Early Modern English Poets
Understanding Poetry
(Revised)
BEGE 106

I
Early Modern English Poets
William Shakespeare, John Milton, John Donne and, Andrew Marvell
EARLY MODERN ENGLISH POETS

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Welcome to this revised course on *Understanding Poetry* (BEGE106). As in the earlier course (EEG06) it has three chunks:

Blocks 1 to 5 on **English Poetry**
Blocks 6 and 7 on **American Poetry**
Block 8 on **Indian English Poetry**

However, we have introduced new material, especially to the sections on American and Indian English poetries. In all now you have 40 units to read. If you read a unit in roughly three days you will take 120 days to read the entire course. Let us add 30 days more for a few holidays and extra reading for some units that have some long poems. Then you can complete the first reading of the course in 150 days. Second revision of the course may take 75 days and the third revision will take still less time. In short, by consistent work you can be fully prepared for your exam well before the end of a year.

Now, let me tell you a few words about the blocks on **English poetry**. The five blocks divide among them into five broad periods of English poetry. They are as under:

i) The Renaissance,
ii) The Augustan and Transition,
iii) The Romantic,
iv) The Victorian, and
v) High and Late Modernist periods

We have left out **Old English** and **Medieval English** periods which are now understood as the **Postclassical** period. I will try to introduce you through my prefatory notes in each block to the broad tendencies of these periods but you must acquaint yourself with the history of English Literature of these periods by reading books – not more than one or two – on History of English Literature. You will get to know about these books as you proceed. Then read the poems in the different blocks to see if you agree with our points of view regarding the general tendencies of the various periods and how they characterize the evolution of the cultural makeup of the English people. ‘Read’ as Francis Bacon said, ‘not to contradict and confute nor to accept and take for granted but to weigh and consider.’

I know that students read not only to learn and discover new ideas and experience novel events and people but also to be successful in exams. So, here are a few tips for you.

This course on poetry in English is an elective course. Some of you will like to go on and do an M.A in English. So you must learn poetry properly. For this you must be able to understand the music of English speech and the role of metre in verse in particular. The second unit thus becomes very important. You need not read it at the outset but you must read it sooner rather than later and **drill yourself in scansion**. It will enhance your ability to appreciate English poetry. Take help from friends, relatives or teachers to learn prosody and scansion.

Next in importance is the critical terminology of literature such as **lyric**, **sonnet**, **ode**, **epic**, **verse drama**, **assonance**, **consonance**, **alliteration**, **simile**,
metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, imagery, symbolism, euphemism, hyperbole, periphrasis, litotes, terza rima, Spenserian stanza, etc. You as a student of literature are expected to be familiar with them. On these questions you have a good chance of scoring high marks.

Next in importance is your familiarity with the history of the poetries in English, American and Indian English literatures. You will be introduced to these in the introductions to the blocks. Master them as one question of 16 marks you may have to answer (See question no. 3 on p. 33) base on the introductions.

Besides prosody, critical terminology and literary history we will ask you to show your familiarity with the text of the poems in two ways: a) through reference to context questions (four of eight marks each) and, b) two critical questions, each carrying 16 marks. A model question paper is given here for your help but remember that they are meant to give direction to your study for examiners are free to make the question paper in the manner they like and the pattern may change from year to year.

When we were preparing EEG06 – that is Understanding Poetry in its earlier form – we gave portraits of poets. We have not done so in this course because now you have access to the internet where you will get pictures and reading material on poets and their age aplenty. Make use of it if also with discretion. You must visit your study centre and interact with the counsellors and classmates and remain in contact with them. You will then be able to get a lot of help from one another.

We once again welcome you to this course and hope that by regular and methodical study and sometimes in groups you will derive the joy that literature is meant to provide and also do well in exams.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma
Editor
INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 1
A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: PERIODIZATION IN HISTORY, THE POSTCLASSICAL ERA AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

You are going to study British, American and Indian English poetry in this course. The ‘Introductions’ to the blocks will provide you with brief historical backgrounds for a proper study of the poets and the poems in the block. Poets and other creative artists are valued owing to their uniqueness but historians and scholars try to see coherence in a period of history and discover certain common features in the various events, political, social, economic, constitutional, or cultural, taking place in that period. For a literary scholar the artistic creations are like events in political, economic or constitutional histories and historians of literature try to understand the spirit of an age by trying to establish certain common features between different works of arts. This is how we will try to bring order to an otherwise diverse productions of the different periods.

Historians divide the entire history of a nation into periods. Traditionally, history of English literature starts with the Anglo-Saxon Period, followed by the Anglo-Norman Period which is also called the Medieval Period, the Renaissance Period, etc. We begin this course with the Renaissance period which is also further subdivided into the Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline and Restoration periods. It is now customary to call the medieval period Postclassical Age and the Renaissance Early Modern Period.

You may like to know the reasons for the change in nomenclature. I must tell you about the Annales School (French pronunciation: a’ nal) historians in France in the twentieth century who stressed long term social history, also called longue duree. Long duree gives priority to long-term historical structures over events that Francois Simian called histoire evenementielle or ‘event history’. In this light the dividing line between the Anglo–Saxon and Medieval eras vanishes and the dominant tendencies can be understood better as early post classical and later postclassical periods.

It has been pointed out that the Ancient European civilization which was born in Greece and flourished under the Roman empire began to decline in the third century of the CE. There were several elements that caused the disruption of the Pax Romana - the peace of the Romans. The Roman empire was plunged into military anarchy, was raided by Germanic tribes and, was burdened by economic dislocation. Besides, eastern religions undermined the Greco-Roman civilization that was based on rational enquiry. The Roman world began to move in a direction in which the quest for the divine was to predominate over all human enterprise.

The political void thus left by the Romans was filled by the Germanic tribes such as the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Visigoths in Hispania, Franks and Burgundians in Gaul and Western Germany and the Angles and Saxons in Britain. We find that the old English epic poem Beowulf narrates, according to Gregory (c 540 –94), Bishop of Tours, the events of the sixth century Merovingian period of French history. The Geatish king Hygelac in Beowulf has been identified with ‘Chociliacus’ (in Latin), a Scandinavian leader, who conducted a raid in 520 against the Frisian territory of the Franks. While the event that Beowulf narrates took place in the sixth century the poem was actually written in the tenth.
The epic narrates two major events in the life of the Geatish hero Beowulf son of Ecgtheow: the first when in his youth, he fights and kills Grendel who has been attacking Heorot, the hall of the Danish king Hrothgar. Next night Grendel’s mother merewif (sea woman) or brymywlf (sea wolf) or grundwyr gen (ground monster), etc. as she is called, comes to avenge her son but meets the same fate. Beowulf is suitably feasted and rewarded and returns to his own land. Beowulf later himself becomes king of the Geats and has a prosperous reign of forty years when he slays a dragon which has ravaged his land but in the fight receives a mortal wound. The poem ends with the funeral ceremonies in honour of the dead hero. There is a strong thread of Christian commentary that runs through the poem and scholars are of the view that the poem was written in the eighth century when England was being won over by Christianity, seemingly inappropriate to the date of the historical events it describes.

Two other poems that refer to the pre-Christian age are ‘Widsith’ (i.e. ‘the far traveller’) and ‘Deor.’ The former dates substantially from the seventh century and is thus the earliest poem in the English language. It is constructed around three ‘thulas’ (i.e. mnemonic name lists) connected by the events in the life of the eponymous minstrel. The first names the great rulers; the second the tribes among whom the minstrel travelled and the third the people the minstrel claimed to have sought out.

‘The Lament of Deor’ records the effusions of a minstrel who has fallen out of favour and who consoles himself in 42 lines of seven unequal sections with the refrain, ‘His sorrow passed away so will mine.’ Deor recalls the past misfortunes of Wayland the Smith, Theodoric and Hermanric. ‘Deor’ unlike other elegies in Old English does not end with a Christian consolation.

‘Waldere’ or ‘Waldhere’ consists of two fragments in 63 lines which must have been part of a longer poem. Waldere was the son of a king of Aquitaine. He was given up to Atilla the Hun and became one of his generals. He later eloped with Hiltgund, a Burgundian princess, to whom he had been betrothed as a child. In the course of their flight they were attacked by assailants whom Waldere defeated but received injury as well. Waldere and Hiltgund continued their journey and were finally married.

‘[I]t was in their war songs’ wrote Emile Legouis that the Anglo-Saxons best retained the vestiges of their wild, primitive mood, especially in those which celebrated their own battles.’ Most prominent among such ‘songs’ are ‘The Battle of Brunanburh’ and ‘The Battle of Maldon’. The former narrates the battle fought between the English under Athelstan, grandson of Alfred (849–99), and the Danes under Anlaf who came from Dublin supported by the Scots and the Welsh. The poem celebrates the victory of Athelstan and his brother and successor Edmund in their defeat of the invaders.

‘The Battle of Maldon’ deals with the battle fought between the Danes and Byrhtnoth (c. 926–91) who rejects the demand for tribute by the former. The English are defeated partly because some of his men flee but partly also because of Byrhtnoth’s ‘ofermod’, his excessive pride in yielding ground to the Danes as a gesture of magnanimity. The latter half of the 325-line poem concerns itself with the loyalty of the followers of Byrhtnoth to their dead leader who vow to avenge his death.

The poetry of Old English or Early Postclassical period falls into two divisions – the pre-Christian and Christian. The former represents the poetry which the Anglo-Saxons brought with them in the form of oral sagas; the latter represents
the poetry developed under the teaching of the monks. The old pagan religion had vanished but it retained its hold on the life and language of the people. I have briefly described the pre-Christian poetry that is vigorous and varied. Let’s now turn to the poetry on Christian themes, though large in quantity, as preserved by the clerks - clergymen of the five minor orders as distinct from the higher or ‘holy orders’ – which are derivative in nature and thus of relatively inferior quality.

One of the salutary influences of the spread of Christianity in England was that it gave the people some relief from the frightful wars that were fought between the petty kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons. The conversions of the English to Christianity was led by Augustine (d. between 604 –609) from Rome who founded a monastery at Canterbury. He is not the same as St. Augustine (354–430) bishop of Hippo in North Africa and author of City of God (413–27) and the autobiographical Confessions. The former Augustine was prior of Pope Grerog’y’s monastery of St. Andrew in Rome. (A prior is a superior officer at a religious house or order.) Augustine was sent by Gregory with some forty monks, in 596, to preach in England. He was received by King Ethelbert of Kent who was later converted. The Augustinians spread the new religion in the South and center of England, especially in the Kingdom of Essex. They, however, produced no literature of lasting value.

St. Aidan (d. 651) came to Northumbria from Ireland which country had been a center of Christianity and education for all Western Europe. The Northumbrian School was centred mainly at the monasteries and abbeys at Jarrow and Whitby and the three great figures of Anglo-Saxon age produced by them were Bede (673–735), Caedmon (7th c.) and Cynewulf (8th c).

Venerable Bede, as he is generally called, has been hailed as the father of English learning. He wrote more them forty tracts in Latin. His translation of the gospel of St. John into Anglo-Saxon has been lost. His most frequently cited work is the Ecclesiastical History of the English People. We know of Caedmon the Anglo-Saxon Milton, from Bede’s account of Abbess Hilda at the monastery at Whitby where Caedmon was a layman and until maturity never learned any poetry. Once in a dream someone stood by and said, ‘Caedmon sing me something’ and Caedmon answered ‘I cannot sing.’ But according to Bede’s history the person said to him again, ‘Caedmon, sing to me.’ And he asked, ‘What shall I sing?’ and he answered, ‘Sing the beginning of created things.’ And, Caedmon began singing in his sleep. Next morning Caedmon narrated his story to the steward of the monastery who conveyed it to the Abbess Hilda. She called him to her presence and asked him to relate his tale to her. After hearing him she arranged, it is said, to have the Bible explained to him in bits which he then converted into songs in his native tongue. The Paraphrase attributed to him is, however, not entirely his creation. Another important work of the school of Caedmon is Judith based on an apocryphal book of the Old Testament.

The only one of the Anglo-Saxon poets who signed his works was Cynewulf. The name, however, was not written plainly but in runes – characters of the early Teutonic alphabet used extensively by the Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. The script dates from the 2nd or 3rd century. It is based on Roman or Greek letters adapted to be inscribed on wood or stone. The only poems signed by Cynewulf are Christ II, Juliana, The Fates of Apostles and, Elene. The poems attributed to him or his school are Andreas, the Phoenix, the Dream of the Rood, the Descent into Hell, Guthlac, the Wanderer and, a few Riddles. Some of the riddles, such as ‘The Storm Spirit’ and ‘The Swan’, are of unusual beauty. Below are lines of the ‘The Swan’ in Brougham’s translation:
My robe is noiseless while I tread the earth,
Or tarry 'neath the banks, or stir the shallows,
But when these shining wings, this depth of air,
Bear me aloft above the bending shores
Where men abide, and far the welkin’s strength
Over the multitudes conveys me, then
With rushing whir and clear melodious sound
My raiment sings. And like a wandering spirit
I float unwearyedly o’er flood and field.

Of the four of Cynewulf’s poems The Christ has been considered the most characteristic of him. It is a poem in three parts: the first celebrates the Nativity or birth of Jesus; the second, ‘His Ascension’ and the third, ‘Doomsday’ narrating the torments of the wicked and the endless joy of the redeemed. The poem reflects Cynewulf’s love for Christ and his reverence for the Virgin Mary. Elene is the story of St. Helena, the mother of Constantine (274–337), the Roman emperor (306–37) who converted to Christianity and transferred the capital of the empire to Byzantium which he renamed Constantinople. In Elene Cynewulf tells us about Constantine’s vision of the Rood or Christ’s Cross on the eve of a battle. After his victory he sends his mother Helena to Jerusalem to search for the original cross and the nails. ‘[I]t is’ writes Emile Legouis, ‘to see in [Cynewulf] the author of The Dream of the Rood, since such a dream is said to have determined his conversion’. There is an intimation here of the theme of the search for the Holy Grail in the literature of the succeeding period.

This flowering of Northumbrian literature came to an untimely end towards the end of the eighth century by the conquest of the Danes. The few fragments that are preserved are the work of Alfred (849–901) the great Anglo-Saxon king who preserved the poetry of the Northumbrians in the dialect of the West Saxons.

Edward the Confessor (1042–66) died heirless on 5 January, 1066. The Witan, the Assembly of Wise Men, elected Harold, son of Godwin, to the throne. Now Edward was more of a Norman than English. He came to the throne at the age of thirty-five but he had spent twenty-five years of this period continuously in Normandy, France. He was at least as familiar with Norman speech and customs as with English and gave preferment to people of Norman origin in the offices of the Church and government. Godwin was a Saxon but he and his sons often behaved quite irresponsibly and so they were unpopular. Duke William of Normandy had come to see Edward, his cousin, and got an assurance that he would succeed him to the throne. The Norman party at Edward’s court supported this move. Before Edward died Godwin had been put to death and so his son gained the throne in January 1066. At this time William of Normandy Conquered Britain and declared himself king.

The Normans were Northmen, the Danes who had settled in the North-West of France and quickly adopted their language, culture and habits. Under Norman influence Anglo-Saxon was simplified to modern English by losing many declensions. Here we are interested in primarily the poetry of the period, i.e. 1066 to 1350. ‘Homilies, sermons in prose and in verse, translation of the Psalms or parts of the Bible, rules for a devout life, lives of the saints, and prayers’ wrote Emile Legouis, ‘fill the pages which form the mass of what may be called English literature until about the middle of the fourteenth century.’
About 1200 an Augustinian canon called Orm in the East Midland wrote a voluminous poem he called after himself *The Ormulum*. It constitutes of paraphrases of the gospels, around 1105 *Moral Odes* and *Proverbs of Alfred* and in the first half of the thirteenth century *Orison to our Lady*, *Genesis* and *Exodus* and *Proverbs of Hendyng* were composed.

**Geoffrey of Monmouth** (d. 1155) probably a Benedictine monk of Monmouth at Oxford in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136) narrates the history of Britain from the time of Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas to Cadwallader (AD 689) the last of the British Kings of England after whom the British would be called Welsh (foreign). This work influenced Layamon’s *Brut* (c. 1200), the most important of the English rhyming chronicles. It marks the first appearance of the Arthurian legend in English.

Metrical romances with their celebration of courtly love, Chivalry and religion distinguishes the century and a half before Chaucer from other periods. However, the most outstanding work of the genre in English was Sir Thomas Malory’s (d 1471) *Le Morte D’Arthur* (1470) published by William Caxton (c. 1422–91) in 1485.

Metrical romance was brought to England by the Normans. It soon became so popular that it overshadowed all other forms of literary expression. Romances are long poems or series of poems treating of love or knightly adventure or both. Its characters are ladies in distress, warriors in armour, giants, dragons, enchanters and enemies of the Church and State. The enormous number of these verse romances are divided, according to subject, into the so called matter of France, Rome and Britain.

The matter of France centres largely around Charlemagne (742–814) king of the Franks (768). He and his Paladins are the subject of several *chansons de geste*, or epic poems in old French, of which *Chanson de Roland* is the most famous. The Paladins were the twelve peers of Charlemagne. The Paladins were brave warriors under the leadership of Roland and Oliver. All of them perish in Roncesvalles. Roland was the most famous of the Paladins of Charlemagne. Einhard (?770–? 840), a Frankish noble in the service of Charlemagne, who wrote the famous biography of the emperor, *Vita Caroli Magni* narrates the event of August 778.

The rearguard of the French army of the emperor was returning through the Pyrenees from a successful expedition in the north of Spain when it was surprised in the valley of Roncesvalles by the Basque inhabitants of the mountains. The baggage was looted and the rearguard killed.

In later retelling of the story - *chanson de geste* or ‘song of heroic deeds’ - beginning in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries the Basques were replaced by the Muslims or the Saracen, as they were called by the Europeans, in the *La Chanson de Roland* or *The Song of Roland* (1040–1115).

Roland, the commander of the rearguard, is appointed at the behest of the traitor Ganelon, who is in league with Marsile the Saracen King. Now Oliver is introduced as Roland’s companion in arms. He is brother of Aude, Roland’s betrothed. Oliver thrice calls upon Roland to summon aid by blowing his horn but Roland from excess of pride defers doing so until it is too late. However, Charlemagne returns and destroys the Saracen army. Ganelon is tried and executed.

Jean Boedel a late twelfth-century romance writer divided the vast literature of the genre into three categories, i.e. the Matter of France, Rome and Britain.
While the literature on the theme of Charlemagne and his circle was ‘The Matter of France’ that on King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table was called ‘The Matter of Britain’. The interesting thing about the legend of Arthur, Gawain, Launcelot, Merlin, the quest of the Holy Grail, etc. are Celtic in origin, their literary form is due to French poets who originated the metrical romances. The English romances are their copies or translations of the French. This is true not only of the matter of France or of Britain as pointed out above but also of Rome, i.e. cycles of romances dealing with the deeds of Alexander and the siege of Troy with which the Britons thought they had some connection. In the twentieth century English scholars, diverging from Jean Boedel’s classification of the metrical romances, called romances concerned with English heroes such as King Horn (c. 1225), or Havelok the Dane (before 1272) Matter of England.

The English author of Cursor Mundi (c. 1320), a poetical work of pseudo–history and hagiography covering mankind’s spiritual history from the Creation to the Last Judgment, divided into seven ages, testified to the popularity of these romances in his work:

Men yernen jestis for to here
And romances rede in diverse manere

The author then went on to summarize the great cycles of romances in his own work.

The romances came into existence in England owing to the French and were thus an upper class phenomenon but here and there were singers who made ballads for the common people. Next to the romances these ballads are the most significant of the works of the Norman period. The ballads alone give us an insight into the lives and aspiration, fears and hopes of the common people. However, on account of its obscure origin and oral transmission the ballads are the most difficult of literary topics to discuss. Some of these, such as ‘Merrie greenwood men’ got assimilated into the Geste of Robin Hood. ‘All literature’ wrote William Long, ‘is but a dream expressed, and “Robin Hood” is the dream of an ignorant and oppressed but essentially noble people, struggling and determined to be free.’

Older than Havelok and Horn was The Owl and the Nightingale written in imitation of the disputoisons or tensons of the poets of Provence. Tensons or Tenzons were contests in verse making by the troubadours, i.e. the epic poets in northern France. The poem in 1794 lines is a debate between the grave owl and the gay nightingale who represent the religious and the love poets respectively. It is a learned poem touching on scholastic legalism on issues of contemporary interests such as foreknowledge, music, confession, papal missions, etc. Contrary to the serious tone of The Owl and the Nightingale Medieval lyrics of the age of Edward I (1272–1307) such as ‘Alysoun’, ‘Springtime’ (c. 1300) and ‘Cuckoo Song’, though still inspired by French models, are more interesting than the romances and the ballads. The graceful ‘Alysoun’ has stanzas of mixed three and four-accented lines that have rhymes repeated even five times:

Bytuene Mersh and Averil,
When spray biginneth to springe,
The lutel foul1 hath hire wyl
On hyre lud2 to synge.
Iche libbe3 in love loginge
For semlokest4 of all thinge.
She may me blisse bringe;
Icham5 in hire baundoun6.
An hendy hap ichabbe yhent',
Ichot⁴ from hevene it is me sent,
From alle wymmen mi love is lent⁹
And lyht¹⁰ on Alysoun.

[Glossary: ¹Little bird. ²in her language. ³I live. ⁴fairest. ⁵I am. ⁶power, bondage ⁷a
plesant fate I have attained. ⁸I know. ⁹gone. ¹⁰lit, alighted.]

These lines herald the coming of Geoffrey Chaucer as also does the felicitous
‘Cuckoo Songh’ with its yet freer and native rhythms:

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu,
Groweth sed and bloweth med,
And springth the wde nu,
Sing Cuccu.

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu.
Bullucsterleth, buckeverteth,
Murie sing cuccu.
Cuccu, cuccu.
Wel singes thu, cuccu
Ne swikethunaver nu.

The poet observes in the first stanza that summer has come in and so he beckons the
cuckoo to sing loudly. The poet again observes the seeds sprouting and the meadows
blossoming and the wood springing with its new foliage and the poet summons the
cuckoo to sing.

In the second stanza the poet describes the ewe bleating after the lamb and the cow
lowing after the calf, the bullock receiving new sensation in its body and the deer
breaking wind and so the poet makes a mute signal to the cuckoo to never ‘swike’ or
cease to sing ‘now’ (nu).

Political songs began to appear from the middle of the thirteenth century. At first they
were written in Latin and French by the clerks (or clergymen) and meant for the
ruling class but very soon the minstrels began to compose them for the people and
therefore in English. These songs, such as Song of the Husbandman sided with the
people and against their governors.

During the reign of Edward III (1327-77) these lays burst into songs of triumph.
Laurence Minot, probably a soldier, came forward as an official bard to Edward
to sing his victories in Scotland and France. ‘The great victories of Edward III’
wrote Emile Legouis, ‘were being sung in London, and Minot’s poems were
current in the country side when Chaucer was born and when his mind received
its first impressions.’ The historians of English literature went on,

Glory in the field of battle was followed by literary achievement as brilliant.
The long period of dependence was about to end. The English language,
which had hitherto conned what others said, often stammering the while, now
had faith in its destiny. Nothing is more striking than the number, the
originality, and the worth of the works which made the latter half of the
fourteenth century a flowering season in English literature.
The reference is to the dependence of the English on French literature which was now on its way out just as on the battlefield Edward’s forces won victories at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) against France. At the treaty of Bretigny (1360) France admitted the English claim to the South-West of France. ‘To con’ is to ‘peruse’, ‘scrutinize’ and ‘learn (by heart)’. Legouis has admirably summed up the end of a period and advent of the age of Chaucer.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400) is definitely the most prominent poet of the latter half of fourteenth century and among the greatest poets in English poetry but there were other prominent figures round about him. Among them were William Langland (c 1332–c 1386) the author of Piers Plowman, the anonymous author of the Cotton Nero Ax manuscript, popularly known as the Pearl Poet, John Gower (? 1330–1408) and, John Barbour (c. 1320–95).

Chaucer was son of John Chaucer (c. 1312–‘68) a London vintner. In 1359 he was in France with Edward III’s invading army, taken prisoner but ransomed by the king. He married Philippa sister of John of Gaunt’s third wife. Philippa died in 1387 but Chaucer enjoyed Gaunt’s patronage throughout his life. He made a journey to Genoa and Florence in 1372–3 in the course of which he could have met Boccaccio (1313–75) and Petrarch (1304–74). In 1378 he was sent to France and Lombardy.

Chaucer’s writings develop through his career from a period of French influence in the late 1360s of which the culmination was The Book of The Duchess (1369?). The ‘middle period’ of Chaucer’s poetry is dominated by the Italian influence as reflected in The House of Fame and Troilus and Criseyde. The Canterbury Tales (1307) Chaucer’s most celebrated work in 17000 lines is a product of his ‘English period’, the last phase. ‘Alone among his contemporaries’ wrote Legouis, ‘Chaucer put art first’. They went on, ‘He did not seek to direct men, to judge events, to reform morals, or to present a philosophy. Poetry was his only object’.

Quite unlike Chaucer was William Langland whose Piers Plowman which first appeared in 1362 as a poem in 1800 lines, is a clarion call to every man, king, priest, noble or labourer to do his Christian duty. Piers Plowman is an allegory. In the first vision of the ‘Field Full of Folk’ we see Piers lying down on the Malvern Hills when a vision comes to him in sleep. He sees a crowd expressing the varied life of the world. The genius of the throng is Lady Bribery who stands for the corruption in her society. Langland’s narration has force and vigour:

In a somer sesun, whon softe was the sonne,
I schop1 me into a shroud, as I a scheep were,
In habite as an hermite, unholy of werkes,
Went wyde in this world, wonders to here,
Bote in a Mayes mornynge, on Malverne hulles,
Me byfel a ferly2, of fairie me thought,
I was wery, forwanddred, and went me to reste
Undur a brod banke, bi a bourne3 side;
And as I lay and lened, and loked on the waters,
I slumbred in slepyng – hit swyed4 so murie…

[Glosar y: 1 clad. 2 wonder. 3 brook. 4 sounded.]

John Gower was a friend of Chaucer and a dedicatee along with Ralph Strode, fellow of Merton College, Oxford of the latter’s Troilus and Criseyde. Gower wrote in three languages, French, Latin and, English. He wrote Cinkante Balades and his first large scale work Mirour de l’ Omme (Speculum Meditantis in c. 1376–8) in Anglo-Norman. His second major work, even more ambitious than the
previous one, was VoxClamantis (c. 1379–81) in Latin. Confessio Amantis (1390s) his principal work was in English. It is a collection of 141 stories in over 33000 octosyllabic couplets. The frame story is the confession of a lover, Amans, to Genius, a priest of Venus. The confessor helps to examine the lover’s conscience by telling him exemplary stories of behaviour and fortune in love. However, Gower’s stories lack the development and scope of Chaucer’s. ‘Gower’ wrote Legouis, ‘learned, industrious, and copious, is the typical average poet of his century. His writings are what Chaucer’s might have been without Chaucer’s genius.’

John Barbour was a Scottish poet and Archdeacon of Aberdeen in 1357. The only poem ascribed to him with certainty is The Bruce or The Actes and Life of the Most Victorious Conqueror, Robert Bruce King of Scotland (1376) a long poem in 13000 lines. It is the national poem of Scotland just as Chanson de Roland is of France. The poem is animated by the spirit of freedom, independence and patriotism that Bruce stood for. Like Maharana Pratap and Shivaji Maharaj in India Bruce led the life of a hunted beast, hiding in the mountains and forestalling the traps laid for him until in 1314 he completely routed the English under Edward II at Bannockburn, near Stirling and secured the independence of Scotland. However, The Bruce was written at a time when the glory of Bannockburn had been tarnished by sanguinary defeats. Barbour’s massage to his nation was that freedom is of greater value ‘than all the gold in world that is’ and that ‘He levys at es that frely levys’ (He lives at ease who freely lives.)

There is no indication of the authorship of four remarkably beautiful poems – Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knignt, Pearl, Purity and Patience – preserved in a manuscript (Cotton Nero A x) in the British Library (formerly British Museum). They are written in West Midland dialect spoken in Lancashire. Historians date it in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knignt is in Edward Albert’s view ‘without doubt the finest of all the Middle English romances, for its mastery of plot handling, its realism, characterization, descriptive powers and use of the alliterative long line.’ It is the only secular work in the collection. It owes much to the Arthurian romances, and especially to the Perceval or Le Conte du Graal (1181–90) of Chrestien de Troyes (fl. 1170-90).

Pearl was the author’s daughter who died when she was two years old and the poem in her memory is a vision of paradise. Purity deals with three topics from the Scriptures: the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and, the fall of Belshazzar. Patience recounts the story of Jonah a bit humorously. Both Purity and Patience are in alliterative verse but without rhyme or stanzas.

England produced no poet worthy to rank with Chaucer for two centuries. In this period, i.e. 1400 – 1550, ‘Miserly Nature’, as Emile Legouis pointed out, ‘created only imitators and reiterators of outworn themes.’ ‘The sense of the beautiful’ Legouis went on, ‘seems to have died with the sense of life and of reality.’ Chaucer’s successors in the fifteenth century were his disciples but they were aware how far below him they were in poetic inspiration and execution. Thomas Occeleve or Hocceleve admitted,  

Fader Chaucer fayne wold han me taught, 
But I was dul, and learned lite or nought

The sentiment was repeated by John Lydgate who held that no poet in his time was left ‘that worthy was his ynkehorne for to hold’.

Very little is known, except what can be gathered from his writings, about
Thomas Occleve (1370?–1454?). He led a life of debauchery in his youth and none was known better to the tavern keepers and cook-shops in Westminster. He became a clerk in Privy Seal office, from which he retired on a pension to Hampshire in 1424. Occleve was the author of Letter of Cupid, long ascribed to Chaucer. La Male Regle de T. Occleve is a sort of confession of his debauched life. His principal work De Regimine Principum was written in 1411-12 to win the favours of the Prince of Wales, later Henry V. It is a series of lessons on conduct. It is an imitation of the work of Roman Aegidius of the same title written for Philip the Fair.

The dates of John Lydgate (1370–1451) are only approximately fixed. Lydgate was a friend of Chaucer. He became a monk at Bury St Edmunds where he rose to become a priest in 1397. He had a wide reputation in his time both as a scholar and poet but the enormous mass of his poems enhance their futility. About 1,40,000 lines of verse, authentically his, are extant. The Fall of Princes, full of platitudes, is 7000 verses long, The Temple of Glas is shorter and so is Story of Thebes a supposed addition to The Canterbury Tales. The authorship of London Lick penny the most popular of the poems ascribed to him is uncertain. The Complaint of the Black Knight has a few pleasant descriptions of nature but this Benedictine monk could hardly lift his eyes from books and these pictures have been, as pointed out by E. Legouis, lifted from them.

John Skelton, Alexander Barclay and Stephen Hawes come rather late in this period but they represent variously rather the last stirrings of the dying Medieval period than the early signs of life of the Renaissance. John Skelton (1406?–1529) earned praise from Erasmus as a learned humanist. He was tutor to the future Henry VIII and rector of Diss in Norfolk. Skelton found heroic verse of his time debased and instead of reforming it wrote loose octosyllabic couplets rhyming more than a dozen times. Skelton was aware of his faults but his aim was to strike hard and straight:

Though my rime be ragged,
Tatter’d and jagged,
Rudely raine–beaten,
Rusty and moth–eaten;
If ye take wel therewith,
It hath in it some pith,

Skelton’s pith is mostly satire. In an age of dull repetitions Skelton’s pleases owing to his brutality and coarseness. Some of his most interesting poems are The Bowge of Court, The Boke of Colin Clout and, Why Come ye not to Court?

The Bowge of Court (1509?) reminds us of The Ship of Fools. It is an allegory. The poet is on board a magnificent ship which is to take him to the land of favour. However, the voyage is troubled by Fortune’s friends, Flattery, Suspicion, Disdain and Dissimulation, who conspire against him and he is about to throw himself into the waters when he wakes up.

In Colin Clout (1519) reminiscent of Piers Plowman, Skelton chastises the vices of the clergy.

Why come ye not to Court? (1522) is an indictment of cardinal Wolsey the all-powerful minister of Henry VIII:

He ruleth all at will,
Without reason or skill;
Howbeit the primordial,
Of his wretched original
And his base progeny,
And his greasy genealogy,
He came of the sank royal
That was cast out of a butcher’s stall.

Skelton did not hesitate to castigate Wolsey’s ‘sank’ or ‘blood’ royal.

**Alexander Barclay** (1474-1552) a Dominican and a Latinist was more a translator than a poet. He in 1509 translated the Strasbourg poet Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools* not directly but through his Latin and French translations. It is a fiction of a ship in which all fools are invited to embark. This gives the poet an opportunity to review diverse kinds of eccentricities and follies of mankind. Barclay added some peculiarly English types to the crew. *Certayne Ecloges* (1541) another of Barclay’s works is the earliest English collection of pastorals. Barclay’s language is rude and his verse is unrythmical.

**Stephen Hawes** (1457–1523) is the most uninspired of the poets of this period. He lived mainly by his *Example of Vertue* (1503–4) and the better known *The Pastime of Pleasure*, or Histories of Graunde Amoure and *La Belle Pucel* (1505–6). Both works are allegorical in character with the then-obsolete spirit of romance. ‘In general’ wrote Legouis, ‘Hawe’s style, sometimes aggrandized by Latinized words, sometimes entangled by awkward constructions, is the worst known to English poetry’.

Chaucer’s personal influence was dominant as much in Scotland in this period, i.e. 1400-1550, as it was in England but the Scot, as Legouis has pointed out, ‘had a vitality which contrasted happily with English languor.’ ‘This’ Legouis goes on, ‘is the most glorious period of all their old poetry.’

If we look for the patriotic impulse in the manner of Barbour in *The Bruce* we can find it only in the *Wallace* (c. 1416) of Blind Harry, a minstrel. The fabulous element is much larger in the latter poem than in the former, for Blind Harry was writing about a hero who lived hundred and fifty years before him but both poets tell their tales in naked simplicity and monotonously. Blind Harry, however, heightens by contrast, the ornate and brilliant character of the verse of this period.

Chronologically the first Scottish poet to be influenced by Chaucer was **King James I** (1394–1436). He was taken prisoner by the English for nineteen years at the age of eleven along with his ship that was carrying him to France. However, he was honourably treated and properly educated by them. During his captivity James fell in love with Lady Jane Beaufort, niece to Henry IV, whom he married in 1424. *The Kingis Quair* (quire or book) written during his captivity describes his first sight of the lady who was destined to be his wife, who had in James’s words, ‘Beautee eneuch to mak a world to dote.’

The Dunfermline schoolmaster **Robert Henryson** (1452–1500) read and admired Chaucer’s *Troylus and Criseyde* but was shocked by the conclusion of the story. How could the faithful Troylus be killed and the fickle Criseyde be happy with Diomede? he wondered, ‘Quha wait gif all that Chaucer wrait was trew?’ (Who knows if all that Chaucer wrote was true?) So Henryson decided to recast the conclusion of the story and wrote *The Testament of Cresseid*.

Henryson’s Diomede soon deserts Cresseid and she is afflicted by Heaven with leprosy. She goes begging from door to door begging with her ‘cop and clapper’. One day Troylus, who is returning from a glorious expedition, passes near the
place where she sits and gives her a generous alms in memory of his ‘fair Cresseid’. When she learns from the other leper folk about the giver of the alms she falls to the ground. She writes her testament before her death in which she bequeaths her body to the worms and toads and all her goods to the lepers, save her ring set with a ruby, which is to be carried to Troylus after her death. When he receives it and hears her story his heart bleeds for his Cresseid and he has ‘ane tomb of merbell gray’, to be raised above her grave. While Henryson was a moralist and wished to set the horrible chastisement for the Cresseids of this world his morality was penetrated with sympathy and humanity.

Henryson was a prolific poet. The longest of his poems is the *Moral Fabillis of Esope*. *Orpheus and Eurydice* is an adaptation from Boethius. ‘Robene and Makyne’ and ‘Garmond of Gude Ladies’ are two better known of his thirteen lyrics.

**William Dunbar** (1406?–1520?) is considered the chief of the Scottish Chaucerian poets. He did not have Chaucer’s or Henryson’s gift of observation but he had virtuosity of style and versification. In Legouis’ words, ‘He dazzles the eyes and ravishes the ears.’ *The Thrissil and the Rois* is meant to commemorate the marriage of Margaret Tudor daughter of Henry VII to James IV of Scotland in 1503. The *Golden Targe* is an allegory in which the poet is accused by Dame Beauty and defended by Reason who shields him with a golden targe or Shield. His *Dance of the Sevin Deadly Synnis* does not offer ‘either propriety of details or religious horror of vice’. ‘It has’ in Legouis’ words, ‘instead the marks of a strange coarseness, and is fuller of buffoonery than of edification.’

Dunbar began as a Franciscan friar who was unfrocked. He was at one time a wandering preacher, sent by James IV on embassies to London and Paris. In ‘How Dunbar was desired to be ane freir’ he sees a demon in the guise of saint Francis who brings him the habit of his order to whom he explains why it does not please him to resume it. Dunbar sharpens his barbs against the Franciscans in ‘The Tournament’ which is in the form of an apology to the guild of traitors who have complained of his ridicule.

In *Lament for the Makaris* he names the poets of his country and of England who have died.

Dunbar was a commoner but **Gavin Douglas** (1475?–1522?) was a member of the famous Douglas family, his father being the fifth Earl of Angus, Archibald ‘Bell the Cat’. Gavin Douglas became a priest and, rose to be Bishop of Dunkeld. He participated in the high politics of his time, but after the disaster of Flodden in 1513, lost his bishopric, was expelled to England and quietly passed away in London. His *Palice of Honour* (1501) was written when Douglas was twenty-six. It was an imitation of Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*. *King Hart* exhibits a cunning mingling of humour and melancholy in which King Hart or Heart is made captive by Dame Pleasance, and delivered by Dame Pietie. However Hart marries Pleasance but after seven years when Age knocks at the palace of Pleasance all the courtiers flee and are at last followed by the dame herself. Reason and wit then advise the king to return to his own castle where before long he is assailed by an army of Decrepitude. Heart makes an ironic testament before his death.

Douglas has a greater claim to fame for his translation of Virgil (1512–13) into verse. Chaucer did indeed translate a few fragments but they are a poor performance. Caxton had published a prose version of Virgil but it was really a medieval romance and Douglas opined,
The most curious parts of Douglas’s Virgil are the prologues to the various books. Description of winter begins the seventh book and one of spring opens the twelfth. Douglas’s poetic abilities are evident in his faithfulness to nature and prodigality of detail.

**Sir David Lyndsay** (1490–1555) is the last of the Scottish poets of the fifteenth century. On the one hand he was an associate of John Knox (1505–72), the Protestant religious reformer and, on the other also a companion of James V who gave him the heraldic office of Lyon King of Arms.

His *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the three Estaitis* is a morality play. In *The Dreme* (1528) Lyndsay descends into Hell where he sees popes, kings, cardinals and archbishops being chastised for their ambition which kept them from succouring the poor. *The Monarchie, or Ane Dialog of the Miserable Estait of this World* (1552) was Lyndsay’s most considerable poem. ‘Lyndsay’ according to Legouis, ‘has nothing of the poet except metre, but his brutal satire strikes hard and multiplies blows without flinching.’

The years 1400 – 1550 appears to be a sterile period in terms of literary productions as most of the poets appeared to be poor imitators of Chaucer. However, this era has also sometimes been called a period of preparation for the Renaissance. The work that would most eminently fall under that rubric is Richard Tottel (c. 1519–c. 1562) and Nicholas Grimald’s compilation *Songs and Sonnettes* (1557) better known as *Tottel’s Miscellany*. Its popularity can be gaged from the fact that Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Shakespeare would have Tottel’s ‘book of songs and sonnets’ with him while courting Anne Page than forty shillings and the grave digger in *Hamlet* mumbles Vaux’s song from the same collection. *Tottel’s Miscellany* contains the chief works of Wyatt and Surrey.

**Sir Thomas Wyatt** (1503–42) held several diplomatic positions in the service of Henry VIII, in France, Italy, Spain and, the Netherlands. It is probable that during his visit in 1527 to Italy he got the idea of translating and imitating Petrarch in his works, especially his sonnets. The sonnet in English became the principal vehicle for the direct expression of personal feeling without recourse to fiction or allegory. Of Wyatt’s ninetysix love poems in the *Miscellany* the most noteworthy are the thirtyone sonnets, the first in English. Ten of these were translations from Petrarch while all were written in the Petrarchian form, apart from the concluding couplet which Wyatt introduced.

**Henry Howard**, (by courtesy) **Earl of Surrey** (1517–47) also like Wyatt studied Italian models, especially Petrarch, but his sonnets were predominantly in the ‘English’ form (abab cdcd efef gg) which was later used by Shakespeare. Forty of his poems were published in *Tottel’s Miscellany*, ten years after his death. A still more durable innovation of Surrey was his use of ‘blank verse’ in his *Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aeneis turned into English Meter* (1557), a translation of the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid*.

The two poets, Wyatt and Surrey, were much in advance of their times and a whole generation passed before their lead was followed. The two poets of their time who deserve mention are **Thomas Sackville** (1536–1608) and **George Gascoigne**
Sackville’s only contribution to poetry was his ‘Induction’ to be followed by ‘The Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham’ written in 1563 for *A Mirror for Magistrates* a work planned originally by George Ferrers and William Baldwin. George Gascoigne was a soldier in the Netherlands, from 1572 to 74 spending four months as a prisoner of the Spanish. His poems and plays were published during his absence, as *A Hundredth Sundrie Flowers* (1573). This was supposedly without his authority. On his return he brought out a corrected and enhanced version under the title *The Poesie of George Gascoigne*. His *Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or rhyme in English* is a pioneering account of English versification. His *The Steele Glas* (1576) is a satire in verse, Gascoigne’s only work still read with interest.

Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) the Italian humanist – known chiefly for his prose dialogues *Il libro del cortegian* (1528), translated into English as *The Courtier* (1561), discusses the qualities of the ideal courtier. It had much influence on English literature, namely on Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare and W.B. Yeats. Yeats laments the ‘soldier, scholar, horseman’ in his ‘In Memory of Major Robert Gregory’ who was to Yeats ‘our Sidney and our perfect man’.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86) was the most commanding literary figure before Spenser and Shakespeare. He took a brilliant part in the military, courtly and literary life of his time. However, all his writings were published after his decease at the early age of 32 at Zutphen on the battlefield while assisting the Dutch against the Spaniards.

His finest achievement was his 108 love sonnets, the *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) addressed to Penelope Devereux daughter of the Earl of Essex. She is his ‘Stella’ or ‘star’ while he is the ‘astrophel’ or ‘lover of the star’. These sonnets owe much to Petrarch (1304–74) and Ronsard (1524–85), the French poet, leader of the Pleiade. Sidney dedicated *Astrophel and Stella* to his wife Frances (daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham). These made Sidney the greatest Elizabethan sonneteer except Shakespeare.

Sidney’s *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595) has taken its place among the most memorable critical essays in English. In it Sidney defends poetry as greater than history or philosophy. While assessing Sidney we must remember that he wrote before most of the great poets and any of the Elizabethan dramatists had published their works.

Since Sir Philip Sidney’s works were published after his death, Edmund Spenser (1552–99) took precedence over him in revealing poetic beauty to his generation. Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–99) was born at East Smithfield, near the Tower of London and was educated at Merchant Taylers’ school founded in 1561 to which the dramatist Thomas Kyd (or kid 1558–94), Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626) one of the divines appointed to translate the Bible, known as the Authorized Version of 1611 and, Thomas Lodge (1558–1625) traveller, explorer and author of *Rosalynde* (1590) his best known romance, also went. Richard Mulcaster (c. 1530–1611) was its first eminent headmaster who later became high master of St. Paul’s.

Spenser studied also at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, as poor sizar and fag for wealthy students. At Cambridge he read the great Italian and French poets and wrote several poems of his own. His sonnets in imitation of the Italian Petrarch (1304–74) and the French Joachim Du Bellay (1522–60) author in 1549–50 of the first sonnet
sequence L’Olive in French, he contributed to van der Noodt’s Theatre for Worldlings (1569). Spenser’s The Vision of Bellay later also appeared in the Complaints of 1591. Chaucer whom Spenser called ‘well of English undefyled’ here became his beloved master, but his ambition was to express the dream of English chivalry as Ariosto (1474–1535) had done for Italy in Orlando Furioso (1532).

Spenser left Cambridge in 1576 and went to the north of England on what occupation or quest it is not known. It is not improbable that there, in his youth he fell in love and began to record his melancholy over the lost Rosalind in The Shepheardes Calender. In 1578 he became secretary to John Young, Bishop of Rochester. In 1579 on the invitation of his college friend Gabriel Harvey (c. 1550–1631) he went to London with his poems. Harvey introduced him to the Earl of Leicester who invited him to live in his house. At Leicester House Spenser came in contact with Sir Philip Sidney to whom he dedicated his Shepheardes Calender (1579). ‘For the England of 1579’ wrote Emile Legouis, ‘lagging behind the continent, seeing the Renaissance flower there while she remained sterile, the appearance of the Shepheardes Calender inaugurated a period of self–confidence and vast hopes.’ Legouis went on,

Spenser was the master of the language whose ‘numbers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse’. He seemed able to tune English verse, which had been so long rebellious, to the tones of his voice. For him the language ceased to be refractory.

1579 was propitious year for him for he married Machabyas Chylde in that year and began to write The Faerie Queene as well.

The Elizabethan court was full of intrigue, lying and flattery and Spenser was ill at ease there. His suffering is evident from the following lines of ‘Mother Hubberd’s Tale’:

Full little knowest thou, that has not tried,
What hell it is, in suing long to bide:
To lose good days, that might be better spent;
To waste long night in pensive discontent;

           To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares;
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs,
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone,

Through Leicester’s influence Spenser, who was utterly weary of his dependent position, became in 1580 secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton, the queen’s deputy in Ireland. This way the third phase of his life began, the first two being those at Cambridge and London.

Spenser accompanied Grey through a campaign of savage brutality in putting down an Irish rebellion in Munster. In reward he was given an immense estate of 3000 acres acquired from Earl Desmond and the Kilcolman Castle near Limerick. Here he settled and occupied himself with his writing – an elegy, Astrophel, for Sidney and, preparing The Faerie Queene for the press. Sir Walter Raleigh (?1554–1618) was in Ireland in 1580 and got acquainted with Spenser. Spenser approved of Raleigh’s commanding role in the massacre of Smerwic, in which 600 Spanish mercenaries were killed. At one of his visits in 1589 Raleigh heard The Faerie Queene with enthusiasm, hurried the poet to London and presented him to the queen. The first three books met with instant success on its
publication and was declared the greatest work in the English language. An annual pension of fifty pounds was conferred by the queen on him but it was rarely paid. Spenser returned unwillingly to Ireland which he regarded as lonely exile:

My luckless lot,
That banished had myself, like wight forlore,
Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.

In 1596, after more than fifteen years residence there he wrote his only prose work *View of the State of Ireland*, not published until 1633. In it he submitted a plan for 'pacifying the oppressed and rebellious people'. His suggestion was to send a huge force of cavalry and infantry into Ireland, give them a short period to submit and then hunt them down like wild beasts. He reckoned that cold, famine and pestilence would assist the sword and after they had been hounded for two winters the following summer peace would descend upon Ireland. Strange as it might appear, Spenser’s views were excellently well received in England as most statesman like.

Spenser returned to Ireland after nearly two years residence in London. This time he fell in love with an Irish girl called Elizabeth Boyle whom he had wooed in his *Amoretti*, a series of 88 sonnets. His marriage to her was celebrated in *Epithalamion*. Both were printed together in 1595. The same year he visited London again and stayed at Leicester House, now occupied by the new favourite of the Queen, Essex. There Spenser also met other luminaries, Shakespeare among them. In 1596 he published Books IV to VI of *The Faerie Queene* and his *Fowre Hymnes* while he stayed at the house of the earl of Essex. There he wrote the *Prothalamion* and also his *View of the State of Ireland*.

Spenser once again returned to Ireland in 1596 or '97. His castle at Kilcolman was burnt in 1598 in a sudden insurrection of the O’Neills under the earl of Desmond. Spenser was forced to flee to Cork with his wife and three children. Some of his manuscripts got burnt. Spenser’s last days were spent at an inn in king street at Westminster, according to Ben Jonson ‘for want of bread’. Spenser was buried near his favourite, Chaucer, in Westminster Abbey, the earl of Essex paying his funeral expenses. Twenty years later a monument was erected to him by Lady Anne Clifford which describes him as ‘THE PRINCE OF POETS IN HIS TYME’. There have been few periods in English literary history in which Spenser’s name has not been taken in the highest esteem.

I hope that this historical background will help you in reading this block with understanding.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma
UNIT 1  WHY READ A POEM ? AND, HOW TO STUDY UNDERSTANDING POETRY?

Structure
1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Answering the Question, ‘What is a Poem?’
1.3 The Scope of this Course: The Syllabus
1.4 Assignments and Term-End-Examination
   1.4.1 Assignments
   1.4.2 Why Examinations?
   1.4.3 A Model Term-End-Examination Question Paper
1.5 Let Us Sum Up
1.6 Answers to Self-check Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES
After going through this unit you will be able to,
• explain the purpose of a formal study of poetry,
• appreciate the importance of poetry in life,
• understand the range of topics, poets and poems covered in this course,
  gage our expectations from you and thus
• give direction to your study of this course.

1.1 INTRODUCTION
Did you ask yourself why you decided to read this course on poetry? Reading of poetry does not enable a person to do anything such as repair a watch, a mobile phone, an AC or a car. It does not lead to any application in technology as physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology and geology would do. Political science, sociology and economics have social relevance. People also seek the help of psychiatrists and lawyers but poets are of no “practical” use, apparently. I will try to make a few suggestions in the next section; read it and then discuss it in your study group. Just by doing so you will make your study of this course meaningful.

Passive education is no education. The T.V. has been called an ‘idiot box’. People who watch the t v for long hours are passive learners. They actually learn nothing. Education should make us wise. ‘Read’ wrote Francis Bacon, ‘not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider.’ Weighing and considering will indeed make you wiser. Study of literature is part of liberal culture or education. Will reading poetry give more meaning to your life? It is akin to history and philosophy. It is ‘for delight, for ornament, and for ability.’
ANSWERING THE QUESTION ‘WHAT IS A POEM?’

Self-check Exercises I

1) Have you talked to your friends about any poem that either you or they may have liked? If not, would you like to do so now and record your response below?
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2) Do you like singing film songs? Write down why you do so?
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3) Imagine that the government has banned film songs. What would happen then?
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Answering the question ‘What is a Poem?’

Well, a poem is an instance of ‘poetry’ and ‘poetry is a variety of literature; the other varieties being non fictional prose, fiction - the short story and the novel - drama and literary criticism. We treat the essay - in both its forms, the long ones, or treatises, such as David Hume’s (1711 - 76) An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748) and Treatise of Human Nature (1739 - 40) and the shorter performances such as Charles Lamb’s (1775-1834) The Essays of Elia (1820-23) or Francis Bacon’s (1561 - 1626) The Essays, or Counsels, Civil and Morall (1597, 1612, 1623) – memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, letters, etc. as nonfiction and literary criticism as a major separate variety of it.

We have said that a ‘poem’ is an example of poetic expression. The Oxford English Dictionary calls poetry ‘expression of beautiful or elevated thought, imagination or feeling in appropriate language and usually in metrical form’. Notice the word ‘usually’ since poetry need not always be in verse. We have prose poems such as ‘The Book of Job’ in the Old Testament, ‘Dream Children’
of Lamb, ‘The Vision of Mirza’ of Joseph Addison, *The Waves* of Virginia Woolf and passages in Jawaharlal Nehru’s autobiography that are pure poetry. Nehru describes the cremation of his father on the banks of the Ganges in the following worlds in his autobiography:

> As evening fell on the river bank on that winter day, the great flames leapt up and consumed that body which had meant so much to us who were close to him as well as to millions in India. Gandhi said a few moving words to the multitude, and then all of us crept silently home. The stars were out and shining brightly when we returned lonely and desolate. (Page 247)

This can be called a piece of prose poem; it has all the qualities of poetry except metre.

Plays have been written in prose as by George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950) and in verse as by T.S.Eliot (1888 – 1965) and William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616). The success of a literary artist rests on many factors but most of all on his imagination, thought and feeling couched in a language that felicitously conveys them to us. Let’s take an example from the fifth act of *Macbeth* (1605). Macbeth has just heard about his wife’s death and befitting the situation he bursts out thus:

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays are lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
> Signifying nothing. (Act V, Sc. V)

You may ask if Shakespeare was not indiscreet in embellishing a murderer of his friend Banquo and his monarch Duncan with the grand poetry that he has been endowed with? The personification of ‘day’ creeping at a ‘petty pace’ the congeries of metaphors of ‘brief candle’, ‘walking shadow’, ‘poor player’ and ‘a tale told by and idiot’ for life demonstrate the profundity of Macbeth’s imagination. How could a man who was capable of such deep philosophical meditation commit crimes of such ghastly proportions? These are debatable points but we can immediately feel the power of Shakespeare’s poetry. ‘A poem’ wrote Wallace Stevens, ‘must resist the intelligence almost successfully.’ Shakespeare will be read as long as English will be read and understood.

Poets don’t read philosophical treatises before writing their poems but philosophers, scientists, and artists, and people in all walks of life are influenced by the spirit of the age which impacts their work. A student of poetry would do well to explore the political, social and cultural history of the society and the life of the poet whose poem they are going to study. A poem is a product of the man, the milieu and, the moment. Just think of some of W.B. Yeats’s poems: ‘September 1913’, ‘Easter 1916’, ‘Nineteen Hundred Nineteen’ and above all ‘Among School Children’. They were influenced by Irish history but Yeats did not give us the details of events in his poems as a historian does. The poems are simultaneously public and private documents, thoughtful and emotional accounts
of experiences at the same time, that Yeats wanted to share with his readers. ‘Poetry’ wrote Aristotle, ‘is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal, and history only the particular’.

‘Reality’ wrote Wallace Stevens, ‘is a cliché from which we escape by metaphors’. ‘A poet’ Stevens went on, ‘looks at the world as a man looks at a woman.’ Philip Larkin’s ‘Church Going’ is a strange poem about the poet, a disbeliever’s visit to a church. He writes:

Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,
The poet seems to have reverence for the “house of god” notwithstanding his lack of faith. The poem ends with a confession:

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

At the end of the nineteenth century Matthew Arnold (1822 - 88) the great Victorian poet wrote in his preface to the Hundred Greatest Men:

The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve.

‘Theories in politics and science change; one dogma in religion founders and a new one arises in its place but poetry stays’. Arnold went on,

Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it... The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry.

Is Philip Larkin’s ‘Church Going’ not about the poetry latent in religion? Poetry ‘is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge’ as William Wordsworth pointed out.

How does poetry stand with respect to science? Francis Bacon has been called the first martyr of science because he caught cold while stuffing dead birds with snow and died. ‘Poesy’ he wrote ‘is part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth, truly refer to the imagination, which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches’ (The Advancement of Learning, BK II, 1605). He also pointed out that poesy offers ‘magnanimity, morality, and ... delectation’ but it is reason which ‘buckle[sl] and bow[sl] the mind unto the nature of things.’ So reason according to him is superior to poetry.
Another major figure of the age of Scientific Revolution and of Reason was John Locke (1632 - 1704) whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) offers a study of the human mind and the mechanism of understanding. He rejected the doctrine of ‘innate ideas’ and pointed out that the source of ideas is experience. Locke believed that sensation is always of a quality and qualities are either primary, i.e., extensions, figure, motion and number or secondary which do not really belong but are imputed to them. Colour, for instance is a secondary quality which is a subjective perception. We are also ignorant of spiritual entities.

John Dryden (1631-1700) a contemporary of Locke seems to have been influenced even more by the scientific ethos of his age. Charles Sedley, Lord Buckhurst as Eugenius in Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatick Poesy* holds the view that his age was superior to the ancients because ‘natural causes [are] more known than in the time of Aristotle.’ So it follows from it that ‘poesy and other arts may with the same pains, arrive still nearer to perfection’. Eugenius wants the method of science to serve as a model for poets. Crites (Sir Robert Howard) shares with Eugenius the euphoria on science. He asks,

> Is it not evident in these last hundred years, when the study of philosophy has been the business of all the virtuosi in Christendom, that almost a new nature has been revealed to us? That more errors of the School have been detected, more useful experiments in philosophy have been made, more noble secrets in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy discovered, than in all those credulous and doting ages from Aristotle to us? – so true it is, that nothing spreads more fast than science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

Eugenius points his finger at the new discoveries such as those of Galileo (1564-1650) and Descartes (1596-1650) in optics and physics and Andreas Vesalius (1515-164) and William Harvey (1578-1657) in anatomy and physiology took European science ahead of those of Aristotle, a constant butt of Galileo’s jibes, Galen, the Arabs such as Al Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes and the Schoolmen such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus and Abelard.

Dryden, as Neander, compares the sub-plots which he calls ‘under-plots or by-concernments’ in drama with phenomenon in Ptolemaic astronomy:

> Our plays, besides the main design, have under-plots or by-concernments, of less considerable persons and intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main plot: as they say the orb of the fixed stars and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the motion of the primum mobile, in which they are contained.

Dryden or Neander, whose role in the essay is to defend English drama against the French stage goes on:

> That similitude expresses much of the English stage; for if contrary motions may be found in nature to agree, if a planet can go east and west at the same time – one way by virtue of his motion, the other by the force of the first mover – it will not be difficult to imagine how the under-plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

In the literature of a nation production of works of art are dialogical in nature and also there is a progression in the appearance of literary pieces. Alexander Pope
Early Modern English Poets (1688 - 1744) came at the cusp of the neoclassical era in Western Europe: the two strands of neo-classicism and science meet in poets and critics such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. By reading *An Essay of Criticism* (1711) against the background of Locke’s ideas on primary and secondary qualities we can appreciate it better. ‘True Wit’ wrote Pope, ‘is Nature to advantage dress’d / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d;’. The office of the poet was to provide felicitous expression to truth, to ‘Nature’. Pope recommends classical plainness such as we find in the Parthenon on the Acropolis at Athens on the one hand and in the ideas of Sir Isaac Newton (1642 - 1727) in the ground breaking *Philosophia Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) on the other. Pope’s euphoria can be gaged from his couplet on Sir Isaac Newton:

> Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in Night:
> God said, *Let Newton be*; and all was Light.

Ignorant of India’s achievements in astronomy and mathematics, Pope in his *An Essay on Man* (1732 – 4) scoffed at us,

> Lo, the poor Indian! Whose untutor’d mind
> Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind:
> His soul, proud science never taught to stray
> Far as the solar walk, or milky way;

He did not know about the scientific ideas of the Buddhists, the Sankhya philosophy of Kapil, the theory of the atom of Kanad, the medical ideas of Charak or Sushrut. He also derided, the Persian dervishes for imitating the circular movements of the planets in the hope of knowing god.

> As Eastern priests in giddy circles run
> And turn their heads to imitate the Sun,

Against the ‘irrational’ Asians Pope pitted the scientific mind of the English:

> Superior beings when of late they saw
> A mortal man unfold all Nature’s law,
> Admir’d such wisdom in an earthly shape,
> And shew’d a NEWTON as we shew an Ape.

Alexander Pope’s poet plays the second fiddle to a scientist.

When Samuel Johnson, that last of the Romans, tried to define the function of the poet, in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759) he apparently compared a poet to a scientist. ‘He’, i.e. the poet, Johnson opined, ‘must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place.’

British conquest of India in the eighteenth century changed all this. Sir William Jones translated Kalidas’s *Shakuntala* into English and in course of time a Wordsworth could say,

> The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion.
Wordsworth went on to pronounce his most famous words,

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.

We read poetry as the ‘finer spirit of all knowledge’ and so a proper study of poetry is important.

1.3 THE SCOPE OF THIS COURSE: THE SYLLABUS

Let’s at the outset find out what you have to study in this course. Read the syllabus properly and prepare a good strategy for studying it. In other words you must plan your study of the course.

Understanding Poetry (Revised) BEGE106

This course has eight blocks comprising of 40 units as under:

Block I

Early Modern Period
1) Introductory Unit
2) On metre and poetic devices
3) Shakespeare and his sonnets (29 and 30)
4) John Milton: ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ ‘On the Late Massacre’ and ‘When the Assault’
6) Andrew Marvell: ‘Thoughts in a Garden’, ‘To his Coy Mistress’

Block II

The Long Eighteenth Century
7) John Dryden: Mac Flecknoe
8) Alexander Pope: An Essay on Man
9) Samuel Johnson: The Vanity of Human Wishes
10) Thomas Gray: Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Block III

The Romantic Poets
12) S.T. Coleridge: ‘Kubla Khan’
13) Lord Byron: ‘Roll on Thou Deep and Dark Blue Ocean’, ‘George the Third’
14) P.B. Shelley: ‘Ode to the West Wind’, ‘To a Skylark’
15) John Keats: ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’

Block IV

The Great Victorian Poets
Early Modern English Poets

20) Thomas Hardy: ‘To an Unborn Pauper Child’, ‘Great Things’
   D.H. Lawrence: ‘Bavarian Gentians’

Block V
The High Modernist, Postmodernist and Recent Poets

23) Philip Larkin: ‘Church Going’, ‘The Whitsun Weddings’
25) Seamus Heaney: ‘Death of Naturalist’

Block VI
The American Poets I

26) R. W. Emerson: ‘The Snowstorm’ and ‘Hamatreya’
27) Walt Whitman: ‘Crossing Brooklyn Ferry’
28) Edgar Allan Poe: ‘The Raven’

Block VII
The American Poets II


Block VIII
Indian English Poetry

36) Rabindranath Tagore: ‘I Cast my Net into the Sea’, ‘When I go Alone at Night’
   Sarojini Naidu: ‘Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile’, ‘Cradle Song’
   Kamala Das: ‘The Dance of the Eunuchs’, ‘A Hot Noon in Malabar’
   JayantMahapatra: ‘Hunger’, ‘A Rain of Rites’
   Agha Shahid Ali: ‘Postcard from Kashmir’
40) Dilip Chitre: ‘The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic’s Sleep’
   Keki N. Daruwalla: ‘Hawk’, ‘Chinar’
1.4 ASSIGNMENTS AND TERM-END-EXAMINATION

As in the conventional universities we ask our students to do some homework and also hold public examinations. Let’s discuss them here one by one.

1.4.1 Assignments

IGNOU earlier had a policy of 3 assignments per eight-credit course. I think it was a good policy for that way we could monitor students’ study better and promote active reading as they could learn form their teachers and discover the finer points as they progressed. Assignments should not only be a ritual, or university requirement.

1.4.2 Why Examinations?

Examinations, tests and assessments are not a necessary evil. They play an important part in our study and mental growth. They tell us where we stand with respect to our peer-group. They also help employers select the right type of employees. Employers often also conduct their own test. Do you know that imperial examinations were held for the first time in ancient China by the Sui Dynasty (581-618 C.E.) in 605. It was abolished by the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912) in 1905, i.e. 1300 years later. Thomas Taylor Meadows, Britain’s Counsel in Guangzhou (or Canton), China observed in his Desultory Notes on the Government and People of China (1847) that ‘the long duration of the Chinese empire is solely … owing to the good government which consists in the advancement of men of talent and merit only’. He advised against the system of preferment, patronage or purchase and making the civil service a meritocratic institution. The East India Company College had been founded in 1806 to train ‘writers’ (administrators) of the age of 16 to 18, for the EIC. (The officers for the army were trained at Addiscombe Military Seminary, Surrey.) William Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, set up a commission under Stafford Northcote (1818-87) and Charles Trevelyan (1807-86) to look into the operation and organisation of the Civil Service. Influenced by the Chinese imperial examination they made their recommendation for recruitment based on merit through standardized written examination. Standardized testing was adopted by the British Universities in the 1850’s.

1.4.3 A Model Term-end-Examination Question Paper

You can take the final examination after studying this course for a year. If you don’t feel sufficiently prepared you can sit for the exam in June or December. Read the handbook and follow the instructions properly.

Now let me give you a few tips for the final examination. These will give direction to your study.

• All good students will learn scansion, taught in the following unit. (‘Here you have a few sections of Block-I, Unit 2 of British Poetry (MEG 01). You can get a copy of it from senior students/Study Centre/ Book Shop.)

• Remember that the more you drill yourself the more confident you will become in scanning units of verse. You must also develop familiarity with poetic devices, genres and various types of metrical compositions.
• A close reading of the texts of poems is done through ‘reference to context questions. You will be required to explain 4 passages from the texts of poems prescribed for you. This question would carry 32 marks. Each answer may be in 150 to 200 words only. Avoid long answers.

• The introductions to the various blocks deal with literary history. They will give your study of the major poets and their poems in their proper perspectives. You may be required to answer one question of 16 marks based on the introductions as in question no 3 on the next page.

• Now we move to general questions that carry a total of 32 marks. They will be on the poets, poems, and their age. You may have to write two essays, each in about 750 words.

Finally you must remember that a good question paper is one that covers all segments of the course adequately, i.e. there should be more questions from the largest segment of the course, such as British poetry (Blocks I to V). However, no section should remain unrepresented on the question paper. The purpose of the examinations is not to find out what the student does not know but to find out how well she/he knows what she/he knows. This can be done by giving the student sufficient choice. Below you have a model term-end-examination question paper. Remember that examiners may change the pattern of the question paper but it is advisable not to do so as the course has been planned and executed with certain goals that get reflected in the question paper given here. Moreover students must be told before hand if the pattern of the question paper is to change which is rather difficult in a distance education scenario.

Model Term End Question Paper

Understanding Poetry (Revised)

Full Marks – 100  Time 3 Hours

Answer questions 1 and 2 and 3 and any two of the remaining questions.

1) a) Scan one of the following passages and comment on its prosodic features:
   Scansion 5 + Comments 5
   i) The way was long, the wind was cold,
      The minstrel was infirm and old;
      The harp, his sole remaining joy,
      Was carried by an orphan boy,
   ii) One more unfortunate
      Weary of breath
      Rashly importunate
      Gone to her death!

b) Write short notes on any two of the following:
   (i) Caesura     (ii) Epic     (iii) Synecdoche
   (iv) Spenserian stanza     (v) Aposiopesis  5 × 2 = 10

2) Explain any four of the following passages with reference to their context supplying brief critical comments where necessary:  8 × 4 = 32
   a) Let the bird of loudest lay
      On the sole Arabian tree
      Herald sad and trumpet be,
      To whose sound chaste wings obey,
Why Read a Poem? and, How to Study Understanding Poetry?

b) Say first, of god above, man below, what can we reason, but from what we know? Of man what see we, but his station refer?

c) Five years have past, five summers, with the length of five long winter! And again I hear These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs With a soft inland murmur.

d) No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion Shine, and blue-buak embers, ah my dear, Fale gall themselves, and gas Gold-vermillion

e) There will be time to murder and create, And time for all the works and days of hands That lift and drop a question on your plate;

f) we paused before a house that seemed A swelling of the ground – The roof was scarcely visible – The cornice – in the ground –

g) I feel that I would like to go there and fall into those flowers and sink into the marsh near them,

h) I don’t know politics but I know the names of those in power, and can repeat them like Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru,

i) I always loved neatness. Now I hold the half inch Himalayas in my hand.

3) Critically comment on Emile Legouis’ words, ‘The great victories of Edward III were being sung in London, and Minot’s poems were current in the countryside when Chaucer was born and when his mind received its first impressions.’

Or

Write short notes on any four of the following:


4) Attempt an evaluation of any one of the following poets, with special reference to the poems prescribed for you:

a) Andrew Marvell
b) P.B. Shelley
c) Allen Ginsberg
d) Arun Kolatkar
5) Critically evaluate one of the following poems:
   a) ‘Ode to a Nightingale’
   b) ‘Ulysses’
   c) ‘After Apple-Picking’
   d) ‘Hawk’

6) Do you agree with the view that Victorian poetry is a pale imitation of Romantic poetry? Provide reasons for your answer.

7) Examine Langston Hughes’s contribution to the Harlem Renaissance.

8) What are the distinguishing features of Indian Poetry in English? Illustrate your answer with suitable examples.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Jot down a few points regarding your plans for reading of this course.

2) How would you prepare for your exams? Note down at least 5 points in the space provided below:
1.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit was concerned with giving direction to your study of this course. We did this by enabling you to think about poetry and its purpose in our life.

All formal education is an efficient way of acquiring knowledge in a short period of time and that is utilizable. We want to give you a fair understanding of British, American and Indian poetries in English methodically so that you may be able to make the best use of your time.

You should try to meet your counsellor every week and form a study circle in which you can help one another clarify the points in this and other units.

We hope you will enjoy reading this course.

1.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

Answers to the three questions will be unique to each student but don’t ignore them. Think over them and discuss them in your study circle.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Your answer may be somewhat as below:
   - Start with the reading of unit 2 and master scansion.
   - Prepare British Poetry in 5 months, one block every month
     a) Poets’ lives
     b) Poems
   - ..............................................................

2) • Master scansion and secure 10 marks. 10 days – half-an-hour / day, - revision every week for 3 months, then once a month.
   • Draw up a list of literary terms and prepare my notes with the help of a dictionary of literary terms and a search engine on the internet
   • For rhetorical terms such as quesitio, percontatio, epanadiplosis, prosopopeia, aposiopesis, etc. take help of The Growth and Evolution of Classical Rhetoric by Amiya Bhushan Sharma
   • Master the topics for notes and secure 10 marks. 10 days – half-an-hour / day - revision every week for 3 months, then once a month
   • Master the introductions to either 1,2 and 3 or 6,7 and 8 first which will help me attempt question no. 3
   • Read blocks 1 to 5 thoroughly in 5 months and attempt at least 20 reference to context questions from them.
UNIT 2  ON METRE, SCANSION AND, PROSODY

Structure

2.0  Objectives
2.1  Introduction
2.2  Versification: The Grammar of Poetry
   2.2.1  Prosody, Metre, Scansion
   a)  Prosody
   b)  Metre and Metrics
   c)  Scansion
2.3  Types of Metres
   2.3.1  Syllable-stress or Accented Syllabic Metres
   i)  The Iambic Metre
   ii)  The Trochaic Metre
   iii)  The Anapaestic Metre
   iv)  The Dactylic Metre
   v)  The Amphibrachic Metre
2.3.2  Strong-stress Metres
2.3.3  Syllabic Metres
2.3.4  Quantitative Metres
2.4  Rhyme and Rhythm in Poetry
   2.4.1  Rhyme and Rhyme Schemes
   2.4.2  Rhythm
2.5  Analysis of a Poem
2.6  Let Us Sum Up
2.7  A Brief Annotated Bibliography
2.8  Answers to Self-check Exercises

2.0  OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to appreciate any work of literary art better, specially a poem. To split it into more concrete terms:

- You will be able to speak about the abstract entity that is a poem – in other words the ontology of a poem;
- Speak on the acoustic aspects of poems such as metre, rhyme, and rhythm. And finally;
- You will complete the task of appreciation by bringing together the capacities developed in the successive sections of this unit.

With this theoretical background you will be better equipped to study this course.

2.1  INTRODUCTION

The function of this unit is, in a way to complete the task we had set for ourselves in the previous unit, i.e. preparing you for a study this course on poetry.
This course on literature, perhaps like any other course on literature, seeks to educate you effectively, improve your ability for appreciation, give you better insights into the ways literary artists, especially the poets, communicate.

There is a still more subtle and deep level which is the rhythm. This is a product of metre and rhyme and of many other effects which perhaps even the poets are not always conscious of. The entire sound effect or prosody of a poem is a common ground of the society, the individual and the language. We will examine some of the fundamental ideas in prosody in the third, fourth and fifth sections. These sections of this unit would require drilling as you do in mathematics.

The last major section i.e. 2.5 shows how all your study can be employed in “deciphering” the text of a poem.

Don’t break off at any of the subsections within a section as that may interrupt the discussion in your mind. Then you may feel muddled.

We have not discussed the poetic forms such as the lyric, epic, allegory or fable or the various aspects of figurative language such as simile, metaphors, irony, hyperbole, or terms of art such as fancy, imagination, gothic, classic, neo-classic, romantic, pastoral, elegy, Satire, pathos, bathos, myth, romance, sensibility, wit and humour, etc. We expect you to prepare your notes from books suggested at 2.7.

Although a little time consuming, this unit will enhance your ability to study poetry properly. You may study this unit for an hour or two daily over a week or two.

2.2 VERSIFICATION: THE GRAMMAR OF POETRY

In one his last poems written in 1938 called ‘The Statues’ the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (1865 - 1939) marvelled at ‘The Lineaments of a plummet measured face’. As you know masons work with plummets which is a plumb or ball of lead attached to a string for testing perpendicularity of wall, etc. And yet the ‘plummet measured face’ has its distinctive features of lineaments. Earlier on in the poem Yeats had written:

… for the men
That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
All Asiatic vague immensities,
And not banks of oars that swam upon
The many-headed foam at Salamis.
Europe put off that foam when Phidias.
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

Salamis, which you may locate on a map of Greece, was the site of the rout in 480 B.C. of Xerxes (485 – 465 B.C.) the son of Darius, the Persian King (521 – 485 B.C.) - by the Greeks. According to Herodotus (5th B.C.) the Greek historian who had participated in the war and left an account of it, the armies of the Persians were fantastic, their might unchallenged. However they were defeated by the cooperation of Athens and Sparta. Salamis is seen here as a symbol of the victory of mathematics, calculation, number over ‘vague immensities’ and the proverbial Asiatic grandeur. We are reminded of the sea battle at Salamis by the
Yeats cunningly slips in the name of Phidias, who was perhaps the greatest artist of ancient Europe. His colossal statue of Zeus at Olympia in the south-east of Acropolis wrought in ivory and gold over a core of wood was the most famous statue of antiquity. He had also contributed three statues of Athena on Acropolis. One of them was wrought in ivory and gold. He had also probably designed and certainly supervised the construction of the frieze of Parthenon. Yeats perhaps wants to tell us that it was Phidias’ artistry, his life-like creations, products of calculation and measurement nonetheless that set high standards for the society of Pericles (492 – 429 B.C.).

We may, may not or only partially agree with Yeats’ observations above on ‘Asiatic vague immensities’ but we cannot deny that pieces of art, or any work in politics or warfare for that matter, are human contrivances of planning with the help of cold concrete facts – be they words, or colours or rocks and mortar or people and locations.

A student who wishes to learn poetry properly must learn the basics of metre, especially if s/he wishes to appreciate the poetry in a foreign language. With reference to the study of ancient Greek and Latin literature by English students Eliot opined:

> We have to learn a dead language by an artificial method, and our methods of teaching have to be applied to pupils most of whom have only a moderate gift for language.

While delivering his W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture (1942) at Glasgow Eliot went even further and emphasised the study of English metre even for the native English speaker:

> Even in approaching the poetry of our own language, we may find the classification of metres, of lines with different numbers of syllables and stresses in different places, useful at a preliminary stage, as a simplified map of a complicated territory: but it is only the study not of poetry but of poems, that can train our ear.

What Eliot says after the colon gives the impression that if you know the technique some day inspiration would descend and give your verse the life that is poetry. The ‘soul of rhythm’ Sri Aurobindo (whose writings you are going to read in another course) wrote ‘can only be found by listening in to what is behind the music of words and sound and things’. He admitted, that the ‘intellectual knowledge of technique helps… provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter’ Aurobindo appears to be in agreement with Eliot but they appear on the surface to place their emphases a little differently. Aurobindo points out:

> Attentions to technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it that the becomes indifferent to substance. But if the substance is adequate, the attention to technique can only give it greater beauty.

> ‘It is in my view’ Aurobindo went on, a serious error to regard meter or rhyme as artificial elements, mere external and superfluous equipment restraining the movement and sincerity of poetic form. Metre, on the contrary, is the most natural mould of expression for certain states of creative emotion and vision; it is much more natural and spontaneous than a non-metrical form; the emotion expresses itself best and most powerfully in a balanced rather than in a loose and shapeless rhythm.
On Metre, Scansion and, Prosody

The search for techniques is simply the search for the best and most appropriate from for expressing what has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it.

In different words though, Eliot and Aurobindo appear to be in agreement about the place and utility of the knowledge of versification in the writing and, by extension for us, the study of poetry in English.

2.2.1 Prosody, Metre, Scansion

a) **Prosody**: That part of grammar which deals with laws governing the structure of verse is called prosody. It encompasses the study of all the elements of language that contribute towards acoustic or rhythmic effects, chiefly in poetry but also in prose. Ezra Pound called Prosody “the articulation of the total sound of a poem”. However, we know that alliteration (the rhythmic repetition of consonants) and assonance (repetition of vowel sounds) occur as much in prose as in poetry. Besides assonance and alliteration rhythmic effects are produced in poetry as well as in prose by the repetition of syntactical and grammatical patterns. However, compared with even the simplest verse, the “prosodic” structure of prose would appear haphazard and unconsidered.

b) **Metr e and Metrics**: Metre measures the rhythm of a line of verse. The word metre derives from the Greek word *metr on* which means ‘measure’. Traditionally metre refers to the regular, recurrence of feet. According to the Hungarian-American linguist John Lotz (b. 1913), ‘In some language there are texts in which the phonetic material within certain syntactic frames, such as sentence, phrase, word, is numerically regulated. Metrics is the study of meter. A nonmetric text is called prose.’ In the words of Seymour Chatman (b. 1928) ‘Meter might be defined as a systematic convention whereby certain aspects of phonology are organised for aesthetic purposes. In order to find out where the accent falls we scan a line.’ ‘Like any convention’ Chatman goes on, ‘it is susceptible of individual variation which could be called stylistic, taking “style” in the common meaning of “idiosyncratic way of doing something”’.

c) **Scansion**: In general parlance, to scan is to look intently at all parts successively. Radars cause particular regions to be traversed by a controlled beam. In prosody scansion refers to metrical scanning of verse. When a unit of verse – a foot, a line or a stanza – is scanned with the help of symbols the metre can be seen as well as heard.

We make use of a few symbols in order to scan a passage in verse (and sometimes also in the case of prose). The symbols are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Name of the symbol</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>The acute accent</td>
<td>Metrically stressed syllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⊙</td>
<td>The brave</td>
<td>Metrically weak syllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A single line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^</td>
<td>A rest</td>
<td>A syllable metrically expected but not actually present.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 TYPES OF METRES

There are basically four types of metres. They are:

i) Syllable–stress or accented syllabic metres

ii) Strong–stress metres

iii) Syllabic metres

iv) Quantitative metres

We will now discuss each one of them one by one.

2.3.1 Syllable-stress or Accented Syllabic Metres

The smallest unit of metre in poetry is a foot. A foot in prosody is a pattern of phonetically stressed and unstressed syllables. The four principal feet found in English verse are illustrated below:

a) iambic

\[\text{appear, behold, attack, supply}\]

b) trochee

\[\text{tiger, holy, upper, grandeur}\]

c) anapaest

\[\text{understand, colonnade, reappear}\]

d) dactyl

\[\text{Desperate, messenger, property, infamous}\]

Besides, the four major feet the spondee(//) and the Pyrrhus (\(\bigcup\)) also occur as substitutions in a passage of verse. Some theorists also admit the amphibrach (\(\bigcup\)), amphimacer (/\(\bigcup\)/) and tribrach (\(\bigcup\bigcup\)) into their scansion. However, these are rather uncommon in English poetry.

Syllable stress metres got established in English in the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340? - 1400). After him, for about two centuries the syllable-stress metre fell into disuse or was misunderstood. It was only towards the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century that the syllable-stress metres got re-established.

Now we will scan a passage of each major metrical type and then leave a few stanzas unscanned for you to scan. After having scanned them with a pencil you may compare your scansion with those scanned at the end of the unit.

i) The Iambic metre:

\[\text{With ravished ears} \]
\[\text{The mon/arch hears} \]
\[\text{Assumes / the God} \]
\[\text{And seems / to shake / the spheres.} \]

Dryden.
On Metre, Scansion and, Prosody

Comments: the five line stanza above is in iambic dimeter (two feet). However, the concluding line is in iambic trimeter. The rhyme scheme is a a b b a.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Check Exercise 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now you may scan the following passages and comment briefly on the metrical features:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Passage 1:** In woods a ranger  
To joy a stranger  
Comments: |
| 2: Thy way not mine, O Lord  
However dark it be;  
Lead me with thine own hand  
Choose out the path for me.  
Comments: |
| 3: The way was long, the wind was cold,  
The minstrel was infirm and old;  
The harp’ his sole remaining joy,  
Was carried by an orphan boy.  
Comments: |
| 4: Confusion shame remorse despair,  
At once his bosom swell  
The damps of death bedewed his brow,  
He shook, he groaned, he fell.  
Comments: |
| 5: I put my hat upon my head  
And walked into the Strand,  
And there I met another man  
Whose hat was in his hand.  
Comments: |
The passages above, you must have noticed, are clumsily regular. They may qualify as passable verse but don’t have the power to move us as poetry does.

By far the most common measure of English poetry is the **iambic pentameter**. It is generally found in two distinct kinds – the unrhymed variety called **blank verse** and the rhymed variety **heroic couplet**.

As epics concentrated on a typical hero such as an Achilles or an Aeneas they were generally called heroic poems. Dryden and Pope translated Virgil (70-19 B.C.) and Homer (9th Century B.C.) respectively in the rhyming couplet. It became the dominant metre of late seventeenth and eighteenth century poetry. Hence the metre began to get called “heroic”. The Restoration playwrights in trying to transfer epic grandeur to their stage made their characters speak in heroic couplet. The effect, however, was grandiose rather than grand. The heroic couplet reached perfection in the hands of Alexander Pope. Below we scan four lines from his *Essay on Criticism* (1711):

```
When Ajax strives/ some rock’s/ vast weight/ to throw,
The line/ too lab/ours, and// the words/ move slow;
Not so,// when swift/ camil/la scours/ the plain
Files o’er/ the unbend/ ing corn/ and skims/ along/ the main.
```

The lines above are in regular iambic pentameter except the sixth which is an hexameter. An iambic hexameter line is also called an **alexandrine**. In the second foot of the fourth line we notice an elision, i.e. omission of a syllable in pronunciation. Thomas Norton (1532 - 84) and Thomas Sackville used **blank verse** for the first time in their play *Gorboduc* (1561). Below is a specimen from the play:

```
The royal king and eke his sons are slain;
No ruler rests within the regal seat;
The heir, to whom the scepter ‘longs, unknown
Lo, Britain’s realm is left an open prey,
A present spoil for conquest to ensue
```

The regimented uniformity of the iambic pentameter lines above communicates monotony and as poetry it is lifeless.

Christopher Marlowe (1564 - 93), a poet and playwright, changed all this by varying the accents, introducing the medial pause (called **caesura**) and allowing the sense to flow into a freer sentence structure. Here is an example from *Doctor Faustus* (1604):

```
Was this/ the face/ that launched/ a thous/ and ships,
And burnt/ the top/less tower/ of ill/ ium?
```
Sweet Helen,/ make me/ immortal/ with a kiss,

Her lips/ suck forth/ my soul;/ see where/ it flies!

Come; Helen,/ come, give me/ my soul/ again.

Here will/ I dwell/ for heaven is/ in these lips,

And all/ is dross/ that is/ not Helena.

You would notice that the passage above is dominated by blank verse, i.e. unrhymed iambic pentameter. However, the third and fifth lines are tetrameter lines. Whereas the first foot of the third line is a spondee, there is an anapaestic variation in the last foot. With the help of an extra unstressed syllable before “Kiss” Marlowe succeeds in communicating, as it were, Faustus’s longing for Helen.

Marlowe introduces the fifth line with a trochaic inversion. This is succeeded by an amphimacer. However, you would notice that while there are metrical variations in the two lines, the number of accented syllables remain uniformly five in each line of the passage. Marlowe thus achieves a felicity of expression by adopting a unique rhythm apposite for the character and his situation in the play but without contravening the natural rhythm of the English language.

Even more flexibility was introduced into English poetry by Shakespeare. You may scan one of his sonnets or some of the passages you like in his plays you may have read on the Understanding Drama course.

**Self-Check Exercise III**

Now you may scan a couple of passages from Shakespeare and Keats and write your comments on them in the space provided:

a) Two truths are told,

As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. I thank you, gentlemen.

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair.

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs Shakespeare: *Macbeth*
On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and Kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bard in fealty to Apollo hold.

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep browed Homer ruled as his demesne
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like about Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men

Looked at each other with a wild surmise
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

John Keats.

In the examples above you noticed that two measurements are involved in metre: we have to speak about the kind of foot and the number of feet. You scanned passages in the iambic metre in two feet or dimeter, three feet or trimester, four feet or tetrameter, five feet or pentameter, six feet or hexameter and seven feet or septameter. You noticed that the septameter verse often divided into lines of tetrameter alternating with trimeter. It has been estimated that ninety per cent of English poetry is in the iambic pentameter. Now we will examine a few examples of the trochee, anapaest and dactyl also.
ii) The Trochaic Metre

Below we scan a stanza in trochaic tetrameter:

```
May thou/ month of/ rosy/ beauty,
Month when/ pleasure/ is a/ duty,
Month of/bees and/ month of/ flowers,
Month of/ blossom/ laden/ bowers.
```

Do the drill below in order to find how well you have understood the trochaic metre.

**Self-Check Exercise IV**

a) Dreadful gleams,
   Dismal screams,
   Fires that glow,
   Shrieks of woe,
   Sullen moans,
   Hollow groans. A. Pope

b) Rich the treasure,
   Sweet the pleasure. J Dryden

c) When the British warrior queen
   Bleeding from the Roman rods,
   Sought with an indignant mien
   Counsel of her country’s gods.

d) Tell me not in mournful numbers
   Life is but an empty dream;
   For the soul is dead that slumbers,
   And things are not what they seem .A.W. Longfellow
e) All that walk on foot or ride in chariots
   All that dwell in palaces or garrets

f) On a mountain stretched beneath a hoary willow
   Lay a shepherd swain and viewed the rolling billow.

Above you scanned passages of trochaic mono-, di-, tri-, tetra-, penta-, and hexameters. However, I may remind you that in good poetry you do not find long stretches in the trochaic metre. The iambus and trochee are bisyllabic feet. Now let us examine the anapaest and dactyl which are trisyllabic feet, i.e. they are made of three syllables.

iii) The Anapaestic Metre

Below is scanned a passage in anapaestic trimeter:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /} \\
\text{I am mon/arch of all/ I survey,} \\
\text{∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /} \\
\text{My right/ there is none/ to dispute;} \\
\text{∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /} \\
\text{From the cen/tre all round/ to the sea} \\
\text{∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /} \\
\text{I am lord/ of the bird/ and the brute}
\end{align*}
\]

You will notice above that the first foot of the second line is an iambus. Verses in the anapaestic metre often have iambic substitution. Now you may do the following self-check exercise.

Self-Check Exercise V

a) How fleet is the glance of the mind
   Compared with the speed of its flight!
   The tempest itself lags behind
   And the swift winged arrows of light

b) The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold
   And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
   And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
   When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.
c) Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot,
O’er the grave where our hero we buried.


d) I am out of humanity’s reach,
Prelude of the Study
I must finish my journey alone.


The couple of lines are in anapaestic trimester. However, the first foot is an iambic substitution.

iv) The Dactylic Metre
It helps to recall a trochee as the converse of an iambus, and the dactyl as the opposite of an anapaest. Below we scan a passage in dactylic dimeter.

/ 〇 〇 〇 / 〇 〇 〇
Touch her not scornfully
/ 〇 〇 〇 / 〇 〇 〇
Think of her mournfully.
/ 〇 〇 〇 / 〇 〇 〇
Gently and humanly;
/ 〇 〇 〇 / 〇 〇 〇
Not of the remains of her
/ 〇 〇 〇 / 〇 〇 〇
Now is pure womanly.

The passage above is in dactylic dimeter. The rhyme scheme is a a a b a. Now do the following exercise.

Self-Check Exercise VI
Scan the following and then briefly comment on the scansion.
a) One more unfortunate
   Weary of breath
   Rashly importunate
   Gone to her death!
   Take her up tendenly;
   Lift her with care;
   Fashion’d so slenderly young and so fair!
b) Merrily merrily shall I live now
   Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

Above you have learnt to scan passages in the four dominant feet of English i.e.
the iambus, trochee, anapaest and dactyl.

v) The Amphibrachic Metre
In a word such as eternal you notice that the emphasis falls on the middle syllable.
‘Eternal’ thus is in the amphibrachic foot. Let’s scan a line in the amphibrachic metre.

<p>| | | | |</p>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O hush thee/</td>
<td>my babie/</td>
<td>thy sire was/</td>
<td>a knight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may have noticed that the last foot is an iambus.

Self-Check Exercise VII
Scan the following passage and then comment on your scansion:

a) Most friendship is feigning
   Most friendship mere folly.

Compare you scansion with the passage scanned for your under 2.9.

Above you have an outline of the “traditional” English metres. These were
established by the Renaissance theorists who tried to subject the vernacular
English forms to the rules of classical prosody. Let us now turn to examine three
other forms of metres.

2.3.2 Strong-stress Metres

Antecedent to the syllable – stress metres was the strong – stress metre of Old
and Middle English poetry. The strong-stress metres for that reason are often
called the “native” metres and they are indigenous to the Germanic languages
(such as German, English, Dutch, Swedish, etc.). In strong-stress verse there are
a fixed number of stresses in each line. The unstressed syllables may, however,
very considerably. The use of strong-stress metre can be seen in the Old English
epic poem Beowulf (C. 1000) and in William Langland’s vision poem, Piers
Plowman. Below you have the opening four lines form the latter:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a somer sesun // whon softe, was the sonne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I schop me in-to a schroud // a scheep as I were;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In habite of an hermite // un-holy of werkes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
You would notice in the four lines above that each line divides into a medial pause (II) or caesura. On both sides of the caesura there are two stressed syllables. The passage in also marked by alliteration.

With the rise of French literature in England in the 12th and 13th centuries rhyme replaced alliteration and stanzaic forms replaced the four-stress line. However, the strong-stress rhythm was too strong to be abandoned completely and it can be felt in the love lyrics and popular ballads of the 14th and 15th centuries. If you scan ‘Lord Randall’ you will find a mixture of the iambus and the anapaest of the “traditional” metre along with the four stresses divided equally on two sides of the caesura.

O where ha you been // Lord Randall, my son?

And where ha you been // my handsome young man?

I ha been at the greenwood; // mother, mak my bed soon

For I’am wearied with huntin, // and fain wad lie down.

Today the strong-stress survives in nursery rhymes and songs:

Jack and Jill // went up the hill,

To fetch a pale // of water,

Jack, fell down, and // broke his crown

And Jill // came tumbling after.

Above there is an alternation of four and three stresses in alternate lines. However, there is more regularity in most of the nursery rhymes:

One, two // buckle my shoe;

Three, four // knock at the door;

Five, six // pick up sticks;

Seven, eight // lay them straight;
The middle of the nineteenth century saw the revival of interest in the strong-stress metres due to the innovations of Walt Whitman (1819 - 92) in America and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 - 89) in England. In the 20th century a number of poets, including Ezra Pound (1885 - 1972), T.S. Eliot (1888 - 1965) and W.H. Auden (1907 - 73) revived the strong-stress metre. Pound’s *Pisan Cantos* (1948) and Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1943) testify to the energy of the strong-stress metre.

### 2.3.3 Syllabic Metres

In syllabic metres stresses and pauses vary. The number of syllables in each line, however, remains fixed. Poetry in Romance languages (languages that have grown out of Latin, the language of ancient Rome, such as French, Italian and Spanish) is dominated by the syllabic metres. In English, however, to most ears, the syllable-count alone does not produce any rhythmic interest.

### 2.3.4 Quantitative Metres

Quantity in the present context refers to the time we take to pronounce a syllable. It is a product of the duration for which we pronounce the vowel at the nucleus of the syllable. For instance you can pronounce “sweet rose” in various ways shortening and lengthening the vowel sound as you please. This variability, however, would hinder communication between the poet and you as the reader. Now if you compare Sanskrit, or Hindi for the matter, with English you find that you cannot exercise your discretion in lengthening or shortening the vowel sound or the quantity of the syllable in the two Indian languages. They are predetermined by the linguistic system of Sanskrit and Hindi.

The quantitative metres dominated Greek and Latin poetry because they are highly inflected. (To inflect a word is to change its form at the end according to its peculiar, case, mood, tense and number. For instance we can say that “child” and “boy” inflect differently in the plural.) The inflection promoted the construction of long, slow-paced lines because those languages supported the alternation of the long vowels in the roots and the short ones in the inflections. English which lost most of its inflections in the 15th century, unlike German, is less hospitable to the quantitative metres.

### 2.4 RHYME AND RHYTHM IN POETRY

You know that verse is generally distinguished from prose as a more compressed and regularly rhythmic form of statement. One of the most important constituents of rhythm in metre about which you know already. There are, however, other factors such as alliteration (the use of several nearby words or stressed syllables beginning with the same consonant), assonance (the repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds usually in accented syllables), consonance (the repetition of a pattern of consonants with changes in the intervening vowels such as in linger, longer, languor) and onomatopoeia (which is direct verbal imitation of natural sounds) that also contribute to rhythm. Besides metre on the one hand and alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia on the other, rhyme helps to create rhythm and define units of verse in subtle ways. Let’s now examine rhyme and what it does, however, after you’ve done a short exercise.
Self-Check Exercise VIII

Don’t scan the following passages. However, identify the use of alliteration, assonance, or consonance in them and then supply your comments in the space provided. Having done so compare your answers with those supplied at the end of the unit.

a) Ruin hath taught we thus to rumin ate
    That Time will come and take my love away.
Shakespeare : Sonnet 64

b) In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin,
Dryden : ‘Absalom and Achitophel’

c) For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.
Keats : ‘Ode or melancholy’

d) Not the twilight of the gods but a precise dawn
If sallow and grey bricks, and the newsboys crying war
Louis MacNeice.

e) It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned
Wilfred Owen : ‘Strange Meeting

2.4.1 Rhyme and Rhyme Schemes

Rhyme consists generally of identity of sounds at the end of lines of verse.

Now let’s read the following lines:

    Faith is not built on disquisitions vain;
    The things we must believe are few or plain

John Dryden : Religio Laici
Above ‘vain’ and ‘plain’ are rhyming words. You will notice that both are accented monosyllabic words. Such a rhyme is called masculine.

When the accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable (as in ‘hounding’ and ‘bounding’) the rhyme is called feminine. An example is given below:

Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow.

You notice above that ‘sorrow’ and ‘morrow’ are bisyllabic words and the accent falls on the first syllables. You will notice also that there is doubled rhyme above.

In English triple rhyme is used for comic or satiric purposes, as Byron does in Don Juan:

…oh!, ye lords of ladies intellectual
Inform us truly, have they not henpecked you all?

Above the last three syllables that have been underlined rhyme.

Sometimes syllables within the same line may rhyme as in the last stanza of Browning’s ‘Confessions’:

Alas,
We loved, sir – used to meet;
How sad and bad and mad it was –
But then how it was sweet!

The words ‘sad’, ‘bad’ and ‘mad’ in the passage above rhyme though within the same line. This is an example of internal rhyme.

When rhymes are only rhymes in appearance and not in sound as in the case of ‘alone’ and ‘done’ or ‘remove’ and ‘love’ we have eye rhyme.

Above (SCE VIII.e) you read a few lines from Wilfred Owen’s Strange Meeting’. The poem furnishes examples of assonance. However, Owen called it pararhyme. Such rhymes are now used for special effects but it was earlier understood as a sign of pressing exigency or lack of skill. It was thus called off rhyme (or partial, imperfect or slant rhyme).

You have read above that Old English and Old Germanic heroic poetry as well as the lyrics in O.E. were written in strong-stress metre. With the ascendancy of the influence of French on English rhymes replaced alliteration and stanzaic forms gave way to four stress lines of the so called “native” or strong-stress metres.

However, blank verse is unrhymed verse and until the advent of free verse it alone achieved wide popularity in English. Although used by the Earl of Surrey in translating Virgil’s Aeneid blank verse was employed primarily in drama. Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667), however, was one of the first epic poems in English to use it. In the nineteenth century Worldworth’s The Prelude (1868 - 1869), Tennyson’s Idylls of the King (1833) and Browning’s The Ring and the Book (1868 - 1869) were written in blank verse.

Sometimes stanzaic forms do not exist in poetry in blank verse as in the case of Milton’s ‘Lycidas’ (1637) and Paradise Lost this is true also of rhymed verse as
in Samuel Johnsons ‘London’ (1738 and ‘The Vanity of Human Wishes’ (1749). The texts are divided into units of sense as in prose paragraphs and are thus called **verse paragraph**.

The recurring feature of English poetry is, however, a **stanza** which consists of a fixed number of lines and a well defined rhyme scheme. However, it is not so in the case of Dryden’s ‘Alexander’s Feast’ (which you will read in Block 5) which has lines of varying lengths as well as number of lines. Similarly Spenser’s *Epithalamion* is in the stanzaic form but the stanzas are constituted of lines of varying lengths and rhymes. In this case stanzaic form is reinforced by a **refrain** i.e. a line repeated at the end of each stanza.

The simplest form of a stanza is the **couplet**; that is two lines rhyming together. A single couplet in isolation is called a **distich**. When a couplet expresses a complete thought and ends in a terminal punctuation sign we call it a **closed couplet**. You have already read about the **heroic couplet**.

A traditional form of the couplet is the **tetrameter**, or **four beat couplet**: Milton’s

‘L’ Allegro’ and Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress’ are admirable examples of great poetry in the octosyllabic couplet.

A three rhymed pattern is called a **triplet** or **tercet**. Below is an example of it from Dryden’s poetry:

Warm’d with more particles of Heav’nly Flame
He wing’d his upward flight, and soar’d to fame:
The rest remained below, a Tribe without a Name

Three lines with on set of rhyming words can be found also in Tennyson’s ‘The Eagle’. This is, however, not very common in English and generally used to give variety to a poem in the rhyming couplet. However, the rhymes are sometimes linked from verse to verse and may run as aba – bcb – cdc –ded- and so on. This form of triplet is called **terzarima**. It is borrowed from Italian and was employed by Dante (1265 - 1321) in his *Divine Comedy*. The finest example of it in English is Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” which, however, ends on a couplet.

Quatrains are stanzas of four lines. Above you read about the **ballad stanza** in which tetrameter and trimester lines alternate. A variety of rhyme schemes have been observed in quatrains: a b a b (in which lines rhyme alternately); a b c b (in which the second and fourth lines only rhyme).

Dryden (in *Annum Mirabilis*) and Gray (*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*) in the eighteenth century employed five stress iambic lines that rhyme alternately. In the nineteenth century Tennyson used tetrameter quatrains rhyming a b b a in *In Memoriam* and FitzGerald used pentameter quatrains that rhyme a a b a in his translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

There are, however, stanzas of five six, seven and eight lines which are too numerous to be differentiated. Here we will discuss some of the “named varieties”.

**a) Rhyme royal** was used by Chaucer for the first time in English in *Troilus and Criseide* (c. 1385/88) and then by Shakespeare in *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). The rhyme scheme of a seven line stanza in rhyme royal is a b a b b c c. It looks as if a quatrain has been dovetailed onto two couplets.
Early Modern English Poets

b) **Ottavarima** was introduced in England by Wyatt in the sixteenth century. The premier example of this verse form is *Byron’s Don Juan*. The rhyme scheme of the eight lines stanza is a b a a b a b c c. You will notice that an extra a rhyme has been introduced in the rhyme royal scheme. The people couplet at the end of the stanza gives a witty verbal snap to the foregoing section.

c) The **Spenserian stanza** like the preceding two stanza forms discussed above has iambic pentameter lines. However, the last line is an Alexandrine. Edmund Spenser devised it for *The Faerie Queene*. In the nineteenth century Keats employed it brilliantly for *Eve of St. Agnes* and Shelley for *Adonais*. The nine lines rhyme a b a b b c b c c. You notice that the b sound recurs 4 times and c three. The pattern is intricate and poems in this stanza form are slow-moving.

d) The **Sonnet** was originally a stanza used by the Sicilian school of court poets in the thirteenth century. From there it went to Tuscany where it reached its highest expression in the poetry of Petrarch (1304 - 74). He wrote 314 sonnets idealizing his beloved Laura.

In England it was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517 - 47) and Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 - 42) who experimented with the sonnet form and gave it the structure that Shakespeare used and made famous. Since then the sonnet has proved itself to be one of the most versatile of the poetic forms. It was used in recent years by Vikram Seth in his novel *The Golden Gate*. Long poems composed of a series of sonnets are called **sonnet sequence**. Poets such as Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, Conrad Aiken and Rainer Maria Rilke have grouped together sonnets dealing with a particular lady of situation. However, the degree in which they are autobiographical or tell a coherent story is a matter on which opinions diverge.

The sonnet today is defined as a lyric of fourteen lines in the iambic pentameter from. However, originally it was a stanza in the Italian. There have been sonnets in the hexameter as for instance the first of Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* and Milton’s ‘On the New Forces of Conscience’, which is in twenty lines. Most of the sonnets, however, fall into two or three categories – the **Petrarchan**, **Shakespearean** and **Spenserian**.

The **Petrarchan sonnet** is divided into two parts of eight and six lines each called the octave and the sestet. Originally the sonneteer set forth a problem in the octave and resolved it in the sestet. However, Milton did not follow the convention nor did he use it as a medium for the expressions of his amorous inclinations as Petrarch had done before him. Wordsworth and Keats both wrote Petrarchan sonnets. a Petrarchan rhymes may be employed such as cdecde or cdecde.

The **Shakespearean sonnet** is usually divided into three quatrains to be followed by a rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet: is ababcdedefgg.

A **Spenserian sonnet** is also divided into three quatrains and a rhyming couplet. However, there are fewer rhymes in a Spenserian sonnet than in the Shakespearean. The former follows rhyme scheme:

   Ababbcbbccddeee.

Above we have discussed rhymes and the various types of rhyme schemes employed by poets writing in English. Now let us examine the function of rhythm in poetry.
2.4.2 Rhythm

Rhythm is to borrow Plato’s words, ‘an order of movement’ in time. We generally speak of rhythm in connection with poetry or music. However, you must have heard people talking of the rhythms of nature or even biological rhythm. Perhaps periodic repetition of a certain pattern is the sine qua non of rhythm. All the arts—painting, sculpture, and architecture—have their rhythm. Here, however, we will talk of rhythm in the context of poetry only. Above you studied about a variety of acoustic effects in poetry such as metre, rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc. They contribute to the rhythm of a poem. Prosody which takes into account the historical period to which poem belongs, the poetic genre and the specificities of a poet’s style goes closer to the rhythmic aspect or a poem.

For instance, quantity (or vowel length) is a rhythmic but not a metrical feature or English poetry. This is because English does not impose any strict regularity in quantity as it does with respect to stress. For example in ‘sweet rose’ the vowel sounds can be lengthened or shortened at will. This cannot be done in many Indian languages. However, the lengthening and shortening of the vowel sound does affect the rhythm of the poem. Similarly, the rise and fall in the human voice, especially in reading poetry which is called cadence is a rhythmic not a metrical feature. Many other factors contribute to the rhythm of a piece of verse or prose. Grammatical features are some of these.

Roman Jakobson drew our attention to grammatical features in poetry. He compared the role of pure grammatical parallelism in poetry to geometrical features in painting ‘For the figurative art’ he wrote, ‘geometrical principles represent a “beautiful necessity”…’ and went on to add, ‘It is the same necessity that in language marks out the grammatical meanings.’ In his ‘Yeats’ “Sorrow of Love” through the Years’ written along with Stephen Rudy they drew attention to Yeats’s predilection for “art that is not mere story – telling”. They went on:

According to Yeats, “the arts have already become full of pattern and rhythm. Subject pictures no longer interest us. “In this context he refers precisely to Degas, in Yeats’ opinion an artist whose excessive and obstinate desire to ‘picture’ life – “and life at its most vivid and vigorous” – had harmed his work. Jakobson and Rudy go further and point out,

The poet’s emphasis on pattern reminds one of Benjamin Lee Whorf, the penetrating linguist who realized that ‘the patterment’ aspect of language always overrides and controls the ‘lexation’ or name – giving aspect, “and an inquiry into the role of “pattern” in Yeats’ own poetry becomes particularly attractive, especially when one is confronted with is constant and careful modification of his own works.

The two authors go on and draw attention to Yeats’ epigraph to his Collected works in Verse and Prose which reads:

The friends that have it I do wrong
When ever I remake a song.
Should know what issue is a stake:
It is myself that I remake.

In the course of his revisions, the patternings, Yeats claimed not just to be improving his poems lexationally but pattern-wise, rhythm-wise which he
equated with remaking himself under the influence of some much more deep and subtle truth which we can apprehend if at all only transiently.

If we scan a couple of sonnets of Shakespeare and compare their rhythm we can appreciate its role in poet’s style. Let’s first scan two sonnet of Shakespeare – sonnets 71 and 116. They are given below:

No long/er mourn/ for me/ when I /am dead

Than you/ shall hear/ the sur/lysul/len bell

Give warn/ing to/ the world/ that I/ am fled

From this/ vile world/ with vil/ est worms/ to dwell

Nay if/ you read/ this line, /remem/ber not

The hand/ that writ/ it:// for/ I love/ you so,

That I/ in your/ sweet thoughts/ would be/ forgot,

If think/ing on/ me then/ should make/ you woe

Oh, if/ (I say,) / you look/ upon/ this verse

When I/ (perhaps)/ compound/ed am/ with clay

Do not/ so much/ as my/ poor name/ rehearse

But let/ your love/ even with/ my life/ decay

Lest the/ wise world/ should look/ into/ your moan

And mock/ you with/ me af/ter I/am gone.

(Sonnet, 71)
That looks on tem pests 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 proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved. (Sonnet, 116)

You may have noticed above that in sonnet 71 Shakespeare’s theme is death, his own death, not death in the abstract as in the case of Donne. Shakespeare is addressing his beloved, the dark lady and asking her to forget all about him. The legacies of time are suffering and despair and Shakespeare conveys his slow progress towards them with the help of the solemn regularity of the iambic pentameter. It is, however, gently disturbed as the narrative progresses. A caesura divides the third food of the sixth line. There are parantheses in lines 9 and 10. In the last line of the third quatrain Shakespeare asks his beloved to forget him (after having written the sonnet to perpetuate his memory) nay more, let her love decay along with decay of the lover’s body. The irony of this audacious request finds echo in a spondaic third foot of the twelfth line. Shakespeare’s resigned irony soon finds voice in the thirteenth line where the pyrrhic first foot is succeeded by a spondee in the next.

Rhythm drives from the Greek rhythmos which in turn derives from rhein which means to flow. Rhythm is generally understood as an ordered alternation of contrasting elements. However, you noticed above that Shakespeare gave expression to his personal feelings in sonnet 71 by wrenching the metre. Mutability, death and decay were a recurrent theme in the poetry of the Elizabethan age and the ground rhythm of iambic pentameter adequately expresses it. However, if Shakespeare had made periodicity of accent the sine qua non of his rhythm it would have been only at the cost of his expressive range.

Unlike sonnet 71 sonnet 116 is, to use Gerard Manley Hopkins’s term, metrically “counter-pointed”. Trochaic reversal in the first foot is not unusual in an iambic pentameter line. However, Shakespeare makes use of a trochaic foot even in the second. In fact the only iambic foot is the third foot which is succeeded by a pyrrhic-spondaic combination. The first line is enjambed i.e., it runs over to the second line with its three iambic feet and a caesura and a reversed fourth foot. The sudden violence of the poet’s felling is checked with the help of two pyrrhic feet alternating with the iambic ones in the last line of the first quatrain. The iambic ground rhythm is fully established only in the second quatrain.
The third quatrain, however, beings with a reversal and a spondaic substitution. In the last line of the quatrain the rhetorical emphasis on the third foot is supported acoustically with the of a spondee. These deviations help the poet in lifting the them above mundane realities and communicating his “meaning” better.

We had a glimpse of Shakespeare’s manipulation of meter in two of his sonnets. Even with the help of just tow samples we can say that Shakespeare has a powerful and distinctive style. The prosody of every poet of genius is unique and his rhythm is perhaps the most personal of the expressive equipments. However, we cannot forget that a language has metrical pattern peculiar to itself. There is also a historical determinant of the choice of metre. Complex factors contribute towards the determination of rhythm. Nature herself said Aristotle, ‘teaches the choice of the proper measure’. However, it is the poet’s task to hear her voice with sincerity and humility if s/he is to discover her/himself.

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<th>Self-Check Exercise IX</th>
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<td>1) Briefly distinguish between rhyme and rhythm.</td>
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<td>2) What according to you is rhythm? Write in about 30 of your own words.</td>
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<td>3) Do you think that rhythm can be indicator of a poet’s style? Give reasons for your answer. Does a poet’s style tell us about the person that s/he is?</td>
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2.5 ANALYSIS OF A POEM

In the foregoing sections you read about the various elements of poetry. A knowledge of some of the theoretical aspects of poetry would help you in reading poems. Below you will read an analysis of Keats’s ‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.’ Did you scan the poem and write your observations in SCE III (b)? If you did not you should now do so in order to benefit from in section. Let’s now analyse the poem.

‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’

John Keats (1795 - 1821) was the youngest of the Romantic poets. He was the son of manager of a livery stables in Moorfields. He died when Keats was eight. His mother remarried but died of tuberculosis when he was fourteen. John the eldest child, had two brothers – George and Tom – and a sister, Fanny. Keats was apprenticed to an apothecary-surgeon at the age of fifteen. Before the apprenticeship he had received his early education at Clarke’s school an Enfield.

On evening in October 1816 Keats read the works of Homer in the translation of the Elizabethan poet George Chapman. He did this in the company of Charles Cowden Clarke, son of his former master and his life long friend. That Keats had a monumental experience is clear from “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”.

Somewhat like a true Petrarchan sonnet this poem also clearly divides the treatment of the theme between the octave and the sestet. In the octave Keats sets the background while the sestet describes the effect on him of his experience. In the first half of the octave Keats speaks of his wide of Western literature – which he characterizes as “realms of gold”. Keats’s metaphor gives us an insight into his attitude towards literature. The ‘goodly states’ and ‘Kingdoms’ are the poet’s territories they have marked out as their own in the infinite area of the English or Western languages. However, these territories are held by poets not insolently as Kingdoms are held but as a sign of their loyalty towards Apollo, the ancient classical god of poetry. This is a sign of Keat’s literary piety for we know that Keats like Shelley was not a Christian poet.

The second half of the octave extends the metaphor of the kingdom of poetry to tell us that Keats had heard about Homer’s epics although he had never read them. Homer is traditionally recognized as the first epic poet of Europe just like Valmiki and Vyasa were of India. They can be considered pure and original because they did not borrow their images from other poets. Homer knew and understood human nature dispassionately. His understanding was clear and unclouded by doubts, distractions and fears. Besides, Homer was the monarch of poets deserving the exalted title of ‘serene’. It is at the end of the octave that Keats tells us about the cause of his exaltation i.e. his reading (with Charles Cowden Clarke) of Homer in Chapman’s translation. The octave structurally is not divided from the sestet as it ends in a colon.

Having told us about the background of his poem in the octave Keats turns to communicate his enjoyment of Homer to us in the sestet. This is done through two unforgettable images. The first of these is that of a professional astronomer into whose sight a new planet has moved in. the second is that of a discoverer such as Hernan Cortez who conquered Mexico for Spain and became the first western adventurer to enter Mexico city. Historically, however, it was Vasco Nunez de Balbaho who was the first European in 1513 to stand upon the peak of
Darien in Panama. It is significant that Keats does not name any astronomer such as Galileo who had discovered new satellites of the planet Jupiter. It would be in keeping with Keats’s piety to infer that in referring to ‘some watcher of the skies’ he is making use of the primitive figure of speech of periphrasis. If the images help Keats in communicating his peculiar felling or flavor of the sense or meaning the rhythm of his verse gives further density by suggesting the right tone and unfolding the intention while reemphasizing his meaning or sense, and feeling.

As pointed out earlier, ‘On First Looking’ is a Petrarchan sonnet that makes use of four rhymes in the following scheme: abbaabba cdcdcd. Perhaps it would be apposite to point out that because of such few rhymes, i.e. 4, the intensity of feeling is communicated better than it could have been done with the help of a Shakespearean sonnet with its seven rhymes and relatively loose structure more suitable for a meditative and philosophical tone.

Although European in appeal thematically, Keats’s sonnet is typically English with its ground rhythm of iambic pentameter. There are only two variations in the first quatrain. There is a pyrrhic foot in the first and another in the fourth line. The second quatrain begins with a trochaic reversal and it announces the turn in the subject matter. From literature in general, Keats narrows down to Homer in the second half of the octave.

The sestet which describes Keats’s state of exaltation conveys it at the acoustic level through variations form the blank verse ground rhythm. Lines 10, 11, 12 and 13 have pyrrhic substitutions. In case we elided the unstressed first foot to include the article ‘a’ in the first root of the tenth line we could read it as an anapaestic foot. However, in that case the line would have only four feet. It would become brief and fast suggesting the swimming of a planet into the range of vision of the astronomer with astronomical speed. There is another anapaestic substitution in the fourth foot of the twelfth line. However, the line retains the five feet notwithstanding the trisyllabic foot. The last four lines are given to the explorers in the new world and the crescendo comes in the last line which begins with a trochaic reversal. The importance of the theme for the poet is suggested by the spondaic second foot of the eleventh line which begins the new comparison.

Keats has been called a poet of the senses. The abstract idea of the discovery of a new planet gives joy is cerebral but the sight of the seascape from the peak in Darien is more sensual and akin to Keats’s character. The choice of Keats’s imagery in this sonnet and marrying it to the appropriate rhythm clinches the success of the poem. ‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’ has, no wonder, become a felicitous record of one of Keats’s unforgettable personal experiences of an encounter with the father of European poetry that was Homer.

Above we have tried to show how the various aspects of the poem can be knit together into an account of your appreciation of it especially with respect to your observations or rhythm. If you were in a class with your friends we might have analysed a few poems and seen how our responses varied. If possible try it out from time to time, at the Study Centre or at a privately formed Study Group.

### 2.6 LET’S SUM UP

In the previous unit we examined in the first place the thing called poetry in somewhat abstract terms. In this unit we examined the prosodic aspect of poetry. Finally we showed how the various aspects can be put together in our critical appreciation of a poem. This is what we expect you to be able to do on this
course. Critics say that the evolution of the rhythm of a language tells us about the cultural evolution of the people, their changing and evolving consciousness. If this is a tall claim I leave you to decide for yourself.

Hereafter the units will tell you either about an age or a poet or about some poems. We will expect you to be able to respond to all the three – the man, the milieu and the moment that gave birth to the poem – in your comments on passages set from poems prescribed for detailed study and printed in these blocks.

This is a long unit. You must not have expected it to be longer. You should prepare your own notes on lyric, epic, ode, etc. or figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, etc. You should consult a dictionary of literature in order to discover the terms of art as and when you feel the need to do so.

2.7 A BRIEF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This unit does not tell you about literary terms, figures of speech, etc. However, as a student of literature you will be required to understand and use them in various contexts including your essays and answers. Below are recommended a few dictionaries and encyclopedias for your use.

The new edition of The Oxford Companion to English Literature (1985) edited by Margaret Drabble is intended to serve, as its predecessor Sir Paul Harvey’s (1932), as a ‘useful companion to ordinary everyday readers of English literature’. It gives brief notes on authors of books, literary trends such as Neo-classicism and Romanticism, (Postmodernism is alas missing), figures of speech such as oxymoron and litotes, literary movements such as the Oxford, or Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements and many other facts that a student of English literature would wish to know from time to time. It is possible that the new edition has not reached the shelves of the library you have access to. That should not disturb you. I found Sir Paul’s work very delightful and in the beginning Drabble’s work with its shorter notes was a bit of a disappointment to me. Besides the Companion you may consult, Dictionary of Literary Terms by Harry Shaw published by McGraw Hill Book Co. (New Delhi, 1972) and The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms by Chris Baldick (Delhi, 1990). The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry edited by Ian Hamilton (Delhi, 1994) has a much broader coverage on poetry in English.

Literary criticism today more than ever before has been under the influence of disciplines such as rhetoric and Linguistics. You would find Amiya Bhushan Sharma’s The Growth and Evolution of Classical Rhetoric (Ajanta: New Delhi, 1991,’ 92) at the Study and Regional Centres. It is meant to introduce classical rhetoric to distant learners in India like yourself. For a quick reference to terms such as felicity conditions of lexic consult. A Dictionary of Stylistics by Katie Wales published by Logman (London, 1989). Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism edited by Martin Coyle et.al. (Routledge: London, 1990) has long articles written by experts on various aspects of literature including an article on ‘Postmodernism’ by Robert B.Ray (pp. 131 - 147).

In case you wish to study some thought provoking essays on poetry and its ‘meaning’ I should recommend just two: the first one is by Roman Jakobson called ‘What is Poetry?’ (pp.368 -378) in Language and Literature edited by KrystyanPomorska and Stephen Ruddy (Harvard University Press: Cambridge,
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Ma, 1987) and other one called ‘The Third Meaning’ (pp. 52-68) by Roland Barthes in *Image, Music, Text* (Flamingo: London, 1982).

### 2.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

**Exercise I**:

1. **In woods/ a ran/ger**
   **To joy/ a stran/ger**
   The two lines above are in iambic dimeter. However, they are *hypermetrical* which means that an unaccented rhyming syllable is at the end of each line.

2. **Thy way/ not mine, / o Lord,**
   **Howev/er dark/ it be;**
   **Lead me / with thine / own hand,**
   **Choose out/ the path/ for me.**
   The quatrain above is in regular iambic trimeter.

3. **The way/ was long/ the wind/ was cold,**
   **The min/strel was/ infirm/ and old;**
   **The harp, / his sole/ remain/ ing joy,**
   **Was car/ ried by /an or/ phan boy.**
   Above there are two couplets in regular iambic tetrameter.

4. **Confu /sion, shame,/ remorse/ despair,**
   **At once/ his bos/ om swell**
   **The damps/ of death/ bedewed/ his brow;**
   **He shook,/ he groaned,/ he fell.**
   In the stanza above iambic trimeter lines alternate with iambic tetrameter lines. We also notice that ‘swell’ and ‘fell’ rhyme but the first and third lines don’t. We thus get the impression that the stanza could also be written as iambic heptameter couplets.
5. I put /my hat/ upon /my head
   And walked/ into/ the strand
   And there/ I met ano/ ther man
   Whose hat /was in/ his hand.

The poem above is iambic in rhythm alternating tetrameter and trimeter in verse length.

**Self-Check Exercise II**

Now you may scan a couple of passages from Shakespeare and Keats and write your comments on them in the space provided:

a) Two truths/ are told,
   As hap/py pro/ logues to /the swell/ing act
   Of the/ imper/ial theme// I thank/ you, gen/ telmen.
   This su/ perna/tural/ soliciting
   Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,
   Why hath/ it gi/ ven me ear/ nest of /success,
   Commend/ing in/ a truth?// I am Thane of Caw/ dor
   If good, why do/ I yield/ to that/ sugges/tion
   Whose hor/ rid im/ age doth/ unfix/ my hair.
   And make/ my sea/ted heart/ knock at/my ribs…

Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

If you read Shakespeare’s *Macbeth in Understanding Drama* you must have recognized the words of the eponymous hero, in the play. Macbeth met the three witches on his way back from the battlefield who had addressed him successively as duke of Glamis, thane of Cawdor and finally as king of Scotland. Impressed by his display of courage Duncan has honoured him by giving him the dukedom of Glamis and thaneship of Cawdor. However, Macbeth is not yet King of Scotland which he cannot be, unless, he thinks, he murders Duncan, his king and benefactor. The idea of regicide and ingratitude has shaken him and he admits of having his ‘functions’ being ‘smothered in surmise’. The given extract is the opening part of his introspection (for us) and soliloquy for the audience in the theatre.
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The ground rhythm of the extract is iambic pentameter. However, he does not follow it slavishly. There are interesting variations. They are as below:

- the first line is iambic dimeter;
- the first foot is a spondee;
- there are at least three pyrrhuses in passage of ten lines i.e. in the 3rd, 6th and 7th;
- seventh and eight lines are hypermetrical;
- there are two caesuras – in the third and seventh lines;
- the third foot of the sixth and the fourth foot of the seventh lines have an elision.

With the help of these variations Shakespeare imparts colloquial ease and informality to the soliloquy. We notice here, to use Coleridge’s words, as we did not in the case of Sackville and Norton, metre being used as a pattern of expectation, fulfilment and surprise. As Macbeth makes his progress from confusion to clarity in the course of the soliloquy we notice the ground rhythm becoming more and more natural. According to Harvey Gross, the function of prosody is ‘to image life in a rich and complex way’. We notice here for ourselves how prosody has succeeded in articulating the movement of the mind of Macbeth.

b) On first Looking into Chapman’s Homer

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western lands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep browed Homer ruled as his demesne
Yet did I never breathe its pure serence
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watch of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
On Metre, Scansion and, Prosody

Looked at/each oth/er with/ a wild/ surmise
Silent/ upon/ a peak/ in Da/rien.

For comments on the prosodic features of this sonnet read section 2.6.

Self-Check Exercise IV

/ / / / a) Dreadful gleams,
/ / / / Dismal screams,
/ / / / Fires that glow,
/ / / / Shrieks of woe,
/ / / / Sullen moans,
/ / / / Hollow groans,

You could say that above there are three couplets in trochaic monometer. However it would be more appropriate to call it a passage in trochaic dimeter with the second foot being catalectic in each case. Perhaps the best idea would be to call it a passage in the amphimacer foot. The passage can be scanned in any of the three ways.

/ / / / b) Rich the/ treasure,
/ / / / Sweet the/ pleasure. J. Dryden

The two lines are in trochaic dimeter.

/ / / / / c) When the/ British/ warrior/ queen
/ / / / / Bleeding/ from the/ Roman/rods,
/ / / / / Sought with/ an in/dignant/mien
/ / / / / Counsel/ of her /country’s/gods.

The stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. However, the last foot of every line is catalectic. We call a foot catalectic that has just an accented syllable.

/ / / / / d) Tell me/ not in /mournful/ numbers
/ / / / / Life is /but an /empty /dream;
Early Modern English Poets

For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

A.W. Longfellow

The stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. However, the last foot of the second and fourth lines are catalectic. The rhyme scheme of the passage above is: a b a b.

e) All that walk on foot or ride in chariots
All that dwell in palaces or garrets

The stanza is in trochaic pentameter.

f) On a mountain stretched beneath a hoary willow
Lay a shepherd swain and viewed the rolling billow.

The couplet is in trochaic hexameter.

Self-Check Exercise V

b) How fleet is the glance of the mind
Compared with the speed of its flight!
The tempest itself lags behind
And the swift winged arrows of light

The ground rhythm of the passage above is anapestic trimeter. However, the first foot of each of the first three lines is an iambus. Iambic substitutions in lines in the anapestic meter is quite common.

b) The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

The passage is without any variation in anapaestic tetrameter.

c) Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot,
O’er the grave where our hero we buried.

If repetition of a pattern is the *sine qua non* of rhythm, the passage is uniformly in tetrameter. However, out of sixteen feet only ten are in the anapaest. The remaining feet are in the iambic.

d) I am out/ of humanity’s reach,
I must finish my journey alone.

The couple of lines are in anapaestic trimeter. However, the first foot is an iambic substitution.

**Self-Check Exercise VI**

Scan the following and then briefly comment on the scansion.

b) One more unfortunate

Weary of breath

Rashly importunate

Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly;

Lift her with care;

Fashion’d so slenderly young and so fair!

The two stanzas above are in dactylic dimeter. They rhyme alternately i.e. a b a b c d c d. the second, fourth, sixth and eight lines are catalectic.

a) Merrily merrily shall I live now

Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

The couplet distich above is in dactylic trimeter.

**Self-Check Exercise VII**

Most friendship is feigning,
Most friendship mere folly.

Both the lines are in amphibrachic dimeter.
Self-Check Exercise VIII

a) There is alliteration in ‘ruin’ and ‘numinate’ on the one hand and ‘taught’, ‘time’ and ‘take’ on the other.

(b) Dryden by employing ‘pious’, ‘priesterhaft’ and ‘ploygamy’ on the one hand and ‘begin’ and ‘before’ on the other in his distich makes use of the figure of sound of alliteration.

c) The repetition of the sibilants i.e. ‘shade’ and ‘soul’ on the one hand and ‘drowsily’ and ‘drown’ on the other create an acoustic effect that is daily experience. This particular type of effect is called alliteration.

d) In the two lines the consonants in ‘dawn’ and ‘war’ are different. However, there is an identity of vowel sounds. This is an example of assonance.

e) It seemed that out of betel I escaped
   Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
   Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
   Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned.

   Wilfred Owen: ‘Strange Meeting’

In the passage above we have underlined four words. ‘Escaped’ and ‘scooped’ have an identity of consonants while the vowels differ just as in ‘groin’ and ‘groan’ also. These are two examples of consonance.

Self-Check Exercise IX

1) Rhyme refers to the agreement in terminal sounds of two or more words of lines in verse such as rich and which; increase and peace; descend and extend. Rhythm indicates measured flow of words and phrases in prose or verse or movement suggested by the succession of strong or weak elements or of different conditions in a given time span.

2) Rhythm is one of the factors of style. It indicates flow or progression in time. Certain units get repeated in rhythm – a foot in English poetry when repeated contributes to the rhythm of that poem. Poets often achieve effects not by regularity but through breaks in the order, the established ground rhythm of the poem.

3) Every poet, for that matter any artist, has a distinctive style and his/her rhythm contributes to words it. We talk about Milton’s grand style and contrast it with the gentle art of Shakespeare. Milton writes about Heaven and Hell, God and satan; Shakespeare about ordinary men and women involved in their common love and hate, ambition and defeat, pride and humility such as we experience ourselves. Their choice of words, rhythm of their language are thus poles apart just as are their themes. All these tell us something about the persons the Milton and Shakespeare must have been in their inner lives.
UNIT 3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S SONNETS

Structure
3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 William Shakespeare: The National Poet of England
   3.2.1 Introduction
   3.2.2 Early Life
   3.2.3 In the Theatre
   3.2.4 The Poet
   3.2.5 Achievements
3.3 Shakespeare’s Sonnets
   3.3.1 Background
   3.3.2 The Themes of Shakespeare’s Sonnets
3.4 Sonnets 29 and 30: A Study in Comparison
   3.4.1 The Texts
   3.4.2 An Analysis
3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES
You have already read some of Shakespeare’s sonnets and learnt to scan them. After reading this unit you will be able to think, speak and write on William Shakespeare and his sonnets in general and two sonnets, 29 and 30 in particular.

This will lay the foundation for an appreciation, in the long run not only of Shakespeare’s sonnets but also other sonnet sequences and long poems of Elizabethan poets such as Edmund Spenser (1552 – ’99), Sir Philip Sidney (1554 – ’86), Christopher Marlowe (1564 – ’93), Samuel Daniel (1563 - 1619) and, quite a few others.

3.1 INTRODUCTION
In this unit you will read a brief life sketch of William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) and two of his sonnets. Read this unit section by section in the order presented here giving yourself a short break from time to time. Don’t try to read both sonnets in quick succession. It may be a good idea to read them several times day after day till you have committed them to memory.

There is plenty of material on the internet on Shakespeare and other Elizabethan poets and poems; you may read them also if you like and if you have time.
3.2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE NATIONAL POET OF ENGLAND

3.2.1 Introduction

Shakespeare is certainly the most famous of literary artists of the English Speaking world. He has been compared with Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749 - 1832) in Germany, Victor Hugo (1802-85) in France, Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) in Spain, Alighieri Dante (1265 -1321) in Italy, Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) in Russia and Tulsidas (1532? - 1623) in India. Ben Jonson (1574-1637) one of Shakespeare’s great contemporaries called him the greatest European writer:

Of all, that insolent *Greece*, or haughtie *Rome*
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come
Triumph, my *Braitainne*, thou hast one to shoue,
To whom all scenes of *Europe* homage owe,

Shakespeare has retained his place in the Western literature as the artist par excellence.

3.2.2 Early Life

William was the eldest son of John Shakespeare as glover and dealer in other commodities such as barley, timber and wood. John’s father Richard Shakespeare was a yeoman farmer of Snitterfield. He farmed in two manors one of which belonged to Robert Arden maternal grandfather of William. Richard, William Shakespeare’s grandfather died in 1561. John married Mary Arden around 1557 and William was born on 23 April, 1564 as he was according to local Church records baptized at the Holy Trinity Church Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April, 1564, three days after his birth following the local tradition. Mary Arden and John Shakespeare had eight children of whom four sons and a daughter survived childhood. For a time John Shakespeare was very successful. He was the burgess of the borough and chosen and alderman in 1565 and bailiff in 1568.

William may have gone to the grammar school at Stratford run by the borough where he may have learnt to read, write and speak Latin and some of the classical poets. William Shakespeare certainly did not go to the University. Instead at the age of 18, in November or December 1582 he married Anne Hathway of Shottery only two miles away from Stratford. She was eight years his senior and three months pregnant by William. Their daughter Susanna was baptized on 26 May, 1583. Anne gave birth to their son Hamnet and daughter Judith on 2 February, 1585. We employment at this time except from the antiquary and biographer John Aubrey’s (1626-97) account of Shakespeare as a school master in the country.

3.2.3 In the Theatre

Shakespeare probably entered the world of theatre in 1587 when the Queen’s Men came to Stratford to stage a play. One of their men had been murdered and William Shakespeare filled the vacancy. The first recorded reference to his drama is by Robert Greene (1558-92) in his *Greenes groats-worth of wittee* (1592) in which he called Shakespeare ‘an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers. Greene had been educated at St. John’s College and Clare Hall, Cambridge from 1575 until 1583 and had been incorporated at Oxford in 1588. Greene was a
University Wit – a name coined by George Saintsbury (1845-1933) the chair, since 1895 of rhetoric and English literature at Edinburgh for twenty years. The other Elizabethan playwrights who had been to Oxford or Cambridge were Thomas Nashe (1567-1601), John Lyly (1554-1606) and Thomas Lodge (?1558-1625) Greene or his editor Henry Chettle (c. 1560-? 1607) printer and playwright of sorts also called Shakespeare un absolute Johannes Factotums ..... in his own conceit the only Shake scene in a country. As ‘Johannes Factotum’ or ‘Jack of all trade’ Shakespeare was criticized for being a second-rate tinkerer with the works of others.

Greene’s attack is the earliest surviving mention of Shakespeare’s career in the theatre. Apart from Henry VI in 3 parts Shakespeare had also published Titus Andronicus and King John by 1592. Shakespeare began his writing career by adapting existing scripts, altering and modifying them which accounts for the variability in these early pieces.

3.2.4 The Poet

Shakespeare finds mention for the first time in the Stationer’s List in 1593 for Venus and Adonis. This was followed by The Rape of Lucrece in 1594. Both were dedicated to young Henny Wriotheslay (pronounced Risley, Riesley or Rosely) the third Earl of Southampton. Both were a literary and commercial success. The warmth and ardour of the dedication to Southampton of The Rape matches the fire and enthusiasm of the sonnets addressed to the ‘Fair Youth’ and it is quite certain that they were getting written about this time. The sonnets were not meant for the general public but only for the eyes of one or two lovers mentioned in the poems. They were published by Thomas Thorpe, without Shakespeare’s agency, in 1609. The volume includes the poem ‘A Lover’s Complaint’. In the meantime Robert Chester had published Shakespeare’s ‘The Phoenix and the Turtle’ in his Loves Martyr (1601) a collection of poems by various hands.

Poetry appears to have been Shakespeare’s pastime during the plague years in 1592 and ‘93. When the theatres opened in 1594 Shakespeare received a sum of hundred pounds, a great sum in those days, from Southampton with which he became a shaver in Lord Chamberlain’s Men, one of the most important acting companies then in London. As a sharer he was part owner of the stocks of the company and shared also in its expenses and profits. In 1596 John Shakespeare at Stratford applied for and got a coat of arms which established his gentility. Next year William bought New Place, the second largest house in Stratford. In 1598 Richard Burbage, the famous actor died and his two sons invited Shakespeare and four other of the principal actors in the Lord Chamberlain’s men to invest for a half share in the new globe theatre which they built on the Thames using timber from the old theatre for the foundations. The venture was a success and in 1602 Shakespeare could buy 107 acres of land and 20 acres of pasture from a local magnate John Combe. In 1603, at the accession of James I the company was renamed King’s Men.

3.2.5 Achievements

Shakespeare wrote some of his greatest tragedies such as Hamlet (1601), King Lear (1605), Othello (1604) and Macbeth (1606), Antony and Cleopatra (1607) and Coriolanus (1608) by 1608. His last plays, perhaps his most perfect, were romances: Pericles (1607), Cymbeline (1609), The Winter’s Tale (1611) and The Tempest (1611). Shakespeare returned to Stratford in 1613 where he died on 23
April, 1616. Tow of his colleagues in the theatre, namely John Heminges (1556-1630) and Henry Condell (d. 1627) together edited the first folio (1623) of his plays and Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) wrote his memorial verses for the in which he proudly proclaimed:

He was not of an age, but for all time
And all the Muses still were in their prime
When like Apollo he came forth to warme
Our eares, or like a Mercury to charm'e!
Nature her selfe was proud of his designes
And joy'd to were the dressing of his lines
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.

Shakespeare has attracted the greatest number of scholars engaged in the study of English Literature in each generation and in every land. Shakespeare has found admirers not only in literature but also in cinema.

Now that you have read a brief note on Shakespeare’s life and work find out for yourself how well you have understood it with the help of the exercise below.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Name some of the literary artists in Western literature of world fame.

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2) Name some of the poems of William Shakespeare along with the dates of their composition/publication.

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3) Name some of the famous tragedies of Shakespeare.

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4) What was the name of the company which Shakespeare also partially owned?

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3.3 SHAKESPEARE’S SONNETS

3.3.1 Background

Sonnets are fourteen-line poems in two or three rhyme schemes. One of them is named after the Italian humanist and poet Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca) (1304-74) who used the sonnet sequence to praise Laura whom he first met in 1327. His odes and sonnets in praise of Laura were later included in *conzioni e Rime* (1360). His sonnets structurally and also in thought process are divided into octaves and sestets, i.e. eight-and six-line stanzas. The octaves follow the rhyme scheme abba, abba put the rhyme scheme of the sestets vary:

Ced ccd or cdcdec or cdecde. Petrarch had profound influence on European literature as he showed the way for the revival of interest in ancient Greek and Latin literatures. The most well known name in English for the immediate influence of Petrarch is that of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) who held many diplomatic assignments in France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands in the service of the Tudor monarch Henry VIII(1509-47).

Sir Thomas visited Italy for the first time in 1527 when he got inspired by Petrarch’s poems and essays and translated them into English. The most accomplished writers of Petrarchan sonnets in English are Milton and Wordsworth.

Henry Howard, (by courtesy) Earl of surrey (? 1517 - 47) was in the English army in France (1544-6). However, his sonnets were predominantly in the ‘English’ form, i.e. abab, cdcd, efef, gg which was later used by Shakespeare. A third variety of the sonnets is that invented by Spenser. The rhyme scheme of a Spenserian sonnets is:

abab bcbcc de

3.3.2 The Themes of Shakespeare’s Sonnets

Shakespeare did not write his sonnets for publication. Thomas Thorpe published them in 1609 without his permission. He got the manuscript from someone whose name bears the initials W.H. A.L. Rowse opines that Shakespeare must have given his sonnets to Henry Wriothesley ten years younger than himself to whom he had dedicated his *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece* and who was the ‘fair youth’ to whom the first 127 sonnets were addressed along with the 25 addressed to the dark lady from some lewd background and the last two to cupid the god of Love, thus making in all 154 in the sequence. These sonnets are amatory in character but it was in these sonnets that Shakespeare bared his soul and must have found their publication quite embarrassing.

Scholars are of the view that a large number of the sonnets were written in the years 1592-94 when the theatres were closed in London due to plague and Shakespeare was in the country. Young Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton about 19 was young and beautiful and Shakespeare 29. Marlowe described Southampton in his portrait of Leander in *Hero and Leander* with liveliness and precision

His dangling tresses that were never shorn,
His body was as straight as Circes wand,
Jove might have sipped out Nectar from his hand,
Even as delicious meat is to the taste,
So was his neck in touching, and surpassed,
The white of Pelop’s shoulder.
In Greek mythology Pelops was grandson of Zeus. His father Tantalus, cooked and served Pelops to the gods at a banquet but only Demeter, mourning the loss of her daughter Persephone, was distracted enough to eat from the dish. The gods ordered the body restored but the shoulder. Demeter’s portion, was missing, and Pelops was given a replacement of ivory. The body of Pelops, says Marlowe, was whiter than ivory.

Marlowe’s description of Southampton in the person of Leander would have been approved by his contemporaries:

Some swore he was a maid in man’s attire
For in his looks were all that men desire……
And such as knew he was a man would say,
Leander, thou are made for amorous play:
Why are thou not in love, and loved of all?
Though thou be fair, yet be not thine own thrall.

Marlowe advised Leander, i.e. Southampton, to avoid narcissistic tendencies in himself and open himself to others’ affections.

Shakespeare’s expressions of love in the ‘fair youth’ sonnets are more platonic than sexual. Let’s read sonnet 18:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all two short a date
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm’d;
And every fair from fair some time declines,
By chance, or nature’s changing course, untrimm’d

In the first two quatrains we get a picture of the impact Southampton has made an Shakespeare’s mind, the portrait draws its power and force by comparison with nature. There is ‘twon’ or ‘Volta opening of the third quatrain. The mood of the poem shifts and the poet expresses a revelation:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wand’rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st.

Shakespeare’s epiphany is in actual fact condescension in the garb of true esteem which ceases to remain muffled in the last two lines of the sonnet:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Compared with the spiritual love for the ‘fair youth’ in sonnet 18 Shakespeare’s sonnets for the Dark Lady are overtly sexual in appeal. It is evident from the poems that the lady has dun coloured skin and black hair. Shakespeare scholars have named Lucy Negro a London prostitute, Mary Fitton and Emilia Lanier as likely candidates for the dubious distinction of being Shakespeare’s partner in the acts of love.
3.4 SONNETS 29 AND 30: A STUDY IN COMPARISON

3.4.1 The Texts

Sonnet XXIX

When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts my self almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven’s gate;
For thy sweet love remember’d such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Sonnet XXIX

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time’s waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death’s dateless night,
And weep afresh love’s long since cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o’er
The sad account of fore-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.

3.4.2 An Analysis

‘When to the sessions’ and the preceding sonnet 29 – ‘When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes’ – are companion pieces. In 29 the poet bewails certain retrogression in his fortune and in 30 the loss of friends and many things he sought in life which he could not get. In both poems Shakespeare cheers up when he remembers his friend. Then he overcomes the hurt caused by his outcast state or depression inflicted by his lack of achievements or loss of friends. However, for a lyric (sonnet 30) that tells us about the intimate experiences of the poet, its language couched in formal court vocabulary may appear wooden on cogitation is seamless in offering the contradictory aesthetic experience of pain and happiness.

In both sonnets i.e. 29 and 30 Shakespeare recounts common losses, unfulfilled ambitions, decease of friends, etc. In sonnet 29 Shakespeare seems to bemoan certain qualities and influence he could not acquire: ‘Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope’. In sonnet 30 he sighs the lack of many a thing he sought. The
immediate reason for the downcast state in which he finds himself is fall from the favour of goddess Fortuna as well as people around him. Nothing precipitous accounts for the dip in happiness in sonnet 30 but idle memory: ‘sessions of sweet silent thought’. So while in sonnet 29 the poet like Job in the Old Testament troubles deaf heaven with his bootless cries’ in sonnet 30 he wastes his ‘dear’ time summoning old thoughts to the court of his mind. A setback in his career forces the poet to take recourse to the reassurance of religion in sonnet 29; in sonnet 30, the relaxed indulgence in past memories makes him somewhat distant, aloof and offish. So while in sonnet 30 he is conscious of the wastage of his time, in sonnet 29 the experience is more intense and the poet like Job curses his fate.

Shakespeare wrote the sonnets when he was in his late twenties and early thirties. It appears somewhat strange that he should be overcome by grief for ‘precious friends hid in death’s dateless night.’ We recall that Marlowe, born in the same year as Shakespeare himself and the only contemporary poet Shakespeare alluded to in his plays died in 1593 and his only son Hamnet passed away in August 1596 and Spenser in 1599. Their decease could bring tears to his eyes. The overarching self-possession in sonnet 30 is expressed by the poet’s assertion that his eyes are ‘unused to flow.’ Still the loss remembered in sonnet 30 is so personal in nature and affecting his person that he cannot help crying:

And weep afresh love’s long since cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight.

The memory of his son Hamnet must have been profound and moving. Did Shakespeare use Hamnet to buttress some scene or character in some of his early plays which comes to him with a sense of guilt? The poet bemoans ‘The expense of’ some of his ‘vanished sight.’

Sonnets 29 and 30 may be called complementary: the former is full of tear and cries and in the latter Shakespeare seems to have gained self-control and authority even compensating for the loss in the former sonnet. The second quatrain of sonnet 29 exposes Shakespeare’s innermost desire. He was a commoner, unlike Henry and Robert i.e. Southampton and Essex. However, he was conscious of his gifts. And still, he must have felt that he was inferior even as a playwright, to Christopher Marlowe of his own age. He must have desired the art of Marlowe and Spenser and the scope of earls of Southampton and Essex to whose circle he belonged. Marlowe was University educated; Shakespeare had to give up his education owing to some catastrophic decline in his father’s fortune. The latter’s status in the late 16th century was that of a hanger on and an ordinary actor and at best an insignificant playwright. He lacked many things: the skills of Marlowe as well his scope as one of Walsingham’s circle and of course the ‘influence’ of Essex who was very dear to Queen Elizabeth. But more than all these Shakespeare sought the company of Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton ‘the world’s fresh ornament’ of which he never felt he had his full.

Let’s now turn to the third quatrains in the two sonnets. It is typical of Shakespeare to turn around the train of thought. Sonnet 30 is a more formal, public conscious utterance, so Shakespeare introduces the idea of now grieving over his grievances mentioned in the preceding quatrains. In a way, the melancholic strain is strengthened in the third stanza which gives and epiphanic character to the concluding lines of the poem:

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.
This revival of spirit comes faster in sonnet 29. The third quatrain reverses the melancholic atmosphere of the foregoing quatrains. Here Shakespeare tells his reader that while he is despising himself on several counts he remembers his friend, i.e. Southampton, his ‘state’ or body begins to sing.

Like the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven’s gate;

Shakespeare has used an epic simile in a lyric and an extremely fresh and rejuvenating one. The poet’s gloom was like the darkness of night, like the solidness, sullenness and miserableness of the dark earth but the lark symbolizes joy and light just like the ‘break of day’ and it rises from the sullen earth carrying with it earth’s music in the form of ‘hymns’, ‘at heaven’s gate.’ Shakespeare has offered a scintillating image of light in the lark in sonnet 29 which reminds us of ‘the main of light’ in sonnet 60 where ‘nativity’ the birth of an infant is compared, by suggestion to dust particles in a shaft of light in an otherwise dark room.

The end of sonnet 29 is as luminescent as the image of the ‘lark at break of day arising’:

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Sonnets 29 and 30 are on the theme of memory but while the former is rich in passion the latter is restrained in emotion. The poetic devices never stand out for their own sake; they unobtrusively enrich the texture of the poem and enrich our aesthetic experience.

Now would you like to answer some of my questions?

**Self-check Exercise II**

1) What is an image? Cite two examples of images from the sonnets you have read in this unit.

2) What is the rhyme scheme of the two sonnets you have read above?
3) Copy a heroic couplet from one of the poems you have read.
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4) Copy a line from one of the texts where you find an example of alliteration.
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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Shakespeare was called a ‘Star of Poets’ who was ‘not of an age but for all time’. In this unit you read a brief biography of him and of his contributions to English drama and poetry. Next you read about the sonnet with special reference to Shakespeare’s.

In this unit you also read two sonnets of Shakespeare. They have been compared as they are on the theme of memory. Shakespeare’s treatment of the subject in the two poems is quite different but appropriate to the mood. You must read the poems several times or better still memorize them.
UNIT 4  JOHN MILTON

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 John Milton (1608-1674)
4.3 ‘L’ Allegro’ & ‘Il Penseroso’
   4.3.1 The Background of the Poems
   4.3.2 The Text: ‘L’ Allegro’
   4.3.3 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘L’ Allegro’
   4.3.4 The Text: ‘Il Penseroso’
   4.3.5 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘Il Penseroso’
   4.3.6 ‘L’ Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’: A Discussion
4.4 ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’
   4.4.1 The Background of the Poem
   4.4.2 The Text
   4.4.3 An Appreciation
4.5 ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’
   4.5.1 The Background of the Poem
   4.5.2 The Text
   4.5.3 An Appreciation
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Suggested Reading
4.8 Answers to Self-check Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read the unit you will be able to:

• Talk about Milton, the poet
• Discuss and appreciate ‘L’ Allegro’ & ‘Il Penseroso’
• Examine ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’
• Appreciate ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As a student of literature you might have heard the name of John Milton. Who was he? Why is he famous for? What is his contribution to English poetry? Most of you might be well familiar with these issues. This unit is an attempt to extend your knowledge of Milton still further and make you very intimate with the poet who wrote the first great epic in English. We shall first try to know Milton both as a person and litterateur. You will agree that knowing the person will give us greater insight into his poems. Then we shall take up four of his poems – two pastoral poems and two sonnets.
4.2  JOHN MILTON (1608 - 1674)

John Milton was born in London on 9 December 1608 in a well-to-do family. He was the second child of John and Sara (née Jeffrey). Milton’s father, John Milton Sr., was a man of culture, a classical scholar and a musician of no mean ability. He supported the reformers against his father’s will. We can very well guess the consequences when one goes against the will of one’s parents. Milton Sr., too, was disinherited by his parents for casting his lot with the Reformers. This forced him to work for his living in different capacities - as a scrivener, legal secretary as well as a person dealing in real estate transactions and money lending. He also served as a composer of church music. Perhaps it was because of this that his son (Milton, the poet) too experienced a lifelong delight in music. Our Milton (the poet) took lessons in classical languages, first by private tutors at home and then at St. Paul’s School in 1620. Milton himself spoke of his childhood:

“My father destined me from my infancy to the study of polite literature, which I embraced with such avidity, that from the age of twelve, I hardly ever retired from my books before midnight. This proved the first source of injury to my eyes, whose natural weakness was attended with frequent pains in the head; but as all these disadvantages could not repress my ardour for learning, my father took care to have me instructed by various preceptors, both at home and at school.” (Quoted from Crompton-Rickett)

In 1625, Milton was admitted to Christ’s College, Cambridge. He was a hardworking student; but he was also argumentative and could not easily accept injustice. Naturally, only a year later, in 1626, he got suspended after a dispute with his tutor, William Chappell. The suspension, however, also proved a blessing in disguise, as it was during his temporary return to London that he attended plays, and perhaps began his first forays into poetry.

At his return to Cambridge, Milton was assigned a new tutor, Nathaniel Tovey. Life at Cambridge was still not easy on Milton. On the one hand, he was dissatisfied with the curriculum and on the other hand, many of his fellow students disliked him and Milton knew this very well. It was at Cambridge that he composed ‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ on December 25, 1629. Crompton- Rickett gives a very good picture of Milton’s life: “Proud and austere even at college, Milton conceived as lofty a view of the poet’s calling as did Wordsworth two centuries later, and like Wordsworth, felt himself to be a consecrated spirit. In age of considerable licence and loose manners, Milton set a fine example by his sobriety of life.”

In 1642, after receiving his M.A. cum laude at Cambridge, Milton returned to the family homes in London and Horton, Buckinghamshire. Here, for several years he devoted his time to private study and literary composition. It was during this period that Milton wrote poems such as ‘On Shakespeare’, ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘IL Penseroso’. His Comus, a masque, was performed at Ludlow Castle in 1644. This masque was first published anonymously in 1647 with music from Henry Lawes, the well known court composer.

For Milton, 1647 was the year of misfortune and losses. In April 1647, his mother died and only a few months later, in August, his friend Edward King died by drowning. In November, upon his memory, Milton composed the beautiful elegy, ‘Lycidas’. Thus, the loss became a gain in terms of literary achievement. This elegy was published in a memorial volume at Cambridge in 1648.
Milton set out for a tour of Europe in the spring of 1648 and met several eminent persons. These persons included Hugo Grotius and Giovanni Batista (biographer of Torquato Tasso). Milton wrote ‘Mansus’ in the latter’s honour. Upon reaching Geneva, Milton found out about the death of his childhood friend, Charles Diodati in London. Milton’s tour of Europe was cut short with rumours of impending civil war in England. He returned home in July 1649 and shortly thereafter composed ‘Epitaphium Damonis’, a Latin poem in the memory of his dearest friend.

During the Civil War, Milton emerged as a prolific pamphlet writer. He wrote pamphlets on political and religious matters. His ‘Of Reformation’, ‘Animadversions’, and ‘Of Prelatical Episcopacy’ were published in 1641 and ‘The Reason for Church Government’ in February, 1642.

In the spring of 1642, at the age of 44, Milton married Mary Powell who was half his age (17 years old). The marriage, however, was an unhappy one. Shortly after their marriage, Mary left him to visit her family and did not return. The political interests of the two families also came in the way of their marriage. The Powells sided with the King in the Civil War and this further worsened the matter. However, his bitter experiences in marriage motivated Milton to write his so-called Divorce Tracts in which he spoke for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. In 1644, Milton published the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, which had its second, longer edition in early 1644. In 1644, Milton also published *The Judgement of Martin Bucer Concerning Divorce*. His Divorce Tracts caused such an uproar all around - in parliament, amidst the clergy, and general populace – that he was nicknamed “Milton the Divorcer.”

The attempted censorship of the Divorce Tracts by the Stationers’ Company provoked Milton to publish his eloquent *Areopagitica* in late 1644. It was an oration advocating freedom of the press. Milton also had time to write a treatise *Of Education*, which prescribed a rigorous course of study for English youth. In 1645, Milton published *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, and registered *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin*.

Milton’s personal life took a favourable turn and he got reunited with Mary Powell. The fruition of this reunion was the birth of two daughters - Anne in 1646 and Mary in 1648.

Two weeks after the public execution of Charles I on January 40, 1649, Milton published *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and in March. As a reward to his services during the Civil War, the Cromwellian government appointed Milton Secretary for Foreign Tongues and ordered him to write an answer to Charles I’s purported *Eikon Basilike* (Royal Image). After publishing *Observations on the Articles of Peace*, Milton published *Eikonoklastes* (Image Breaker) in October, 1649. In 1650, the Council of State ordered Milton to write a response to Salmasius’ *Defensio Regia* - the Continental outcry against the English action (Defense of Kingship). *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* was published in February, 1651. Milton’s first son, John, was born in March and the Miltons moved to Westminster.

The year 1652 was another year of losses and gains. It was in this year that he lost his sight. This was a great personal loss but this also made him introspect his ‘talent’ as well as the future course of life. The loss of sight prompted him to write the well known sonnet ‘When I Consider How My Light is Spent’ also known as ‘On his blindness’. In May, 1652, Mary after giving birth to a daughter, Deborah, died and their one year old son John met with the same fate in June.
In 1654, Milton published *Defensio Secunda* and in 1655, *Defensio Pro Se* (“Defense of Himself”). In 1656, Milton married Katherine Woodcock and in late 1657, their daughter Katherine was born. However, his new wife and their daughter both passed away in 1658. Milton wrote the sonnet ‘Methought I saw my late espousèd saint’ in the memory of his wife Katherine Woodcock.

In early 1659, Milton published *A Treatise of Civil Power* and *Ready and Easy Way To Establish a Free Commonwealth*. However, for his propaganda writings, Milton had to go into hiding, for fear of retribution from the followers of King Charles II. The reason was obvious: with the death of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell in 1658 the Commonwealth were coming to a close. King Charles II was restored to the throne on May 40, 1660.

In 1664, notwithstanding his daughters’ protest, Milton married again. This time to Elizabeth Minshull. It was during this time that Milton completed his epic, *Paradise Lost* which is among the greatest works ever written in English. With this Milton overcame the pangs of his blindness. You may wonder how a blind person could write so prolifically and also compose such a great work. Well, it is said that he would compose verse upon verse at night in his head and then dictate them from memory to his aides in the morning. *Paradise Lost* finally saw publication in 1667, in ten books. It was reissued in 1668 with a new title-page and additional materials. The book was met with instant success. It amazed several persons. Even Dryden is reported to have said, “This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too.”

Hereafter, Milton wrote prolifically: *History of Britain* was published in 1670; *Paradise Regain’d* and *Samson Agonistes* were published together in 1671. *Of True Religion* and *Poems, &c. upon Several Occasions* were published in 1674. In summer 1674, the second edition of *Paradise Lost* was published, in twelve books.

Milton died peacefully of gout in November, 1674, and was buried in the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate. His funeral was attended by “his learned and great Friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the Vulgar.” A monument to Milton rests in Poets’ Corner at Westminster Abbey.

From the brief sketch of Milton’s life, it is obvious that Milton was the child both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. His childhood was spent at a time when the Renaissance was in the ascendency. His youth witnessed the rise of Puritanism, and his old age marked the consummation of the Puritan ideals. Naturally, in his poetry we notice a nice fusion of elements both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. A link between the Age of the Renaissance and the Puritan Age is well perceived in his poetry. He is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation.

On the basis of our discussion in this section, we can put Milton’s works in four periods.

- **The College Period.** His college poems, Latin and English, are for the most part simply a young man’s experimental work, and are of little importance. But ‘the Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ is an exception. It is written on a Biblical subject, but glows with imagination and is full of pagan imagery, thus revealing a fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation influences.

- **The Horton Period.** To this period belong four minor poems. These poems are ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ (1644), *Comus* (1644), and ‘Lycidas’
John Milton (1647). From them we now learn that he began to write chiefly under the inspiration of the learning and art of the Renaissance. The Puritan element was at first quite subordinate but it gradually gained in strength and depth till it became at last the dominant element. ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ present charming contrasted pictures of man, nature and art. The first poem is in the mood of gladness whereas the second in that of melancholy. What is remarkable in these poems is that there is little that is characteristically Puritan. In fact, there is a good deal that is really un-puritan; for, the poet dwells frankly upon the pleasures of romance and rustic sports, upon the beauty of Church architecture and music – all these were the objects of uncompromising hatred to the religious fanatic. *Comus*, which is the finest example in our literature of Masque, also belongs to the Renaissance.

However, in ‘Lycidas’ we have a Puritanism which is political and ecclesiastical as well as spiritual and ethical. The religious accent in this elegy is unmistakably puritan. Its fair attack upon the corrupt church and the hireling clergy also openly proclaims Milton’s adherences to the Puritan cause. However, like Spenser’s ‘Astrophel’, ‘Lycidas’, too, is in the conventional style of the classical pastoral elegy. Thus, in terms of form, ‘Lycidas’, too, like *Comus*, belongs to the Renaissance.

**The period of religious and political controversies.** In his 41st year, Milton willingly got himself into the fierce controversies of the hour. To use his own words, by choosing to do that he embarked “on a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes”. In fact, to discharge in his opinion, ‘a great public duty’, he laid aside his ambition to write a great epic which had always taken shape in his mind. For the next twenty years, Milton continued actively as a writer of prose and was involved in political and religious controversies all the time. He thus turned from poetry entirely and this was a great loss to poetry.

**The Period of the Great Epics.** Eventually, when he turned back to poetry, he produced *Paradise Lost*, the greatest English epic, the stupendous masterpiece of intellectual energy and creative power. Here, we have the complete fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation elements. This is not the case with *Paradise Regained* which is completely dominated by Puritanism. The entire space in this epic is taken by the spiritual conflict between good and evil. As such, there is hardly any action in it.

The labours of Milton’s closing years triumph again in *Samson Agonistes*. As in *Paradise Lost*, in this ‘dramatic poem’, too, Milton applies the form of classical art to the treatment of a Biblical subject. *Samson Agonistes* is fashioned strictly upon the principle of Great tragedy, while the matter, mood, tone and outlook are strictly Herbraic and Biblical.

We may say, on the basis of our presentation so far that Milton represents the highest and the complete type of Puritanism. However, the culture of the Renaissance was never totally exterminated by his puritanical bend of mind. In his poetry, the puritanical strain is apparent in following manners (a) in the choice of religious subjects, especially in the later poems, (b) the sense of responsibility and moral exaltation, (c) the fondness for preaching, and lecturing, which in *Paradise Lost* is a positive weakness, and (d) the narrowness of outlook, strongly puritanical, seen in his outbursts against his opponents (as in *Lycidas*), in his belief regarding the inferiority of women, and in his scorn for the “miscellaneous rabble”. Similarly, the Renaissance elements are seen in his love
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of beauty, his classical learning, and his use of classical forms of poetry. Don’t you think that studying such a poet who offers so much will be a fascinating exercise? Why to wait then? Let’s read in detail some of his poems and see for ourselves what he offers to us.

Self Check Exercise 1

1) In the pace provided below write the names of Milton’s work belonging to

a) The Horton Period .................................................................
..........................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................

b) The Period of the Great Epics ..................................................
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2) What impact did blindness leave on Milton’s life and his career?
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..........................................................................................................

3) Why did Milton involve himself in religious and political controversies?
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4) ‘Milton is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the
Reformation.’ Explain.
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4.3 ‘L’ALLEGRO’ & ‘IL PENSOROSO’

4.3.1 The Background of the Poems

‘L’Allegro’ (which means “the happy man” in Italian) is a pastoral poem by John Milton. This poem is invariably paired with ‘Il Penseroso’ (“the melancholy man”), which depicts a similar day spent in contemplation and thought. It is uncertain when ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ were composed because they do not appear in Milton’s Trinity College manuscript of poetry. However, if we go by the settings in the poems, we may infer that they were possibly composed shortly after Milton left
Cambridge. As far as their publication is concerned, both these poems were first published in Milton’s 1645 collection of poems. In the said collection, the two poems complement each other structurally and contain images which are in specific dialogue with one another. They also serve as a balance not only to each other but also to his Latin poems, including ‘Elegia 1’ and ‘Elegia 6’.

Several critics are of the opinion that it is nearly impossible to understand and appreciate ‘L’Allegro’ without also having read its companion piece, ‘Il Penseroso’. If L’Allegro is “the happy person” who spends an idealized day in the country and a festive evening in the city, Il Penseroso is “the thoughtful person” whose night is filled with meditative walking in the woods and hours of study in a “lonely Tower.”

4.3.2 The Text: ‘L’ Allegro’

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerebus and blackest Midnight born
In Stygian cave forlorn,
‘Mongst horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy
Find out some uncouth cell.
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings.
And the night-raven sings:
There, under ebon shades and low-browed rocks.
As ragged as thy locks.
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.
But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,
And by men heart-easing Mirth;
Whom lovely Venus, at a birth.
With two sister Graces more,
To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore:
Or whether (as some sager sing)
The frolic wind that breathes the spring.
Zephyr, with Aurora playing.
As he met her once a-Maying,
There, on beds of violets blue......

On summer eves by haunted stream,
Then to the well-trod stage anon.
If Jonson’s learned sock be on.
Or sweetest Shakspere, Fancy’s child.
Warble his native wood-notes wild.
And ever, against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs.
Married to immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce.
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out
With wanton heed and giddy cunning.
The melting voice through mazes running.
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony;
That Orpheus’ self may heave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydice.

These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

(From ‘L’Allegro’)

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’Allegro</td>
<td>The happy or cheerful person; “lively, gay, merry.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melancholy</td>
<td>A physiological condition associated with both depression and genius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerberu</td>
<td>The three-headed hound that guards the gates of hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncout</td>
<td>Unknown, desolate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ebon</td>
<td>A type of hard, black wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimmeria</td>
<td>The Homeric land of the Cimmerians was so close to the edge of the world that it was eternally wrapped in “mist and cloud” of night (Odyssey 11.14 -9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ycleap’d</td>
<td>Named, called. Most editors point to this archaism as particularly Spenserian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphrosyne</td>
<td>The Goddess of Mirth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sager</td>
<td>Wise men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zephir with Aurora</td>
<td>This alternate ancestry of Euphrosyne makes her the daughter of the west wind and the dawn. As Roy Flannagan suggests, Milton may be saying that accurately tracing Mirth’s origin is not important: “getting there is all the fun, in the sense that the begetting of Mirth must be joyful and guilt-free” (Flannagan 66).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fill’d her</td>
<td>Begot, as if he were breathing wind into her. In other words, Mirth will awaken man to his joyful potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranks</td>
<td>Like “quip” and “wile,” a crank is a fanciful verbal trick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becks</td>
<td>“A gesture expressive of salutation or respect; an inclination of the head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebe’s</td>
<td>The goddess of youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Youthful mockery, jest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trip...toe</td>
<td>Here, “trip” means to step or dance full of life and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
vigour.

**crue**: “Crew,” reminiscent of Comus’s gang of revellers.

**Unreproved**: Blameless, or simply unblamed

**Lark**: The counterpart to nightingale in ‘Il Penseroso’; traditionally the first bird to sing in the morning.

**Bid good morrow**: There has been some disagreement over who comes to the window to “bid good morrow.” While critics have suggested Mirth, the Lark, and the Dawn, most editorial opinion supports L’Allegro himself. For a discussion on this issue see Stanley Fish 114-15.

**Eglantine**: Honeysuckle

**the Cock**: The rooster and his Dames are the first of several paired figures (for example, the clouds and the mountain’s breast, and so on) which Casey Finch and Peter Bowen suggest reflect the poem’s theme of sexual companionship.

**Scatters the rear**: As in military combat, the rooster’s crowing forces Darkness’ troops to retreat quickly.

**Stack**: Haystack

**Chearly**: Cheerfully

**Hoar Hil**: The dew-covered hills of a summer morning.

**Som time**: Analyzing ‘L’Allegro’ as if it were a cinematic montage with dream sequences and slow dissolves, Herbert Phelan notes that while lines 41-56 seem to be in the present tense, 57-69 describe a different time period (Phelan 4).

**State**: The sun begins his stately march as if he were a king.

**Dight**: Clothed

**tells his tale**: Most editors identify this as a play on words: the shepherd recounts his story and/or counts his sheep.

**Lantskip**: Landscape

**Measures**: To travel over, traverse (a certain distance, a tract of country)

**Pide**: Pied, spotted

**Cynosure**: Something that attracts attention by its brilliancy or beauty; a centre of attraction, interest, or admiration.

**Corydon and Thyrsi**: Greek pastoral figures

**Phillis...Thestyris**: Two more Virgilian shepherds

**Bowre**: Cottage

**Mead**: Meadow

**Secure**: Free from care; derived from the Latin meaning.

**Rebecks**: A medieval form of fiddle with three strings

**Faery Mab**: Queen of the fairies
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Junkets : “Any dainty sweetmeat, cake, or confection”

Friars Lanthorn : Friar’s Lantern.

Goblin : Several editors have suggested the goblin here is a version of Shakespeare’s Puck, the hobgoblin from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Milton’s goblin will do housework and field work only if he is fed by the homeowner.

Lubbar Fend : Lubber Fiend: “A beneficent goblin supposed to perform some of the laborious work of a household or farm during the night”

Chimney’s : Fireplace

Crop-ful : Sated, full. Presumably, the goblin has just gorged himself on the cream which was set out for him.

Mattin : Morning song

Towred Cities : The scene now shifts from a day in the country to a night in the city.

Weeds : Garments, here courtly costumes.

Triumphs : Courtly festivals

Hymen : God of marriage

Sock : The slipper worn by Greek comic actors. Traditionally the sock refers to comic performances and the buskin to tragic.

fancies childe : As if Shakespeare were the child of imagination (fancy) personified.

Lydian Aires : John Carey and Alastair Fowler note that in the Republic 4.498 -9, Plato associates this Greek musical mode with laxness, conviviality, softness and sloth. James Hutton, however, suggests that Milton may not have meant this as a pejorative term, since Cassiodorus speaks of it approvingly as providing relaxation and delight.

4.3.3 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘L’Allegro’

The first 10 lines of ‘L’Allegro’ may be looked upon as prelude. Here, the speaker ritually banishes melancholy and disease, associated with hell and darkness. Milton follows the traditional classical hymn model when the narrator invokes Mirth/ Euphrosyne and her divine parentage between lines 11 and 24. He first welcome Mirth (fair vs dark, free vs cave). She is known as the daughter of Venus (love) and Bacchus (wine, revelry), sister to brightness and bloom. But in typically Miltonic alternative genealogy, she is daughter of Zephyr (west wind) and Aurora (dawn). Mirth embodies time of day the poem celebrates, and is connected with May rituals (fertility, community), and flowers. She is buxom (yielding) and gentle. In lines 25-46, we find the speaker inviting her to bring personified friends - Jest, Jollity, Hebe (youth), Sport and Laughter, followed by the mountain nymph Liberty (political resonance?) or Freedom (not license or luxury). In lines 44-48, Mirth and Liberty are linked – linked to lark (dawn), which pushes
back darkness, and bids him (sun) good morning. Then we have the depiction of
crowing cock scattering darkness, while infinitive (speaker, not cock) hears hounds
and horns (49-56). We also have a subtle hint of “sometime walking” (57-68). This
something is presumably the speaker. He is listing all the things he’d do if he joined
the crew. The ‘something’ also walks by the ploughman, milkmaid, mower, shepherd,
all about to, or actually at, work. All these references along with Shepherds “tell”
(either tallying sheep, or telling stories, or both) very well link up with pastoral and
georgic poetry.

Then, the speaker straightway eyes new pleasures (69-80): landscape, mountains,
brooks, rivers, towers (country estate). Then we find shepherds meeting for lunch
and then the suggestion (81-90) that Phyllis needs to haste (present emphatic) to
work, a different job whatever the season (seasonal rounds and rural rituals). We
are then carried to a local village, on a holiday (91-117) where we have bells and
dancing all day. Here, the poem has literary links about English lore (Mab, Friar,
Hobgoblin, Robin Goodfellow): Robin joins with others in unending toil of rural
life; he leaves at dawn. The tales done, the villagers go to bed.

From line 117, the scene changes again and we are brought to cities’ pleasures:
social life, people, ladies, beauty, city marriages, feasts, revelry and masques.
These references add to the poem’s appeal to romance. This is further reinforced
when the suggestion about fantasy. One wonders if the entire poem is a fantasy
(the sights young poets dream “on summer’s eve by haunted stream”) vision.

That the art is part of this “ideal” day is made explicit, from line 141 onwards,
though the suggestion was implicit throughout the poem. Now we have
references to the theatre of Jonson, Shakespeare (learned, and “native” comedy
respectively), and music, married to verse (song): “linked sweetness long drawn
out”. The speaker is requested to be immersed in the poetry and the pleasures
that Mirth is able to produce:

And ever against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse
Such as the meeting soul may pierce (lines 145–148)

In the last two lines we are told that these are the delights, if Mirth can give
them, that would make speaker join her. The final lines of the poem is a response
to questions found within Elizabethan poetry, including Christopher Marlowe’s
‘Come live with me and be my love’:

These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee, I mean to live. (lines 151–152)

4.3.4 The Text: ‘Il Pensoroso’

Hence, vain deluding Joys,
The brood of Folly without father bred !
How little you bested,
Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys !
Dwell in some idle brain.
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
As thick and numberless
As the gay motes that people the sunbeams.
Or likest hovering dreams,
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The fickle pensioners of Morpheus’ train. 
But, hail! thou Goddess sag and hoy! 
Hail, divinest Melancholy! 
Whose saintly visage is too bright 
To hit the sense of human sight. 
And therefore to our weaker view 
O’erlaid with black, staid Wisdom’s hue; 
Black, but such as in esteem 
Prince Memnon’s sister might beseeem, 
Or that starred Ethiope queen that strove 
To set her beauty’s praise above 
The Sea Nymphs, and their powers offended. 
Yet thou art higher far descended: 
Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore 
To solitary Saturn bore; 
His daughter she; in Saturn’s reign 
Such mixture was not held a stain. 
Oft in glimmering bowers and glades 
He met her, and in secret shades 
Of woody Ida’s inmost grove, 
While yet there was no fear of Jove. 
Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure. 
Sober, steadfast, and demure, 
All in a robe of darkest grain. 
Flowing with majestic train. 
And sable stole of cypress lawn 
Over thy decent shoulders drawn. 
, Come, but keep thy wonted state. 
With even step, and musing gait, 
And looks commencing with the skies, 
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes: .... 

(Excerpt from ‘Il Penseroso’)

Glossary

Il Penseroso: The thoughtful contemplative person melancholy person or personality
Bested: Bested; help, assist, relieve
Toyes: Idle fancies and imaginary playthings
Fond: Foolish
gay motes: Tiny bits of dust that become visible in a bright ray of sunshine.
Pensioners: “One who is in receipt of pension or regular pay.
Morpheus: In Greek mythology, Morpheus is the god of dreams - one of the sons of Hypnos, the god of sleep. He and his brothers, Phobetor and Phantasus, are responsible for the variety of dreams experienced by human beings.
Melancholy: Stella Revard believes that Milton’s goddess Melancholy is an earlier version of Urania, the Muse he invokes in Paradise Lost.

Visage: The face or features as expressive of feeling or temperament; the countenance.

To hit the Sense: Literally, too bright for the human sense of sight to apprehend it, or endure it. Milton imagines the female personification of Melancholy has been “O’erlaid with black” to accommodate “our weaker view,” or sense of sight.

with black: Melancholy was one of ancient medicine’s four humours: black bile, under Saturn’s influence. Milton allows his personification to appear to have a black face, but this is simply the way she must appear to worldly mortals.

Wisdoms hue: Solomon often is cited as wisdom personified.

Mennons sister: In Homer, Memnon is an Ethiopian king who fights for Troy. John Leonard notes that later writers ascribe to him a sister of legendary beauty.

Ethiope Queen: Cassiopeia, Queen to Ethiopian King Cephalus. She was stellified - hanged into a constellation—after she claimed to be more beautiful than the sea nymphs or Nereids.

higher far descended: Compare Melancholy’s single genealogy with the two versions of Mirth’s origins in L’Allegro 14-24.

Vesta: Roman goddess of the hearth, and daughter of Saturn, Vesta vowed to remain a virgin. Milton imagines his personified Melancholy as Vesta’s daughter, and Saturn as her Father.

Saturns raign: In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, which tells a story of the world’s beginnings, the reign of Saturn, or Saturnine age, was a golden age.

Bowrres: A place closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants; a shady recess, leafy covert, arbour.

Ida’s inmost grove: Saturn’s capital was, according to legend, on Mount Ida in Crete. There Jove was born; he ended the golden age and ushered in the silver by usurping his father’s throne.

Nun: An archaic word for pagan priestess, but Milton would also have considered Catholic nuns virtually pagan.

Demure: Sober, grave, serious; reserved or composed in demeanour

Cipres Lawn: Cypress (fine black) linen

wonted state: The dignity and attendance to which she is accustomed
Commercing with the skies

Forget thyself to marble

Leaden

Cherub

Hist

Philomel

Cynthia

Charm

Towr

Thrice great Hermes

fleshly nook

Dæmons

Pall

Pelops line

Troy

Buskind

Musaeus

Him that left half told

Virtuous
civil-suited
brown : Dusky, dark
Sylvan : Pertaining to Sylva, the Roman woodland deity
massy proof : Massive strength. Milton always used the older “massy” instead of “massive”
dight : Decorated, decked
Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell : This phrase reinforces the preceding line’s mention of “hermitage.” A hair shirt would often be worn by a man doing penance. Sir Thomas More was famous for wearing a hair shirt under his daily clothes. “Cell” can mean “a dwelling consisting of a single chamber inhabited by a hermit or other solitary”.
Spell : “Spell” can mean “to engage in a study or contemplation of something”

4.3.5 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘Il Peneroso’

‘Il Peneroso’ is a vision of poetic melancholy. The speaker of this reflective ode dispels “vain deluding Joys” from his mind in a ten-line prelude, before invoking “divinest Melancholy” to inspire his future verses. You will do well by noticing how the melancholic mood is idealised by the speaker as a means by which to “attain / To something like prophetic strain”. It is also important to note how the central action of ‘Il Peneroso’ proceeds: the speaker speculates about the poetic inspiration that would transpire if the imagined goddess of Melancholy he invokes were his Muse. It is true that the highly digressive style dually precludes any summary of the poem’s dramatic action. However, it is not difficult to find out that the vision of poetic inspiration offered by the speaker of ‘Il Peneroso’ is an allegorical exploration of a contemplative paradigm of poetic genre.

If you read the poem carefully, you will notice that like ‘L’ Allegro’, in this poem, too, the first 10 lines serve as prelude. As prelude to his invocation of Melancholy, the speaker dismisses joy from his imagination. Vain joys and folly are ritually banished. You may also note here a dig at their parentage. Soon after the prelude, the speaker invokes a Melancholy goddess, veiled in black. In the next 20 lines, Melancholy is linked to holy, divine, saintly wisdom garbed in devotional colours. Following the form of classical hymn, she claims her heritage with the Roman pantheon. Here we also find reference to her parents - solitary Saturn and Vesta - and a sort of link to secrecy, shades and twilight. Having invoked the Melancholy goddess, the speaker imagines her ideal personification. So from line 45 onward, we have references to her companions: Peace, Quiet, Fast (Milton had a thing about food), Leisure, Retirement. The main companion, equivalent to Liberty, is Contemplation and the favourite bird is Philomel (nightingale) with her sweet and sad music: melancholic person’s favourite bird (vs lark).

The central action of the poem proceeds as poetic visions of Melancholy, imagined by the speaker. In the lines 65-76, we see the speaker walking in evening (‘unseen’ vs ‘not unseen’: solitary) under moon. He hears curfew bell (8 o’clock), over sullen roar of distant waves on rocky beach. Then if weather (air) does not permit, he moves indoors (77-96), by a quiet fireside for bellman’s charm or stay up late to read and study, as Milton did as a youth. The speaker is found reading philosophy, Hermes Trismegistus (ancient mystic text, popular in the
Renaissance, of Gnostic or hermetic writing; they thought it ancient Egyptian, but it was late Greek. You cannot fail to notice art associated with Melancholy, which includes tragedy: ancient, or contemporary (97-102), or other forms of art (104-20): Musaeus (father of priestly poetry), Orpheus in underworld or Chaucerian Squire’s tale, or “sage and solemn” Spenser. Here we also notice a succinct definition of allegory. The speaker’s love of studies is further reinforced in lines 121-140. The speaker is found studying all night. Then arrives the morning - sombre, raining and windy and the speaker walks abroad (141-154). He walks to (Tolkienesque) woods, quiet, ancient, dark and deep, at times pauses by a brook, sleeps, dreams and listens to sweet music; i.e. Contemplation. At the end of his reverie on poetic Melancholy, the speaker invokes the Muse’s song; he imagines that his Muse will reward his studious devotion to her by revealing a heavenly visions. As the final ten lines reveal, the speaker aspires to a revelation of divine knowledge to inspire his great poetry. The final couplet issues an ultimatum to the Melancholy mood; the speaker will devote himself to the existence of a solitary hermit, staking his life upon the contemplative ideal he has illustrated throughout the poem, which he imagines will be rewarded by a vision of the divine. These are all the pleasures Melancholy gives and the speaker declares “I with thee do chose to live”.

4.3.6 ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’: A Discussion

‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ - both poems were very popular during the eighteenth century. They were also widely imitated by poets. You can measure their popularity by the fact that William Blake made illustrations to both ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’. Critics’ opinions vary on the merits and significance of these poems. Critics like Stelle Revard believe that Milton “takes care to showcase himself as a poet in these first and last selections and at the same time to build his poetic reputation along the way by skilful positioning of poems such as ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso.’ Barbara Lewalski is of the view that ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ “explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles... that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence”. There has been a variety of responses with regard to their classification in various traditions and genres. E. M. W. Tillyard views them as an example of academic writing, Sara Watson call them pastoral, Maren-Sofie Rostvig view them as part of classical philosophy whereas S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush view them as part of Renaissance encomia and similar to Homeric hymns and Pindaric odes. Stelle Revard believes that the poems follow the classical hymn model, which discuss goddess that are connected to poetry and uses these females to replace Apollo completely.

Notwithstanding the multiple views of the critics, the best way to understand these poems is to read them carefully. If we do so, we shall agree that ‘L’Allegro’ celebrates Grace Euphrosone through the traditional Theocritan pastoral model. The poem is playful and is set within a pastoral scene that allows the main character to connect with folk stories and fairy tales in addition to various comedic plays and performances. If we read these pomes together, we shall also notice a sort of progression from the pleasures found in ‘L’Allegro’ with the pleasures found within ‘Il Penseroso’. We shall also notice that except one similarity that both are set in traditional form, there is no poetic antecedent for Milton’s pairing.

‘L’Allegro’ invokes Mirth and other allegorical figures of joy and merriment, and extols the active and cheerful life, while depicting a day in the countryside according to this philosophy. Here, it is important to note that Mirth, as one of
the Graces, is connected with poetry within Renaissance literature. We will do well by noticing that the poem, in its form and content, is similar to dithyrambs to Bacchus or hymns to Venus. However, the pleasure that Mirth brings is moderated, and there is a delicate balance between the influence of Venus or Bacchus achieved by relying on their daughter.

‘Il Penseroso’, on the other hand, celebrates Melancholy through the traditional Theocritan pastoral model. The setting focuses on a Gothic scene and emphasises a solitary scholarly life. The speaker of the poem invokes a melancholic mood with which the speaker wanders through an urban environment and the descriptions are reminiscent of medieval settings. In his pursuits, he devotes his time to philosophy, to allegory, to tragedy, to Classical hymns, and, finally, to Christian hymns that cause him to be filled with a vision. Besides being set in a traditional form, there is no poetic antecedent for Milton’s pairing.

It is also to be noted that Melancholy, in ‘Il Penseroso’ does not have the same parentage as Mirth does in ‘L’Allegro’. Melancholy comes from Saturn and Vesta, who are connected to science and a focus on the heavens. Melancholy is connected in the poem with the “heavenly” muse Urania, the goddess of inspiring epics, through her focus and through her relationship with Saturn. Furthermore, she is related to prophecy, and the prophetic account within the final lines of ‘Il Penseroso’ does not suggest that isolation is ideal, but they do emphasise the importance of experience and an understanding of nature. The higher life found within the poem, as opposed to the one within ‘L’Allegro’, allows an individual to experience such a vision.

It is very common to view ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ as companion poems, but as a serious reader we need to find out for ourselves how and why they are related. Is it a battle between Day and Night/Mirth and Melancholy, as Tillyard has pointed out? Or, do these poems represent opposing paths (of pleasure and wisdom), as pointed out by Gerard Cox, toward complete union with God? Or, do these poems represent, as pointed out by Zacharias, Milton’s own struggle to become a “whole” man and a truly great poet? Or, can we claim after Roy Flannagan that L’Allegro is the light-hearted Charles Diodati and II Penseroso, the studious Milton?

Notwithstanding these varied responses, one thing is clear and almost all critics agree that “[w]hat one poem twists, the other untwists” in an unending cycle of what might be called “dissonant companionship” (Finch and Bowen 18). If we wish to appreciate their complementary sounds, we have to read these poems aloud. Then we shall discover how lilting pitch and images of crowing roosters and singing larks deeply of ‘L’Allegro’ contrasts with sombre tone and “Belmans drousie charm” of ‘Il Penseroso’.

Another remarkable feature of these companion poems is the highly digressive style which dually precludes any summary of the poems’ dramatic action as it renders them interpretively ambiguous to critics. However, it can surely be said that the vision of poetic inspiration offered by the speaker of ‘Il Penseroso’ is an allegorical exploration of a contemplative paradigm of poetic genre.

According to Barbara Lewalski, ‘Il Penseroso’ along with ‘L’Allegro’ “explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles... that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence”. Milton’s “companion poems” explore the pleasures associated with two competing (or perhaps complementary) lifestyles, and the attractions of two
competing (or perhaps complementary) sources of artistic inspiration, with corresponding descriptions of their differing subjects and genres. Both are in a sense extended versions of Marlowe’s ‘Come live with me and be my love’, the paradigmatic seduction poem, though here it is the poet who is being seduced: which life, or which art, is more appealing? Graceful, urbane, evocatively descriptive, and technically virtuoso, these two poems have exerted an enormous influence on later English poetry.

Self Check Exercise 2

1) List a range of activities associated with each:
   a) ‘L’Allegro’ ...............................................................................................
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   ..............................................................................................................
   ..............................................................................................................
   b) ‘Il Penseroso’ .......................................................................................
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2) List a range of figures associated with each:
   a) ‘L’Allegro’ ...............................................................................................
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   b) ‘Il Penseroso’ .......................................................................................
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3) Describe briefly what actually happens in each poem?
   a) ‘L’Allegro’ ...............................................................................................
   ..............................................................................................................
   ..............................................................................................................
   ..............................................................................................................
   ..............................................................................................................
   ..............................................................................................................
b) ‘Il Penseroso’

4) Comment on the life style presented in each poem
a) ‘L’Allegro’

b) ‘Il Penseroso’

5) Which life style you find more attractive? Give reasons

6) Do these life styles compete with each other or complement each other? Explain.
4.4 ‘ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEDMONT’

4.4.1 The Background of the Poem

‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ is a sonnet which is inspired by the massacre of Waldensians in Piedmont by the Charles Emmanuel II, Duke of Savoy, in April 1655. Piedmont is a region of Italy, which especially at that time was a strongly Catholic country. Annoyed with the peoples’ choice against Catholicism, the troops unleashed an unprovoked campaign of loot, rape, torture, and murder. They killed around 2,000 people and forcibly converted another 2,000 to the Catholic faith. The news of the killings spread quickly throughout Europe. Great efforts were made to remove any survivors from the area and bring them to safety. This massacre inspired John Milton to write his sonnet “On the Late Massacre in Piedmont.”

The Waldensians or Vaudois were Protestants who had long lived in the territories of the Roman Catholic rulers of Piedmont, and were thought of, by Protestants of Milton’s day, as having preserved a simple scriptural faith from earlier times. Confined by the treaty to certain mountain valleys, they had gradually intruded into the plain of Piedmont. Ordered to retire, they had been pursued into the mountains and there massacred by the Piedmontese soldiery in April 1655. In documents penned by Milton as Latin secretary, Cromwell strongly protested against such treachery and cruelty. Later in the year, possibly after Morland returned with his report (see below, 7-8 note), Milton wrote his sonnet, first published in Poems, 1674.

The largest theme of the sonnet is religion but with a view to enact justice. The other theme is the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The poem compares the theme of vengeance from the Old Testament to the theme of regeneration in the New Testament. The clear example of vengeance in the poem is the address in first line “Avenge, O Lord,” which could be a reference to Luke 18:7, a bible verse that speaks about vengeance. An example of regeneration is the lines “grow/ A hundredfold” and “Mother with Infant.”

4.4.2 The Text

On the Late Massacre in Piedmont

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones;  
Forget not: in thy book record their groans 5
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow 10
O’er all th’ Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.
thy slaughtered saints: The innocent victims are saints because they held their faith
Alpine mountains: a rigid mountain range whose peaks are often covered in snow.
Pure: the victims as people of light, undeserving of their fate
thy book: Refers to the books to be consulted at the Judgment (Revelation 20:12)
thy sheep: Emphasises the innocence of the massacred
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks: the way the mother and infant have died
Vale: valley; the valleys “redouble” or grow into hills. In this image of nature, the low point of the land has become the high point, and the people whose lives have ended so tragically have been raised to heaven.
Redoubled: re-echoed
Babylonian woe: The Babylonian Exile is an infamous event of Jewish and Judeo-Christian history. The Babylonians invaded and destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem, but the religion endures. This allusion to the Babylonians’ taking advantage of the temple and the land is reflected here in the destruction of the bodies of the martyrs.

4.4.3 An Appreciation

‘On The Late Massacre in Piedmont’ is a sonnet with the theme of good, pious people trapped in a dark world. You will also notice that the themes of the struggle of good and evil as well as freedom and oppression make their presence strongly felt in the poem. Milton calls on God to avenge the martyrs at Piedmont. The use of the word ‘martyrs’ is the poem is significant. These innocent victims are martyrs because they have been killed for their Protestant faith. As a perceptive reader, you will do well to notice the transition in the nature that Milton effectively brings about in the poem. Milton invokes images of nature to set a grim tone in the beginning of the poem. The Alpines are a rigid mountain range. Their peaks are often covered in snow. The bones scattered on the cold mountains creates a grim tone, a dark world. So the reference to the Alpines and their association with the words such as ‘avenge’, ‘slaughtered’ and ‘saints’ in the first two lines set the grim tone:

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold

At the very outset, Milton forcefully evokes the slaughtering of ‘pious’ people as a tragic act. Mark the use of ‘pure’ that identifies the victims as people of righteousness, undeserving of their fate. Milton’s style in the lines that follow
mimics the rolling of the people. This thought ends with a period, a crafted absolute stopping point, the way the mother and infant have died, their own lives terminated. However, a transition begins to appear from the fifth with his request to the Lord to ‘record their groans’ in ‘thy book’. This transition is complete by the end of the poem with the ‘blood of the martyrs’ making the nature around it ‘fertile’. It is an interesting transition, and Milton is not speaking of literally making the ground more fertile for plants to grow, but people:

that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

The reference to ‘the Babylonian woe’ is significant here. Most Christian faiths hold the belief that a person’s body is a temple, sacred and to be well-kept. Additionally, many Protestants of Milton’s time identified the Catholic Church with Babylon and the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation. So what these lines seek to emphasise is that when one believer dies for his or her faith, a hundred more will take his or her place. Their deaths have transformed the image of Piedmont from a bone-covered rigid and cold mountain range to a fertile field.

The theme of the sonnet is usually understood to be sorrow for the victims and anger at the forces that were responsible for the massacre. This idea is reinforced by the fact that this prayer to ‘Lord, &c’ on behalf of the persecuted protestants was not entirely without effect. For Cromwell exerted himself in their favour.

However, you will notice for yourself that the poem is an address to God and not to the perpetrators of the massacre. Milton emphasises in the poem that God should be blamed for the occurrence of the massacre because He allows the event to happen even though He has direct intervention in it. The author stresses that the poem prophesies the one action that can justify God’s ways to His faithful.

The poem may very well be understood in the light of Tertullian’s famous phrase, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” and the parable of the sower (Matthew 14:4-9) where the seed that fell on good ground brought forth as much as a hundredfold. Such was to be the blood of these martyrs sown where the Pope (triple tyrant in his mitre with its three crowns) still rules: it was to make converts who, having learned God’s truth, would renounce the idolatry of Rome (figured, as Protestants believed, by the Babylon of Revelation 16:19, etc.) and thus escape the woe of God’s punishment upon it.

As far as the stanza form is concerned, Milton’s present sonnet (which is also known as sonnet 18) follows an iambic pentameter rhythm scheme with ten syllables per line consisting of 14 lines. You will observe that Milton’s sonnet does not follow the Shakespearean sonnet form. Instead, it follows the ABBA, ABBA, CDCDCD rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme changes in the third quatrain, and the poem reveals who is behind the massacre: the “Triple Tyrant,” a reference to the Pope with his triple crown.

**Self Check Exercise 4**

1) How will you evaluate “On The Late Massacre in Piedmont” as a sonnet?

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........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
4.5 WHEN THE ASSAULT WAS INTENDED ON THE CITY

4.5.1 The Background of the Poem

‘When the Assault was intended on the City’ is Milton’s eighth sonnet. It was written by the poet in 1642 as a form of joke – a ‘serious joke’ as it has been described. In this sonnet, Milton imagines himself at his home in London at a period when it might have been attacked by King Charles I and his army. Originally, it was untitled but subsequently it got the title ‘When Assault Was Intended to the City’. In the Manuscript this sonnet was written by another hand, with the title “On his door when the City expected an assault”. The present title is reported to have been written by Milton. He scratched out the title “On his door when the City expected an assault” and wrote with his own hand “When the assault was intended to the City.” The date was also added 1642, but blotted out again; incidentally, it was in November 1642 that the King marched with his army as near as Brentford, and put the city in great consternation. Milton was then in his 44th year.

4.5.2 The Text

‘When the Assault was intended on the City’

Captain or Colonel, or Knight in Arms,
Whose chance on these defenceless dores may sease,
If ever deed of honour did thee please,
Guard them, and him within protect from harms,
He can requite thee, for he knows the charms 5
That call Fame on such gentle acts as these,
And he can spread thy Name o’er Lands and Seas,
What ever clime the Suns bright circle warms.

Lift not thy spear against the Muses Bowre, 10
The great Emathian Conqueror bid spare
The house of Pindarus, when Temple and Towre
Went to the ground: And the repeated air
Of sad Electra’s Poet had the power
To save th’ Athenian Walls from ruine bare.

Glossary

Colonel : Three syllables, usually pronounced “coronel”
Sease : Seize
Charms : Referring to both magic spells (Old English cierm) and songs (Latin carmen)
gentle acts : Adjective suggesting both mild and noble; as well as generous, as becomes a knight in arms
Emathian Conqueror : Alexander the Great was given this title in recognition of his father’s reign as king of the Emathia district of Macedoia. In Plutarch’s Alexander 11.450, the conqueror spared the house of the poet Pindar during the sack of Thebes.

Temple and Towre : A frequent combination in the old metrical romances that recurs in Paradise Regain’d
Sad : Serious, solemn
Electra’s Poet : Plutarch’s Lysander 15.4 tells the story of how Athens was spared from destruction by Lysander when a Spartan general recited the first chorus from Euripides’ Electra 167-69.

4.5.3 An Appreciation

The poem’s fancy is that it should be written out on a piece of paper which is then pinned to the outside of the door and acts as a means of an appeal to spare the life of the poet who cowers inside. The supposed model for doing this is Alexander the Great’s sparing of the poet Pindar during the seizure of Emathia. It is Alexander who is given the title ‘Emathian Conqueror’ in the poem.

The poem’s appeal is to the readers’ imagination. He invites readers to imagine that the poet pins this sonnet to his door to protect his property during a military attack. Here, you will notice a touch of reality. Milton, like most of London in 1642, probably expected the King’s forces to attack the city. You may infer from this that Milton designs this sonnet as a plea for special protection for poets in time of war. In its gesture, the poem alludes to Alexander the Great, who is said to have spared the house of the poet Pindar during his invasion of Thebes.

We, as reader, may ask why should a poet be spared by an invading army more than any other person? It may be argued that the poet is a talented person who might act as a valuable resource for the invader. However, the fact remains that in a
situation of civil war and revolution, the seizure and control of the means of production of ideas would be an important part of the struggle. Elimination of an opposing voice (if it could not be suborned) would be important to Charles and his supporters. In that sense, then, it would be more sensible for Milton to hide himself away as a non-exceptional person whom the invaders would not bother to hunt or kill. This leads us to ask: is the poet overstating his importance? But the associated question is: why should he do so? We may say that the poet is deliberately overstating his importance for comic effect. However, at the same time he is having an undercurrent of what must be understandable and indeed justifiable fear. Fear, because if an outspoken individual such as Milton had been taken by the enemy, then he would certainly have been in serious trouble. Several critics such as Barbara Lewalski are of the view that this sonnet “inaugurates the political sonnet in the English tradition”.

The sonnet’s structure is formally quite straightforward. It is written in the conventional iambic pentameter and follows a rhyming scheme of *abba abba dedede*. It would have been more normal for the final two lines to have had an ‘ff’ rhyme scheme and to act as a couplet which concludes and summarises in some way the content and meaning of the poem – this is a technique that had been much used by Shakespeare. Milton avoids this technique and gives the feeling of life continuing into the future, an unknown future to be sure without a specific end point. For a poet of Milton’s calibre, it may be assumed that even the smallest detail has meaning.

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<th>Self Check Exercise 4</th>
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<td>1) How will you evaluate ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’ as a political sonnet?</td>
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<td>2) Throw light on the stanza form of ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’.</td>
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<td>3) Do you agree that the poem is a ‘serious joke’?</td>
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4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life of John Milton. Then, his four poems; namely, ‘L’ Allegro’, ‘Il Penseroso’, ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ and ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’. The first two are pastoral poems and the last two sonnets. The first two poems are also treated as companion poems and both are very lengthy as well. Hence, we could give you just excerpts. You need to study the complete poems to have a better grasp of them. We have tried to give you the gist of the poem but it would be better if you do more exercise with your counsellor at the study centre.

As far as the two sonnets are concerned, we have included the complete text. When we talk of Milton the image that comes to our mind is that of a poet who wrote the first great epic in English. We regard him chiefly as a puritan writer. But as you have found out for yourself by going through the poems in this unit that John Milton, the Puritan writer of the great biblical epic Paradise Lost, also wrote about 24 sonnets though many of them are not known to the common reader. The most effective of the personal sonnets is sonnet 19, usually called ‘On his Blindness’ or ‘When I Consider How My Light is Spent’. Here, we find allusion to his blindness for the first time. This sonnet records his fear that he will never be able to use his God-given gift for poetry again. Yet God may demand an accounting of his righteousness. And his entry into Heaven will depend upon how well he has used the gifts that God gave him. The sonnet ends with Milton’s acceptance of the fact that what God wants of him is obedience and resignation. He can then serve God even if he cannot write poetry, for “they also serve who only stand and wait.”

Milton’s sonnets, or poem, are composed in Petrarchan style, but in iambic pentameter, similar to William Shakespeare’s sonnets. However, John Milton differs from his contemporaries and his literary idols in choice of topic for poems. While other poets wrote primarily about love or God, John Milton chose more pedantic topics, such as politics, or friendships he enjoyed, or even personal crises. The tension he creates in his poems seldom breaks the confines of form and metre. His emotion and his poetic form remain under control, even as his passion or emotions threaten to break through. Each line has a perfect five beats within. However, if you read his poems carefully, you will note that at times he even cheats a little, shortening some words rather than sacrificing the form of the poem (as in “stol’n”, “shew’th”, or “endu’th”).

Sonnet 18 along with the sonnets and the poems that we have dealt with in this unit very well illustrates that the general perception about Milton as a writer of rebellion is not very tenable. There is no denying the element of rebellion in his poetry but it is also a fact that there were many other writers of rebellion. We usually tend to forget his devotion to the old masters of literature which was greater than anyone else’s. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that he spent six years of his education in a self-devised deliberate study and emulation of poets such as Virgil and Petrarch.

Milton has often been praised for his grandiloquence of voice and vision, his peculiar diction and phraseology. His stylistic innovations such as grandiloquence of voice and vision, peculiar diction and phraseology and use of blank verse influenced later poets. Before Milton, poetic blank verse was considered distinct from its use in verse drama, and Paradise Lost was taken as a unique example. Isaac Watts in 1744 made a significant comment, “Mr. Milton is esteemed the parent and author of blank verse among us”. “Miltonic verse” might be
John Milton

synonymous for a century with blank verse as poetry, a new poetic terrain independent from both the drama and the heroic couplet.

Lack of rhyme was sometimes taken as Milton’s defining innovation. He himself considered the rhymeless quality of *Paradise Lost* to be an extension of his own personal liberty. His pursuit of freedom was largely a reaction against conservative values entrenched within the rigid heroic couplet. Within a dominant culture that stressed elegance and finish, he granted primacy to freedom, breadth and imaginative suggestiveness, eventually developed into the romantic vision of sublime terror. Milton’s blank-verse paragraph, and his audacious and victorious attempt to combine blank and rhymed verse with paragraphic effect in ‘Lycidas’, lay down indestructible models and patterns of English verse-rhythm, as distinguished from the narrower and more strait-laced forms of English metre. The varied manifestations of personal liberty in Milton’s works (e.g. abandonment of rhyme, irregular rhythms, and peculiar diction) converge to create specific Miltonic effects that live on to this day.

You might have come to realise why Milton is regarded by many as the “greatest English author” (William Hayley) and “as one of the preeminent writers in the English language”. Critical reception, no doubt, has oscillated in the centuries since his death but that is chiefly because of his political affiliation. Samuel Johnson praised *Paradise Lost* as “a poem which...with respect to design may claim the first place, and with respect to performance, the second, among the productions of the human mind,” but he also viewed Milton’s politics as those of an “acrimonious and surly republican”.

We hope now that now you are ready to read some more poems of Milton and form your own opinion about him.

### 4.7 SUGGESTED READING

There are several seminal works on Milton and his poetry. For Milton’s biography, you may study “Life of John Milton” by Anniina Jokinen in Luminarium which is available on Internet and this article has been used in this unit as well. You will do well by reading ‘Milton’ in *A Short History of English Literature* by Crompton – Rickett (New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, Reprint 1988) *Milton: A Biography* Vol 1 by William Riley Parker (Oxford: Clarendon Press) and “A Brief Life of Milton” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (9th ed, 1888).


Early Modern English Poets


4.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self Check Exercise 1


   b) The Period of the Great Epics: Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes

2) The loss of sight in 1652 was a great personal loss but this also made him introspect his ‘talent’ as well as the future course of life. The loss of sight prompted him to write the well known sonnet ‘When I Consider How My Light is Spent’ or ‘On his Blindness’. This may be viewed as a blessing in disguise, as it was after his blindness that he wrote his epic, Paradise Lost which is among the greatest works ever written in English. With this Milton overcame the pangs of his blindness. It is said that he would compose verse upon verse at night in his head and then dictate them from memory to his aides in the morning. Paradise Lost finally saw publication in 1667, in ten books. It was reissued in 1668 with a new title-page and additional materials. The book was met with instant success. It amazed several persons. Even Dryden is reported to have said, “This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too.”

3) Milton involved himself in religious and political controversies in order to discharge, to choose his own words, ‘a great public duty’. He did it willingly and for this he laid aside his ambition to write a great epic poem for over two decades. During the Civil War, Milton wrote pamphlets such as ‘Of Reformation’, ‘Animadversions’, ‘Of Prelatical Episcopacy’ and ‘The Reason for Church Government’. He also wrote his so-called ‘Divorce Tracts’ in which he spoke for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. The attempted censorship of the ‘Divorce Tracts’ by the Stationers’ Company provoked Milton to publish his eloquent Areopagitica in late 1644. It was an oration advocating freedom of the press. In early 1659, Milton published A Treatise of Civil Power and Ready and Easy Way To Establish a Free Commonwealth. However, for his propaganda writings, Milton had to go into hiding, for fear of retribution from the followers of King Charles II, as with the death of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell in 1658 the Commonwealth were coming to a close.

4) Milton’s childhood was spent at a time when the Renaissance was in the ascendency. His youth witnessed the rise of Puritanism, and his old age marked the consummation of the Puritan ideals. Naturally, in his poetry we notice a nice fusion of elements both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. A link between the Renaissance and the Puritan Age is well perceived in his poetry. He is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation. Take for example, ‘the Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ which is written on a Biblical subject, but glows with imagination and is full of pagan imagery, thus revealing a fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation influences. In his companion pastoral poems ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ that present charming contrasted pictures of man,
nature and art, there is little that is characteristically Puritan. The poet dwells frankly upon the pleasures of romance and rustic sports, upon the beauty of Church architecture and music. However, in *Lycidas* we have a Puritanism which is political and ecclesiastical as well as spiritual and ethical. The religious accent in this elegy is unmistakably puritan. However, in *Paradise Lost*, the greatest English epic, we have the complete fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation elements. Even in *Samson Agonistes*, Milton applies the form of classical art to the treatment of a Biblical subject. This is the reason that it is said that ‘Milton is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation.’

**Self Check Exercise 2**

1) a) The activities in ‘*L’Allegro*’ include: Ritual banishing of melancholy, invoking mirth, welcoming mirth, inviting mirth to bring personified friends, ‘sometime walking’, speaker straightway eyeing new pleasures, shepherds meeting for lunch, bells and dancing in a local village, Robin joining with others in unending toil of rural life, leaving at dawn, the villagers going to bed, feasting and revelry in cities, delights offered by Mirth, etc.

b) The activities in ‘*Il Penseroso*’ include: dismissing joy from imagination, ritually banishing vain joys and folly and invoking a Melancholy goddess, Melancholy claiming her heritage with the Roman pantheon, the speaker walking in evening under moon, hearing curfew bell, moving indoors, sitting by a quiet fireside for bellman’s charm or staying up late to reading and studying philosophy; arrival of morning - sombre, raining and windy - and the speaker walking to woods and declaring to Melancholy “I with thee do chose to live”.

2) a) The figures associated with ‘*L’Allegro*’ include: melancholy, Mirth/ Euphrosyne and her divine parents Zephyr (west wind) and Aurora (dawn), her personified friends - Jest, Jollity, Hebe (youth), Sport and Laughter along with the mountain nymph Liberty, “sometime walking” (presumably the speaker), the ploughman, milkmaid, mower, shepherd, Mab, Friar, Hobgoblin, Robin Goodfellow, etc.

b) The figures associated with ‘*L’Allegro*’ include: Melancholy, joys, folly, the Roman pantheon, Melancholy’s parents Saturn and Vesta, her companions - Peace, Quiet, Fast, Leisure, Retirement, Liberty, Philomel (nightingale), Musaeus (father of priestly poetry), Orpheus in underworld or Chaucerian Squire’s tale, or “sage and solemn” Spenser and the Muse.

3) a) **What actually happens in *L’Allegro***: The speaker ritually banishes melancholy and invokes Mirth/ Euphrosyne. He first welcomes Mirth, the daughter of Zephyr (west wind) and Aurora (dawn). Mirth embodies time of day the poem celebrates, and is connected with May rituals (fertility, community), and flowers. The speaker invites her to bring her friends - Jest, Jollity, Hebe (youth), Sport and Laughter along with the mountain nymph Liberty or Freedom. Amidst the multiplicity of sound, we have a subtle hint of “sometime walking”, presumably the speaker. He is listing all the things he’d do if he joined the crew. The ‘something’ also walks by the ploughman, milkmaid, mower, shepherd, all about to, or actually at, work. The speaker straightway eyes new pleasures: landscape,
Early Modern English Poets

mountains, brooks, rivers, towers (country estate). The shepherds meet for lunch. We see a local village, on a holiday, where we have bells and dancing all day. Tales done, the villagers eventually go to bed. On the other hand, we have the picture of cities’ pleasures: social life, people, ladies, beauty, city marriages, feasts, revelry and masques. The speaker is requested to be immersed in the poetry and the pleasures that Mirth is able to produce. In the last two lines we are told that these are the delights, if Mirth can give them, that would make speaker join her.

b) **What actually happens in ‘IL Pensoroso’**: The speaker dismisses joy from his imagination. He ritually banishes vain joys and folly and invokes a Melancholy goddess, veiled in black. He links Melancholy to holy, divine, saintly wisdom garbed in devotional colours and refers to her parents solitary Saturn and Vesta. He also talks about her companions: Peace, Quiet, Fast, Leisure, Retirement, Contemplation and the bird Philomel (nightingale) with her sweet and sad music. The speaker walks in evening under moon. He hears curfew bell (8 o’clock) as well as over sullen roar of distant waves on rocky beach. As weather (air) does not permit, he moves indoors, by a quiet fireside for bellman’s charm or stays up late to read and study, as Milton did as a youth. The speaker is found reading philosophy. He is found studying all night. Then arrives the morning - sombre, raining and windy and the speaker walks to woods in contemplation. At the end of his reverie on poetic Melancholy, the speaker invokes the Muse’s song; he imagines that his Muse will reward his studious devotion to her by revealing a heavenly visions. Finally, he declares “I with thee do chose to live”.

4) a) **Life style presented in ‘L’Allegro’**: L’Allegro is “the happy person” who spends an idealized day in the country and a festive evening in the city. ‘L’Allegro’, thus, celebrates Grace Euphrosone and is playful. It extols the active and cheerful life, while depicting a day in the countryside as well the pleasures of the city life. It explores the ideal pleasures appropriate during day time, various comedic plays and performances. There the lilting pitch of crowing roosters and deep singing of larks. All these make the environment very cheerful and add to the romantic life style depicted in the poem. The pleasures offered by Mirth in a way seduce the speaker to accept to live with Mirth.

b) **Life style presented in ‘Il Penseroso’**: Il Penseroso is “the thoughtful person” whose night is filled with meditative walking in the woods and hours of study in a “lonely Towr.” ‘Il Penseroso’ depicts a day spent in contemplation and thought. In fact, the melancholic mood is idealised. There is no room for imagination or for vain joys and folly. The speaker invokes a melancholic mood with which the speaker wanders through an urban environment. He walks in evening under moon, listening to curfew bell, sullen roar of distant waves on rocky beach. Then if weather (air) does not permit, he moves indoors, by a quiet fireside for bellman’s charm or stays up late to read and study. In his pursuits, he devotes his time to philosophy, to allegory, to tragedy, to Classical hymns, and, finally, to Christian hymns that cause him to be filled with a vision. Impressed with the pleasures of Melancholy the speaker declares “I with thee do chose to live”.

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5) ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ explore and contrast the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles. Both these life styles are important and they in fact complement each other. However, if I am to choose between the two, I would prefer the life style presented in ‘Il Penseroso’. The reason is that the life without meditation and thoughtfulness is no life at all. Mirth no doubt has a very significant role in man’s life. However, it is meditation that gives meaning to life. Hence, like the speaker of ‘Il Penseroso’, I too will like to devote my time to study and contemplation to be filled with a vision.

6) ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles. The life style in ‘L’Allegro’ is playful, celebrating Mirth and extolling the active and cheerful life. ‘Il Penseroso’, on the other hand, emphasises a solitary scholarly life celebrating a melancholic mood. However, we read these poems carefully, we shall find that for a balanced life, we need both. Naturally, we notice a sort of progression from the pleasures found in ‘L’Allegro’ with the pleasures found within ‘Il Penseroso’. That is why several critics have noted that that “[w]hat one poem twists, the other untwists” in an unending cycle of what might be called “dissonant companionship” (Finch and Bowen 18). Barbara Lewalski has very rightly observed that ‘Il Penseroso’ along with ‘L’Allegro’ “explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles... that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence”. In short, both life styles complete each other.

Self Check Exercise 3

1) A sonnet is a poetic form consisting of 14 lines. There are two major types of sonnets – one, Italian type (Petrarchan) sonnets divided into two stanzas of eight and six lines; another, English type (Shakespearean) sonnets divided into three quatrains (a stanza of four lines) and a couplet (two lines). Milton’s sonnets, or poem, are composed in Petrarchan style, but in iambic pentameter, similar to William Shakespeare’s sonnets. However, John Milton differs from his contemporaries and his literary idols in choice of topic for poems. While other poets wrote primarily about love or God, John Milton chose more pedantic topics, such as politics, or friendships he enjoyed, or even personal crises. ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ is a sonnet of Italian type. At the very outset, Milton forcefully evokes the slaughtering of “pious” people as a tragic act. And in the sestet there is reference to “the Babylonian woe” which is very significant. Many Protestants of Milton’s time identified the Catholic Church with Babylon and the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation. So what these lines seek to emphasise is that when one believer dies for his or her faith, a hundred more will take his or her place. Their deaths have transformed the image of Piedmont from a bone-covered rigid and cold mountain range to a fertile field. Milton’s sonnet does not follow the Shakespearean sonnet form. Instead, it follows the ABBA, ABBA, CDCDCD rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme changes in the third quatrain, and the poem reveals who is behind the massacre: the “Triple Tyrant,” a reference to the Pope with his triple crown.

2) Milton’s sonnets, or poem, are composed in Petrarchan style, but in iambic pentameter, similar to William Shakespeare’s sonnets. Milton’s present sonnet (which is also known as sonnet 18) follows an iambic pentameter rhyme scheme with ten syllables per line consisting of 14 lines. You will observe that Milton’s sonnet does not follow the Shakespearean sonnet form. Instead, it
Early Modern English Poets follows the ABBA, ABBA, CDCDCD rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme changes in the third quatrains, and the poem reveals who is behind the massacre: the “Triple Tyrant,” a reference to the Pope with his triple crown. Milton’s emotion and his poetic form remain under control, even as his passion or emotions threaten to break through. Each line has a perfect five beats within.

3) ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ is a sonnet which is inspired by the massacre of Waldensians in Piedmont. The theme of the sonnet is usually understood to be sorrow for the victims and anger at the forces that were responsible for the massacre. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the prayer to ‘Lord, &c’ on behalf of the persecuted protestants was not entirely without effect. For, Cromwell exerted himself in their favour. However, on a serious note, the poem is an address to God and not to the perpetrators of the massacre. Milton emphasises in the poem that God should be blamed for the occurrence of the massacre because He allows the event to happen even though He has direct intervention in it. One can say that the poem prophesies the one action that can justify God’s ways to His faithful.

Self Check Exercise 4

1) ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’ is Milton’s eighth sonnet and it is remarkable for its political overtones. The poem’s appeal is to the readers’ imagination. It invites readers to imagine that the poet pins this sonnet to his door to protect his property during a military attack. Here is the touch of political reality. Milton, like most in London in 1642, expected the King’s forces to attack the city. We can say that Milton designs this sonnet as a plea for special protection for poets in time of war. In its gesture, the poem alludes to Alexander the Great, who is said to have spared the house of the poet Pindar during his invasion of Thebes. It is because of this political association of the poem that several critics such as Barbara Lewalski are of the view that this sonnet “inaugurates the political sonnet in the English tradition”.

2) ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’, Milton’s eighth sonnet, has a quite straightforward structure. It is written in the conventional iambic pentameter and follows a rhyming scheme of abba abba dedede. It would have been more normal for the final two lines to have had an ‘ff’ rhyme scheme and to act as a couplet which concludes and summarises in some way the content and meaning of the poem – this is a technique that had been much used by Shakespeare. Milton avoids this technique and gives the feeling of life continuing into the future, an unknown future to be sure without a specific end point.

3) ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’, Milton’s eighth sonnet was believed by many to be a ‘serious joke’. The reason is obvious. Milton, here, imagines himself at his home in London at a period when it might have been attacked by King Charles I and his army. And so he intends to write this poem on a piece of paper and to keep it pinned to the outside of the door. This is supposed to act as a means of an appeal to spare the life of the poet who cowers inside. The supposed model for doing this is Alexander the Great’s sparing of the poet Pindar during the seizure of Emathia. It is Alexander who is given the title ‘Emathian Conqueror’ in the poem. That this poem is a ‘serious joke’ becomes clear when we try to answer why a poet should be spared by an invading army more than any other person. It may be
argued that the poet is a talented person who might act as a valuable resource for the invader. However, the fact remains that in a situation of civil war and revolution, the seizure and control of the means of production of ideas would be an important part of the struggle. Elimination of an opposing voice (if it could not be suborned) would be important to Charles and his supporters. In that sense, then, it would be more sensible for Milton to hide himself away as a non-exceptional person whom the invaders would not bother to hunt or kill rather than proclaim his importance. Hence, it is right to say that the poem is a 'serious joke'.
UNIT 5  JOHN DONNE

Structure

5.0  Objectives
5.1  Introduction
5.2  John Donne: Life and Works
5.3  Poem: The Sun Rising
   5.3.1  Glossary
   5.3.2  Discussion
   5.3.3  Appreciation
5.4  Poem: The Anniversary
   5.4.1  Glossary
   5.4.2  Discussion
   5.4.3  Appreciation
5.5  Poem: The Relic
   5.5.1  Glossary
   5.5.2  Discussion
   5.5.3  Appreciation
5.6  Let Us Sum Up
5.7  Suggested Reading
5.8  Answers to Self-check Exercises

5.0  OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be reading three poems of John Donne, a leading metaphysical poet. On reading this Unit you will be able to:

• understand the features of the metaphysical school of poetry;
• appreciate the salient features of the poetry of John Donne;
• understand the stylistic achievements of John Donne; and
• understand the popularity of John Donne with modern poets.

5.1  INTRODUCTION

John Donne is the most influential poet of the Metaphysical School, a name that was given by Dr. Johnson in the eighteenth century. It was a disparaging christening in as much as it was meant to suggest a major drawback of the poetry that Donne and his followers wrote. In Lives of the Poets Dr. Johnson commented: *the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions.*

It can be seen that there is little association of this poetry with metaphysics, a subject that enjoyed a high rank in the classical learning. Dr. Johnson only meant that the poets pretended to be learned.

Succeeding Shakespeare and Ben Johnson immediately, John Donne wrote a poetry of love which clearly breaks from the Elizabethan courtly and pastoral tradition. The lover addresses neither a princess nor a lady of rank who is virtually unapproachable nor does he relate himself to a shepherdess living in idyllic landscape, away from the
John Donne

din and bustle of a city. She is rather a person who reciprocates the lover, is of the same social class and has been on terms of real intimacy. There is a genuine earthly touch about this kind of love. Shorn of loftiness and vague imaginative touches, the poems articulate feelings of fulfilment or frustration that can be shared by common men. The bold physicality of approach makes the experience of love more concrete and human. It is not an experience of the distant ages in a remote diction; it is an everyday experience given in startling words and idioms.

What is very striking is the fact that despite private circulation – Donne’s poems were not published in his lifetime – his writings could have almost a mass following as every poet of the seventeenth century is seen imitating his attitude and style of expression.

It is the style which basically provoked Dr. Johnson’s censure; but it was this that was actively imitated by Donne’s contemporaries. A major characteristic of this style was its colloquialism, its closeness with the spoken language of London of its time. What Ben Jonson used in his satirical plays is here as a vehicle of poetry, creating an immediate bond with the readers. In a sense this kind of writing was a revolt against Elizabethan diction, its tenderness and selectiveness. Lines like Busy, old unruly Sun, Go and catch a falling star were somewhat harsh and unpoetic and yet they created a tone of conversation, natural and familiar.

Being an ecclesiastical figure himself, Donne also wrote religious poems in which again his non-conformism is evident. Instead of writing in a humble devoted manner, he chose to express his doubts and apprehensions, even his sinfulness so candidly that it altered the texture of religious poetry. However, it was seen by his contemporaries as an honest representation of human predicament, of the fundamental situation of being in sin and aspiring for the grace of God at the same time. This was later on termed as tension between flesh and soul – a motif that recurs in the works of George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan.

A curious fact about Donne is his influence on T.S. Eliot who credited him for uniting feeling with thought. Generally, poets are supposed to be concerned with feeling, the emotional response to a situation in which there is little intervention of thinking. But, in Donne and the metaphysical poets T.S. Eliot observed: a thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility ....... in Chapman there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling which is exactly what we find in Donne.

What is implied in this remark is the power of poetry to incorporate thought into the framework of feeling so that an experience could be communicated in its totality. The truth is that in any experience feeling and thought are inextricably fused; a poet by emphasizing the one robs poetry of its comprehensiveness.

John Donne therefore should be seen not as an innovative poet, but as a poet who corrected the course of poetry. In the modern age his influence has been very deep both on the writing of poetry and critical thought.
Self-Check Exercise

1) Bring out two important characteristics of Donne’s poetry.
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2) Point out the influence of John Donne on his contemporaries.
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3) Who called Donne a metaphysical poet and why?
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4) What did T.S. Eliot appreciate Donne for?
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5.2 JOHN DONNE: LIFE AND WORKS

John Donne was born in a Roman Catholic family in 1572. After the death of his father in 1576, his mother, Elizabeth Heywood, married one Dr. John Syminges. Donne studied in Cambridge and then at Lincoln’s Inn. But he had bitter experiences of religious persecution, a fact of his life that turned him into a rebellious thinker. His brother was put to great torture for his religious views and practices. All this left a painful imprint on the mind of John Donne.

By a stroke of good luck, Donne came to enjoy political patronage. He travelled in Spain and Italy and fought against Spain in the company of the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh. At the age of 25 he entered into a diplomatic career as Chief Secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton at
whose house he had opportunity to mix with the high and the mighty of the London society.

Donne’s falling in love with Anne More, the niece of Egerton, ruined his career. He was imprisoned. On release he had to remain content with a country life, making his living as a lawyer.

In 1602 Donne was elected Member of Parliament from Brackley. His financial difficulties were not yet over. But his way with the rich and the influential was further supported by his poetry that was now in circulation among the elite of London. Sir Robert Drury became the chief patron of Donne, for whom he wrote many poems. On acceding to King James’s wishes Donne was ordained into the Church of England. He was awarded an honorary degree in divinity by Cambridge in 1615. In 1621 he was made Dean of St. Paul’s.

In addition to his poetry, John Donne’s sermons have exercised great intellectual appeal. His famous lines from the sermons are: no man is an island, one equal music and for whom the bell tolls. They have been used by modern writers as titles of their works. Ernest Hemingway chose For whom the Bell Tolls as a title of a novel of his. Interestingly, Vikram Seth’s novel is An Equal Music.

The years of poverty and uncertainty had a toll on Donne’s health. He is supposed to have died of stomach cancer in 1631.

**Major Works**

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anniversary</td>
<td>1611</td>
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<td>The Progress of the Soul</td>
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<td>Anatomy of the World</td>
<td>1611</td>
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<td>Holy Sonnets</td>
<td>1613</td>
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<tr>
<td>Devotions upon Emergent Occasions</td>
<td>1624</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy’s Day</td>
<td>1627</td>
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(The above are actually dates of composition given by editors of Donne’s manuscripts)

**Self-Check Exercise**

1) How did Roman Catholicism affect Donne’s life?

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John Donne
2) How did Donne become part of the glamorous life of London?

3) Describe the later years of Donne’s life.

5.3 POEM: THE SUN RISING

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers’ seasons run?

Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so revered and strong
Why shouldst you think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long;

If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th’ Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.

Ask for those kings whom thou saw’st yesterday,

And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She’s all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour’s mimic, all wealth alchemy.

Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world’s contracted thus.
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that’s done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

5.3.1 Glossary

**Saucy** : rude, offensive

**Pedantic** : academic, teachers

**Sour** : having bitter taste, implying people who have become bored by their routine of hard work

**Prentices** : apprentices, trainee mechanics

**Country ants** : peasants, so called because of their hard work

**Mimic** : imitation, a copy (it has a Platonic / Aristotelian echo), to imitate

**Alchemy** : a form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages which involved trying to discover how to change ordinary metals into gold.

5.3.2 Discussion

Let us visualize the situation – the speaker and his beloved are still in bed when the former observes the sun’s rays falling on windows and curtains. This provokes his anger. In a sharp rebuke to the sun he says that it has no business to disturb the lovers. Love is not a slave to time and season; the world’s time-keeper, the sun, has therefore transgressed its limits by trying to awaken the lovers.

There is significant novelty in this situation to attract and sustain the attention of the reader. With great amusement one hears the mocking tone of the speaker and is almost persuaded of the crime of the sun. The lines that follow make a well-argued case on behalf of the speaker who seems to be quite knowledgeable as well as quite sure of the privileges of lovers.

The speaker asks the sun to mind its business which is to regulate the conduct of late school boys, mechanics, hunters and village farmers. These are the people who should follow the regulations of time. A school boy must get ready for school in the morning, a mechanic should make preparations for his everyday work, a hunter should get ready to accompany the king and equip himself with arms accordingly, and village farmers should do agricultural work demanded by the season. These worldly activities cannot go on in the absence of the sun. Therefore, it is quite logical to ask the sun to supervise the activities of the above-mentioned classes of men.

More boastful claims follow in the next two sections of the poem. The speaker says that he can eclipse the sun by closing an eye of his. But he is not ready to lose the sight of his beloved even for an instant by doing so. Whatever is rich and magnificent in the world – precious spices, gems of the eastern countries or the royal power – they all happen to be there contracted in his bedroom. Finally, he asks the sun to mind its old age and take rest. This it can avail of by forsaking its daily travelling from east to west and showering its beams on the two lovers. There is reversal of the speaker’s stand in the last; but it is in the interest of the sun that he makes such a concession.
5.3.3 Appreciation

You should take note of some important features of the language, structure and thematic novelties of the poem.

Donne’s tone is colloquial and deliberately irreverential. Can you see that he is trying to imitate the attitude of seventeenth century scientists who were trying to research planetary motions and were entirely rational and objective in their approach? The sun and other stars were objects of study, not of worship. Donne goes a step further and calls the sun a busy old fool, brushing aside all reverence that theology suggested.

Words and phrases like motions, Indias of spice and mine, all states, alchemy, thy centre, thy sphere have been taken from astronomy and politics. Not only they connect the audience with contemporary scientific attitudes, they give a new orientation to poetic activity. It is no longer an entry into the recesses of emotions and feelings; it is an interiorization of the external world.

The use of hyperbolic expressions is quite abundant. The defiant mood of the lover is established thereby. The situation of the lovers in the bedroom is in itself quite different from the lover begging a glimpse of the beloved, the staple theme in the Elizabethan sonnets.

The poem is developed as a thesis that proves that the bedroom is the centre of the world. Something of the traditional glorification of love is however still there in Donne’s claim that all wealth and power are perishable; being in love alone gives a joy that is eternal.

The beginnings of a dramatic monologue can be felt in a poem like this where the speaker, in a specific situation of his life, speaks to a silent listener. There is enactment of drama; the changing gestures and verbal attacks create varieties of scenes. The concentration and slow movement of a lyric have been substituted by fast tempo.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Self-check Exercise I</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Why is the sun called unruly?</td>
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| 2) Who should the sun wake up? |
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3) How could the speaker eclipse the sun?
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4) How is the bedroom the centre of the world?
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5) What are the contemporary political and scientific references in the poem?
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5.4 POEM: THE ANNIVERSARY

All kings, and all their favorites,
All glory’ of honors, beauties, wits,
The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
Is elder by a year, now, than it was
5 When thou and I first one another saw:
All other things to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday;
Running it never runs from us away,
10 But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corse;
If one might, death were no divorce.
Alas, as well as other princes, we
(Who prince enough in one another be)
15 Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and ears,
Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt tears;
But souls where nothing dwells but love
(All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove
This, or a love increased there above,
20 When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.
    And then we shall be thoroughly blest,
    But we no more than all the rest;
    Here upon earth, we’re kings, and none but we
    Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be;
25 Who is safe as we, where none can do
    Treason to us, except one of us two?
    True and false fears let us refrain,
    Let us love nobly, ‘and live, and add again
    Years and years unto years, till we attain
30 To write threescore, this is the second of our reign.

5.4.1 Glossary
Corse : corpse, dead body
inmates : inhabitants, dwellers

5.4.2 Discussion
Apparently the poem is the celebration of the first anniversary of falling in love, the occasion on which the speaker turns quite philosophical. He has passed a year in love and had an opportunity to follow the movement of time in the world and in the realm of love. It is this dual movement of time that is the subject of the speaker’s reflection.

He refers first of all to the important political milestones of the year – the changes in the fortunes of the princes and the kings. He finds that all of them have suffered a change. The sun, the marker of time and change, is also older by a year. And then he turns to the personal phenomenon, the act of falling in love. He finds that there has taken place no loss, no disfigurement, no change – the indications of decay in other substances of the world. Love alone has been above all change. It seems to be constant. Once it has occurred it simply continues to be.

The thought of death amidst this feeling of certitude appears to be out of tune. But it is part of a strategy. And Donne’s poems are at once an exercise in argument and a splendid strategy by which the speaker wins the beloved’s heart. The issue of death the speaker brings in intentionally only to allay all doubts in the last. At one instant he lets his beloved apprehend – we must leave at last in death.

But this is all momentary. He tries to convince that the real grave is the body from which the soul, at the moment of death, will find quick and sure release. Then he announces his programme. As the two alone are real sovereigns between whom there is no chance of breach of trust they should continue to be in love for the next three scores of years.

5.4.3 Appreciation
Now that you have read two of Donne’s poems you can better understand what metaphysical conceit is. It is essentially a use of images from diverse worlds, an extended metaphor that combines two entirely different ideas into a single one. In The Sun Rising the two Indias, alchemy, sphere, eclipse are geographical and technical images, used in a context of love. In The Anniversary the solar movements and the political affairs are juxtaposed against love’s constancy. They
create a sequence of arguments and connect things and experiences which are apparently unconnected.

Donne’s interest in politics and science is not merely superficial. The readers of his manuscripts were the highest of the nobility, capable of enjoying the subtlest of references to political plots and intrigues. More importantly they underline Donne’s independent thinking and secular interests.

It would be interesting to see common patterns in Donne’s love-poems. A very important point is the use of unconventional situations – it may be the bedroom scene, celebration of anniversary, a planning of the future, or simply a continuation of a quarrel. An attitude to death also forms part of these poems – in some poems the tone is mocking and satirical, while in some Donne is quite melancholic and yet capable of rising above the fit of sadness to a brilliancy of wit. There is always something unexpected and sparkling in his poems, forcing the readers to be watchful and alert. The line of his argument is simple, almost predictable and yet the conclusions can be hilarious and complex.

**Self-Check Exercise II**

1) How does the speaker mark the change in a year?

2) What is unchanged in the opinion of the speaker and how?

3) What is the speaker’s argument about death?
4) Summarise the line of argument in the poem.
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5) Note the examples of alliteration, conceit, paradox and hyperbole in the poem.
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5.5 POEM: THE RELIC

When my grave is broke up again
Some second guest to entertain
(For graves have learned that woman head
To be to more than one a bed),

And he that digs it, spies
A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
Will he not let us alone,
And think that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way

To make their souls, at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

If this fall in a time, or land,
Where mis-devotion doth command,
Then he that digs us up, will bring

Us to the Bishop and the King,
To make us relics; then

Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I
A something else thereby;
All women shall adore us, and some men;

And since at such time, miracles are sought,
I would have that age by this paper taught
What miracles we harmless lovers wrought.

First, we loved well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what we loved, nor why,

Difference of sex no more we knew,
Than our guardian angels do;
Coming and going, we
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;
   Our hands ne’er touched the seals,
30 Which nature, injured by late law, sets free:
These miracles we did; but now, alas,
All measure and all language I should pass,
Should I tell what a miracle she was.

5.5.1 Glossary

spies : to discover suddenly
the last busy day : Judgment day
mis-devotion : false mode of worship
Mary Magdalen : a prostitute from whom Christ cast out seven devils; she
   has been painted by Renaissance painters with long
golden hairs.

5.5.2 Discussion

The poem is a fine example of the unconventional ways of thinking of John Donne.
He imagines here discovery of a long bright hair around the bone of the speaker’s
corpse in case of digging of his grave. The hair is rightly pictured as a bracelet, an
ornament, priceless and indestructible. In fact, the entire thing is a brilliant imaginative
exercise that continues in the subsequent lines. The discovery would lead to
speculation that the single grave accommodated a lover-couple. Donne contradicts
this and says that it could be a device by which – To make their souls, at the last
busy day / Meet at this grave, and make a little stay.

As on Judgment day, men would be resurrected, this hair would revive not only the
speaker but also his beloved and reunite them. It is a very clever way of sanctifying
love, of raising it to a Christian scale of values.

The speaker thinks of a second possibility of being discovered in this fashion
where heathen practices are in force. In that case the diggers would have this
preserved as a relic and would be used as a magical object. The speaker thinks
that his beloved may be viewed as another Magdalene, and he as an evil cast out
from her body.

The rest of the poem is a marvellous pun on miracle. A miracle is a phenomenon that
is beyond common laws of nature and science. In this sense the love affair of the
speaker was also a miracle, not merely an earthly phenomenon. He recapitulates his
affair from the beginning. They loved well and faithfully. The sexual suggestion is
not lacking here. But something is in-comprehensible – yet knew not what we loved
nor why. Love has a physical basis, but there is a transcendental element in it. It is
these vague perceptions of transcendence that have been suggested – perchance we
might kiss, these miracles we did. To love was to go beyond the limits of mortality.
And it is in this sense that the affair is a miracle. It is no wonder that the hair of his
beloved is on his bone.

5.5.3 Appreciation

Of all the poems written by Donne this one seems to be quite popular. Although it has
an argumentative structure like other poems of his, there is a touch of sentiment also
in this slight picture of a bright hair about the bone. Whatever Donne may say in its
defence, it is truly a bright idea. Something very tender and passionate enters into this
picture. There is in love something very pure and ethereal that transcends time and death.

From a poet who treated love in its physical form or simply as a fashion of the day, it would have required a little devotion to speak of this eternity of love. A study of the holy sonnets of Donne shows that actually there is no break between his love poems and religious poems. Already he was on the way to realize that love opened such areas of sensitiveness to which divine reflections came quite easily and naturally.

Donne’s knowledge of scientific affairs apart, we are impressed by his mastery of ecclesiastical facts which he subjects to an idiosyncratic vision. To bring the judgment and Magdalene’s hairs together, to talk of miracles in a witty fashion and to weave a poem around a slender idea – all this shows a complexity that characterizes his poetry.

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<th>Self-Check Exercise III</th>
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<td>1) With what new idea does the poem begin?</td>
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<td>2) What explanation would the diggers give?</td>
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<td>3) What alternative explanations does the speaker offer?</td>
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<td>4) What view of love does the poem express?</td>
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5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied:

- the poetry of John Donne, the leading metaphysical poet;
- the three well-known poems of John Donne, noting their stylistic features;
- the influence of John Donne on his contemporaries and also on modern poets.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

For a more detailed study you can refer to the following books:

E. Gosse, *Seventeenth Century Studies*, Oxford, 1883
H.J.C. Grierson, *Crosscurrents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, 1929

5.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

**Self-check Exercise I**

1) The sun is called so because he has dared to disturb the sleeping lovers.
2) The sun should wake up all kinds of workmen. Give details.
3) The speaker could do so by closing of his eyes.
4) The bedroom is the centre of the universe as only a fixed point can be a centre. The lovers have remained unchanged; everything else has changed its position.
5) Consult a history text book for more details.

**Self-check Exercise II**

1) The change is reflected in the position of the sun and in the conditions of kings and princes.
2) There is no change in the attitude to love.
3) Death is inevitable but the speaker believes that the body is a grave from which the soul will get a release in death.
4) Consult discussion.

**Self-check Exercise III**

1) It begins with the discovery of a lock of bright hair on the bone of the speaker.
2) They would think that a couple was lying in the grave.
3) There are many alternatives. Consult discussion.
4) The poem presents a very exalted notion of love. Consult Appreciation.
UNIT 6  ANDREW MARVELL

Structure

6.0  Objectives
6.1  Introduction
6.2  Andrew Marvell: Life and Works
6.3  Poem: Thoughts in a Garden
  6.3.1  Glossary
  6.3.2  Discussion
  6.3.3  Appreciation
6.4  Poem: To His Coy Mistress
  6.4.1  Glossary
  6.4.2  Discussion
  6.4.3  Appreciation
6.5  Let Us Sum Up
6.6  Suggested Reading
6.7  Answers to Self-check Exercises

6.0  OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be reading two well-known poems of Andrew Marvell. He shows the influence of John Donne, though he is also different from him.

On reading the Unit you will be able to:
• understand the range of metaphysical poetry,
• understand the distinctive achievement of Marvell whose lucidity of expression is quite appealing.

6.1  INTRODUCTION

Andrew Marvell led a distinguished civil life as a teacher, a political activist and as an associate of John Milton. He had an opportunity to spend sometime in the rural countryside, a factor that shaped his poetic interests. There he had time to observe natural phenomena and the life of birds, trees and plants from close quarters. He has written about these things sometimes as a detached observer and sometimes as a person who is privy to their secrets:

Thus I, easy philosopher
Among the birds and and trees confer
And little now to me make wants
Or of the fowls, or of the plants

He was also influenced by the poetry of Donne. He liked its candour, its bold romanticism and the playfulness of language with which things were expressed. With a little exercise he was able to catch up with the new style. Under Donne’s influence he now wrote of love quite frankly – his persuasions of the bashful mistress make a delightful reading; his sensuousness creates a warmth and his arguments have an intellectual appeal.
There is a third element in his poetry – he writes of spiritual experiences which do not fit exactly with his puritan background. There is in them simply a realization of the release that moments of meditation provide to the soul, its distancing from the things corporeal and material and an aspiring after the heavenly and the ethereal.

A simplicity of utterance remained an important feature of all the phases of his writing which was also united by a well-directed growth of emotional life. From acute observations of Nature to romantic exuberances and then to a cultivation of mystical attitude, his journey can be likened to that of W.B. Yeats. Both of them remained rooted to deeply private experiences and yet they explored the spiritual moorings of human life.

Self-check Exercise

1) What are the principal themes of Andrew Marvell’s poetry?

2) What influence did Donne exert on him?

3) In what way is he different from other metaphysical poets?

6.2 ANDREW MARVELL: LIFE AND WORKS

Andrew Marvell was born on March 31, 1621. His father was a clergyman and was later appointed Lecturer at Holy Trinity Church. For two years Andrew Marvell, on graduating from Cambridge University, served as a tutor to the daughter of Lord General Thomas Fairfax.

Andrew Marvell started writing and publishing poems when he was studying at Cambridge. He had interest in the political affairs of England, reflected in his Horatian Ode and Character of Holland. He had also a long association with Oliver Cromwell and John Milton. Because of his active political life he was
elected Member of Parliament. On restoration of Charles II, he managed to avoid punishment and was re-elected M.P. for Hull in 1661.

Although he continued to write poems when he was travelling in the continent or in a state of retirement, his political interests compelled him to compose essays and pamphlets in prose in which his views are expressed in a satirical view. His important prose works are *The Rehearsal Transposed*, *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England*, *Mr. Smirke or the Divine in Mode*.

He died in 1678, when he was addressing meeting of his constituents in Hull.

**Major Works**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horatian Ode</td>
<td>1650</td>
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<td>To His Coy Mistress</td>
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<td>Upon The Appleton House</td>
<td>1652</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last Instructions to a Painter</td>
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**Self-Check Exercise**

1) Describe the early life of Andrew Marvell.

2) Describe the political background of Marvell.

3) What prompted Marvell to write prose?

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**6.3 POEM: THOUGHTS IN A GARDEN**

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their incessant labors see
Crowned from some single herb, or tree,
Whose short and **narrow-verged** shade
Does **prudently** their toils **upbraid**;
While all flowers and all trees do close
To weave the garlands of **repose**!

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

No white nor red was ever seen
So **amorous** as this lovely green.
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress’ name:
Little, alas, they know or heed
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees, wheresoe’er your barks I wound,
No name shall but your own be found.

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

What wondrous life is this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness;
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds and other seas,
Annihilating all that’s made
To a green thought in a green shade.
Here at the fountain’s sliding foot,
Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside,
My soul into the boughs does glide:
There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then whets and combs its silver wings,
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light.

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

How well the skillful gardener drew
Of flowers and herbs this dial new,
Where, from above, the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
And as it works, th' industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we!

Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers?

6.3.1 Glossary

Incessant : never-stopping (in a disapproving tone)
narrow-verged : having a small area
prudently : sensibly, carefully
upbraid : to reproach, to criticize angrily
repose : the state of rest
amorous : showing love
retreat : a place for rest, quiet and prayer
luscious : having a strong pleasant taste
nectarine : a round red and yellow fruit
annihilating : destroying completely
vest : a clothing worn next to the skin
whets : increases the desire
Garden-state : the state when Adam and Eve were in Paradise, free from fears of mortality and sin
Zodiac : the imaginary area in the sky in which the sun, moon and planets appear to lie and which has been divided into twelve equal parts
Andr ew Marvell

Apollo : The sun god
Pan : the Greek god of shepherds and herdsmen, part man and part goat in appearance
Daphne : Zeus transformed Daphne into a laurel-tree to enable her to escape the passionate pursuit of Apollo
Syrinx : she was also changed into reeds when Pan chased her

5.3.2 Discussion

The title of the poem is self-revelatory. It is about the thoughts arising in the speaker when he is in a garden. The very situation is such that the speaker enjoys a quietness of mind. There is a scene of natural beauty spread before him which further augments this sense of quietude.

A new set of ideas come to mind in this condition. The thought process starts with a feeling of pleasant surprise, the realization that there is no use going anywhere in quest of peace which is available in such abundance in every corner in a garden. Peace cannot be found in the company of men; it is present in its most charming form in the garden. The poet visualizes peace as a beautiful maiden, good looking and inducing a state of calm.

The garden lies spread before the speaker in an expanse of green, a colour not associated with romance, and yet it arouses romantic ecstasy in him. This is so because his eyes can catch relics of lovers’ activities in the garden: they have inscribed their names on the banks of trees. The pleasure is not only of sight; it is one of the saturation of all senses- there is fragrance and also the reaching of ripe fruits and vines into the mouth of the speaker.

From this pleasure there is a further ascent of the mind. For the first time the speaker is aware of the creative powers of mind, its power of creating a new world and also of being firmly concentrated in one attitude. This attitude the speaker names a green thought in a green shade. It is very difficult to specify this green thought- it is full of ambiguities, it may be a highly productive thought or it simply may be the habit of mind to take on the colour of the surroundings. A new vista is added to the experience of the speaker when he feels that his soul has flown out of the body and like a bird freed from a cage has taken seat among the branches of a tree of the garden. The soul in the form of the bird starts singing in an ecstasy of freedom. This is actually the culmination of the experience of the speaker. In the garden he first discovered a repose, then a satisfaction of all the senses, and finally a spiritual release. It is logical therefore for him to view the garden as a replica of Paradise, the first seat of man’s ancestors. He can understand that in this garden the movement of time and change of seasons can be read only in terms of increasing fragrance and wholesomeness of herbs and flowers.

6.3.3 Appreciation

The most important feature of this poem is its symbolism. There are a number of symbols – garden, green, ocean, bird, flight etc. That these words mean more than what they literally suggest becomes obvious because of their repetition and also because of the context in which they have been used.

The speaker becomes aware of the immense value of the garden only gradually. It is a realization that comes to him in stages of clear apprehension, feelings and
Early Modern English Poets

thoughts. In the first stage there is the sense of peace and solitude, a state when the mind is quickened to respond to the beauty of this new environment. There is the second stage of sense-fulfilment, of fruits and vines pouring juices into the mouth of the speaker, instilling a new energy. However, this relish of fruit juices induces a new capacity of contemplation, of becoming aware of the several capacities of mind – of its becoming a repository of all experience, of its power of transcending experience and creating new worlds, and then of cancelling all and being firmly established in an attitude of total concentration. In the last the speaker experiences spiritual freedom – freedom from physicality, mortality and terrestrial restrictions.

There is an interplay of sensuousness and spirituality. To call solitude delicious is to communicate a pleasure with which the word is not associated. Solitude is a state of being alone with pleasant thoughts. But in the surroundings of the garden, full of herbs, flowers, fruits and vines, this can naturally become a thing of taste. You should also understand that sensuousness has not been seen as an obstruction; it has been presented as a stage leading to spiritual fulfilment. The suggestion is that it is only when the senses have been properly gratified that man can rise above bodily limitations and aspire for spiritual elevation.

The use of pagan references – Apollo – Daphne, Pan-Syrinx episodes – and of the Biblical story of Paradise create an exciting complexity in the poem. Both of them however emphasize that the herbs and plants of the garden constitute retreat from passion and create ideal atmosphere for realization of the spiritual potential of man.

**Self-check Exercise I**

1) Why does the speaker call society rude?

2) What pleasures does the speaker enjoy in the garden?

3) What functions of the mind does the speaker allude to?

4) What role of the garden does the speaker talk of?
And we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love’s day.

Thou by the Indian Ganges side
Shoudst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse

Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;

Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,

Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.

Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor turn to dust,

And into ashes all my lust:
The grave’s a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour

Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:

Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.
6.4.1 Glossary

rubies : red, precious gemstones, supposed to preserve virginity

Humber : the Humber river flows through Marvell’s nature town, Hull

conversion of Jew : to occur, as Christian tradition holds, at the end of history

vegetable love : love growing abundantly

transpires : breathes out

slow-chapped power : slowly consuming

6.4.2 Discussion

The poem is a clever presentation of the carpe diem philosophy – the view that the days of youth are short and so should be best used in the enjoyment of pleasures of love. The speaker presents this view before his sweetheart in order to persuade her to accept his proposal without delay since the end of youth is imminent and without youth there is no pleasure.

The satirical vein directed at the poor understanding of the lover is evident in the speaker’s reference to the two continents where two rivers, the Ganges and the Humber, flow and maintain the division of the world. The lovers would have been by the banks of the two rivers and would have passed time in waiting if only they had the privilege of control over time. This is the beginning of a tedious argument – of the references to the beginning of the creation, its end and to the recent growth of European imperialism. All these historical stages have been crossed over a long stretch of time. Had the lovers had that much time in their disposal, the speaker would have taken a hundred years to look at her beautiful eyes and two hundred years to gaze at her breasts. All this is in hyperbolic mode, implying its sheer improbability.

The second stanza is downright realistic by contrast. The speaker turns to the vision of the old age and death. The marble body of his beloved would decay and perhaps they could unite only in the moment of death, of dust and ashes. The force of argument is strongest here as the beloved can be easily convinced of the futility of union in this state.

The third and the final stanza restores the brilliance of the scene with which the poem began. The speaker refers to the glowing skin of the beloved, to the fires burning in the cells of the body and suggests that the available time should be enjoyed in love – the only means to defeat time.

6.4.3 Appreciation

Having read the two poems of Andrew Marvell you can see for yourself with what great ease the poet could write poems of two different strains. Thoughts In A Garden is celebration of peace, solitude and spirituality; To His Coy Mistress is the celebration of youth and beauty in frankly erotic terms.

There reigns over such diversity of theme and style a definite influence of John Donne. He reiterated the power of rhetoric and ratiocination and also of the value of religious urge amidst the sinfulness of human life.
Marvell’s argument is marked by originality and copiousness. He contrasts the amplitude of time that characterizes the slow growth of civilization with the painful short duration of youth. Compared to the developments in the history of the world man’s life is short, and youth is even shorter. But can anything match the glory of youth?

Of the several rhetorical constructions and conceits you should note chiefly – *Time’s winged chariot* and *deserts of vast eternity*. They are perfectly in tune with the hyperbolic opening of the poem. But they are also examples of epigrammatic condensation. Time is flying in a non-stop chariot – a very dynamic image, a powerful suggestion of lack of man’s control over time. The visualization of eternity in the form of deserts stretched before the eyes is not exact as it is suggestive of the intense, hurting pain.

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| 2) What could the speaker have done had they had time in their control? |
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| 3) How does the speaker create a sense of decay and death? |
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| 4) Write a detailed note on the argument in the poem. |
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6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied:

- the life and works of Andrew Marvell, noting the affinities between him and John Donne;
- two poems, having two different themes, in which the distinctive contribution of Marvell is well-represented.

6.6 SUGGESTED READING

For a detailed study you can consult the following books on Andrew Marvell:


Bradbrook and Lloyd Thomas, Andrew Marvell, Cambridge, 1940

H.J.C. Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, Oxford, 1921

6.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

1) Society is a disciplining institution. To call it rude is an example of paradox. Marvell calls society rude since it does not allow man’s spiritual growth; it keeps him involved in the affairs of the world. Elaborate the above idea.

2) The speaker enjoys in the garden peace, solitude and gratification of senses. There are pleasures of the initial stage. As he prolongs his stay the garden offers him a moment of release, an opportunity to rise above the limitations of the body.

3) Normally, mind is the organ that helps us organize disparate thoughts and experiences in a whole. But Marvell alludes to a higher power of mind – it has God-like power to create and annihilate.

4) Go through Discussion and Appreciation.

Self-check Exercise II

1) She is indifferent to the speaker’s entreaties. In so far as it involves waste of youth, it is a crime.

2) The lady would have waited and the speaker would have spent thousands of years simply gazing at her body.

3) Consult Discussion.

4) Consult Discussion.