moves around within each line, sometimes coming after four syllables and sometimes after seven. Moreover, Pope balances a main idea or thesis within each line with a statement of its opposite or antithesis. He displays great ingenuity and wit in his skillful compression of ideas.Stylistic analysis describes how does a language user enhance the impact of the text and discourse with the help of hidden and indirect clues. Now, this type of analysis is widely applied to literary and non-literary text.

Keywords

1. ***Semantic***:connected with the meaning of words and sentences
2. ***Syntactic***: of or according to syntax
3. ***Discourse***: written or spoken communication or debate
4. ***Cognitive***:relating to cognition
5. ***Deviation***: the action of departing from an established course or accepted standard

Self Assessment

1. Leech uses a term of _____ for the poetic traditions.

A. poetic license

B. poetic justice
C. poetic caliber
D. none of these

2. In _____, the poets catch the attention of the reader by 'defamiliarization.
A. parallelism
B. foregrounding
C. deviation
D. none of these

3. Graphological Deviation refers to the unusual use of the _____.
A. pronunciation
B. spelling
C. punctuation
D. intonation

4. _____ deviation refers to the use of new words.
A. Graphological
B. Syntactic
C. Parallelism
D. Lexical

5. The repetition of the same sentence structure but not the same wording is called _____ parallelism.
A. Syntactic
B. Lexical
C. Phonological
D. None of these

6. Leech (1969) and Short (1996) calls the deliberate, artistic repetition of any one or two of the stressed and unstressed syllables as_____ parallelism.
A. Lexical
B. Phonological
C. Syntactic
D. None of these

7. If the words 'dream' and 'roam' are used in the same line of a poem, it is an example of _____.
A. Assonance
B. Phonemes
C. Consonance
D. None of these

8. If the words 'dream' and 'drum' are used in the same line of a poem, it is an example of _____-.

A. Assonance
B. Consonance
C. Simile
D. Reverse rhyme

9. The Rape of the Lock is a mock-epic based upon an actual disagreement between two aristocratic English families during the _____ century.

A. 18th
B. 19th
C. 17th
D. 16th

10. To which of the following texts does Pope not allude to in 'The Rape of the Lock'?

A. Iliad
B. Arms and the Man
C. Odyssey
D. Paradise Lost

11. The word 'cantos' is derived from the Latin _____.

A. Canti
B. Cantonum
C. Cantus
D. Cantes

12. The couplet style was first used by _____ in the Canterbury Tales.

A. Francis Bacon
B. G.B Shaw
C. William Shakespeare
D. Geoffrey Chaucer

13. In the epic poem, 'The Rape of the Lock', the visit to the Cave of spleen parodies the epic visit to the _____.

A. underworld
B. valley
C. hill
D. hell

14. In the epic poem, 'The Rape of the Lock', the game of _____ parodies the heroic games.

A. Cards
B. Ombre
C. DiceCr

D. None of these

15. In the epic poem, 'The Rape of the Lock', the adorning of Belinda parallels the arming of _____.

A. Helen
B. Macbeth
C. Achilles
D. Othello

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	C	4.	D	5.	A
6.	B	7.	C	8.	D	9.	A	10.	B
11.	C	12.	D	13.	A	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. Critically analyze the epic poem 'Rape of the Lock'.
2. Stylistically analyze the epic poem 'Rape of the Lock'.
3. Which stylistic feature of this epic poem distinguishes this poem from other epics?
4. Comment on the style of Alexander Pope.
5. What does the word 'mock' mean in a mock epic?

Further Reading

1. https://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/rapeofthelock/plot-analysis/
2. https://literariness.org/2020/07/09/analysis-of-alexander-popes-the-rape-of-the-lock/

Unit 12:Volpone

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- gain insights into the historical, social, political and economic conditions of Jacobean era
- gain insights into the intriguing features of the Jacobean era
- understand the characteristics of Jacobean drama and the reasons for its decline
- know about the dramatist Ben Jonson and his style of writing drama.

Introduction

Jacobean age, (from Latin Jacobus, "James") is a period of visual and literary arts during the reign of James I of England (1603–25). The distinctions between the early Jacobean and the preceding Elizabethan styles are subtle ones, often merely a question of degree, for although the dynasty changed, there was no distinct stylistic transition. In architecture, the Jacobean age is characterized by a combination of motifs from the late Perpendicular Gothic period with clumsy and imperfectly understood classical details, in which the influence of Flanders was strong. The Tudor pointed arch is common, and in interior work there is considerable simple Tudor paneling and an occasional use of Perpendicular vaulting forms. The Tudor pointed arch is common, and in interior work there is considerable simple Tudor paneling and an occasional use of Perpendicular vaulting forms. Jacobean furniture pieces are usually of oak and are notable for their heavy forms and bulbous legs. It was during the Jacobean period, however, that the designer Inigo Jones introduced the first fully realized Renaissance classical style of architecture into England with his design of the Banqueting House, Whitehall. Jones's style was based on the theories and works of Andrea Palladio, and Palladianism subsequently became a widely adopted architectural style in England. During this period, painting and sculpture lagged architecture in accomplishments because there was no outstanding practitioner of either. The chief of the early Jacobean painters was the talented miniaturist, Isaac Oliver. Most of the Jacobean portraitists, like the sculptors, were foreign-born or foreign-influenced—for example, Marcus Gheerhaerts the Younger, Paul van Somer, Cornelius Johnson, and Daniel Mytens. Their efforts were later surpassed by those of the Flemish painters Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck, who worked in England during the reign of Charles I. In literature, too, many themes and patterns were carried over from the preceding Elizabethan era.

Though rich, Jacobean literature is often darkly questioning. William Shakespeare's greatest tragedies were written between about 1601 and 1607.

Other Jacobean dramatic writers became preoccupied with the problem of evil: the plays of John Webster, John Marston, Thomas Middleton, and George Chapman induce all the terror of tragedy but little of its pity. Comedy was best represented by the acid satire of Ben Jonson and by the varied works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. Another feature of drama at this time, however, was the development of the extravagant courtly entertainment known as the masque, which reached its literary peak in the works of Jonson and Inigo Jones. Jonson's comparatively lucid and graceful verse and the writings of his Cavalier successors constituted one of the two main streams of Jacobean poetry. The other poetic stream lay in the intellectual complexity of John Donne and the Metaphysical poets. In prose, Francis Bacon and Robert Burton were among the writers who displayed a new toughness and flexibility of style. The monumental prose achievement of the era was the great King James Version of the Bible, which first appeared in 1611. Jacobean literature begins with the drama, including some of Shakespeare's greatest, and darkest, plays. The dominant literary figure of James's reign was Ben Jonson, whose varied and dramatic works followed classical models and were enriched by his worldly, peculiarly English wit. His satiric dramas, notably the great Volpone (1606), all take a cynical view of human nature.

Also cynical were the horrific revenge tragedies of John Ford, Thomas Middleton, Cyril Tourneur, and John Webster (the best poet of this grim genre). Novelty was in great demand, and the possibilities of plot and genre were exploited to exhaustion. Still, many excellent plays were written by men such as George Chapman, the masters of comedy Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, and the team of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. Drama continued to flourish until the closing of the theaters at the onset of the English Revolution in 1642. The foremost poets of the Jacobean era, Ben Jonson and John Donne, are regarded as the originators of two diverse poetic traditions—the Cavalier and the metaphysical (see Cavalier poets and metaphysical poets). Jonson and Donne shared not only a common fund of literary resources, but also a dryness of wit and precision of expression. Donne's poetry is distinctive for its passionate intellection, Jonson's for its classicism and urbane guidance of passion. Although George Herbert and Donne were the principal metaphysical poets, the meditative religious poets Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne were also influenced by Donne, as were Abraham Cowley and Richard Crashaw.The greatest of the Cavalier poets was the sensuously lyrical Robert Herrick. Such other Cavaliers as Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, and Richard Lovelace were lyricists in the elegant Johnsonian tradition, though their lyricism turned political during the English Revolution.

Although ranked with metaphysical poets, the highly individual Andrew Marvell partook of the traditions of both Donne and Jonson. Among the leading prose writers of the Jacobean period were the translators who produced the classic King James Version of the Bible (1611) and the divines Lancelot Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor, and John Donne. The work of Francis Bacon helped shape philosophical and scientific methods. Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) offers a varied, virtually encyclopedic view of the moral and intellectual preoccupations of the 17th cent. Like Burton, Sir Thomas Browne sought to reconcile the mysteries of religion with the newer mysteries of science. Izaak Walton, author of The Compleat Angler (1653), produced several graceful biographies of prominent writers. Thomas Hobbes wrote the most influential political treatise of the age, Leviathan (1651). The Jacobean era's most fiery and eloquent author of political tracts (many in defense of Cromwell's government, of which he was a member) was also one of the greatest of all English poets, John Milton. His Paradise Lost (1667) is a Christian epic of encompassing scope. In Milton, the literary and philosophical heritage of the Renaissance merged with Protestant political and moral conviction.

12.1 Intriguing features of Jacobean Era

- The Jacobean era marks the beginning of the reign of King James I who ruled over a unified kingdom comprising of England and Scotland.
- During Jacobean era, there was emergence of the tobacco industry, and it was consumed in enormous amounts.

- Architectural style of the Jacobean era was an amalgamation of several styles.
- However, the architectural pattern remained like the type used during the Tudor era.
- Renaissance classical style of architecture was introduced by Inigo Jones.
- It was sometime during the rule of King James I that Britain started establishing colonies. One such colony was America.
- There was a change in the way in which chairs were made.
- During this period, chairs were made with higher back. They even had rectangular seats.
- Most noted event of this era took place was when a group of English Catholics plotted to attack the Parliament and the King in the Palace of Westminster.
- There was a tremendous advancement of modern science which was influenced by Francis Bacon.
- During the Jacobean period, people were religious.
- However, they also believed in the existence of witchcraft and supernatural beings and activities.
- It was during the Jacobean period that popular Shakespearean plays like Tempest and Macbeth were written.
- Tragedy and Satire was at its peak during the Jacobean era.

12.2 Characteristics of Jacobean Drama

Jacobean drama (i.e., the drama of the age of James-I <1603-1625>) was a dark form of the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The Elizabethan age was the golden age of English drama. But with the turn of the century, the drama in English also took a turn. It does not mean that there were no dramatists left. There were certainly many of them, but none of them could come near Shakespeare.

Decline of Jacobean Era:

After the turn of the 16th century and the passing away of Elizabeth, the theatre continued to command popularity, although the Puritan opposition was stiffening. But the taste was changing: the audiences for a stronger fare. The playwrights attempted to fulfill the desire of the audience, but it lacked organic unity which a supreme art must possess. In the Jacobean period, there was a steep decline in drama.

Following are the main reasons behind the decline of drama in this age:

Change of Patrons:

In the Elizabethan period, the drama was patronized by the feudal lords, but from the time of the accession of James-I, dramatists depended on the king, the queen and the royal domination. The dramatists depended on the royal favor. In this way, the theatre was cut off from common life and no longer remained a national institution as it was at the time of Shakespeare. The dramatists cared less for men in the street and women in the kitchen.

They delighted the court

While Beaumont and Fletcher were writing, the theatre was gradually losing its hold on the middle and lower classes. It marked the decline of drama.

Lack of Genius

After Shakespeare, there was no other dramatist who could fill his space which naturally marked the decline of Drama.

Poor Characterization

Lack of creative power in the art of characterization was also one of the major causes. The dramatists repeated such characters as cheats, bullies, gamblers etc. In the place of Shakespeare's immortal characters like heroes, heroines, villains & clowns (jokers).

Lack of Dramatic Technique

The decline could also be seen in dramatic technique. The dramatists could not maintain the 'mighty line' of Marlowe & their blank verse became weak & rapid.

Art of Plot Construction

In the art of plot-construction, except for Ben Jonson's "Volpone" and "The Alchemist" and "The White Devil" of Webster, we find the signs of decline. Too often, plot-construction shows carelessness in detail and want of coherence. There are effective episodes but no structural growth.

Imbalance in Drama

The Shakespearian balance between romance and realism is poorly replaced either by narrow social activities or by romantic excess.

Opposition by Puritans

The Puritan opposition to the drama is also responsible for the decline of drama during this age. Ever since the drama became popular in England, the Puritans waged a war against it. They regarded drama and all forms of entertainment as the devil's work, to be avoided by men and women. Thus, after the death of Shakespeare, the drama became to show signs of decline in morals, plot construction, characterization, and technique. The spirit had passed in 1616; the corpse remained to be burnt and it was burnt 1642.

12.3 Introduction to Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson was born in June 1572, on the site of what is now Charring Cross station in London. His father died shortly before his birth. His mother remarried an expert bricklayer, one Robert Brett. Jonson was educated at the nearby Westminster School under the noted humanist scholar and educationalist William Camden. Jonson later paid Camden the compliment of being the man 'to whom I owe/ All that I am in arts, all that I know'. For some reason his education at Westminster was never completed, and instead of university he was apprenticed to his bricklayer stepfather. Jonson abandoned this profession to serve for a short time as a soldier in the English army fighting the Spanish in the Netherlands. Here he claimed to have defeated an enemy soldier in single combat and taken his weapons and armor.

Back in England he returned to his 'wonted study' and married Anne Lewis in 1594. By 1597, he was an actor in the Earl of Pembroke's company and had become a playwright. It appears that he remained part of the Bricklayers' Guild as late as 1611; he was, it seems, to have need of another source of income at times in the troubled few years ahead. In 1597, Jonson collaborated on a lost comedy, 'The Isle of Dogs', which was condemned by the Queen's Privy Council as 'a lewd play . . . containing very seditious and slanderous matter'. After two months in prison, he began to write for the impresario Philip Henslowe, for whom he produced the play which established him on the London stage, Every Man in His Humor. Shortly after the play's first performance, however, Jonson killed the actor Gabriel Spencer in a fight outside a Hoxton tavern. We do not know the origin of the dispute. Spencer had been imprisoned with Jonson for his part in The Isle of Dogs. Jonson escaped hanging because he could plead 'benefit of clergy', an archaic privilege from ecclesiastical law which protected the literate from execution at the hands of the crown.

All his property was nevertheless confiscated, and he found himself temporarily back in prison for debt in late 1599. Jonson stated that during his time in prison after killing Spencer he converted to Catholicism and remained a Catholic for the next twelve years. In the final years of Elizabeth's reign Jonson wrote the plays often known as the 'comical satires': Every Man Out of His Humor (1599), Cynthia's Revels (1600) and Poetaster (1601). These last two plays contained barely

concealed mockery of the work of two other dramatists, John Marston and Thomas Dekker, who in turn lampooned Jonson in their own plays. This so-called 'war of the theatres' was soon over, and Jonson turned to tragedy. We know that he was paid by Henslowe for 'additions' to Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy in 1602 and wrote a lost play about Richard III as well as his first Roman tragedy, Sejanus (1603). By this time Jonson was living under the patronage of noblemen, firstly Sir Robert Townshend and then Lord Aubigny. We know he was away from his family when his eldest son Benjamin died in 1603. Sejanus once more landed him in trouble with the Privy Council, accused of 'popery and treason'. Neither this nor his Catholicism prevented him from being commissioned to write for King James I's coronation festivities in 1604, nor from being employed by the Privy Council to give safe conduct to a Catholic priest who was supposed to have evidence about the Gunpowder Plot conspiracy of 1605.

The new regime showed favor and he began to prosper. Jonson continued to write masques and entertainment for the court throughout James's life.

12.4 Ben Jonson as a Dramatist

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) produced a total of seventeen dramas, including fifteen comedies and two tragedies, and wrote portions of numerous others. As Anne Barton points out in her introduction, Jonson's plays are now read and performed less frequently than they deserve. Jonson wrote not so much to entertain the audience as to make a moral statement—to stake out a moral territory, to weigh his own time against Augustan Rome and find it wanting.

His neoclassical view of the Roman ideal cut in two important directions—one leading him to praise those elements that he admired in his society as approaching or equaling their best expression in Roman civilization and another to revile those tendencies and flaws deflecting man from the ideal and resulting in degradation. In his poetry, one frequently encounters the former approach, notably in the poems addressed to aristocratic patrons such as Lucy, Countess of Bedford, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. Jonson could view aristocratic society as approaching the ideal, a dazzling and inviting world of manners, taste, arms, and arts accompanied by generosity, grace, and magnanimity.In the plays, however, one encounters a far different tone. Set primarily in urban middle- and lower-class environments, they represent the most extensive expression of Jonson's satiric nature.

The Johnsonian dramatic tone owes more to classical satire than to any other literary form, with a dominant moral edge in the manner of the Roman satirist Juvenal.Jonson delights in presenting the typical butt of his satire—a character demonstrating excesses, vices, eccentricities, or follies that must be reformed, purged, and flailed.He sets about his task with energy and unflagging determination and brings his characters, if not always to dread correction, at least to an appropriate end.Even the amplitude and energy that inform English Renaissance literature, as manifested in the catalogs of trees and flowers that enrich and ornament the poetry of Edmund Spenser and John Milton, create unusual effects in the dramas.In Jonson, amplitude becomes a vehicle not for enrichment but for the satiric purpose of exposing vanity and excesses.His collocations of nouns represent the unpleasant aspects of urban life, reflecting human appetites that he is at pains to condemn.In her traditional scholarly analysis of all the dramas, Barton advances no comprehensive thesis. Instead, she selects several related themes for emphasis. In her view, Jonson's development as a dramatist is more closely related to his life than has been previously realized.She often uses his contemporaries, particularly William Shakespeare, as points of comparison, and she classifies Jonson not so much as a neoclassicist but as an Elizabethan. She often uses his contemporaries, particularly William Shakespeare, as points of comparison, and she classifies Jonson not so much as a neoclassicist but as an Elizabethan.

12.5 Introduction to Volpone

The play is dedicated to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, both of which had recently awarded Jonson honorary doctorates at the time of the play's writing. He briefly discusses the moral intentions of the play and its debt to classical drama. In the Argument, Jonson provides a brief summary of the play's plot in the form of an acrostic on Volpone's name. The prologue then introduces the play to the viewing audience, informing them that "with a little luck," it will be a hit;

Jonson ends by promising that the audience's cheeks will turn red from laughter after viewing his work.These opening parts of the play, before we are introduced to the action, may seem superfluous. But they help us understand the play in several ways. First, in the banal sense; the Argument, as Jonson terms it, provides in brief encapsulated form the premise of the play, a premise that will be fully introduced in the first scene.The Dedication, however, gives us a clue as to Jonson's intentions in writing Volpone. First of all, he is intent on writing a "moral" play. By taking to task those "poetasters" (his derogatory term for an inferior playwright) who have disgraced the theatrical profession with their immoral work, Jonson highlights the moral intentions of his play.His play will make a moral statement. And it will do so in line with the traditions of drama followed by classical dramatists, that is, the dramatists of ancient Greece. This connection to the past further indicates that the play we are about to read is a work of serious intellectual and moral weight.

But, in the Prologue, we see a different side of Jonson. This side of Jonson is boastful—this play was written in five weeks, says Jonson, all the jokes are mine, I think it's going to be a huge hit, and you are all going to laugh hysterically until your cheeks turn red. The Prologue sets a boisterous tone that the rest of the play will follow.

12.6 Volpone: Plot summary

Volpone, a Venetian nobleman, has no relative to make his heir; he must name someone his beneficiary. Several rivals try to attain his favor by bringing the sick Volpone gifts that they hope will be returned tenfold. Mosca, a clever parasite to Volpone, encourages the three major gulls to give until it hurts. These birds of prey are Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old miser about to die himself; and Corvino, a rich merchant and husband to Celia, a beautiful lady of Venice. Also naively competing for Volpone's wealth is Lady Would-be, the affected wife of an English knight, Sir Politic Would-be. After each gull is fleeced before our eyes, Mosca encourages Volpone to think of seeking a greater treasure than gold: the wife of Corvino. After a sensuous description by Mosca, Volpone resolves to see this paragon of beauty.

As the second act begins, Volpone appears beneath Celia's window disguised as a mountebank. Jealous Corvino drives him away upon discovering his wife in an upper window. While Corvino threatens his wife with closer incarceration, Volpone sings to Mosca of her beauty and his desire. Mosca hatches a plot to secure Celia for his master. He tells Corvino that the mountebank's oil, purchased for Volpone by Corbaccio, has revived the flagging health of the fox. However, if Volpone is to live on, he must sleep with some young woman. The others are seeking the cure for Volpone, and Corvino must hurry or lose his investment. Corvino wisely suggests a courtesan, but Mosca slyly rejects this plan, reasoning that an artful quean might cheat them all. Finally, Corvino offers his wife. He is convinced that she is safe, and Mosca is sent to tell Volpone the good news.

Act III reveals Mosca and Bonario conversing in the street. For some reason, Mosca is telling Bonario of Corbaccio's intention to disinherit him and inviting the son to witness the deed at Volpone's house. Meanwhile, Lady Would-be visits Volpone and nearly talks him to death. Mosca gets rid of her by saying that Sir Politic was lately seen rowing in a gondola with a cunning courtesan. Corvino arrives, dragging his unwilling wife into the fox's lair; Volpone, left alone with the shrinking lady, is not successful in his persuasive attempts to seduce her. Just as he is about to take her by force, Bonario leaps from his hiding place and denounces Volpone and spirits the lady to safety.

Mosca saves Volpone from the police by explaining the incident to the three gulls and persuading them to tell his contrived story in court. Mosca says that Bonario, impatient to see Volpone, discovered the fox with Celia, seized the lady, and made her swear that Volpone had attempted to rape her. The plan is to get an injunction against Bonario.

Act IV begins with the subplot of Sir Politic Would-be and Peregrine. Sir Politic is discovered entertaining his fellow Englishman with his naive understanding of politics. Lady Would-be interrupts the conversation and mistakes Peregrine for the courtesan. She apologizes upon

discovering her mistake, but Peregrine leaves in a huff and promises to take his revenge for the affront.

At the court, Voltore succeeds in making Celia and Bonario look like lovers. Mosca persuades Lady Would-be to testify that Celia was the bawd in the gondola with her husband. Volpone makes his entrance on a stretcher to demonstrate his impotence.

All augurs well for the rogues as the fifth act begins. But Volpone cannot leave well enough alone. He sends his servants to announce his demise and waits for the gulls to come to claim their inheritance. Mosca is the heir! The parasite flaunts his knowledge of their wrongdoing to the birds of prey and they leave in despair. Disguised as a police officer, Volpone follows them to taunt them further.

Meanwhile, Peregrine, disguised as a merchant, comes to Sir Politic'shouse and tells the knight that the police are seeking him because he has plotted to overthrow the Venetian state. When Sir Politic hides in a tortoise shell, Peregrine calls in some other merchants to mock and humiliate the foolish Englishman.

At the court, the three gulls, enraged by Mosca and Volpone and the loss of their hopes, decide to tell the truth. They accuse Mosca of being the lying villain who created the whole plot. Mosca is summoned and arrives with another plot in mind. He will extricate Volpone from this predicament, but the fox must remain dead and he, Mosca, must continue as the heir. Volpone throws off his disguise and the entire intrigue is revealed.

The court sentences Mosca to the galleys; Volpone is deprived of his goods and sent to a hospital for incurables. The gulls are deprived of a legal practice, a wife, and a fortune. Celia returns to her father with her dowry trebled, and Bonario is his father's heir immediately.

Summary

Volpone is an old, wealthy man without children living in Venice, Italy. With Mosca, his parasite (which means a hanger-on, a low-born servant or follower living off a wealthier person), Volpone stages an elaborate scam. Volpone pretends to be deathly ill, and is leading several people on to believe that they will be named his heir. Chief among them areVoltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an even older, sicker man; and Corvino, a merchant. Mosca convinces each man that he is the front runner to be named heir, and each one showers Volpone with gifts and gold hoping to remain on his good side. After fooling each man, and even getting Corbaccio to disinherit his son, Volpone learns that Corvino has a beautiful wife (named Celia), and he decides to try to woo her. Outside of Corvino's home elsewhere in Venice, the English knight Sir Politic Would-be meets a fellow English traveler named Peregrine. Sir Politic is extremely gullible about news from home, and Peregrine asks him for travel advice because he thinks Sir Politic is so amusing.Disguised as assistants to a mountebank (an Italian swindler), Mosca and Nano, Volpone's dwarf, enter the square where Sir Politic and Peregrine have been talking.

Keywords

1. ***Venetian***: belonging to Venice
2. ***Knight*** :a man who served his sovereign or lord as a mounted soldier in armor
3. ***Disguise*** :give (someone or oneself) a different appearance in order to conceal one's identity
4. ***Prologue*** :an opening to a story that establishes the context and gives background details
5. ***Purge***: rid (someone or something) of an unwanted quality, condition, or feeling

Self Assessment

1. What happens in the scene II of Act V in the play?

A. Volpone wants to be over with the con.
B. Mosca deceives Volpone
C. Corvino ensnares Celia
D. Volpone gets killed

2. Whom does Volpone pretend to make his heir?
A. Corvino
B. Mosca
C. Celia
D. Corbaccio

3. Who injures Mosca with a sword?
A. Bonario
B. Volpone
C. Corvino
D. Corbaccio

4. Who teaches about life in Venice to Peregrine?
A. Volpone
B. Sir Politic would be
C. Celia
D. Mosca

5. The first scene of the Act III of the play is set in _____.
A. Volpone's house
B. Court
C. Mosca's house
D. Venice

6. This scene consists entirely of a soliloquy by _____.
A. Volpone
B. Mosca
C. Bonario
D. Celia

7. Who is Peregrine?
A. English traveler
B. Lawyer
C. Realtor
D. None of these

8. Sir Politic explains that is was his wife's wish that the two should go to Venice, for she desired to pick up some of the local _____.

A. clothes
B. culture
C. drinks
D. food

9. The play is dedicated to the universities of _____ and _____.
A. Oxford and Cambridge
B. Yale and Stanford
C. Harvard and Princeton
D. Yale and Harvard

10. In the prologue to _____, Jonson declares that 'this pen/ Did never aim to grieve, but better men'.
A. The Alchemist
B. Volpone
C. Every man is his humor
D. Every man out of his humor

11. Jonson stated that during his time in prison after killing Spencer he converted to _____.
A. Protestantism
B. Catholicism
C. Judaism
D. Jainism

12. Jacobean era marks the beginning of the reign of King _____.
A. James I
B. Henry IV
C. Richard
D. John

13. Renaissance classical style of architecture was introduced by _____.
A. Francis Bacon
B. Inigo Jones
C. Henry
D. Thomas Richardson

14. Ben Jonson is intent on writing a _____ play.
A. miracle
B. moral
C. social
D. none of these

15. Anne Barton often uses Jonson's contemporaries, particularly _____ to draw a comparison with him.

A. William Shakespeare
B. John Milton
C. Christopher Marlowe
D. None of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	A	4.	B	5.	A
6.	B	7.	A	8.	B	9.	A	10.	A
11.	B	12.	A	13.	B	14.	B	15.	A

Review Questions

1. What is the first impression of Volpone?
2. Does the beginning of the play indicate anything about the end of the play?
3. Discuss the happenings in Act I of the play.
4. What is the climax in the play?
5. Can you think of another piece of writing that conveys the same moral message?

Further Reading

1. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/nov/04/theatre3
2. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/theater/reviews/volpone-with-stephen-spinella-at-lucille-lortel-theater.html

Unit 13: Volpone

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- understand the meaning of city comedy and beast fable
- analyse the play 'Volpone' as a city comedy and beast fable
- understand the thematic concerns of the play "Volpone" written by Ben Jonson
- analyze Volpone as a Satire

Introduction

City Comedy

It was a kind of comic drama produced in the London theatres of the early 17th century, characterized by its contemporary urban subject-matter and its portrayal, often satirical, of middle-class life and manners.The principal examples are John Marston's The Dutch Courtezan (1605), Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair (1614), and Thomas Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1613).

Our Scene is London, 'cause we would make known,
No country's mirth is better than our own.
No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
Bawd, squire, imposter, many persons more

— Ben Jonson, The Alchemist(1610).

Emerging from Ben Jonson's late-Elizabethan comedies of humors (1598–1599), the conventions of city comedy developed rapidly in the first decade of the Jacobean era, as one playwright's innovations were soon adopted by others, such that by about 1605 the new genre was fully established.Its principal playwrights were Jonson himself, Thomas Middleton, and John Marston,

though many others also contributed to its development, including Thomas Heywood, Thomas Dekker, John Day, and John Webster.Once the companies of boy players—the Children of Paul's and the Children of the Chapel—had resumed public performances from 1600 onwards, most of their plays were city comedies.The closest that William Shakespeare's plays come to the genre is the slightly earlier The Merry Wives of Windsor (c. 1597), which is his only play set entirely in England; it avoids the caustic satire of city comedy, however, in preference for a more bourgeois mode (with its dual romantic plots governed by socio-economic not love or sex), while its setting, Windsor, is a town rather than a city.

In contrast to the adventurous chronicles of Elizabethan comedy, such as Thomas Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday (1599) or George Peele's The Old Wives' Tale (c. 1590), or the intricately plotted romantic comedies of Shakespeare and John Lyly, city comedy was more realistic (excluding magical or marvelous elements) and sharp and satirical in tone. It portrayed a broad range of characters from different ranks (often focused on citizens), employing "deeds and language such as men do use", as Jonson put it, and was usually set in London.During the Tudor period the Reformation had produced a gradual shift to Protestantism and much of London passed from church to private ownership. The Royal Exchange was founded in this period. Mercantilism grew, and monopoly trading companies such as the East India Company were established, with trade expanding to the New World.London became the principal North Sea port, with migrants arriving from England and abroad. The population rose from an estimated 50,000 in 1530 to about 225,000 in 1605. City comedies depict London as a hotbed of vice and folly; in particular, Jonson's Epicoene, Middleton's A Trick to Catch the Old One and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, and Marston's The Dutch Courtesan.Verna Foster has argued that John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore (c. 1629–1633) re-works many of the features of city comedy within a tragic drama.

1.1 Beast fable

A fable (also called an apologue) is a short narrative, in prose or verse, that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behavior; usually, at its conclusion, either the narrator or one of the characters states the moral in the form of an epigram. Most common is the beast fable, in which animals talk and act like the human types they represent.In the familiar fable of the fox and the grapes, the fox—after exerting all his wiles to get the grapes hanging beyond his reach, but in vain—concludes that they are probably sour anyway: the express moral is that human beings belittle what they cannot get. The modern expression "sour grapes" derives from this fable.The beast fable is a very ancient form that existed in Egypt, India, and Greece. The fables in Western cultures derive mainly from the stories that were, probably mistakenly, attributed to Aesop, a Greek slave of the sixth century BC.In the seventeenth century a Frenchman, Jean de la Fontaine, wrote a set of witty fables in verse which are the classics of this literary kind. Chaucer's "The Nun's Priest's Tale," the story of the cock and the fox, is a beast fable.The American Joel Chandler Harris wrote many Uncle Remus stories that are beast fables, told in southern African-American dialect, whose origins have been traced to folktales in the oral literature of West Africa that feature a trickster like Uncle Remus' Brer Rabbit.A trickster is a character in a story who persistently uses his wiliness, and gift of gab, to achieve his ends by outmaneuvering or outwitting other characters. A counterpart in many Native American cultures is the beast fables that feature Coyote as the central trickster.James Thurber's Fables for Our Time (1940) is a recent set of short fables; and in Animal Farm (1945), George Orwell expanded the beast fable into a sustained satire on Russian totalitarianism under Stalin in the mid-twentieth century.

1.2 Volpone as a City Comedy

Not only is Volpone (1606) Ben Jonson's most well-known work, it also, according to some critics, marks the turning point of his career. The play is about how Volpone, the Venetian Magnifico, tricks the old fortune-hunters Voltore (the vulture), Corbaccio (the raven) and Corvino (the crow) into believing that they will get his inheritance when he dies.With the help of Mosca (the fly, the parasite), Volpone pretends to be sick and lies in a huge bed onstage, weaving one plot with another, making 'so rare a music out of discords'.This makes the old Corbaccio think that he can outlive Volpone, so that he disinherits his son Bonario; while Corvino, who gets jealous because his wife Celia throws down a handkerchief to the mountebank (who is actually Volpone), makes himself a virtual cuckold.However, since the fox 'glories more in the cunning purchase of wealth than in the glad possession', he does not know when to stop and is sold out by the fly and has to expose everything in the end, preferring to ruin their scheme rather than allow the latter to outwit

him.The play has been widely discussed and studied, and often performed, and remains Jonson's most popular piece, but it still poses many problems.

"Of all the dramatists of his time, Jonson is probably the one whom the present age would find the most sympathetic, if it knew him. There is a brutality, a lack of sentiment, a polished surface, a handling of large gold designs in brilliant colours, which ought to attract about three thousand people in London and elsewhere."

-T.S. Eliot

Eliot's comment on Jonson is still as relevant as ever.In the 2015 production of Volpone by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratfordupon-Avon, the play's background is moved from seventeenth-century Venice to the current world, which is struggling with the aftermath of the financial tsunami of 2008.Eliot's words and the RSC production both suggest a point: Volpone is still a play that resonates with us, the twenty-first-century readers and audiences. They raise another question: can we understand the play and its comedy from a twentieth and twenty-first-century perspective?For example, can we interpret the play on the basis of the more recent theories of comedy, or critical and cultural theory, so that it would be even more relevant to current audiences and readers?Volpone and other Jonsonian and early modern city comedies comment on the nascent early modern capitalism through concepts such as death, castration and nothingness.

Each of Jonson's bastards provides us with an angle to interpret his comedy.

However, they also signify the construction and the powerful presence of the city subjects, as they embody a multiplication of identities that is linked with the transformative power of gold, performance and signifiers.Reading these bastards together, we can say that Jonson's city comedy is built upon a series of comic misrecognitions. These bastards are significant because of their slippages of identity and their refusal to be categorized.The dwarf is the Vice, the hunchback, the ape and the zany; the androgyne is simultaneously the fool, the hermaphrodite and the epicene, who is related to the eunuch. Nano, Androgyno and Castrone are interrelated, while Mosca, the parasite, does not differ much from them.In other words, while the early modern city comedies relate to the 'bastardised' nature of a city subject, they celebrate new forms of identities emerging in the city.Responding to disability studies, this book agrees that 'one of the tasks for a developing consciousness of disability issues is the attempt . . . to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal'.

Studying Jonson's comedies through the bastards allows us to see that while his comedies laugh at the city and its subject, there is something slipping away from the control of the author, the text and the audience. This book reverses the concept of proper and improper: while the seemingly 'normal' subjects are indeed 'deformed', the recognition and the acknowledgement of the 'deformity' within us represent an affirmation of life and comedy.Jonson's city comedy relates to the anxiety of being 'improper', or the ambiguity between proper and improper. If money de-legitimates, corrupts, destroys paternity, and paternity destroys the future, comedy is a matter of begetting an improper issue.Jokes can be seen as the affirmation of the improper, because they lift the barrier on repressed or censored material, as Freud argued in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. For Freud, the purpose of jokes is either to be hostile, which serves 'the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defense'; or to be obscene, which serves 'the purpose of exposure'.Much in the interlude contains double entendres, of which a good example is Nano ending with the 'cobbler's cock'.While this is a reference to Lucian, as suggested by Dutton, there is a sexual connotation in the word 'cock', raising the question of whether the origin of the transmigration is related to the phallus, yet at the same time ridiculing it.

1.3 Volpone as a Beast fable

One of the more obvious influences on the play is the beast fable, which is defined as a short tale in which "animals and birds speak and bebave like human beings [...] usually illustrating some moral point."As Dutton observes, "no other play of its era is so fully peopled with characters who are explicitly animals, birds, and insects, behaving exactly in the manner of Aesop's archetypal beasts, as the text knowingly reminds us."Jonson even gives his characters names which identify them as their animal counterparts in fables. There is Volpone, the protagonist, whose character is almost identical to that of his namesake, the fox. Like the animal, he "feigns death in order to catch predatory birds."The similarities do not end with the actual creature, however. Volpone also shares

features which have been ascribed to the fox in mythology. He certainly qualifies as a "crafty shape-shifter", since he spends a large part of the play in disguise, fooling almost everyone around him.The protagonist himself makes references to the resemblance between his plot and events in the fables of Aesop:

"Good!—and not a fox/Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights, / Mocking a gaping crow?"

Volpone's victims are just as aptly named: Voltore, Corvino, and Corbaccio, the vulture, crow, and raven. They all personify the faults which were associated with the birds whose names they carry.Vultures "were associated with avarice, particularly in lawyers, but also with their persuasiveness."Voltore certainly fits the bill perfectly, as he demonstrates in his pursuit of Volpone's riches and his manipulation of the Avocatori in court. Corvino and Corbaccio match their animal foils just as well.The former's treatment of his wife can be seen as an ironic hint to the "medieval fable of a white crow turned black by Apollo for tattling on his wife's infidelity", while the latter's treatment of his son corresponds to the idea of ravens neglecting their offspring. Mosca is an equally good example. Volpone, other characters, and he himself constantly call him a "parasite".His relationship to his master reflects the relationship between the parasitic fly and the fox. At first he only lives off Volpone's possessions and seems to help him with his schemes, but later in the play he turns on his master.Like the flies, Mosca turns out to be "the best cure for the 'fox's evil'."

Of course, this does not mean that Volpone is a beast fable. The characters may be called Voltore or Covino, but they are still completely human and not just animals acting like humans.

1.4 Thematic concerns

Greed

Volpone's satire is directed against "avarice," which can be thought of as greed that extends not just to money but also to all objects of human desire. The play's main thesis is stated by Volpone himself, "What a rare punishment / Is avarice to itself."The punishment—and the central irony of the play—is that while greed drives the search for money, power, and respect, it ends up making everyone in the play look foolish, contemptible, and poorer, both spiritually and financially. A similar idea is stated by both Celia, when she asks in III.vii, "Whither [where] is shame fled human breasts?" and by the judge at the end of the play in his plea that the audience should "learn" from the play what happens to those who succumb to greed, emphasizing that the play's stance on greed is a didactic one, intended to teach the audience what greed's real consequences are.In addition to having a reputation for commerce, Venice (and Italy in general) was stereotypically known for greed and corruption, both moral and political. Volpone's subplot involves fear of spying, but the play's primary interest in corruption is of a different kind; more than political corruption, Volpone explores the ways in which people can become morally corrupted.The Italian men in the play are all corrupted by avarice, which means greed or excessive desire. According to Jonson, desire itself is not inherently evil. Rather, it's avarice—excessive desire—that becomes morally corrupting.Avarice is first presented (as hinted at in the Money and Commerce theme), as financial greed. Again, desire for money isn't inherently bad, but the characters in Volpone become corrupted once that desire is excessive. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are obsessed with becoming Volpone's heir because they hope to inherit his fortune. Their greed is so strong that they have no regard for Volpone's life; Corbaccio even overtly expresses glee when Mosca lists Volpone's fake symptoms and diseases. Volpone's subplot involves fear of spying, but the play's primary interest in corruption is of a different kind; more than political corruption, Volpone explores the ways in which people can become morally corrupted.

All three of the hopeful heirs are driven to extreme moral lapses by their greed, each of which violates a key aspect of society. Voltore, the lawyer, commits perjury and helps Mosca to deceive the court, the play's ultimate source of punishment, authority, and justice. Corbaccio is convinced to disinherit his son, challenging the fundamental means by which wealth was preserved. (Though it could be argued that he only disinherited his son to win Volpone's fortune, thereby increasing the fortune that Corbaccio's son would eventually inherit.) Greed is also sufficient to convince Corvino to break the sanctity of marriage and offer his wife up to Volpone.Volpone is greedy for money, but his downfall is ultimately caused by excessive greed for pleasure, showing that greed comes in many forms and that, in excess, it is all consuming.Volpone takes immense pleasure in fooling and swindling Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, and it's his inability to stop and settle for the pleasure

he's already had that brings him to his demise. After he has almost been discovered and still managed to get away with his plots, Volpone is driven to try to pull off an even more excessive one, going as far to fake his death. This fake death then provides opportunity for Mosca to succumb to greed and turn on Volpone. Victory, then, and excess of anything (especially wealth and pleasure) are corrupting. Put simply, desire for too much of anything is bad.

While the Italian men in the play are morally corrupted by greed in many forms, the play also explores the way Englishmen could be morally corrupted by Italian influence. This dynamic is explored through Sir Politic Would-Be and Peregrine, two English travelers abroad in Italy. Sir Politic offers to help teach Peregrine how to properly be Italian without corrupting his more reserved, English nature. Neither man becomes corrupted in the same sense that the other major characters are (a ruinous obsession with wealth or pleasure), but Peregrine does stage an elaborate ruse to prank Sir Politic, complete with disguises and costumes, which suggests that his time in Venice did influence him to use the type of trickery that Volpone and Mosca abuse.The play's moral stance towards greed and corruption is outlined by Volpone at the beginning of the play, despite the fact that even he eventually falls prey to it. Volpone says, "What a rare punishment is avarice to itself."The act of being greedy necessarily brings on its own punishment. He is referring to his would-be heirs here, but also unwittingly foretelling his own downfall.Audiences might root for Volpone in his first plots and take pleasure in his ability to manipulate others, but Volpone's desire for pleasure becomes so excessive and insatiable that the play turns on him and ends with his punishment. The harsh sentencing rendered at the end of the play reinforces Jonson's moral lesson to avoid excess: all the men are stripped of their wealth, and it is implied that Volpone will lose his life for his own acquiescence to avarice.

1.5 Money & Commerce

The driving force of the play's plot is desire for money, which propels the three men trying to steal Volpone's fortune and drives Volpone in his attempt to manipulate and swindle them. In the play's opening scene, Volpone shows how much the Italians value money when he delivers a blasphemous speech in which he calls money "the world's soul" and praises it like a god.Money, he says, is everything, and whoever has money is naturally imbued with nobility, valiance, honesty, and wisdom. Numerous other analogies are also used during the play that stress money's importance.Talking to Volpone's fortune, for example, Mosca tells money to "multiply," which personifies wealth by invoking reproduction.Throughout the play, money is also described, through medicinal and alchemical imagery, as the best, purest cure for all ailments, expanding on Volpone's claim that money makes everything better.

In a final, extreme example, Mosca leads Corvino to believe that he will act as Corvino's servant, and he says that for this employment he owes his very being to Corvino. Mosca thereby substitutes money and employment for a divine creator, who would typically be credited for a person's existence. It's a telling substitution, because, in the play, material pursuits become a sort of religion for those obsessed with money.Such excessive emphasis on money is a satire on Venice's stereotypical obsession with commerce. In one sense, Ben Jonson's satire of commerce is purely comedic and ridiculous. Sir Politic Would-Be plans numerous farfetched entrepreneurial schemes with the hope of becoming rich, all the while being ridiculed by Peregrine. This absurd subplot goes as far as Sir Politic pretending to be an imported turtle.But the play also gives a more serious satire in the main plot, in which money is depicted as dangerous and corrupting. The play shows that people are willing to do anything for money, which leads to moral lapses.Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvio, and even Lady Would-Be become convinced that they will inherit Volpone's fortune, and all of them compromise their values and are easily manipulated by Mosca. Corvino is even convinced to offer his wife up as a sexual partner for Volpone to secure his chances at the fortune.

Much of the emphasis on commerce and money comes from the English stereotype of Italians (and in particular Venetians). English playwrights like Jonson saw in Italy a dangerous society in which wealth, competition, and materialism were valued over morality.Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, for example, concerns money and desire for wealth taken to the extreme, and it is also set in Venice (as its title suggests). Part of Jonson's mission as a playwright is to leave the audience with a lesson, and so his satire of the Italian obsession with commerce also expresses the fear that London would fall prey to the same obsession and become morally bankrupt in the pursuit of wealth. In

other words, Jonson feared that London would turn into an English version of Venice, in which citizens are fatally, blasphemously obsessed with wealth. The play thus hopes to dissuade viewers and readers from allowing financial matters to outweigh moral ones. This message is heavily reinforced by the play's ending, in which none of the principal characters wind up with any fortune, and Volpone himself winds up with a near death sentence. Money can be taken away easily, since it is impermanent, but the implications of moral lapses are eternal.

1.6 Theatre VS. Reality

Like other Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, Jonson explores the relationship between appearance and reality, of seeming versus being—which, of course, evokes the theatre itself.

At first glance, much in the play is as it seems. Certain appearances and labels (names, for example) are indicative of reality. Volpone, the fox, is a sly trickster hoping to fool other animals. Mosca, the fly, is his servant, buzzing around and whispering lies into peoples' ears.Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, the vulture, raven, and crow respectively, act like birds of prey, scavenging for Volpone's wealth on his (apparent) deathbed. Most of the play's other characters also have allegorical names that reveal their true selves at first glance. This effect is used for humor (the dwarf has the deadpan name of Nano, which means "dwarf") and to reinforce the play's sense of morality, as the virtuous characters Bonario and Celia are named after, respectively, "good" and "heaven."While Jonson merges many sources and complicates the typical morality play, the plot of Volpone is essentially that of a simple animal fable in which the fox uses cunning to trick birds out of their meals.Appearance, then, can be indicative of reality. At the same time, the trickery in the play suggests that appearance cannot always be trusted. Volpone is filled with disguise, deception, and theatre. The characters constantly stage performances to confuse and manipulate on another.Volpone pretends to be mortally ill as part of his ruse, which includes a costume and makeup to appear more convincing. In a completely contrasting role, he also acts as an over-the-top mountebank selling a healing elixir, and later he acts as a court deputy.

Mosca facilitates much of this deception; he deceives Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino into believing that they each will be Volpone's heir, acting as a writer and a director of the play's tricks. Mosca's skills, then, are performance and improvisation—in other words, obscuring reality with theatrical appearances. At one point, Volpone even praises Mosca for his "quick fiction," which draws him into parallel with the playwright himself, since Jonson's "quick comedy" is praised in the play's prologue. As the play unfolds, though, Jonson begins to suggest some of the dangers of deception: some of the disguises in the play, for example, become so convincing they threaten to become real—Volpone worries that pretending to be diseased will cause his health to decline, and the ruse in which Volpone makes Mosca his heir threatens to become reality and rob Volpone of his fortune. Ultimately, though, the ruses are all revealed. Jonson's opinion on theatre, as indicated in the prologue, is that it should be entertaining and beneficial; theatre can be funny, but it should still contain some moral lesson.In this play, the moral lesson is reinforced through the punishment of pretty much all of the major characters. Volpone and Mosca are exposed and punished for their deception, and so are Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, who by the end of the play have been roped into one of Mosca's ruses.After all the plots have been revealed in court, Bonario says, "Heaven will not let such gross crimes be hid." This line can be used to express the play's overall treatment of appearance and reality. Appearances can be convincing and deceptive, and they can be manipulated for positive gain. However, certain realities—fundamental truths, goodness, and evil—will always make themselves known, despite any attempts to change or hide their appearance.Theatre can create powerful fantasies, but Jonson seems to say that, even in the best performances, truth and goodness will shine through fiction.

1.7 Gender Roles

Most of the play's characters are men who operate in the traditionally male sphere of commerce. At the time in which the play is set, men were wholly responsible for finance and they were expected to have power over women in relationships, roles that most of the male characters in the play firmly occupy.However, the play also compares male authority, love, sex, and courtship to the social expectations of women by exploring two examples of marriages, one an extreme depiction of an Italian marriage and the other a comedic English relationship.The Italian marriage is between Celia and Corvino. Though Celia is virtuous, she is kept under Corvino's extremely careful and cruel control—Corvino keeps her indoors almost at all times, and he forbids her, at one

point, from even venturing too close to a window. Corvino's rule over Celia is extreme, but it was stereotypical for Italian men to be jealous and controlling of their wives.Likewise, Celia represents the stereotypical Renaissance ideal of a woman; she is silent, chaste, and obedient. This is shown to work to both her advantage and disadvantage. Her sterling reputation initially gives her credibility in court, but her testimony is quickly undermined since, as a woman, she was considered to be an unreliable witness (even to a crime of which she was a victim).

The power of Celia's reputation cannot stand up to the stereotype that women are too hysterical and emotional to be trustworthy and rational, even though the men who argue against her are known to be deceitful.The cruelty of the impossible position in which Celia finds herself in court illustrates that seventeenth century women couldn't win—no matter how virtuous, women were considered to be untrustworthy and inferior creatures.Jonson's position on gender roles can be clarified, to an extent, through an examination of Corvino and Volpone, who both try to exhibit male authority over Celia through sexuality (Corvino attempts to whore her to Volpone, who in turn attempts to rape her). For a while, it seems that Volpone will get away with this rape attempt, as several men during the play conspire to say that Celia is lying about her accusation.

At the end of the play, Volpone is punished, but it seems that the primary reason for his punishment is his continuous deception of the play's other men, rather than the attempted rape. It's difficult to discern Jonson's ultimate statement (if any exists) about sexual oppression.However, it could be argued that, while he shows sexual oppression and violence to be reprehensible, Jonson believes that the oppression of women is less important than the moral lesson about excessive desire and greed.Lust and rape are bad, in other words, but only because they are a form of avariciousness. The crime Volpone seems most guilty of in the play is excessive greed for money at the expense of Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino.Lady Would-Be, the second woman in the play, is the opposite of Celia. The play contrasts her marriage to Sir Politic Would-Be—a quintessentially English marriage—with the Italian marriage between Corvino and Celia. Lady Would-Be is more independent than Celia, which reinforces the stereotype that married English women were given more freedom than married Italian women.Lady Would-Be is able to wander Venice on her own, and she is seen without her husband just as often as with him (contrast this with Celia, who is prevented from even leaving her home).

Lady Would-Be is also much more talkative than Celia, though the play doesn't exactly suggest that this is a good thing.When Lady Would-Be visits Volpone, he jokes in asides that she is so long-winded that he's being tortured by her "flood of words," and that, though he's only pretending to be sick, she's actually making him ill by talking ceaselessly.Much of this scene, we can note, is taken from an ancient Greek book called "On Talkative Women," suggesting that Jonson might have believed that there was some truth to the stereotype that woman talk excessively (more generously, one could argue that Jonson is merely engaging with the literary tradition of depicting women in this way).Lady Would-Be, however, also breaks the mold of a renaissance woman in that she appears to be educated, certainly much more so than Celia. Her long-winded speeches are so filled with literary references and allusions that Peregrine is shocked when she yells at him.The differences between Lady Would-Be and Celia illustrate different societal roles for women in Italy and England, which suggests that gender roles are culturally contingent, rather than biologically determined. In this way, the play challenges stereotypical gender roles and assumptions about women, though it sometimes affirms stereotypes, too.

1.8 Volpone as a Satire

Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Ben Jonson's Volpone (1607) clearly satirizes the type of person whose cleverness—or stupidity—is put at the service of his cupidity. The play Volpone has shown the negative side of the Renaissance. Jonson found the newly sprung views causing degeneration of contemporary life during the Renaissance.

Summary

The beast fable is a verse or a prose short story that usually has a moral. In beast fables, animal characters are represented as acting with human feelings and motives. The tales of the Greek

legendary writer Aesop are the best examples of beast fables in Western literature.Panchatantra in India is the best known Asian collection of beast fables. In the 20th century literature, "Volpone" by Ben Jonson has been generally recognized as a beast fable.The beast fable presents animal protagonists whose behavior and nature can be compared to that of humans, usually in terms of satire and allegory. These comparisons are usually made without paying too much attention to the behavior of the actual animal."Volpone" is a different beast fable since its characters are humans, not animals but the human characters have animal like features. As the drama "Volpone" is a reverse beast fable, the play starkly displays the bestiality of human beings.Theree legacy hunters are predatory birds. Voltore who does not have any familial ties in a vulture. Corbaccio is a raven.A raven is notrious for its hostility to its children or young ones if they do not resemble it.

Keywords

1. ***Volpone*** : fox
2. ***Voltore*** : One of the three legacy hunters or carrion-birds—the legacy hunters continually circle around Volpone, giving him gifts in the hope that he will choose them as his heir.
3. ***Mosca***: Mosca is Volpone's parasite, a combination of his slave, his servant, his lackey, and his surrogate child.
4. ***Corino***: An extremely vicious and dishonorable character, Corvino is Celia's jealous husband.
5. ***Corbaccio*** : The third "carrion-bird" circling Volpone, Corbaccio is actually extremely old and ill himself.

Self Assessment

1. "Those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous." Who has said this?

A. Alexander Pope
B. William Shakespeare
C. Ben Jonson
D. Christopher Marlowe

2. The two types of formal satire are _____ and _____.

A. Direct and Indirect
B. Horace and Juvenal
C. Bitter and Crafty
D. None of these

3. The early master of satiric comedy was the Greek _____.

A. Homer
B. Aeniad
C. Aristophanes
D. None of these

4. William Shakespeare's contemporary _____ wrote corrective comedy.

A. John Milton
B. Thomas Drayton
C. G.B. Shaw
D. Ben Jonson

5. Which of the following is the Italian couple in the play?

A. Corvino and Celia

B. Sir Politic and Lady Politic

C. Celia and Bonario

D. None of these

6. _____represents the stereotypical Renaissance ideal of a woman.

A. Lady Politic

B. Celia

C. Mosca

D. None of these

7. Which of the following is the English couple in the play?

A. Corvino and Celia

B. Sir Politic and Lady Politic

C. Celia and Bonario

D. None of these

8. The play begins with an Argument and a Prologue. Is this statement true?

A. No

B. Yes

C. May be

D. Can't say

9. Volpone's satire is directed against "avarice". What do you understand by avarice?

A. Excessive greed

B. Excessive love

C. Excessive attachment

D. None of these

10. "What a rare punishment / Is avarice to itself." Who says this?

A. Mosca

B. Volpone

C. Corvino

D. Corbaccio

11. "Whither [where] is shame fled human breasts?" Who says this?

A. Volpone

B. Sir Politic would be

C. Celia

D. Bonario

12. In the play's opening scene, Volpone shows how much the _____ value money.

A. Americans
B. British
C. Asians
D. Italians

13. City comedy was a kind of comic drama produced in the London theatres of the early _____century.

A. 17th
B. 16th
C. 18th
D. 20th

14. Who among the following did not contribute to the development of city comedy?

A. John Heywood
B. Philip Sidney
C. Ben Jonson
D. John Webster

15. A fable is also called an_____.

A. epilogue
B. prologue
C. apologue
D. anecdote

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	C	4.	D	5.	A
6.	B	7.	B	8.	B	9.	A	10.	B
11.	C	12.	D	13.	A	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. Who is your favorite character from the play 'Volpone'? Why?
2. Delineate the thematic concerns of the play 'Volpone'
3. How does the play 'Volpone' satirize the human nature?
4. Critically analyze the play 'Volpone'.
5. How does the play 'Volpone' comment on Gender roles?

Further Reading

1. https://www.bl.uk/works/volpone
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Unit 14:Volpone

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- study the concept of 'parasitism' in the play 'Volpone' written by Ben Jonson.
- delineate the concept of animalization in the play 'Volpone' written by Ben Jonson

Introduction

Although Mosca is the foremost parasite in the play, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore might well be considered parasites as well. Certainly, Volpone's entire scam depends on Mosca's keen ability to leech his clients, but if not for the clients' desire to leech Volpone, the scam would fall flat. Volpone, Mosca, and all the clients are, in fact, competing parasites.Parasitism is an explicit theme of the play as it emerges from Mosca's soliloquy in 3.1. Here, Mosca expresses his opinion that parasitism is a universal guiding principle: that is, everyone is a parasite, but some are better at it than others. In the case of *Volpone*, this principle rings true.Few characters in the play act honestly; all seem willing, instead, to use any means to secure Volpone's fortune. They are all parasites, flies and carrion birds competing over Volpone's dying carcass. Only Mosca, however - the cleverest parasite of all - is fully aware of his parasitic status. Thus, arguably, he is best able to manipulate others.The soliloquy delivered by Mosca in Act III scene 1 is a significant scene of the play because it is a direct insight into a character who the audience previously doesn't know much about besides that he uses his cleverness and manipulation to benefit his master. Mosca is an example of the "parasite" stock character, and even refers to himself as a parasite throughout this soliloquy.In the soliloquy, Mosca reveals his increasing independence from Volpone by saying,

"I fear I shall begin to grow in love/ With my

dear self and my most prosperous parts…"

Mosca is growing increasingly narcissistic and he praises himself, calling himself the truest of parasites because he of his innate ability to deceive and swiftly adapt to situation.Mosca views the role of being a parasite as a superior role in society, saying

"…Almost/ All the wise world is little else in nature/ But parasites or subparasites."

While he is nearly completely dependent on Volpone for his survival, ironically Volpone is also dependent onMosca, who heavily aids him in his schemes. Mosca knows that Volpone is

dependent on him in carrying out his hoax, therefore he is becoming more confident in his parasitism and develops a more inflated self-worth.

14.1 Critical Essay

'I fear I shall begin to grow in love with my dear self': The Parasite and His 'Mirror Stage

The comedy in the play can be explained through Lacan's concept of 'the mirror stage'.The psychoanalytic theory illustrates how human beings gain their identity through the recognition of the mirror image.The essence of it, in sum, is how we, as human beings, are constructed subjects, a point which this chapter will elaborate later. While we are seldom aware of the working of the 'mirror stage' in our daily existence, comedy highlights the functioning of it.The exposing of this concept explains why comedy is often built on the concept of narcissism: a comic character is often the subject who is driven by the logic of the mirror. The comedy of Mosca is related to his role as a parasite.While this role has its traditional and historical meaning, it can be understood through a breaking down of the word – 'para-site'. 'Para-', as a prefix, forms 'miscellaneous terms in the sense "analogous or parallel to, but separate from or going beyond, what is denoted by the root word"'.

Therefore, the word 'para-site', as a theoretical concept, can, perhaps, mean the existence of a space which is parallel to or even beyond the original one.Moreover, the pun 'site' and 'sight' raises the question of whether this parallel space is related to a person's perception.In other words, because of his narcissism (the parasite acts as if he is looking at his mirror image in the scene), Mosca is a creature who thinks that he is living and existing in another zone.Although he is the servant, he thinks that he is the master. And, at the same time, he becomes who he claims he is not.To quote another famous line from the Marx Brothers:

'He may look like an idiot, and talk like an idiot, but don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot.'

While the set-up of this joke makes us believe that there is a difference between 'he' and the 'idiot', the punch line says that there is none.The parasite's speech is full of internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Even though the parasite claims that he is different from the three 'bastards', his speech suggests that he is no different from the trio.He believes in his own words and their power because he is situated in his 'para-site'.

14.2 The Traditional & Historical meaning of Parasite

In ancient Greek history, a parasite was 'permitted to eat at the table of a public official, or at the feast following a sacrifice'. He may have been 'a priest or priest's assistant who was permitted meals at the public expense'.In later periods, a parasite refers to a person who 'lives at the expense of another, or of society in general'; it especially relates to 'a person who obtains the hospitality or patronage of the wealthy or powerful by obsequiousness and flattery'.Enid Welsford suggests that, originally, the parasite 'was a dignified title applied to those associates of priests and magistrates who took part in official banquets not by right but by special invitation'.However, the writers of the Middle and New Comedy 'used the word in a more degraded sense and applied it to those whose position at table was due neither to right nor to courtesy but to their own impudence', and, gradually, the more honorable meaning of parasite became something obsolete.Parasites become those who have their own methods of gaining free meals; others are mere flatterers, while others gain favors from their master by 'a talent for mimicry, repartee, etc.', and they are especially associated with the type of buffoon that the Greeks call 'laughter-maker'.

In Volpone, Mosca is a fly, a parasite and a Vice. The parasite is a classical figure, and the Vice is a Christian character.Robert Withington suggests that the parasite 'came from the classical drama to an English stage', while the Vice 'was originally the agent or servant of the Seven Deadly Sins, and sought to entrap "Mankind" – by whatever name he was known – into the power of evil'.Bernard Spivack argues that the transformation of the Vice assimilates him with the parasite, making his performance opaque.He says that the Vice's performance loses its figurative and inward meaning and gets its explanation instead from what it appears to be – the cunning beguilements of a witty villain exerted upon everyone within reach.Furthermore, it becomes flexible in respect to its objects, bending itself against a world of values and loyalties – social, political, sectarian, domestic, and romantic – that replace the original value of the Christian virtues and the original loyalty of the soul to God.Spivack adds that 'the world in which he [The Vice] now finds himself is to naturalize him

to its human laws and conventions, to change him into a moral creature, in order to preserve his role on a stage very different from the one which brought it into being'.

There are many parasites or parasitical characters in Jonson's comedies. E. P. Vandiver, Jr. writes that there are three characters who are explicitly designated as parasites, namely, Mosca; Fly, in The New Inn; and Polish, in The Magnetic Lady.Other parasitical Jonsonian characters are Bobadill; Sejanus; Carlo Buffone and Shift, in Every Man Out of His Humour; and Tucca, in Poetaster. On the creation of Mosca, Jonson may have been influenced by Lucian's The Parasite.In the story, Simon claims that he practices the art of the parasite, the 'art which is concerned with food and drink and what must be said and done to obtain them, and its end is pleasure'.With the traditional and historical meaning of the parasite in mind, we will now re-examine the parasite's role in Jonson and his comedy from a psychoanalytic perspective.With a particular focus on the subject of narcissism, this suggests how the parasite in Jonson can be read as a creature that lives in his 'para-site'.

14.3 Volpone's Parasite and His 'Para-site'

In Act I scene v, when Corvino asks if Volpone has any children, Mosca says that the dwarf, the androgyne and the eunuch are Volpone'sbastards, as if he is not one of them. Posing himself as someone outside, Mosca sounds as if he were another Vice figure, Richard III, who tells Buckingham to 'infer the bastardy of Edward's children'. Richard bastardises Edward's children, proclaiming their illegitimacy. Even though Richard Dutton comments that 'Mosca dissociates himself from Volpone's paternity',it remains unclear if the parasite's words are trustworthy.

Act III scene i marks the turning point of Volpone. The scene starts with Mosca's speech, contrasting with Volpone's soliloquy in Act I scene i that is interrupted by the parasite.Carol A. Carr argues: Mosca does not merely interrupt Volpone; he breaks a spell, and he does so sheerly through his tone of voice. He is not contradicting Volpone but merely summing up his speech into a concise maxim. Mosca's tone is dry, matter-of-fact, and detached; Volpone's is buoyant, imaginative, and impassioned.The audience witness that the parasite is waiting for his chance to subvert his master. However, the parasite's speech is full of contradictions.It illustrates the gap between what Mosca sees and what he is unable to see, suggesting that he, perhaps, is also just one of Volpone'sbastards. The scene shows how Mosca is in the 'mirror stage', which is doomed to produce misrecognition of subjectivity.

MOSCA:

"I fear I shall begin to grow in love With my dear self and my most prosp'rous parts, They do so spring and burgeon; I can feel A whimsy i' my blood. I know not how, Success hath made me wanton. I could skip Out of my skin, now, like a subtle snake, I am so limber."

In this speech, Mosca shows his ambition for the first time, saying, 'I fear I shall begin to grow in love / With my dear self' (III.i.1–2), lines which suggest his narcissistic nature.His downfall might start from the moment when he begins to see the 'parasite' as an independent subject, misbelieving in the seeming omnipotence of his role. This scene shows Mosca as if he were looking at his mirror image. The words of the parasite represent his desire.However, Mosca's narcissism is ironic and ambiguous. First of all, the parasite says he is in love with his 'prosperous parts'. Examining his speech with the Lacanian concept, these prosperous parts can be seen as the sum of the body as fragments.They are in contrast with his dear 'self', which implies a sense of completeness. Because of his narcissism, Mosca sees a double image. The complete, dear self of Mosca is contradicted by his fragmentary parts.On the idea of a fragmented body, Lacan writes:

"This fragmented body . . . is regularly manifested in dreams when the movement of an analysis reaches a certain level of aggressive disintegration of the individual. It then appears in the form of disconnected limbs or of organs exoscopically represented, growing wings and taking up arms for internal persecutions that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch fixed for all time in painting, in their ascent in the fifteenth century to the imaginary zenith of modern man."

The identification of subjectivity through the mirror image is simultaneously a construction and a repression. The fragmented body, which represents the disintegration of the individual, comes out

in dreams and in art.Such a tendency of the disintegration of the body comes out from Mosca's language, which represents his unconscious. While celebrating his love for his 'complete' self, his language betrays him as it reveals a force of disintegration.The prosperous parts of Mosca are sexual and phallic as they can 'spring' and 'burgeon'. Howard Marchitell links the theatrical with the sexual. He suggests that 'Mosca's celebration of his talent attest[s] to the phallic nature of the power to which he aspires, a power he understands as both protean and procreative, social and sexual.'As Mosca 'grows' in love with himself, he 'erects' when he sees his own image, which corresponds with the suggestion of 'zany' in Jonson's Poetaster as the zany is 'a good skipping swaggerer'. The word 'swag' means to 'move unsteadily or heavily from side to side or up and down' or 'to sway without control' with 'a pendulous part of the body'. Although Mosca praises himself for being different from the zanies, he talks and acts like one.

Moreover, the prosperous parts can mean Mosca's theatrical parts: what Mosca sees in his mirror image is not necessarily Mosca per se, but Mosca as a Vice, a parasite and a servant.

Jonas Barish links the soliloquy of Mosca with aping and counterfeiting.

He argues:

> "Mosca's opening soliloquy in Act III shows that this excellent counterfeiter is himself, like his master, obsessed by the notion of imitators. His contempt for ordinary parasites suggests that there is a hierarchy of counterfeits, ranging from those who are deeply and essentially false (like himself) to those who practice falsity out of mere affectation, who are, so to speak, falsely false and therefore, again, at two removes from nature."

Norbert Greiner sees Mosca as 'the universal man of the theatre'. He thinks that Mosca 'is one jump ahead of Volpone, because he is open for improvisation; he does not rely on literary tradition alone, but reacts extempore as required by the needs of the moment'.Jonathan Dollimore suggests that Moscais able to 'subvert social differentiation and identity'.When Volpone asks Mosca to be 'a brave clarissimo', even though it is a pity that Mosca was 'not born one', Mosca replies,If I hold / My made one, 'twill be well'. Dollimore argues that Mosca's answer implies two meanings: on one level, ''Twill be well because he is not the real thing, never could be, and is not even now presuming to be'; but, on the other level, Mosca's answer implies that 'the imitation, the travesty, of the real thing can also usurp it and to all intents and purposes become it'.

He sees that as a moment of 'ambiguity and irony' since it effortlessly abolishes the social differentiation. It is also a moment of appropriation since it incites knowledge and, at the same time, provokes the fear of the 'riot of the perverse, the antisocial and the anti-natural' within Volpone. The word 'whimsy', in his speech, is linked with 'whim', which is 'a capricious notion or fancy; a fantastic or freakish idea; an odd fancy'.The 'whimsical blood' points to Mosca's capability to construct different plots and identities. However, the word 'whimsy' also means 'dizziness, giddiness, vertigo', which suggests an image of Mosca standing at the top and foreshadows his eventual downfall.The image of Mosca as a Vice standing at the top (and also of Volpone on his platform) recalls that of Lucifer, illustrating the danger of hubris. Isaiah 14 tells of the devil Lucifer's fall from heaven. Lucifer has to be cut down to the earth and brought down to the grave.Mosca's shape-changing ability indicates his power of de-forming. His 'self' is contradicted by his interchangeable roles. Even though he praises himself for his play-acting ability, the mirror image of what Mosca sees is and is not he simultaneously.

The parasite suggests that 'success has made me wanton'. Being 'undisciplined' and 'ungoverned', he thinks that he is no longer under anybody's control and cannot be managed. Having no regard for his master, his words correspond to the meaning of 'swaggerer' in Poetaster.The parasite suggests that 'success has made me wanton'. Being 'undisciplined' and 'ungoverned', he thinks that he is no longer under anybody's control and cannot be managed. Having no regard for his master, his words correspond to the meaning of 'swaggerer' in Poetaster.In addition to the sense of 'undisciplined' and 'unruly', 'wanton' can be used to refer to a person who is 'sexually promiscuous'. The linkage between 'wanton' and 'swaggerer' refers to Mosca's attitude towards sexuality.The two words are contradictory since the use of 'wanton' puts him in a feminine position. This image contrasts with his phallic usage of words. Masculinity and femininity collide within the parasite's mind, which creates the image of the androgyny within him.

Mosca feels like a snake that can limberly skip out of his skin. The use of the word 'skip' instead of 'slough' raises the image of jumping, which echoes with Mosca's whimsy blood and his hubris. The power to skip out of skin represents an ability to separate the body from its surface.We are, therefore, reminded of the characters Subtle and Face in The Alchemist. If Subtle refers to the inner body, Face relates to the outer. Not only can Mosca skip out of his skin, he is a 'subtle' snake, making him both characters at once.The snake raises the importance of temptation and the image of the devil in Genesis 3: 1. Mosca makes others lose the meaning of words and identities: because of him, Lady Would-be confuses Peregrine with being Politic Would-be's catamite and calls him a hermaphrodite, and the avocatores have doubts over Bonario's and Celia's integrity.The parasite says he is so 'limber', meaning that he is easily bent, flexible, pliant and supple.

However, the word also refers to things that are 'properly firm or crisp: limp, flaccid, flabby'. Commenting on Volpone, Stephen Greenblatt argues:

"The creature who can perform these feats has literally to be nothing, a bodiless fiction. Hence the terror lurking in a mere cramp: a sign that the body resists the will and thus that the fiction is collapsing. For Volpone, to sense the body's resistance is to sense death."

He suggests that Volpone's fear is not an illusion but something physical, namely, 'the fear of real paralysis in place of feigned'. His remark points out the bodiless of Mosca and its relation to physical paralysis, which resonates with the two meanings of 'limber'. The parasite might think that he is capable of playing with words, but his hubris makes him blind to their opposite meanings.While Mosca puts himself in God's position, his words 'Oh! Your parasite' sound as if he were putting himself in a scientific demonstration, implying his own alienation. Mosca says that the parasite is the most precious thing that 'dropped from above'.Such an image has its religious meaning. The contrast between a figure dropping from above and clod or clodpolls demonstrates Mosca's superiority over others. He is different from others because of his wit, since 'clod' does not only mean soil or dust, it also means thickhead or clodhopper.

However, to be dropped from above is the fate of Lucifer. Therefore, even though he thinks that he can pun, his words demonstrate that it is language that plays with him. Describing himself and his art as mystery, Mosca says, 'I muse the mystery was not made a science.'The word 'mystery', other than the meaning of 'craft' or 'trade', shows that there are certain 'mystic' qualities in his 'art'. The mystic quality puts him in God's position, which echoes with the suggestion of the parasite's religious function. Mosca's comment on making his art into science parallels his words 'Oh! Your parasite.'The final line pinpoints the parasite's spirit. He says, 'All the wise world is little else, in nature, / But parasites or sub-parasites.' This statement seems to suggest a breaking down of all categories, of all norms of hierarchy and all recognised positions of human society in a hostile manner.There is no distinction between master and servant. All dominations are trivialized because there is nothing but parasites or sub-parasites. Mosca unlocks the binary opposition between face and identity, signifier and signified, and the dominant and the dominated.If there is no other, there is no 'self'. Therefore, all 'selves' are heterogeneous in nature. Mosca's statement turns all people into parasites, which is the extinction of any form of independent identity.However, although he eliminates other people's belief in an independent subject, he embraces his identity as a parasite without recognising the illusion of this 'parasite'. Moreover, perhaps the very distinction between parasites and sub-parasites suggests that there is a hierarchical order in Mosca's mind after all.

Herford and Simpson suggest that 'If his [Mosca's] position and authority distinguish him from the vulgar parasite in the literal sense, his brilliant capacity equally distinguishes him from the professional jester.'Even though Mosca may be neither a traditional parasite nor a traditional jester, there are ambiguities within his words.His claim is questionable because he moulds tales by describing Celia as gold to bait Volpone. Because of his tale, Volpone is 'lure[d] out of the safety of his own house and into the street', which leaves 'Mosca in possession of the keys, the house, and the goods of his master'.Indeed, several times in the play we see Volpone giving Mosca money after the parasite flatters him. His suggestion of pleasing the groin raises another ambiguity.The groin can mean the one of the parasite or, perhaps, the master whom the parasite serves. The second interpretation suggests reading Mosca as Volpone's catamite, reminding readers of the similarity between the parasite and Castrone.Finally, Mosca describes himself and his art as sparks. The word 'sparks' refers to men-about-town. The imagery is interesting because a spark is a glimpse of fire that no one can catch, implying the

importance of fragments and something that exists for a second before being extinguished.The suggestion demonstrates the existence and the non-existence of the parasite's power, which shows itself only for a glimpse. Before any person can realize his power, it has already gone. Therefore, a true parasite plays with the art of presence and absence.Mosca claims to be a true parasite, saying that he is different from zanies. It means that those sub-parasites are nothing but fools, or some fools who act like or imitate others. If the true parasites are the imitators – as the proverb says, 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery' – the zanies are imitators of imitators.The suggestion of being a true parasite shows his blindness once again because the idea is an oxymoron.

It demonstrates his attempt to go beyond his role, suggesting that he takes being a parasite as a 'true' identity, an identity that, he thinks, does not need to depend on others. However, being a 'true' parasite, paradoxically, means that he needs to depend on others forever.

14.4 Animalization in the Play

Animal imagery, conveying altered physical features, merely represents an element of comedy which serves as an amusement trigger in order to entertain the audience and achieve dramatic jesting. Alternatively, moral monstrosity is actually a form of challenging the social notions of physical monstrosity of the period by opposing the monstrosity of the mind through monstrous exaggerations of the body.What do the monster-like characters in Volpone demonstrate? Of what are they signs? To whom and for whom are early modern monster-like characters constituted as meaningful creatures? Mental monstrosity is enhanced in the play through animal-like features of the characters and their symbolic names. The porosity of the boundaries between what was arguably seen as "monstrosity" and what the society would consider "normal" is enhanced in early modern drama through the metaphors of the body during dramatic action.

Distorted body and mind become significant realities in the world of the play, which, in their turn, are influenced by cultural representations of monstrosity drawing on classical and early modern discourses. Vices displayed during the dramatic interaction in Volpone are mental monstrosities that affect most characters, while the animal imagery highlights the parasite symbolism of the play, which indicates how one life-form feeds on another. By examining the rhetoric of animalization in Volpone, the audiences are compelled to determine which attributes actually represent the definition of the monstrous. Is the animalistic allusion a direct designation for monstrosity? Or is it covertly implied that there is a significant shift of monstrosity in Jonson's play, from a medieval physically-deformed understanding of bestiality to a reflection upon the moral nature of the nobility in Venice?

Hence, audiences are made to glimpse the contrasts between the picture-perfect Venetian civility and its actual beast-like immorality.The connection to Aesop's fable of the fox, which shrewdly tricks the crow into dropping its cheese, is evident in Volpone, being referred to several times during the dramatic interaction. The play's Prologue speaks of "our poet" who "makes jests to fit his fable". The "fable" may be a moralizing story, in the manner of Aesop's fables, but it also signifies the products of imagination. This is a meta-theatrical element that links the world of the play with issues of authorship and self-mirroring effects. In following this fictional poet's actions, the Prologue says that it took the poet five weeks to fully pen the playscript,"From his own hand, without a coadjutor, / Novice, journeyman, or tutor"The originality of the play is, therefore, incontestable, as attested by the text itself. This self-reflexivity is important in shaping the questions raised about the effects of monstrosity in the comedy. The Prologue calls the play "this creature"—a creature engendered by the poet's imagination—which suggests "[a] created thing or being; a product of creative action; a creation".

Therefore, the relation to the creative aspect of playwriting is clearly delineated from the start. The Prologue invites the audience "to stop the gaps" in the poet's "loose writing", and so determine him to be more coherent. The aggressive emendation of the dramatic text by the audience is expected to occur "With such a deal of monstrous and forced action" that it may be similar to the activity in "Bedlam". This self-critical note that Ben Jonson ins which refers to his own writing, demonstrates that the "monstrous and forced action" of satire can have positive effects in the world of the theatre: to amend the vices represented through the characters. The image of the grotesque body in literature has been discussed by many critics, starting with Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body.The beast-like imagery is exploited in the play to create an evocative reflection of a lustful Venice and its felonious, immoral inhabitants.

In "Volpone: A Critical Guide, edited by Matthew Steggle", Matthew C. Hansen draws our attention to the fact that audiences would have to choose between understanding Jonson's characters to be essentially human, infused with certain animal characteristics as indicated by their names, or they could be perceived as "talking animals".Hansen goes even further, launching the question: "Which dynamic— animalistic humans or humanistic animals—is more threatening?". The motif of the medieval beast-play is accordingly employed by assigning animal-like features to almost every character who adopts the corresponding behaviour of the animal that gives its name.

Volpone is the sharp-witted fox, a depraved hedonist, who manages to cunningly deceive Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, at least in the beginning, but who eventually becomes a victim of his own monstrous mental deformity. Mosca is the unscrupulous master of disguise, a parasite whose only worth is obeying and fulfilling his master's corrupt orders and who ultimately adds disloyalty and perfidy to his array of moral flaws. Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino are legacy-hunters who crave for Volpone's money and incessantly try to act deludingly in order to lay hands on Volpone's fortune. The only character who lacks any animal-featured behavior, or other name-alluded attributes, is the virtuous Celia. While not portraying any grotesque creature-like element, Celia however impersonates the objectified female.

There are two significant readings when referring to the animal imagery in the play. In his introduction to Volpone: A Critical Guide, Matthew Steggle draws attention to the fact that Volpone is an "oddity" in the Ben Jonson canon because of the fact that it lacks "much of Jonson's characteristic interest in money and wealth".While this seems a strange thing to say, because riches are so obviously central to the play, in Volpone, as Steggle argues, "Money is interesting because it has a double nature: it is simultaneously the tool required for a competitive display necessary to exercise social power, and also the tool required to keep starvation at arm's length. That doubleness is what makes it slippery and fascinating."This paradoxical statement of the "doubleness" encountered in Volpone can be applied to the play's delineation of monster-like characters. While the characters bear animal names and display beastly moral features, it is uncertain which elements prevail.

It is this doubleness, also observed by Bakhtin in his analysis of the grotesque that, informs the representations of the monstrous body in Volpone.While representing ordinary human beings evolving in the highly civilized milieu of early modern cosmopolitan Venice, the play re-creates grotesque bodies whose animal-like features are neither here nor there, neither beastly nor human. In the language of the theatre, the monstrous body is both spiritual and earthly, both human and animal.Volpone, an Italian equivalent for "fox," is the protagonist of the play, an allegedly sick wealthy nobleman who, similarly to the fox's shrewdness, tricks three elderly gentlemen into thinking that he is extremely ill, almost on his death-bed. Volpone's unscrupulous nature and deceiving personality helps him receive expensive attentions and gifts from these fortune-hunters.Volpone himself indicates the similarities between him and the animal that denotes his name. Not only does he wear "furs"and talks as a canny, sly fox, but he actually alludes to Aesop's moralistic text through his own suggestive discourse: "[…] and not a Fox / Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights / Mocking a gaping Crow— ha, Mosca?"

In this conversation, Mosca (the Fly) is not only Volpone's interlocutor and the parasite privy to his con-art manipulations, but he is also an alterego of the sly character, cunningly involved in staging the tricks for the gullible and greedy target-monsters.Negativity does not have any effect on the cunning fox-like creatures, as Volpone wisely tells Mosca: "The Fox fares ever best when he is cursed". Challenges and aggressivity are incentives for provocative behaviour, according to Volpone.Another character that displays immoral, beast-like characteristics is Mosca, Volpone's misleadingly most loyal servant, a parasite who initially seems to have no independent judgment. Apparently, he blindly executes his master's immoral orders, but secretly, he is also monstrously greed-driven and deceitfully plots against Volpone.Mosca's traitorous nature is well disguised through flattery and servile discourse, displaying his false praise for Volpone. After describing horribly inhuman actions, such as tearing forth the fathers of poor families out of their beds and sending them to prison, Mosca observes that Volpone's

"sweet nature doth abhor these courses".In a display of dramatic irony, Mosca continues to describe Volpone's apparent moral qualities:

"You are not like the thresher that doth stand / with a huge flail, watching a heap of corn, / And, hungry, dares not taste the smallest grain"This means that Mosca thinks Volpone is not a miser who amasses fortunes and refuses to enjoy them. Next, Mosca makes a comparison related to Venetian commerce: "Nor like the merchant, who hath filled his vaults / With Romagnia and rich Candian wines, / Yet drinks the lees of Lombard vinegar". This spatial metaphor, which shows the extent of Venetian commerce (the Italian provinces of Romagna and Lombardy, but also Candia, or the island of Crete) is meant to be flattering in showing that Volpone is not a miser and knows how to enjoy the pleasures of life. Mosca's conclusion about Volpone's character is logical: "You know the use of riches, and dare give, now, / From that bright heap, to me, your poor observer.What is amusing in this apparently laudatory display of Volpone's riches and his capacity of enjoying them is the negative characterization, alluded to by the repetition of "no" "nor" and "not". By emphasizing what he thinks Volpone is not, Mosca flatters his employer and tries to make him share his riches with him, Mosca, and the other parasites. In this scene, it is Mosca who is the proverbial flattering fox from Aesop's fable, while Volpone is the gull who lets himself be influenced by complimentary speech.

Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino represent the scavengers, Volpone's wealth predators. Each of them does his best to live up to his name: lawyer Voltore is the vulture, elderly gentleman Corbaccio is the raven, and merchant Corvino is the crow.Their beast-like connection is clearly evidenced through Volpone's references in animal language, when he speaks in an aside about his clients: "Now, now, my clients Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite, Raven, and gorcrow, all my birds of prey, That think me turning carcass, now they come"Carrion birds are symbolic of despicable character because they feed on corpses. As Volpone says, since the predators think he is turning into a "carcass", the dead body of an animal, he might as well prepare the stage for them and play the moribund victim.When Voltore leaves the setting of Volpone's enactment of illness, and Corbaccio is about to enter, Volpone declares: "The vulture's gone, and the old raven's come". Volpone accurately characterizes these bird-like creatures, emphasising their greediness and concurrent gullible nature.

Comparably to a moralistic fable, all the depraved characters receive their punishment, which shows how their degraded moral values bounce back at them once the truth is unveiled. Volpone himself seems to have foreseen, since the very beginning, what greed can bring: "Tis true, 'tis true. What rare punishment / Is avarice to itself!"While Corvino is humiliated in public by being made to wear donkey's ears, Corbaccio loses all his properties in Bonario'sfavour, Mosca becomes a slave, Voltore loses his job for trying to deceive the court in his benefit, and Volpone is caged like a wild animal.The gulls receive these punishments because they have succumbed to animalic instincts. In "On Comedy and Death: The Anamorphic Ape in Volpone," Isaac Hui gives a discussion of the ape as an anamorphic figure (as an image of distortion and deformity, constantly changing shape, as well as challenging the audience's perspective) in order to conclude that the dwarf in Volpone is an important character that can be related to ideas such as imitation, death, and castration.

Summary

Although Mosca is the foremost parasite in the play, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore might well be considered parasites as well. Certainly, Volpone's entire scam depends on Mosca's keen ability to leech his clients, but if not for the clients' desire to leech Volpone, the scam would fall flat. Volpone, Mosca, and all the clients are, in fact, competing parasites.Parasitism is an explicit theme of the play as it emerges from Mosca's soliloquy in 3.1. Here, Mosca expresses his opinion that parasitism is a universal guiding principle: that is, everyone is a parasite, but some are better at it than others. In the case of *Volpone*, this principle rings true.Few characters in the play act honestly; all seem willing, instead, to use any means to secure Volpone's fortune. They are all parasites, flies and carrion birds competing over Volpone's dying carcass. Only Mosca, however - the cleverest parasite of all - is fully aware of his parasitic status. Thus, arguably, he is best able to manipulate others.The soliloquy delivered by Mosca in Act III scene 1 is a significant scene of the play because it is a direct insight into a character who the audience previously doesn't know much about besides that he uses his cleverness and manipulation to benefit his master. Mosca is an example of the "parasite" stock character, and even refers to himself as a parasite throughout this soliloquy. Animal imagery,

conveying altered physical features, merely represents an element of comedy which serves as an amusement trigger in order to entertain the audience and achieve dramatic jesting. Alternatively, moral monstrosity is actually a form of challenging the social notions of physical monstrosity of the period by opposing the monstrosity of the mind through monstrous exaggerations of the body.

Keywords

1. ***Animalization***: a depiction in the form of an animal. limning, line drawing, delineation, depiction - a drawing of the outlines of forms or objects
2. ***Parasite***: a plant or an animal that lives in or on another plant or animal and gets its food from it. Parasites sometimes cause disease
3. ***Ambiguity***: the possibility of being understood in more than one way; something that can be understood in more than one way
4. ***Irony***:Irony, in its broadest sense, is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or event in which what on the surface appears to be the case or to be expected differs radically from what is actually the case
5. ***Emendation***: the process of making a revision or correction to a text

Self Assessment

1. "From his own hand, without a coadjutor, / Novice, journeyman, or tutor" Where has this line been included?

A. Prologue
B. Argument
C. Act I
D. Act IV

2. Who has given the theory of grotesque body?

A. Thomas Drayton
B. Mikhail Bhaktin
C. George Herbert
D. None of these

3. Who has edited the book 'Volpone: A Critical Guide'?

A. Matthew C Hansen
B. Ben Jonson
C. Matthew Steggle
D. None of these

4. "He is a creature of passion, an imaginative hedonist continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be." Who is 'he' in these lines?

A. Mosca
B. Corvino
C. Bonario
D. Volpone

5. "In a play that revolves around disguises, he is the ultimate master of disguise." Who is 'he' in these lines?

A. Mosca
B. Corbaccio
C. Sir Politic
D. None of these

6. "Her willingness to subject herself to Corvino's harsh dictates and abuse may make her seem more weak than strong." Who is 'her' in this line?

A. Lady Politic
B. Celia
C. Both
D. None of these

7. In the case of _____, the carrion bird is the vulture.

A. Corbaccio
B. Mosca
C. Voltore
D. Volpone

8. The carrion bird is a _____ in case of Corvino.

A. vulture
B. eagle
C. woodpecker
D. crow

9. Is Mosca the only parasite in the play 'Volpone'?

A. No
B. Yes
C. May be
D. Can't say

10. In which act does Mosca deliver his soliloquy?

A. Act II
B. Act III
C. Act IV
D. Act V

11. "I fear I shall begin to grow in love/ With my dear self and my most prosperous parts…" Who says this in the play?

A. Volpone
B. Celia
C. Mosca

D. Corvino

12. Almost/ All the wise world is little else in nature/ But parasites or _____. Complete the line.

A. pure
B. mortals
C. immortals
D. subparasites

13. Who has given the concept of the mirror stage?

A. Jacques Lacan
B. Sigmund Freud
C. Ben Jonson
D. None of these

14. "He may look like an idiot, and talk like an idiot, but don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot." Who is 'he' in these lines?

A. Volpone
B. Mosca
C. Sir Poltic would be
D. None of these

15. In ancient Greek history, a _____ was 'permitted to eat at the table of a public official, or at the feast following a sacrifice.

A. fox
B. fly
C. parasite
D. none of these

Answers for Self Assessment

1.	A	2.	B	3.	C	4.	D	5.	A
6.	B	7.	C	8.	D	9.	A	10.	B
11.	C	12.	D	13.	A	14.	B	15.	C

Review Questions

1. How would you define the concept of parasite?
2. Do you think that Mosca acts true to his characteristics?
3. Can you think of another play that makes use of animals to depict human behavior?
4. Comment on the technique of animalization in the play.
5. Do you think that the play has a moral lesson to give?

Further reading

1. https://www.sparknotes.com/drama/volpone/symbols/
2. https://www.markedbyteachers.com/university-degree/biological-sciences/examine-jonson-s-use-in-volpone-of-animal-imagery.html
3. https://www.gradesaver.com/volpone/study-guide/themes

LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY
Jalandhar-Delhi G.T. Road (NH-1)
Phagwara, Punjab (India)-144411
For Enquiry: +91-1824-521360
Fax.: +91-1824-506111
Email: odl@lpu.co.in