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# British Poetry

MAENCC103

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION**



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**12-B Status from UGC**

**BRITISH POETRY  
(MAENCC103)**

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## **Unit 01- Geoffrey Chaucer The Canterbury Tales- Prologue to Tales and The Tale of Wife of Bath**

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### **Objectives**

- To trace the journey of one of the most influential writers in the entire range of English literature.
- To discuss the various periods in which Chaucer's literary career has been divided
- To facilitate understanding of Chaucer's seminal works.
- To elaborately Prologue in reference to the tale of Wife of Bath

### **Introduction**

Chaucer's best descriptions, of man, manners and place, are of the first rank in their beauty, impressiveness, and humour. Even when he follows the common examples of the time, as when giving details of conventional spring mornings and flowery gardens, he has a vivacity that makes his poetry unique.

#### **1.1 The Historical Background (1350-1450)**

The period now under review is quite short. It includes the greater part of the reign of Edward III and the long French wars associated with his name: the accession of his grandson Richard II (1377); and the revolution of 1399, the deposition of Richard, and the foundation of the Lancastrian dynasty. From the literary point of view, of greater importance are the social and intellectual movements of the periods: the terrible plague called the Black Death, bringing poverty, unrest, and revolt among the peasant, and the growth of the spirit of inquiry, which was strongly critical of the ways of church, and found expression in the teaching of Wycliff and the Lollards, and in the stern denunciations of Langland.

#### **1.2 Literary features of the age :**

1. The standardizing of English: French and English have amalgamated to form the standard English tongue, which attains to its first full expression in the works of Chaucer.
2. A curious 'MODERN' NOTE begins to be apparent at this period. There is a sharper spirit of criticism, more searching interest in man's affairs, and a less childlike faith in, and a less complacent acceptances of, the establish order. The vogue of romance, though it has by no means gone, is passing, and in Chaucer it is derided. The freshness of the romantic ideal is being superseded by the more acute spirit of the drama, which even at this early time is faintly foreshadowed.

3. Prose: The era sees the foundation of an English prose style. Earlier specimens have been experimental or purely imitative; now, in the works of Mandeville and Malory, we have prose that is both original and individual. The English tongue is now ripe for a prose style. The language is settling to a standard; Latin and French are losing grip as popular prose mediums and the growing desire for an English Bible exercises steady pressure in favour of a standard English prose.

4. Scottish Literature: For the first time in our literature, in the person of Barbour (1316 (?)-9 95), Scotland supplies a writer worthy of note. This is only the beginning; for the tradition is handed on to the powerful group who are mentioned in this age.

### **Subject Matter**

The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is now generally accepted as being 1340. He was born in London entered the household of the wife of the Duke of Clarence (1357), and saw military service abroad, where he was captured. Next, he seems to have entered the royal household, for he is frequently mentioned as the recipient of royal pensions and bounties. When Richard II succeeded to the crown, Chaucer was confirmed in his offices and pensions, and shortly afterwards. He was sent to Italy on one of his several diplomatic missions. He was first poet to be buried in what is now known as poets' corner in west minister Abbey.

### **His poems:**

The order of Chaucer's poem cannot be ascertained with certitude. But from internal evidence they can as a rule be approximately dated. It is now customary to divide the Chaucerian poems into three stages. THE ITALIAN, and THE FRENCH, and THE ENGLISH of which is the last is a development of the first two.

#### **1) French Stage:**

##### ***The Romaunt of the Rose:***

(The Romaunt) is a partial translation into Middle English of the French allegorical poem, le Roman de la Rose (le Roman). Originally believed to be the work of Chaucer, the Romaunt inspired controversy among 19th-century scholars when parts of the text were found to differ in style from Chaucer's other works. Also, the text was found to contain three distinct fragments of translation. Together, the fragments – A, B, and C – provide a translation of approximately one-third of Le Roman.

There is little doubt that Chaucer did translate *Le Roman de la Rose* under the title *The Romaunt of the Rose*: in *The Legend of Good Women*, the narrator, Chaucer, states as much. The question is whether the surviving text is the same one that Chaucer wrote. The authorship question has been a topic of research and controversy. As such, scholarly discussion of the Romaunt has tended toward linguistic rather than literary analysis.

Scholars today generally agree that only fragment A is attributable to Chaucer, although fragment C closely resembles Chaucer's style in language and manner. Fragment C differs mainly in the way that rhymes are constructed. And where fragments A and C adhere to a London dialect of the 1370s, Fragment B contains forms characteristic of a northern dialect.

##### ***The Book of the Duchess:***

The Book of the Duchess is the first of Chaucer's major poems. Scholars are uncertain about the date of composition. Most scholars ascribe the date of composition between 1369 and 1372. Chaucer probably wrote the poem to commemorate the death of Blanche of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's wife. Notes from antiquary John Stowe indicate that the poem was written at John of Gaunt's request.

The poem begins with a sleepless poet who lies in bed reading a book. The poet reads a story about Ceyx and Alcyone and wanders around in his thoughts. Suddenly the poet falls asleep and dreams a wonderful story. He dreams that he wakes up in a beautiful chamber by the sound of hunters and hunting dogs. The poet follows a small hunting dog into the forest and finds a knight dressed in black who mourns about losing a game of chess. The poet asks the knight some questions and realizes at the end of the poem that the knight was talking symbolically instead of literally: the black knight has lost his love and lady. The poet awakes and decides that this wonderful dream should be preserved in rhyme.

#### **2) Italian Stage:**

##### ***The Parliament of Fowls:***

The Parliament of Fowls is also known as the "Parlement of Foules", "Parliament of Foules," "Parlement of Briddes," "Assembly of Fowls" or "Assemble of Foules". The poem has 699 lines and has the form of a dream vision of the narrator. The poem is one of the first references to the idea that St. Valentine's Day was a special day for lovers. As the printing press had yet to be invented when Chaucer wrote his works, The Parliament of Fowls has been passed down in fourteen manuscripts (not including manuscripts that are considered to be lost). Scholars generally agree that the poem has been composed in 1381-1382.

The plot is about the narrator who dreams that he passes through a beautiful landscape, through the dark temple of Venus to the bright sunlight. Dame Nature sees over a large flock of birds who are gathered to choose their mates. The birds have a parliamentary debate while three male eagles try to seduce a female bird. The debate is full of speeches and insults. At the end, none of the three eagles wins the female eagle. The dream ends welcoming the coming spring.

The letter has a fine opening and in the characterization of the birds, shows Chaucer's true comic spirit. **Troilus and Criseyde** is a long poem adapted from Boccaccio but its emphasis on character it is original, and indicative of the line of Chaucer's development. This both poem Chaucer's best narrative work.

#### *The House of Fame :*

(Hous of Fame in the original spelling) is a Middle English poem by Geoffrey Chaucer, probably written between 1379 and 1380, making it one of his earlier works. It was most likely written after *The Book of the Duchess*, but its chronological relation to Chaucer's other early poems is uncertain.

The House of Fame is over 2,000 lines long in three books and takes the form of a dream vision composed in octosyllabic couplets. Upon falling asleep the poet finds himself in a glass temple adorned with images of the famous and their deeds. With an eagle as a guide, he meditates on the nature of fame and the trustworthiness of recorded renown. This allows Chaucer to contemplate the role of the poet in reporting the lives of the famous and how much truth there is in what can be told.

**The third or English group contains** work of the greatest individual accomplishment.

The achievement of this period is the *Canterbury tales*, though one or two of the separate tales may be of slightly earlier composition. For the general idea of the tales Chaucer may be indebted to Boccaccio, but in near every important feature the work is essentially English. The separate tales are linked with their individual prologues, and with dialogues and scraps of narrative. There are two prose tales, Chaucer's own **Tale of Melibee** and **The Parson's Tale**; and nearly all the others are composed in a powerful and versatile species of the decasyllabic or heroic couplet.

### **His Prose**

#### **1) *The Tale of Melibee (also called The Tale of Melibeus)***

The story concerns Melibee who is away one day when three enemies break into his house, beat his wife Dame Prudence, and attack his daughter, leaving her for dead. The tale then proceeds as a long debate mainly between Melibee and his wife on what actions to take and how to seek redress from his enemies. His wife, as her name suggests, counsels prudence, and chides him for his rash opinions. The discussion uses many proverbs and quotes from learned authorities and the Bible as each make their points. Dame Prudence is a woman discussing the role of the wife within marriage in a similar way to the Wife of Bath and the wife in *The Shipman's Tale*.

#### **2) *The Parson's Tale***

The subject of the parson's "tale" (or rather, treatise) is penitence. It may thus be taken as containing inferential criticism of the behaviour and character of humanity detectable in all the other pilgrims, knight included. Chaucer himself claims to be swayed by the plea for penitence, since he follows the Parson's Tale with a Retraction (the conceit which appears to have been the intended close entire cycle) in which he personally asks forgiveness for any offences he may have caused and (perhaps) for having deed to write works of worldly vanitee at all (line 1085).

The parson divides penitence into three parts; contrition of the heart, confession of the mouth, and satisfaction. The second part about confession is illustrated by referring to the Seven Deadly sins offering remedies against them. The Seven Deadly Sins are pride, envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust; they are "healed" by the virtues of humility, contentment, patience attitude, mercy, moderation, and chastity.

## Summary

### *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*

This section contains summaries and (occasionally) comment on the important details in successive sections of the prologue. It is not a full paraphrase, but a way into the text, with which it should be used.

1-8: (numbers refer to lines in the Cambridge University Press edition, ed. James Winny, 1965; revised 1994): The Wife states that, apart from the authority of the Bible, her experience (of five husbands) qualifies her to speak of the "wo that is in mariage". This is to be the theme of what she has to say.

19-104: The Wife attacks arguments (explicit and reasonable or - like her first example - contrived and implausible) from the Bible and the Fathers (ancient writers believed to have authority in the Roman church) which purport to show marriage to be inferior to chastity. She gives contrary arguments, citing the large number of Solomon's wives; showing how St. Paul advises but does not command chastity, and quotes Paul's metaphor of golden and wooden vessels, which can both be serviceable.

NOTE: St. Paul is the writer of many of the books of the New Testament (traditionally, fourteen letters are ascribed to him, though the authorship of some is now disputed). The second half of the Acts of the Apostles is about St. Paul's bringing the gospel to the many parts of the Roman Empire. The relevance of this to the Prologue is that the Wife knows St. Paul's letters. She correctly shows that while St. Paul recommends chastity, for those who can achieve it, the Apostle accepts that it is better to marry than to burn with passion. The passage she alludes to is in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 7.

An interesting question is how the Wife knows this - in Chaucer's time there WAS an unofficial English version of the Bible (translated by Wycliffe and others between 1380 and 1397) but reading it was against the law. F.N. Robinson, in the Oxford University Press edition of the Canterbury Tales, notes (p. xxvii) that Chaucer "can hardly have failed to know Wycliffe" - but this does not mean Chaucer had read any of Wycliffe's English bible. And even if he had, he gives us no reason to think that the Wife knew it. The only approved version of the Bible was Jerome's Vulgate, in Latin, which was read TO the common people by the priests, if the priests were literate and latinate (some were not). Perhaps she has heard St. Paul's letters read in church or summarized in a sermon, or perhaps she has paid very close attention to what Jankin has said to her. In the Wife of Bath's Prologue, "the Apostle" means St. Paul.

105-168: The Wife argues that other virtues than chastity (such as poverty) are not expected to be perfectly achieved by all. She readily admits not to aspire to perfect chastity ("that am nat I"). She argues against the view that the genitals were made merely for "purgacion of urine" and to differentiate the sexes: experience shows them to be made for pleasure and procreation. She has no quarrel with virginity, so long as it is not forced on her: she likens the chaste to bread made of "pured" (refined) flour while those who are married are as (coarser) "barly-breed", with which, in Mark's gospel, Jesus fed a crowd. She insists on her right to use her "instrument frely...bothe eve and morwe", and approves of St. Paul's command to husbands to love their wives. The Pardoner interrupts to thank her for warning him off marriage, but she promptly silences him.

169-233: The Wife warns the Pardoner to expect to hear unpleasant things, advising him, in Ptolemy's proverb, to take heed; he applauds her intention to teach "yonge men" such as himself. The Wife speaks of her five husbands, considering together the first three, good men all, wealthy but too old to satisfy the Wife's voracious sexual appetite. She recalls with glee how hard she made them work to "holde the statut" (their marital obligations). She recalls that she and her husbands, though they tried to appease her with knick-knacks from the fair, would certainly never have qualified for the Dunmow Flich (a side of bacon, awarded annually to the most harmoniously married couple).

234-378: The Wife offers to other "wise wives" (though the only women present are nuns) advice on how (with help from the maid) to manage a husband. She illustrates her advice with a typical verbal assault: in this a husband is accused of meanness over his wife's clothing allowance; of lechery with the neighbour's wife and maid; of being suspicious and making drunken accusations of her conduct with other men; of preaching against the dangers of wealth or beauty in women, and against a wife's nagging; of lamenting the fact that wives cannot, like other wares, be sampled before purchase; of complaining of her complaints (that he does not praise her, is rude to her servants and relatives); of suspecting her relations with the apprentice; of hiding the keys to the

coffer, and of trying to restrict her movements! (Here she digresses to praise Ptolemy's liberal teaching which she thinks allows promiscuity.) She tells how she would accuse her husband of believing gay attire to be shameless; of likening her to a cat, eager to show its fur; of jealously spying on her (though she boasts that she can outwit his spies); of calling women that "ferthe" (fourth) thing which nobody can endure (a reference to Proverbs, 30,21); of likening women's love to hell, to a parched land, or to wild fire; and, finally (!) of comparing women's love to the parasites which kill trees. Note how the unreasonableness of some of her husband's reproaches conceals the fact that for the most part, she objects to his complaining about things she has really done, and which cannot be defended!

379-450: The Wife boasts of her false accusations, showing how she got the better of her husbands by taking the offensive. She justified her own night-time excursions with the claim that she was spying on her husband's lovers. She prides herself on having, by skill, force, and nagging, gained mastery over her husbands, even trading sexual favours for gifts from them. If her husband grew angry, she would first urge him to imitate the legendary patience of Job (a character in the Old Testament), then argue that, as man is more reasonable than woman, he should exercise his reason in indulging her. She would conclude the argument by satisfying her husband's desire: her "bele chose" could make her rich, but she keeps it solely for him.

451-502: The first three husbands have been vaguely and generally depicted above, but here the Wife provides a more definite portrait of the fourth, who was riotous and kept a mistress. Having said this, she breaks off to describe herself as she then was fun-loving, full of vigour and a wine-bibber whom even the murderous Metellius of classical notoriety could not have deterred from drinking, which made her lecherous - a fact known to some men, who would take advantage of it. Reflecting on her younger days, she laments the passing of beauty and vigour - but though the flour is gone, she will sell the bran as dearly as she may. She returns to her description of her fourth husband, recalling how she was made jealous by his infidelity, paying him back in like manner, though she claims to have only pretended to illicit affairs. In the end, she claims, her husband was made jealous and felt his shoe pinch. On the Wife's return from a pilgrimage (in Jerusalem) he died and was buried, at no great expense, as she freely admits.

503-586: The Wife speaks at length of her last husband, whom, despite his ill-treatment of her, she loved best of all the five, both for his prowess in bed, and for the difficulty with which his love was won. For, says the Wife, women love best what is hardest to gain. The fifth husband was formerly a student of Oxford, lodging with the Wife's "gossib", Alisoun, to whom she told all her and her (fourth) husband's secrets. One Lent, while he was in London, the Wife had leisure to attend various vigils and processions. Walking in a field with Jankin, she dropped a hint that were she free to marry, he should wed her. She commends herself for this insight, not wishing to be like the mouse which has only one hole to which to run, going on to tell of inventing an account of a dream in which Jankin killed her as she lay in bed, telling him that she hoped, nevertheless, that he would do her good - following, in this matter, her mother's teaching. Realising that she has lost the thread of her story, she resumes it (though this digression is slight, compared to some).

587-626: The Wife tells of her fourth husband's burial, recalling clearly the trim and shapely legs of Jankin, among the mourners. He was then twenty and she twice his age, but she minimises the difference, appealing to her coltishness and the impress, on her soul, of "seinte Venus". Returned to this subject, she tells of the excellence of her "quoniam", of the lecherousness she has from Venus and the toughness she has from Mars (whose mark she bears on her face and genitalia). Because of this mixture, she loves impulsively, following her appetite, for men of all kinds.

627-710: The Wife tells of her wedding to Jankin and her subsequent regret at marrying. She briefly mentions Jankin's striking her (making her deaf in one ear) for tearing a page from a book of his (she will return to this subject at line 788). Jankin's misogyny (dislike of women) was aggravated by the Wife's wilfulness. She recalls how he would lecture her on the evils of women, using as authority various ancient classical writers: the wife refers to stories about Simplicius Gallus whose countryman deserted his errant wife; to a saying in Ecclesiasticus. Stating again her intention of explaining Jankin's attack on her, she proceeds instead to describe the contents of the book which caused the quarrel. This was Jankin's favourite volume, a collection of misogynist works, among which are Valerie and Theophrastus; Jerome's treatise against Jovinian; writings of Tertullian, Crisippus, Trotula and Heloise; the Biblical Proverbs and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. From this book, Jankin would read of the wickedness of women, knowing more stories than there are of good women in the Bible. The Wife notes the bias of these works written not merely by men but by scholarly clerics, whose character (governed by Mercury) is opposed to Venus and her pleasure-loving children.

711-828: The wife comes at last to the point of her story about the torn book. Jankin had provoked her by reading of the wickedness of Eve; of Delilah's treachery to Samson; of Deianira's abuse of Hercules; of Socrates' suffering at the hands of his two wives; of the unnatural lust of Pasiphæe; of Clytemnestra and Eriphyle, who brought about the deaths of their husbands; of Livilla who killed for love, and Lucilla who killed out of hatred; of the hanging-tree of Latumnus, and of many other unidentified tales of women's iniquity. Having related all this, Jankin attempted to rest his case, by citing a succession of biblical proverbs of the same misogynist character. Maddened beyond endurance, the Wife snatched at his book, tearing out three pages (earlier she has said it was one page), struck Jankin on the cheek and knocked him into the fire (which line 714 suggests was alight). At this, Jankin leapt up and hit the Wife, who fell, feigning death, to the floor. After noting Jankin's horrified reaction, the Wife pretended to revive, accused Jankin of murdering her for her wealth, and, as if nobly, demanded a last kiss. Jankin knelt down meekly and promised never to strike her again (pointing out, however, that her assault had provoked his retaliation). He concluded by begging forgiveness, whereupon the Wife struck him again, and feigned inability to say or do more. After this episode, she tells us, she and Jankin were reconciled and she was able, as with her former husbands, to gain the whip hand, so far achieving mastery over Jankin, as to compel him to burn the offending book. After this, she treated him as lovingly as any wife would, while she returned this love. She prays that God will have mercy on the soul of Jankin, who has evidently since died. The Wife tells her audience nothing of this death: her prologue is so chaotic in its spontaneity, that she may not know she has omitted to tell us.

829-856: The Friar interrupts the Wife to remark jocularly that this has been "a long preamble", whereat the Summoner rebukes the Friar for his outburst, which he believes typical of meddling friars. The Friar retaliates with a threat to tell a tale ridiculing summoner, and the Summoner duly promises to tell even more scandalous stories about friars, accusing the Friar of having lost his temper. The quarrel is quelled by the Host, who likens the conduct of the disputants to that of drunkards (a subject on which he may be presumed to speak with authority). He enjoins the Wife to start her tale. She replies that she is quite ready, if the Friar will grant her permission. Rebuked by her sarcasm and the Host's reproach, the Friar asks the Wife to begin.

### Analysis

1. The first thing that strikes the eye is the unique position that Chaucer's work occupies in the literature of the age. He is first, with no competitor for hundreds of years to challenge his position.
2. Among Chaucer's literary virtues his acute faculty of observation is very important. He was man of the world, mixing freely with all type of mankind; and he used his opportunities to observe the little peculiarities of human nature.
3. Chaucer's best descriptions, of man, manners, and place, are of the first rank in their beauty, impressiveness, and humour. Even when he follows the common examples of the time, as when giving details of conventional spring mornings and flowery gardens, he has a vivacity that makes his poetry unique.
4. "Thebisylarke, messenger of day,  
Salueth in her song the morwe gay,  
And firyphocebusriseth up so bright  
That all the orient laugheth with the lighte."
5. The knight's Tale
6. The prevailing feature of Chaucer's humour is its Urbanity: the man of the world's kindly tolerance of the weakness of his erring fellow mortals. He lays an emphasis on pathos, but it is not overlooked. In the poetry of Chaucer's the sentiment is human and unforced. We have excellent example of pathos in the tale of the 'prioress' and in 'The Legend of good women'.
7. Chaucer's stories viewed strictly as stories, have most of the weakness of his generation: a fondness for long speeches, for pedantic digressions on such subjects as dreams and ethical problems, and for long explanation when none are necessary.

8. His Metrical skill: The seven lined stanza a b a b b c c has become known as the Chaucerian or rhyme royal. He shows the skill that is as good as the very best apparent in the contemporary poems.
9. We many summarize chaucer's achievement by saying that he is earliest of the great moderns. In comparison with the poets of his own time, and those of the succeeding century, the advance he makes is almost starting. All the chaucerian's features help to create this modern atmosphere. He is indeed a genius; he stands alone, and for nearly two hundred years none dare claim equality with him.

## Age of Chaucer (1300 To 1400 Ad)

### 1 The Hundred Years' War:

The period between 1337 and 1453 between France and England, which are collectively known as the "Hundred Years War". Under the guidance of King Edward III (1327-1377)

### 2. The Age of Chivalry:

Rickett observes: "Chaucer's England is 'Still characteristically medieval, and nowhere is the conservative feeling more strongly marked than in the persistence of chivalry."

The Black Death, Peasants' Revolt, and Labour Unrest

### 3. The Church:

John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, whom he calls "moral Gower" (on account of his didactic tendency) thus pictures the condition of the Church in his Prologue to *Confessio Amantis*:

*Lo, thus ye-broke is cristesFolde:  
Whereof the flock without guide  
Devoured is on every side,  
In lacks of hem that been urrware In cheperdes, which her wit beware  
Upon the world in other halve.*

### 4. Literary and Intellectual Tendencies:

Latin and French were the dominant languages in fourteenth-century England. However, in the later half of the century English came to its own, thanks to the sterling work done by Chaucer and some others like Langland, Gower, and Wyclif who wrote in English.

"Homilies, sermons in prose and verse, translation of the Psalms or parts of the Bible.....fill the pages which form the mass of what we may be called English literature until about the middle of the fourteenth century," Rickett. And its first part is The Age of Chaucer (1340-1400), which "is the Age of unrest and transition, (Rickett)."

The fourteenth century brightly opened for industrial England, but the glory was overtaken by plague, the Black Death (1348-49), as a result most of the laborers escaped death, left the country. The prestige of the Church was, in truth, beginning to decline, and then came the birth of parliament. The literary moment of the age clearly reflected by five famous poets, in which, Langland, voicing the social discontent, preaching the equality of men and the dignity of labor; Wyclif, giving the Gospel to the people in their own tongue; Gower criticizing the vigorous life and plainly afraid of its consequences; Mandeville romancing about the wonders to be seen abroad; and Chaucer, sharing in all the stirring life of the times, and reflecting it in literature as no other but Shakespeare had ever done.

There is little to record about the prose which includes Chaucer's Treatise on the Astrolabe; Wyclif's Bible, but Mandeville's Travels and Travellers keeps its place as the first English prose classic. The greatest gift of the age was "the heroic couplet Chaucer introduced into English verse, the rhyme royal he invented", and its example is The Canterbury Tales which shows, Chaucer's Age is still characteristically medieval, marked the persistence of chivalry. In this Age, for the first time, the major poets wrote poetry in the native language, and make it a rival to the dominant French; as a result, literature came to be written which was read alike by all the classes of the literate. Chaucer writes.

Through me men gon into that blysfyl place  
Of hertes hele and dedlywoundes cure;  
Through me men gon unto the welle of grace.

"With Chaucer was born our real poetry" (Arnold) who has "a fondness for long speeches and pedantic digression...long explanation when none were necessary" (Albert). Chaucer was much occupied by divers' official duties which all helped to increase his knowledge of humanity and of affairs, and gave him that intimate, sympathetic acquaintance with men and women which was the raw stuff of his final accomplishment – The Canterbury Tales, an immense work of one hundred and twenty-eight tales, which covers the whole life of England, through 32 characters. The Canterbury Tales (c.1387-1400) is a cycle of linked tales told by a group of pilgrims who meet in a London tavern before their pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. The Canterbury Tales had been essentially romantic, and so had never attempted to the study of men and women as they are so that the reader recognizes them, not as ideal heroes, but as his own neighbours. The work ends with a kindly farewell form the poet to his reader, and so "here taketh the makere of this book his leve" In, The Canterbury Tales, it appears that he did not have a very high opinion of woman, but we find a remark respectable to women when he says about the Squire, Knight's son:

"and born him well, as of so litel space;  
in hope to standen in his lady grace."

The critics have found the seed of the novel in The Canterbury Tales, which is famous for the ten syllable rhyming couplets, which makes him, as Ward points out, "the first painter of character" that is why "Chaucer is to be regarded as English first story-teller as well as first modern poet," cries W.J. Long. The Canterbury Tales had been essentially romantic, and so had never attempted to the study of men and women as they are so that the reader recognizes them, not as ideal heroes, but as his own neighbours. The work ends with a kindly farewell form the poet to his reader, and so "here taketh the makere of this book his leve."

The most important thing that Chaucer did for English poetry was to bring a healthy realism to it. He brought poetry closer to nature, and or reality. He began as his contemporaries did, with dream visions and allegorical works. But gradually he reached the conclusion that nothing could be as nature herself. He comes to look upon the world of man. He set about reproducing it in his work. He became a painter of life in words. Chaucer's broad and humane vision of life helped him in his portraiture of life. Sympathizing with the follies of men and women of average standards, he never riles and rants in his writings. He lets his characters speak for themselves. He is the pioneer of that set of people who look upon the world with indulgent, tolerant, and amused eyes.

Chaucer is by universal consent the first great English humorist. His is a healthy humour like that of Shakespeare and Fielding that depends for its effect on strong commonsense. Chaucer had a sound mind and could play with humanity. He had so much sorrow in his life that could get down in his heart and weaken his intelligence or dim is sight. Chaucer had a free and open mind. He was not afraid, on occasion, of questioning even the ways of God to men. In, The Knights's Tale, he shows his poignant awareness of the baffling problem of pain and evil in the world. Chaucer found English a dry, uncouth brick but left it marble – beautiful and full of liquid luster. He found it a dialect and made it a Standard English of his own day. In his works, he appears as a great picture painter, as an observer whose aim was to see and not to reform, and as a representative of his century.

He was a great reformer and observer of men and had an extraordinary insight into human nature. "Chaucer sees things", writes Legouis, "as they are, and paints them as he sees them." He saw all sorts of men – rogues, hypocrites, and posers – and had a soft corner in his heart for all of them. All of Chaucer's characters are true to life and cause willing suspension of disbelief. Chaucer considered the first poet of English literature. In his poetry we find the great qualities of simplicity, clarity, melody, and harmony which arouse fellow feeling and brotherly affection in the heart of the reader. Chaucer's characters are a description of eternal principles" says Blake. They are not for one age but for all ages.

The world which Chaucer had created in the geography of imagination is as fresh as ever or even more fresh than the world in which we live. There is no doubt about Chaucer's help to dramatist. Shakespeare is borrowing of a plot for one of his complicated plays, Troilus and Cressida from Chaucer's Troilus and Cressida. Chaucer's The Prologue may be described as "a novel of miniature". It has an unrivalled richness and variety in the characterization, an abundant fund of humour, and a full representation of real life. He had the sweetness of Goldsmith, the compassionate realism and humor of Fielding, and the high chivalrous tone of Scott. Thus, we follow the point fro Chesterton, that "There was ever a man who was more of a Maker than Chaucer." Shakespeare and Milton were the greatest sons of their country; but Chaucer was the father of his country.



### 1.3 Chief characteristics of the age of Chaucer

**INTRODUCTION:** The age of Chaucer is the first significant period in the literary history of England. In every walk of life there were signs of change. The social, political, religious, and literary changes were taking place. In short, it was an age of change.

**AN AGE OF TRANSITION:** The age of Chaucer was a transitional age. The medievalism was departing, and modernism was developing slowly. Wycliffe and his followers were sowing the seeds of Reformation. They were making attack upon the church. Individualism was being emphasized. Military events were contributing to the growth of patriotism and national consciousness. The industrial development was giving rise to the middle and working classes. It led to the end of feudal system. In this way we find that the age of Chaucer was an era of transition.

**GROWTH OF NATIONAL SENTIMENT:** The age of Chaucer witnessed the beginning of the Hundred Years War. England was at war with Scotland and France. This war brought great victories in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. The consciousness of national unity was strengthened. The war gave a feeling of national pride and self-respect to the people of England. The national life got purified and powerful national sentiments grew.

**BLACK DEATH, FAMINE AND SOCIAL UNREST:** The age of Chaucer faced natural calamities and social unrest. Plagues and pestilences, constitutional conflicts and unorthodoxy came to the forefront. In 1348-49 came the terrible Black Death. It shook the social fabric violently. Many people died. It reappeared in 1362, 1367 and 1370. Famine followed plague. Vagrants and thieves multiplied. Labour became scarce. Heavy taxation was imposed. The Toll Tax brought about the peasants' revolt. This revolt was a clear sign of social tension and unrest.

**THE CORRUPTION OF THE CHURCH:** In the age of Chaucer the church was the seat of power and prestige. It was infected with corruption. The churchmen were fond of wealth and luxury. They indulged themselves in all sorts of vices. They lived in a Godless and worldly way. John Wycliff, the morning star of the Reformation, led an attack upon the growing corruption of the church.

**THE NEW LEARNING:** The age of Chaucer marked the dawn of new learning. It brought about a change in the general outlook of the age. Man's intellectual horizon expanded. He began to make efforts to liberate himself from the shackles of theological slavery. Two Italian writers Petrarch and Boccaccio were the pioneers of this great revival. But beneath the medievalism the heaven of Renaissance was already at work. The modern world was in the process of being born.

**CONCLUSION:** Thus, in the age of Chaucer a curious modern note began to be apparent. There was a sharper spirit of criticism. The vogue of the romance was passing. In this age there was a spirit of revolt. The church was losing her great hold upon the masses of people. Reformation was in process. The light of new learning was shining. This age was given proper voice by Chaucer.

### Keywords/Glossary

**"Five husbands . . . at the church door"** In Chaucer's time, a wedding was performed at the church door and not inside the church or chapel.

**Mark can tell** the miracle of the loaves and fishes and the barley bread is John, not Mark (see John VI:9), but this is a slight error for a woman of the Middle Ages to make.

**Ptolemy . . . almagest** Ptolemy was a second century a.d. astronomer whose chief work was the *Almagest*. The Wife of Bath's quote shows that she is familiar with such a famous person.

**Dunmow Fliatcah** a prize awarded to the married couple in Essex who had no quarrels, no regrets, and, if the opportunity presented itself, would remarry each other. The Wife is still establishing the right of more than one marriage.

**Argus . . . pull his beard** a mythological giant with a hundred eyes whose duty was to guard a mortal (Io) whom Zeus loved. By Chaucer's time the word referred to any observant, vigilant person, or guardian.

**Three Misfortunes, Things Three** reference to Proverbs xxx, 21-23.

**quoniam** a vulgar designation for the female pudendum, or vulva.

**Venerien . . . Marcién** astrological terms.

**Ecclesiasticus, Ecclesiaste** See xxv: 29.

**Valerie and Theofraste** a work attributed to Walter Map, a minor satirist who disparaged marriage. All the writers the Wife of Bath quotes have written something either antifeminist, satiric, or unpleasant about marriage.

**Valerius, Tullius, Boethius, Seneca** writers who espoused that gentility comes from within and not from outward appearances.

### Self-Assessment

1. According to the Wife of Bath, what do women most desire?
  - A. Sovereignty over their husbands
  - B. That he will be taken away by an orange, hound like creature
  - C. Death
  - D. Nicholas
  
2. What does Chanticleer dream?
  - A. Sovereignty over their husbands
  - B. That he will be taken away by an orange, hound like creature
  - C. Death
  - D. Nicholas
  
3. Who are the three men searching for in the Pardoner's Tale?
  - A. Sovereignty over their husbands
  - B. That he will be taken away by an orange, hound like creature
  - C. Death
  - D. Nicholas
  
4. Who is branded by a red-hot poker in the Miller's Tale?
  - A. Sovereignty over their husbands
  - B. That he will be taken away by an orange, hound like creature
  - C. Death
  - D. Nicholas
  
5. Which pilgrim has a forked beard?
  - A. The Merchant
  - B. Reeve
  - C. Miller
  - D. Host
  
6. Which pilgrim carries a brooch inscribed with Latin words meaning "Love Conquers All"?
  - A. Wife of Bath, Squire, Monk, Physician, Franklin
  - B. The Man of Law's Tale and the Squire's Tale
  - C. The Prioress
  - D. The Squire's Tale
  
7. Which tale is about a talking falcon?
  - A. Wife of Bath, Squire, Monk, Physician, Franklin
  - B. The Man of Law's Tale and the Squire's Tale
  - C. The Prioress
  - D. The Squire's Tale

8. Which tales are about the patient suffering of women?
  - A. The Man of Law's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, and the Physician's Tale
  - B. The Prioress
  - C. The Squire's Tale
  - D. Wife of Bath, Squire, Monk, Physician, Franklin
  
9. What "class" does the Wife of Bath belong to?
  - A. Rich
  - B. Poor
  - C. Elite
  - D. Weak
  
10. Wife of Bath married how many times:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 5
  
11. What is the moral of the Nun's Priest's Tale?
  - A. Never trust a flatterer
  - B. Her life with her five different husbands
  - C. The Pardoner's Tale
  - D. Be happy
  
12. What is the Wife of Bath's Prologue about?
  - A. Never trust a flatterer
  - B. Her life with her five different husbands
  - C. The Pardoner's Tale
  - D. Be happy
  
13. Which tale qualifies as part of a medieval sermon?
  - A. The Miller's Tale
  - B. The Reeve's Tale
  - C. The Pardoner's Tale
  - D. The Knight's Tale
  
14. Which pilgrims are most richly attired?
  - A. Wife of Bath, Squire, Monk, Physician, Franklin
  - B. The Man of Law's Tale and the Squire's Tale
  - C. The Prioress
  - D. The Squire's Tale
  
15. Which tales take place in the Orient?
  - A. Wife of Bath, Squire, Monk, Physician, Franklin
  - B. The Man of Law's Tale and the Squire's Tale
  - C. The Prioress

## D. The Squire's Tale

**Answer for Self Assessment**

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

**Review Questions**

1. What "class" does the Wife of Bath belong to? How do you know?
2. Is this character a proto feminist? Or is Chaucer writing an inherently anti-feminist text here?
3. She has many counterarguments to the prevailing ideas about women of her day (usually introduced with the phrase "Thou sayest"). What arguments are these? What evidence does she provide?
4. There are very few women in *Canterbury Tales*; how does Wife of Bath compare to the other "major" female storyteller (The Prioress)?
5. How does the Tale she tells relate to the information in her Prologue?
6. Who holds power in "The Wife of Bath's Tale"? Do those who have power use it correctly?
7. According to the Wife of Bath, what do women most desire?
  - A. Sovereignty over their husbands
8. What does Chanticleer dream?
  - A. That he will be taken away by an orange, hound like creature
9. Who are the three men searching for in the Pardoner's Tale?
  - A. Death
10. Who is branded by a red-hot poker in the Miller's Tale?
  - A. Nicholas
11. Which pilgrim has a forked beard?
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12. What is the moral of the Nun's Priest's Tale?
  - A. Never trust a flatterer.
13. What is the Wife of Bath's Prologue about?
  - A. Her life with her five different husbands
14. Which tale qualifies as part of a medieval sermon?
  - A. The Pardoner's Tale
15. Which pilgrims are most richly attired?
  - A. Wife of Bath, Squire, Monk, Physician, Franklin
16. Which tales take place in the Orient?
  - A. The Man of Law's Tale and the Squire's Tale
17. Which pilgrim carries a brooch inscribed with Latin words meaning "Love Conquers All"?
  - A. The Prioress
18. Which tale is about a talking falcon?
  - A. The Squire's Tale
19. Which tales are about the patient suffering of women?
  - A. The Man of Law's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, and the Physician's Tale

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## Unit 02: Geoffrey Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales- Prologue to Tales and The Tale of Wife of Bath

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### Objectives

- To facilitate understanding of Chaucer's seminal works.
- To elaborately Prologue in reference to the tale of Wife of Bath
- To trace the journey of one of the most influential writers in the entire range of English literature.
- To discuss the various periods in which Chaucer's literary career has been divided

### Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer is the most important writer of the Middle English Period, without whom any discussion of Middle English poetry would be completely meaningless. He is unquestionably the Middle English poet in whose capable and assured hands both the English language and literature matured. His selection, complexity, witty tone, fundamentally humane outlook, and technical genius set him apart from other poets of his age. His familiarity with European literature allowed him to address themes and attitudes common in European literature in English. He was a keen observer of human nature, which he depicted with a mix of compassion and irony.

His courtly and diplomatic training allowed him to portray a wide range of characters in his works with utmost conviction.

His work in a variety of public and civil services, as well as his travels abroad on behalf of the King, gave him the opportunity to meet people from all walks of life, from the nobility to the lower classes. His trips to France and Italy were especially important because they introduced him to Italian literature, particularly Dante's and Boccaccio's works. He met Barnabo Visconti, Lord of Milan, on his second trip to Italy, and his death is the subject of one stanza in the Monk's Story. Chaucer's literary works can be divided into three periods:

1. French Period
2. Italian Period
3. English Period

### 2.1 Subject Matter

In a prologue, the Wife shares details about her life and experiences before beginning her story. The Wife of Bath begins her lengthy prologue by declaring that she has always followed experience over authority. She has enough experience with five husbands "at the church door" to consider herself an expert. She sees no problem with having five husbands and is perplexed by Jesus' rebuke

of the woman at the well, who had five husbands as well. Instead, she chooses to obey the biblical order to multiply.

The Wife defends her stance by citing King Solomon's many wives and St. Paul's admonition that it is easier to marry than to burry. She challenges everyone to convince her that God ordered virginity after demonstrating a knowledge of the Bible. Furthermore, sexual organs are produced for both practical and recreational purposes. She has always been able to have sex whenever her man wants it, unlike many cold women.

The Wife of Bath then tells stories about her previous husbands and describes how she achieved power ("sovereignty") over them. Unfortunately, one of her husband's dies just as she gains full power over him. She then goes into depth about how she took custody of her fifth husband.

She couldn't take her attention away from a young clerk named Jankyn, whom she had always admired, at her fourth husband's funeral. Even though she was twice his age, she and Jankyn were married by the end of the month. She was disturbed to discover that Jankyn spent all of his time reading after the honeymoon was over, especially from a series of books that disparaged women. He started reading aloud from this collection one night, starting with the tale of Eve and reading about all the unfaithful women, murderesses, prostitutes, and other women he could find. The Wife of Bath, unable to bear these stories any longer, took the book and slammed it into Jankyn, causing him to fall over backwards into the fire.

He sprang to his feet and smashed his fist into her. She collapsed and appeared to be dead on the concrete. When he knelt over her, she smacked him again and pretended to die. He was so angry that if she survived, he promised her something. She achieved "sovereignty" over her fifth husband in this way. She was a real and loyal wife to him from that day until his death. Her storey confirms her conviction that a successful marriage is one in which the wife is in control.

In King Arthur's court, a lusty young knight rapes a lovely young maiden. The citizens are disgusted by the knight's actions and demand that he be punished.

Despite the fact that the statute requires the knight's beheading, the queen and ladies of the court beg to be permitted to choose the knight's fate. After that, the queen gives the knight a year to figure out what women really want.

The calendar year flies by. As the knight returns dejectedly to the court, thinking he will perish, he finds 24 young maidens dancing and singing. The maidens vanish as he approaches them, leaving only a foul old woman to approach him and inquire as to what he wants. When the knight explains his quest, the old woman promises him the correct answer if he does what she asks in exchange for saving his life. The knight concurs. When the queen asks the knight to answer, he correctly notes that women want sovereignty over their husbands the most.

The old crone demands that she be his wife and love after providing him with the correct response. In pain, the knight agrees. The knight pays little attention to the filthy woman next to him on their wedding night. When she interrogates him, he admits that her age, ugliness, and low breeding disgust him. The old hag tells him that true gentility is based on virtue rather than appearances. She informs him that her good looks are an advantage.

Many men would be after her if she were attractive; in her current condition, however, he can rest assured that he has a good wife. She gives him the option of marrying either an old ugly hag like herself, who is still a faithful, real, and virtuous wife, or a beautiful woman with whom he must gamble. The knight claims she has the final say. "Kiss me... and you shall find me both... fair and faithful as a wife," she tells him, since she has "earned the mastery." She had grown into a beautiful young lady, and they had lived happily ever after.

## Summary

Geoffrey Chaucer's English stage is regarded as his pinnacle achievement, as it was during this period that he wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, one of the most important works of English literature. It follows pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury to visit Thomas Becket's grave, who meet at the Tabard Inn in Southwark to pass the time by sharing stories from various literary and folk sources. The inn's host, Harry Bailey, agrees to accompany the pilgrims and serve as the master of ceremonies. With his acute powers of perception and thorough knowledge of human character, Chaucer selects pilgrims from all walks of life.

With his acute powers of observation and extensive knowledge of human character, Chaucer selects pilgrims from all walks of life, from the noble knight to the simple ploughman. This allows Chaucer to combine his literary expertise with his keen observational skills. Almost all of the characters—knight, esquire, doctor, merchant, shipman, monk, friar, parson, miller, reeve, farmer, prioress—have been delineated in such detail by Chaucer that it seems as though Chaucer based his characters on his own real-life experiences.

### **Information Box**

Pilgrimage was a common feature of mediaeval times, and one of the most famous English pilgrimages was to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury. There are also reports that the Venetians organised pilgrimages to the Holy Land that included food, transportation, and tolls. The pilgrims gather at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, at the southern end of London Bridge, the only bridge across the Thames at the time, in *The Canterbury Tales*.

### Literary Influences

For the general idea of this poem, Chaucer was heavily influenced by Boccaccio. Boccaccio's *Decameron* is based on a similar concept, as it is a series of a hundred stories told by ten gentlemen who seek shelter in a palace to avoid a plague. However, it is unknown if Chaucer was familiar with the *Decameron*, because if he was, he would have alluded to it in his own work. Furthermore, in contrast to Boccaccio's work, Chaucer's magnum opus has a much broader reach.

Giovanni Sercambi's *Novelle*, which refers to a pilgrimage, a chief, and by-play among the pilgrims, bears a closer resemblance. There is no proof that Chaucer had read this work before. Whatever influences may have influenced Chaucer's writing of *The Canterbury Tales*, they are all tempered by his English sensibility.

Before Chaucer, literature covered a broad range of topics dealing with a wide range of emotions and themes, including love, honour, separation, reconciliation, history, faith, and so on. However, as the authors became more individualistic, the same thing happened to society's members. As a result, Chaucer portrays characters such as the knight, Bath's wife, the miller, and the prioress as distinct individuals with distinct personalities and distinctions. They are not only representative of their own social class, but also individuated: the Cook's ulcer, the Miller's wart, the Knight's dirty tunic, the Squire's carving, the Wife of Bath's wide-spaced teeth—all these physical details help to make the character portrayals believable and special. The characters are recognised by the rough sound of their voices at times, the complexion at other times, and at times by their appearance.

The characters are recognised by the rough sound of their voices, the complexion of the characters, and the sensitiveness of a lady who cries at the sight of a captured mouse. It's notable that neither Chaucer nor the narrator pass direct judgement on the characters. Rather, he encourages his readers to shape their own views about the characters based on the ironic difference between what the characters think about themselves and what others think about them, thanks to his wide field of vision and broad genial humour.

## 2.2 Importance of the Inn

In that sense is immense. In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Tabard Inn in Southwark plays a key role. It's a gathering spot that highlights the importance of drinking and socialising in this culture. It makes us think of Beowulf. The society represented here, on the other hand, is a modern social order in which citizens from various social groups come together. As a result, the inn serves as a miniature representation of society.

HOSTING Duties also plays very important role. Despite the fact that the *Canterbury Tales* is a compilation of stories told by various pilgrims from various social backgrounds and with various qualities and behaviours, Chaucer never forgets to maintain a connecting connection between them all.

He accomplishes this in a variety of ways, one of which is the introduction of the Host character. He is portrayed as forthright and boisterous, with a wide variety of humour. Throughout, he is present, bridging all gaps among the pilgrims, resolving quarrels, instilling trust in the timid, and keeping everyone in good spirits. The Host is a source of humour and irony as well. When the Host objects to Chaucer's own narrative, the standard method of shortening a boring storey is made all the more amusing, increasing the comic and ironic results.

This book is a MEDIEVAL LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY. *The Canterbury Tales* is a fantastic compilation of mediaeval literature in the form of a series of separate tales. The Knight's Tale and the storey of Constance as told by the Man of Law reflect the courtly romance tradition, while Sir Thopas, as Guy of Warwick or Bevis of Hampton, parodies the common romance. Franklin's Tale contains elements of Breton literature, such as supernatural elements, devotion toward lovers, and a setting in Brittany. The Physician's Tale of Virginius, who kills his own daughter to save her honour, is a retelling of a classical legend.

The Parson's Tale can be considered a sermon with its own didactic purposes, while the storey of Chauntecleer and Dame Pertelot told by the Nun's Priest is a remarkable example of beast fable. Even lyric elements can be found in the Second Nun's Tale's "Invocation to Mary." As a result, *The Canterbury Tales* tends to be a treasure chest of any imaginable genre of mediaeval literature, expertly treated by Chaucer.

There are many "GROUPS" in the book. *The Canterbury Tales* starts off with a bang. After a short journey, the pilgrims are asked to draw lots, with the Knight being the first to say a storey. He tells the storey of Arcite and Palamon, two friends who fall in love with the same woman. The Monk is



invited to the next storey by the Host, who is very happy with the storey. Intoxicated Miller, on the other hand, becomes adamant about becoming the next storyteller. He tells a vulgar storey about a carpenter, which humiliates the Reeve, who is of the "carpenteris craft," and he responds by telling an obscene storey about a miller. The Cook is enthralled by the storey and is ready to say a joke about an apprentice. However, three humorous stories in a row may cause an imbalance, so Chaucer ends the Cook's Tale after fifty lines.

The order of the stories is fairly clear up to this point. Other tales are grouped together. The order in which the groups are arranged, however, is not defined. The arrangement of the Ellesmere manuscript, which is detailed below, is followed by the majority of modern editions: The letters in parenthesis signify a particular structure invented by some modern editors to fix contradictions in the time scheme.

It's worth noting that, in terms of subject matter, Groups III, IV, and V may be considered a single longer group. Since most of the stories deal with marital issues, this is often referred to as the Marriage Party. The Wife of Bath, who believes in a rather earthy philosophy of life, brings the issue to the fore. She has already married five men and has no qualms about marrying a sixth. She is forthright in expressing her rejection of virginity, which many believe should be preferred to matrimony. She has no qualms in talking about her ex-husbands and her utter superiority over them. She is convinced that the only way to find happiness in marriage is to acknowledge the wife's dominance, and the tale she tells serves only to prove her point.

She is convinced that the only way to find happiness in marriage is to acknowledge the wife's dominance, and the tale she tells serves only to bolster her case. A quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner starts after this debatable novel, which could have raised several objections. After everybody has finished their stories and cooled down, the Clerk is asked to say a storey. The Wife of Bath's tale contrasts sharply with the Clerk's, which emphasises a woman's submission to her husband and how her patience is rewarded with marital bliss and happiness.

The Merchant then tells the tale of January and May, a fabliau about an old man marrying a young girl and being shamefully duped by her. The Squire's Tale follows, which is a piece of Eastern romance with no clear reference to marriage. Franklin, on the other hand, tells the storey of Arviragus and Dorigen, a married couple. It refers to a happy marital relationship founded on passion, trust, patience, and self-control. Given that the Marriage Group sequence concludes with the Franklin's Story, it would not be inappropriate to consider Franklin's views on marriage to be Chaucer's own.

Those groupings may also be derived from Chaucer's description of pilgrims in the General Prologue, but it is impossible to know if these distinctions were made on purpose by Chaucer. However, there is no harm in having character discussions based on such classifications. Chaucer expressly states that he has not arranged the pilgrims in any order of importance or degree. But he starts with the Knight, who is accompanied by his son, the Squire, and his servant, the Yeoman, on their journey. This party of pilgrims can be considered the first. The Knight is represented as a chivalrous character who displays courtesies, courage, and freedom. He is still able to protect Christianity in the face of adversity.

He is always ready to protect Christendom from barbarians, and he is making this pilgrimage right after returning from an adventure, showing his deep religious mentality. The Knight's son is a twenty-year-old young man who has fought closer to home in the hopes of gaining a reputation that will help him gain his lady's favour and affection. Even though he is dressed in a glamorous manner, he maintains his modesty. He is humble enough to know that he is a novice in the role of knight and is only acting as an apprentice. The Yeoman is the epitome of performance and discipline. He is prepared to use his equipment whenever it is needed.

In the Knight's estate, he plays the role of a forster or bailiff. In describing the pilgrims who belong to this party, Chaucer uses a small amount of satire.

The second group of pilgrims consists of the Prioress, the Priest, and the Friar, all of whom are members of the religious community and are active in the daily administration of the church. Since she is the head of the convent, the Prioress holds a major role. However, the way she is portrayed to the readers makes her seem more like a romance heroine than a nun, which she is. She is fair and fetishistic, well-educated, pleasurable, and amiable, with grey eyes and a rosebud lip.

She is refined, has a small dog, and feeds it the finest bread. Because of Chaucer's ambivalent style of presentation of her character, the readers almost forget she is a nun, despite the fact that he is not harsh or critical of her. While the Prioress is sweet and charming, the Monk is strong, ambitious, prosperous, and forward-thinking. He takes pride in the fact that he is not bound by the monastic code of conduct. Many monasteries purchasing large estates during Chaucer's period required efficient management, and this monk was also assigned to this mission.

As a result, he met wealthy landowners who had a clear preference for. As a result, he encountered wealthy landowners who had a clear preference for luxury living and hunting. The Monk's plump appearance, gilded crown, pricey boots, fine horse, and hunting obsession all attest to his affiliation

with rich people from whom he has absorbed gross self-love and indulgence. The Friar is in the same boat. Chaucer's Friar is dressed in luxurious clothing and frequents the taverns, ignoring his evangelical responsibilities of reaching out to the needy and sick, and living his own life in utter poverty. In addition to being a wealthy confessor, he is a matchmaker and entertainer. Chaucer uses a number of methods to comment on these three characters: he prefers to be tolerant when describing the Prioress, satirical when describing the Monk, and critical when describing the Friar.

The Merchant, the Clerk, the Lawyer, the Franklin, the five Guildsmen and their Cook, the Shipman, the Physician, and the Wife of Bath make up the third party of pilgrims. They are all middle-class people, and their portrayal is primarily based on their materialistic and mercenary outlook.

The Merchant is the first of this party, and in an effort to project a sense of duty and dependability, he talks rather formally. He is, however, not only unimpressive but also financially insecure:

This worthy man ful well his wit bisette

Therwiste no wight that he was in dette.

Because of Chaucer's satirical tone in portraying the Merchant's character, we might wonder if this character was based on a real-life merchant from Chaucer's period. The Clerk seems to be an outlier in this category since he is the only one who is uninterested in worldly and material possessions other than books. He is slim (which suggests his modest lifestyle in contrast to the luxury associated with the lives of other characters) and genuinely committed to his studies without any monetary gain, in contrast to almost all of the characters. In stark contrast to the Clerk, the Lawyer is not afraid to apply his expertise in practical ways, thus gaining money out of it.

In stark contrast to the Clerk, the Lawyer is not afraid to put his experience to good use and thereby make money. Franklin is also affluent, but he spends his money on social activities and does not seem to be willing to buy more. He is well-known for his hospitality as well as his positions as Justice of the Peace, Member of Parliament, Sheriff, and Tax Auditor. The only criticism levelled at him is for his antiquated ideas and uneasy demeanour in front of important people. The carpenter, weaver, haberdasher, dyer, and tapestry maker are the five Guildsmen who work together.

No one of them tells a storey, but the Cook who is accompanying them begins to say one. The Guildsmen are religious guild members who are socially responsible. Their uniforms and accoutrements are striking, and they're a welcome addition to the pilgrimage. They are all in good physical condition and eligible to serve as aldermen. Except for a shin sore, their Cook is also very capable. The Host is very particular about maintaining a high level of hygiene. The Shipman's seamanship is without a doubt excellent, but he is also involved in cargo theft and even piracy. The physician is a wealthy man who makes a lot of money from the plague.

He seeks to impress people with his speech and is aware of both his health and his finances. Chaucer, on the other hand, seems to have some admiration for this physician. The Wife of Bath, who appears to be a mix of Mars and Venus and thus is both pugnacious and amorous in her demeanour, is the final member of this party. She is directly affiliated with commerce as a cloth-maker, with cloth-making being a thriving profession in today's society. Her audacity and unconventional views on marriage distinguish her as a unique and memorable character.

On the one hand, mediaeval medicine was a rare blend of classical and Arab authorities, and on the other, astrology. Casting horoscopes for birth, the onset of disease, and deciding the best time to administer a cure all involved consulting astrology. The drugs were administered with the intention of restoring the equilibrium of fluids or humours in the body, which affected a person's disposition.

The prologue is used by *The Wife of Bath* to describe the foundations of her theories about experience versus authority, as well as to introduce the argument that she highlights in her storey: The most important thing that women want from their husbands is total power ("sovereignty"). The Wife believes she can talk authoritatively about her experience since she has had five husbands, and she describes how she gained the upper hand with each of them in the prologue.

The church's antifeminism was a powerful controlling force in Chaucer's time. Women were often depicted as near-monsters, sexually insatiable, lecherous, and shrewish, and they were favoured by church officials. Women were not permitted to engage in any way in church doctrine. Similarly, a second marriage was considered suspicious in Chaucer's day, so the Wife of Bath carefully investigates the words of God as revealed in scripture. And her understanding of the Bible (while at times baffling) demonstrates that she is not a simpleton. She acknowledges that she can't find a prohibition against multiple marriages anywhere in the Bible, with the exception of Jesus' condemnation of the woman at the well for her five husbands. She admits, however, that she is baffled by this. Furthermore, everlasting virginity was highly regarded in Chaucer's day. Some saints were canonised because they would rather die than lose their virginity, and others fought so hard to keep their virginity that they were deemed martyrs and canonised.

After departing from the holy scriptures, the Wife of Bath appeals to common sense, arguing that if everybody remained a virgin, who would be left to give birth to more virgins? Perhaps more

fundamentally, she believes that the sex organs should be used for pleasure as well as procreation: she acknowledges that she is a boisterous woman who loves sex and is not ashamed of it, contradicting the mediaeval belief that sex was only justified for procreation. She also refutes the commonly held idea that women should be submissive, especially when it comes to sex.

The reader should keep in mind that the Wife's claims are often in opposition to the church's authority, and that she is a woman who values her own experiences above academic arguments. The truly remarkable feature of the Wife of Bath's prologue is the very wonderful image of a human being, not her argument with the mores of her time or the strictures of the church. She is a woman with a lot of energy, a woman who is incredibly alive and sensitive.

She has overcome five husbands and adversity despite the fact that she has lost her beauty and youth. She has the ability to relish life in a way that the other glum pilgrims lack, as well as the will to enjoy what she cannot alter.

Technically, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is an exemplum, or a storey told to explain an intellectual concept. The story's intent in this case is to address the question, "What do women most desire?" Despite the fact that some of the ideas originated from other sources (the Roman de las Rose as expanded by Jean de Meun, and St. Jerome's remarks on celibacy in Hieronymous contra Jovinianum), Chaucer reshaped the storey to suit the Wife of Bath's introduction and her character.

Despite the fact that some of the ideas came from other sources (the Roman de las Rose as expanded by Jean de Meun and St. Jerome's remarks on celibacy in Hieronymous contra Jovinianum), Chaucer reshaped the storey to fit in with the Wife of Bath's introduction and her basic thesis that women most want "sovereignty." For example, Chaucer employs an older shrew as the narrator of a storey about an old hag who gains sovereignty over her youthful husband, resulting in the couple living a contented and long, happy life.

Traditional values and headships, that is leadership and supplication, are present in the Wife's tale. Traditional ideals and headships, i.e. leadership and dominance, are overturned or overthrown in the Wife's tale. At the start of the storey, King Arthur submits to Guinevere's rule (thus relinquishing both his state and family leadership); the ladies of the court act as justices instead of the men; and the authority of books and scriptures is replaced by practise. Furthermore, the knight is rescued by another woman, albeit a hag, who has violated the sanctity of a young girl's chastity. Finally, all options presented by the hag to the knight are unacceptable. As a result, he has abandoned the male's sov when he lets her make the decision. As a result, by allowing her to make the decision, he has given up male authority in favour of female rule, effectively turning the mediaeval world image "up-so-down."

*The Canterbury Tales*, written by Geoffrey Chaucer towards the end of the fourteenth century, is known as an estates satire because it effectively criticises, even to the point of parody, the major social groups of the period. The three estates, which for a long time constituted the majority of the population, were known as the church, the aristocracy, and the peasantry. As a result of greater social mobility. By the time Chaucer wrote *Canterbury Tales*, a person did not necessarily belong to an estate by birth, but rather by their work or acts (which greatly aided Chaucer himself). Furthermore, many of Chaucer's characters do not belong to any of the estates and instead belong to the middle class. The Parson is the only traveller who follows what he preaches on behalf of the church.

The Church is the first estate. This estate, which was mostly made up of clergy, effectively encompassed those who spent a lot of time praying. Many clergy members worked outside of the church or had a family in addition to their clerical duties at this period, so their role was very different from what we think of today. The Parson's character is perhaps the best example of the first estate. Although some of the other travellers are clergy, they display signs of evolving social changes such as intellectualism and social mobility, as well as factors that are not stereotypically associated with the clergy. The Parson, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with. By contrast, the Parson is primarily concerned with "holy thought and service," as all clergy should be. His work within the priesthood appears to be his primary focus, as he is portrayed as a poor man who does not threaten excommunication to extract tithes. The Knight is a member of the aristocracy who tells a storey about courtly love.

The Nobility is the second estate. Large landowners, knights, those with a lot of free time, and those who have fought in war are all part of this estate. The knight character is an outstanding example of the second estate. Travel, war, chivalry, and glory are all important to the knight. He does not work for a living and is unconcerned about such petty matters as earning a living, money, or labour. As a nobleman, these duties fall outside of his domain and are performed by others, especially those from the third estate.

The knight is never identified in terms of his lineage, which is a significant departure from earlier works focused on the nobility. For example, the *Beowulf* epic spends a considerable portion of its text detailing each character's ancestry in detail. The only thing we know about the knight in

Canterbury Tales is that he fought in the Crusades. The Plowman is idealised as a labouring class figure.

The Peasantry is the third estate, and it is made up of people who worked for a living under the feudal system. The third estate was responsible for the work that funded and allowed the Church and Nobility's income and lifestyle. The ploughman, who is very concerned with toil and work, is a good representative of this estate. He is portrayed as hardworking and impoverished, but he does not complain about his condition and seems to have no desire for money. The ploughman is loyal and content with his lot in life. He has no qualms about doing the job for the benefit of others. The ploughman earns his livelihood by carrying dung, the proverbial bottom of the barrel.

The bulk of the characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are from the emerging middle class, despite the fact that he wrote it as an estates satire. The middle class was a modern phenomenon during Chaucer's time, and many people didn't know how to make sense of this new, decidedly anti-feudal social class. As a result, those travellers who are part of one of the three traditional estates stand out even more.

Chaucer builds his characters using the idea of nonpareils (peerless characters), meaning that these characters are intended to serve as stand-ins for broader social concepts. The ultimate result of using nonpareils in combination with a small number of members from each estate is a clearly defined estate satire—the reader is well aware that Chaucer is dealing with elements of culture and social tradition rather than characters.

Type of music: Originally, it was assumed that this was only a narrative prologue to a full-fledged literary work known as the "Canterbury Tales," which Chaucer completely intended to compose as stated in Harry Bailey's dialogue. Scholars have started to regard the "General Prologue" as a piece of art regarded as a "estates parody" since the 1970s (see Jill Mann below). The "estates" were the social classes (nobility, clergy, and commoners), "those who reside in them." "Those who protect all," "those who pray for all," and "those who feed all" were the "estates," or social distinctions (nobility, clergy, and commoners). The estates satire compiles a list of well-known personality types from all three estates, along with concrete examples of their common flaws and virtues. This prologue was also inspired by the dramatic monologue. It bears a strong resemblance to parts of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Sercambi's *Nouvelle*, but there is no proof that C knew the first, and the second was written after C's death. Since the GP appears in both manuscript fragments and full tale sets, and because it always starts the KT-MT-RT-C Frag series, it's a good place to start.

The GP's relevance to Chaucer's overall scheme of a tale-cycle appears to link it "organically" to the "tales of Canterbury" as a whole work, as it appears in both manuscript fragments and full tale collections, and as it often begins the KT-MT-RT-CFrag series (often called "Fragment 1" and constantly line-numbered by critics). The prologue is made up of rhyming couplets, mainly in four-stress lines but with a little regularised iambic tetrameter thrown in for good measure. It is often cited as a masterwork of simple colloquial dialogue combined with sophisticated poetic effects (metaphor, metonymy, internal rhyme and assonance, and artful dramatic revelations).

The GP is often found with the other Fragment 1 members, the Knight's Miller's and Reeve's stories, and the Cook's fragmentary storey. Its initial location in every manuscript clearly expresses Chaucer's intention, so it's tempting to use the pilgrim portraits as a sort of interpretive "key" to unlock the intentions of the stories they tell. C. David Benson (1986) criticised this "dramatistic" reading of the GP as a universal prologue to all stories, and critics have been wary of claiming tale-portrait and tale connection without proving its plausibility since then. However, if you read carefully, you can notice potential inconsistencies between the parts.

However, if you read carefully, you can notice potential inconsistencies between the GP portraits and the stories. In the GP, the Monk, for example, is a forthright and lusty man, but by the time he tells his tale, he has painted himself as a gloomy man whose "cell" is filled with "histories" of great men's collapse. This isn't an unlikely correlation, but Benson's criticism of simplistic comparisons to the GP personae forces us to investigate it more closely. (Does he read in the hopes that his elder brother's ostensibly imminent "fall" would free him from his monastic obligations?) The GP suggests that the Wife of Bath's opulent lifestyle, which includes her penchant for pilgrimages, is due to her wealth.

The GP suggests that the Wife of Bath's opulent lifestyle, which includes her love of pilgrimages, is due to her lace-making skills. Her own prologue, on the other hand, never mentions the art, instead claiming that she married her money. These issues might be the product of Chaucer revising his characters but never publishing a single final revision, or they could be nothing at all—perhaps the Wife's money comes from both sources, but the one she's most proud of in this context is her exploitation of husbands ("take that, you male pilgrims who could question my being her and my pride in it!").

The narrator's attitude toward certain pilgrims is openly sarcastic, while his attitude toward others is honestly ambiguous (e.g., the Pardoner and Monk, vs. the Shipman or Man of Law). Readers must maintain scepticism about everything he says here, in the prologues, or in the epilogues. Take

the time to compare that to what appears probable in the circumstances and what he has said previously. There aren't many manuscript variants that are significant enough to create interpretive "roadblocks" or dilemmas. Scribal variations make the Prioress's oath by "Sainte Loy" (St. Elegendius) and the number of priests who accompany the nuns unclear (see RC 803-4).

If the Nuns' Priest (who tells the beast fable) is the third of three priests, the former version may mean she swears no oaths at all, and the crux in the latter case may be solved if the Nuns' Priest (who tells the beast fable) is the third of three priests (instead of one plus three more, which messes up the pilgrim count).

Characters: Chaucer-the-pilgrim (narrator), twenty-eight other pilgrims (lower nobility, clergy, and laity), and a Host of the Tabard Inn ("Harry Bailey," as identified in the prologue of the Cook's Fragment at I.4358). The high nobility (earls, dukes, duchesses, princes, kings, and queens) are, however, conspicuously absent.

What is the explanation for this? The guildsmen, despite being presented near the end of the procession, will not say any stories. Why is it that this influential community isn't represented in the stories?

In conclusion: The coming of Spring is described as a "naturingang," or "nature-beginning," in many Provençal, Italian, and German courtly romances and lyrics (possibly derived from Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*). The narrator describes why he is at the Tabard Inn outside of London, where he is waiting to begin a pilgrimage to St. Thomas a Becket's shrine in gratitude for his support during his illness. The Pilgrims are then presented in groups, with explanations of their "condicioun" or moral/emotional nature, "whiche they were" by profession, "of what degree" or estate of nobility or villainy, and "in what array that they were inne,"

The narrator of Chaucer's tales often begs to be excused for telling tales that might offend for four reasons: those who repeat others' tales must speak the words as nearly as they were said; those who repeat others' tales must speak the words as nearly as they were said; those who repeat others' tales must speak the words as nearly as they were said; and those who repeat others' tales must speak the words

"moot telle his tale untrewre,

Or feynethyng, or fyndewordesnewe" (735-6);

In the gospels, Christ speaks boldly; Plato says that words must be "cousins to the deed"; and C-the-pilgrim is a moron ("My wit is short," 746). This scene has received a lot of positive reviews from critics.

Then "Oure Hooste" suggests playing a game of telling stories to pass the time. On the way to Canterbury, all pilgrims must tell two stories, and on the way back, they must tell two more (a potential 116 tales). The winner will be the teller whose storey is deemed "Tales of best sentence and moost solaas" (798) by Harry Bailey, OH, or most wise and pleasing. This dual measure of storey quality is not unique to Chaucer, but it sets a possible target for all storytellers.

The winner will receive a supper at the Tabard, and poor sports will be paid all of the pilgrims' expenses on the journey. The game allows Chaucer to experiment with a society created by the governed's mutual consent and ruled by a man whose constitution is laid out for them to explore (vs. the feudal system which depends for its legitimacy on "timeless" precedent). The Host suggests that they draw straws for the first storey, with the highest status pilgrim winning (surprise!).

Issues of Interpretation:

- 1) Chaucer's narrator establishes a cross-section of English society, but he excludes the high nobility, who are often the subjects of romances, one of the most common genres of the mediaeval era. Why will there be no kings, queens, dukes, or earls (or their ladies) on this pilgrimage, considering the fact that the stories include characters who are kings, queens, and so on?
- 2) What impact does the game's development have on the social hierarchy that Chaucer the Pilgrim and Oure Hooste (the game's designer) are so concerned to preserve? The tale-telling game has what kind of social structure?
- 3) Who is riding with whom, and what does this imply? Who will guide the pilgrims and who will be the last to ride? This is key to comprehending the "Miller's Tale Prologue." What modern social habits should "riding with" someone be compared to? What does this have to do with "The Battle of Maldon"?
- 4) The "pilgrim portraits" paint a vivid and succinct picture of the pilgrims who throng the Tabard Inn the night before the pilgrimage. Chaucer-the-Narrator explains each person's "condition," or socioeconomic situation (status and wealth within their social group), the social group to which they belonged (usually employment), and their "degree" (whether they were nobles [Knight, Squire,

and by birth, probably the Monk and Prioress], gentlemen and -women [Man of Law, Franklin, Doctor? ], or other).

Their "array," or clothing and other implements or jewellery they wear, are the most subtle and important indicators of status and wealth. Look for fourteenth-century prices of clothing and other items listed in the portraits to get a sense of their socioeconomic differences and how they could affect their relationships.

5) The entire "tales of Canterbury" act more like a musician's play-list than a written work of literature in the modern sense, since they were created as ensembles for oral presentation. While Chaucer may have had an evolving sense of their overall shape as he wrote them (probably between 1385 and 1400), scholars do not believe he left them unfinished.

Though Chaucer may have had an evolving sense of their overall shape as he wrote them (probably between 1385 and 1400), scholars do not believe he left detailed instructions on how to order the tales. Some groups of stories, on the other hand, seem to be "movable," while others seem to have been swapped ("Melibee," as told by Chaucer in several versions, may have been the Man of Law's original storey, and the Shipman's fabliau may have originally been the Wife of Bath's tale).

Benson believes that the Canterbury Tales' sheer diversity of genres and modes is part of Chaucer's deliberate appeal to a mediaeval aesthetic of exuberant variety, a selection of tale forms.

Chaucer's pre-modern appeal to a mediaeval aesthetic of exuberant variety, a set of tale styles that would establish him as a great artist. The "dramatic" reading of tales as part of an ongoing drama in which tellers introduced in the General Prologue carried out a programme of tale-telling to form alliances and strike enemies in the remaining tales, prologues, and endlinks was a point of contention in this argument. Many of the prologues and endlinks had been written by proof scribes, which enhanced the plausibility of Benson's interpretation. In pursuit of literary renown, other mediaeval artists published a similarly diverse selection of works.

For example, the genre and style of John Gower's three main works (also written in three languages) are similarly diverse. Benson's criticism served primarily to dispel any expectation that we might interpret a clear relationship between GP pilgrim portraits and the tales attributed to the teller. Those claims must now be defended, even though they are not unpersuasive in certain situations.

## Keywords/Glossary

**Argus . . . pull his beard** a mythological giant with a hundred eyes whose duty was to guard a mortal (Io) whom Zeus loved. By Chaucer's time the word referred to any observant, vigilant person or guardian.

**Three Misfortunes, Things Three** reference to Proverbs xxx, 21-23.

**quoniam** a vulgar designation for the female pudendum, or vulva.

**Venerien . . . Marcien** astrological terms.

**Ecclesiasticus, Ecclesiaste** See xxv: 29.

**Mark can tell** The miracle of the loaves and fishes and the barley bread is actually John, not Mark (see John VI:9), but this is a slight error for a woman of the Middle Ages to make.

**Ptolemy . . . almagest** Ptolemy was a second century a.d. astronomer whose chief work was the *Almagest*. The Wife of Bath's quote shows that she is familiar with such a famous person.

**Dunmow Fliatah** a prize awarded to the married couple in Essex who had no quarrels, no regrets, and, if the opportunity presented itself, would remarry each other. The Wife is still establishing the right of more than one marriage.

**Valerie and Theofraste** a work attributed to Walter Map, a minor satirist who disparaged marriage. All the writers the Wife of Bath quotes have written something either antifeminist, satiric, or unpleasant about marriage.

**Valerius, Tullius, Boethius, Seneca** writers who espoused that gentility comes from within and not from outward appearances.

**"Five husbands . . . at the church door"** In Chaucer's time, a wedding was performed at the church door and not inside the church or chapel.

**Self-Assessment**

1. 'The Knight's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 4
  
2. 'The Miller's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 4
  
3. 'The Reeve's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 4
  
4. 'The Cook's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 4
  
5. 'The Man of Law's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 5
  
6. 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 6
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 4
  
7. 'The Friar's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 7
  - C. 3
  - D. 4
  
8. 'The Summoner's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
  - A. 1
  - B. 2

C. 8

D. 4

9. 'The Clerk's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 9

B. 10

C. 11

D. 12

10. 'The Merchant's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 9

B. 10

C. 11

D. 12

11. 'The Squire's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 9

B. 10

C. 11

D. 12

12. 'The Franklin's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 9

B. 10

C. 11

D. 12

13. 'The Second Nun's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 13

B. 14

C. 15

D. 16

14. 'The Yeoman's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 13

B. 14

C. 15

D. 16

15. 'The Physician's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

A. 13

B. 14

C. 15

D. 16



### Answer for Self Assessment

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

### Review Questions

1. In his writings from the French time, how much was Chaucer influenced by French literature?
2. How successful is Chaucer's use of dream forms in *The Parliament of Fowles* and *The House of Fame*?
3. Discuss Chaucer's ability to distinguish characters in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Consider the characters of *Troilus* and *Criseyde* in particular.
4. What is Chaucer's obsession with French poets based on?
5. Write a brief note about *The Romance of the Rose*.
6. What is the meaning of the word "elegy" in *The Book of the Duchesse*?
7. *The Legend of Good Women* by Geoffrey Chaucer is considered a penance. Do you agree with me? Justify your behaviour.
8. In the *Monk's Story*, can you find any personal references to Chaucer's life?
9. In *The Book of the Duchesse*, whose death is commemorated?
10. What is Chaucer's main source for *Troilus and Criseyde*?
11. What can you tell me about Chaucer's literary periods? Name the most important work from the previous century.



### Further/Suggested Readings

- Kirby, Thomas A. "The General Prologue" in Beryl Rowland Ed. *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, Rev. Ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979. (A decent overview, though dated, like all from this now sadly aged volume, with a fine bibliography through 1978.)
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- – "'Experience woot well it is noght so': Marriage and the Pursuit of Happiness in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." In *The Wife of Bath: Geoffrey Chaucer, 133-54*. Edited by Peter G. Beidler. Boston and New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996.
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- Sheehan, Micheal M. *Marriage, Family and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies*. Edited by James K. Farge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
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- Saint Jerome, from *The Epistle Against Jovinian in Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*, 415-36. Edited by Robert P. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Theophrastus, from the *Golden Book on Marriage in The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, 357-59. Edited by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2005.

## Unit03: Geoffrey Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales-Prologue to Tales and The Tale of Wife of Bath

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### Objective

- To focus Chaucer's landmark work, *The Canterbury Tales*
- To discuss the various aspects and the social background which was a significant influence that went into the composition of this particular work along with other literary influences.
- To discuss the *General Prologue* which is an important part of the *Tales* and the various groups of pilgrims.
- To highlight Chaucer's brilliance in the art of characterization with the employment of irony and humour.

### Introduction

In the year 1340, Geoffrey Chaucer was born (in the reign of Edward III). He died on October 25, 1400, a year after Henry IV's accession and the death of Richard II, whose reign, which began in 1377, coincides with the poet's life. Chaucer, the son of a wealthy wine merchant, began his career as a courtier in the household of Prince Lionel (later Duke of Clarence) in 1357. (a kind of civil servant and diplomat). He served as a page to John of Gaunt, among others, and saw military service for a short time.

When Chaucer was kidnapped in the Ardennes in 1360, he was quickly ransomed, partially by the king as a measure of his importance to the state. Chaucer rose through the ranks to become a Justice of the Peace for Kent and a Knight of the Shire in 1386. John of Gaunt's absence in Spain disrupted Chaucer's career in this year, but when Gaunt returned in 1389, Chaucer was elevated to a high position once more. The Black Death, the Peasants' Revolt (1381, a rebellion against the initial Poll Tax), and the deposition of Richard II all happened during Chaucer's lifetime. Despite the turmoil of the times, as seen (retrospectively) in Shakespeare's history plays, Chaucer seems to have had a long and prosperous career. He was the first poet to be buried in the area of Westminster Abbey that is now known as Poets' Corner.

### 3.1 Subject Matter

While much excellent literature was written in English prior to the Norman Conquest, the language's structure (Old English, also known as Anglo-Saxon) makes it unfamiliar to modern readers, as do the literary styles. Chaucer is the first notable author to create significant works in a dialect of English that is recognisable as the language we speak and write today. Many readers still find Chaucer's English challenging to read without assistance, but beyond the surface difficulties, there is much that is available to the modern student. Most critics consider Chaucer to be the most important English writer before Shakespeare, and one of the few English-speaking writers whose merits are undeniable: he is dubbed the "Father of English Literature" for these reasons.

Chaucer was a well-educated man who was well-versed in Latin, French, and Italian. Both his subjects and his writing methods were inspired by his reading. Starting with *The Book of the*

Duchess and *The Romance of the Rose*, he wrote a number of long poetic works (a part translation of an allegorical French poem). *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The House of Fame*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *The Legend of Good Women* are among his later works. Chaucer wrote a prose version of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in addition to several short poems.

*The Canterbury Tales* is without a doubt Chaucer's most popular work. It was started in the 1380s but never finished, and modern versions are the product of scholars attempting to make the least bad arrangement of its various completed pieces. These sections are referred to as "Fragments" by editors, but they are very long. Chaucer weaves a series of tales into a concise account of a visit to Canterbury. These "tales" are mainly narratives written in verse (except for Chaucer's own *Melibeus* and *The Parson's Tale*, which are written in prose). While each tale is a coherent and skilled illustration of the storyteller's craft in and of itself, Chaucer has contrived them in ways that add to our enjoyment: for example, each tale illustrates what we read about the teller's character elsewhere (in the General Prologue or in the prologues or linking narratives written for the individual tales).

*The Knight's Tale* (a worthy tale, eloquently told by a speaker of the highest social class) is accompanied by the much shorter, bawdy *Miller's Tale* (a worthy tale, eloquently told by a speaker of the highest social class) to create effects of comparison. We are led to believe that this "low" narrative is inferior to the *Knight's* in every way, but the story-telling is masterful in its wit and economy: Chaucer demonstrates right away that there are many ways to tell a story, and that style should be appropriate to the subject. Chaucer himself appears as a character in his own right, not only as a recorder of the events of the journey and the stories he learned. He makes erroneous judgments about the stories' accuracy, and (in a deft touch) tells his own first attempted tale (*Sir Topaz*) so boringly that he is stopped and forced to try again with his tale of *Melibeus*.

### Summary

The General Prologue to the *Tales* explains how Chaucer came to be riding from London to Canterbury with a group of pilgrims one April day, each of whom he vividly portrays for us. As they leave their inn (*The Tabard* in Southwark), their "Host" (Harry Bailly, the innkeeper, who today acts more as a messenger or tour guide) suggests that each pilgrim say two stories on the way out and back (four in all). On their return to London, the best storyteller (as determined by the Host) will be awarded a meal, which will be paid for by the rest of the group. Because of his social status, the Host invites the *Knight* to start the game.

The Host invites the *Monk* to pursue the *Knight's* (very long and dignified) story, but the drunken *Miller* refuses, insisting on speaking first: from this point on, any notion of choosing the tellers of the tales by (descending) social status is forgotten. Unfortunately, although the fragments indicate how the stories could be grouped in a specific section of the novel, the fragments' overall sequence is unknown. Furthermore, each teller only has one complete story (Chaucer has a second incomplete story), and there is nothing at the end to correspond to the General Prologue. Despite these omissions, the work is extremely amusing in its current state.

*The Wife's* is the sixth tale (of twenty-four, including two by Chaucer) in Robinson's OUP edition of the tales, although Coghill positions it fourteenth in his modern version. Her story (from what scholars refer to as Fragment III, which contains Group D of the tales) comes before the *Friar's* and the *Summoner's* in both cases. She is following the *Cook* in Robinson and the *Pardoner* in Coghill. Her story is the first of a series of seven (*Wife*, *Friar*, *Summoner*, *Clerk*, *Merchant*, *Squire*, *Franklin*) known as the "Marriage Party," since they all deal with the topic of authority (where it resides and how it is exercised) in married life.

*The Wife's* prologue is unique in that it is longer than her tale, and it is by far the longest prologue Chaucer ever gives to any storyteller (only the *Pardoner* comes remotely near her for length). The prologue is generally an instructive introduction to the tale in most tales; here, however, the tale is more like a sequel to the prologue, which is of greater interest to the *Wife's* hearers and us, modern readers. *The Wife*, like the *Pardoner*, tells us a lot about herself, but her account is almost a complete autobiography; it reads like a combination of confession and attempted self-justification, similar to the *Pardoner's* prologue.

*The Wife* speaks explicitly from her own marital experience, while her story serves as a kind of model example for her theories. She married three wealthy older husbands when she was young; her fourth husband, who was similar in age to her, defied all of her attempts to dominate him. But it was her fifth husband with whom she had the most strife, though she eventually triumphed. She's been widowed five times and is ready to marry again. She can now be more selective in choosing a new mate, having inherited the riches of her numerous husbands. At every turn, her account of her own life rings real. In some ways, it's fitting that her story takes place in the gilded age of King Arthur.

One of the most vivid sketches in the General Prologue is this one. The Wife's physical appearance, dress, way of life, and character are all revealed, while Chaucer drops hints that he plans to expand on later in the storey. Although the portrait from the General Prologue is typically included in editions of the Wife's prologue and storey, the portrait will be separated from the Wife's speaking by at least (as in Robinson's edition) five complete stories, with prologues and connecting narratives, in the work as Chaucer intended it to be in its finished state. As a result, although some specifics are stated in the portrait, they are not clarified until much later. The Wife's deafness is the most critical of these information (See line 668 of her prologue for more information). Her "gath-tothed" presence was, and still is, interpreted as a sign of sexual vigour.

The Wife isn't particularly attractive, but she is strong and vivacious. Her garish outfits and intricate headdresses ("coverchiefs") are garish rather than elegant: her hat is as wide as a "bokeler" (a buckler or small shield). Her clothes are of high quality "fyn scarlet reed," and her shoes are "moiste and newe," with the effect of advertising herself and her riches rather than attempting uncharacteristic finesse.

Apart from "other compaignye in youthe," we're told she's had five partners, which is a surprise about which we'd like to learn more. This, of course, means she has been widowed five times (no divorce for women in 14th century England). This is shocking, but it becomes less so as we hear (in her prologue) that three of the husbands were elderly. Her habit of going on pilgrimages gives the impression that she is a religious woman, but her true motivations are a love of adventure and the social opportunities that these trips provide. The majority of pilgrims are men, as they are in this case (and the few other women present are nuns). One of them may be the next husband she's looking for.

### Definition

The definition concludes with a description of her social abilities, especially her knowledge of "love remedies," a "art" that she clearly understands. Let's take a look at the poem line by line:

#### 857-918:

The Wife's tale is set during King Arthur's reign, when England was awash in fairies, and she ironically praises holy men like the friar for driving them out. The story's "hero" is a young knight who was sentenced to death for rape but was spared at the request of Arthur's queen. If he can figure out what women want the most in a year, his life will be spared. The knight is troubled, so he doesn't have much of a choice.

#### 919-982:

The Wife takes a detour to discuss some of the things women are thought to like the most. One of these theories is that women want to be seen as discreet. This is obviously not the answer to the knight's question, but the Wife goes on to tell a storey about Midas' ears from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*!

#### 982-1072:

The Wife returns to her tale, telling how the knight has been unable to find the response he seeks until he sees a group of (24) dancers by a forest on the day he must return home. They're fairies, and when he gets close enough, they all vanish, leaving an unsightly old woman sitting on the grass. He tells her about his problems, and she agrees to give him the answer to the queen's question in exchange for his giving her everything she wants, which he promises to do. She whispers the answer into his ear (a naive touch, given that no one is around to hear what she says, but the device explains the Wife's decision to keep the answer hidden from her audience). The knight responds in front of the queen and the ladies of the court on the appointed day: what women most crave is authority over their husbands. When the old woman tells the knight of his promise and insists that he marry her, everyone agrees that he has replied correctly and deserves to live. He is taken aback, but he has no choice but to comply with her order.

#### 1073-1264:

The knight marries the old woman "privately" (quietly, as we say today), but his wife rebukes him for his lack of enthusiasm when she comes to bed. He responds by labelling her as unattractive, elderly, and of low birth. She retorts that she might fix all of this in three days, but not until she chastises him for his attitude.

She explains (improbably) that virtue is not a matter of riches but of character, citing Dante, Valerius, Seneca, Boethius, Juvenal, and the scriptures; she speaks more briefly of her age (which should give him respect) and ugliness (which should save him from cuckoldry).

She offers her husband a choice: she can stay old and hideous while remaining a model wife, or she can stay young and attractive while he must take chances with suitors. The knight has clearly learned his lesson, as he wisely encourages her to make her own decision. She promises him that now that he has given her the throne, she will be obedient and as beautiful as any queen or empress in the world by morning.

She tells him to "cast up the curtain" to see how much she has improved. The knight is overjoyed, and the couple has a happy life together. The Wife of Bath concludes with a double prayer: first, that God send meek, young, and virile husbands to women, and second, that cantankerous and niggardly husbands succumb to the plague (no empty threat at the time when she speaks).

You should understand and be able to refer (briefly) to the circumstances under which Chaucer depicts the tales being told; the role of Harry Bailly (the Host); some of the tales in outline and their relation to the teller; and the character, social status, and values of the teller of the story.

The stories, taken together, paint a complete picture of Chaucer's life: not only the daily world of craftsmen and traders, but also the creative world of thought, religious and philosophical ideas. The image is detailed and consistent, but not uniform: it is as diverse as humanity, of whom Chaucer provides us with as representative a sample as we might hope for. There are a variety of views, just as in a well-made play, and the overall work has the consistency of good drama.

Let us look at the Prologue's Connection to the Tale:

### **The reality and the fiction**

We encounter numerous characters who present their "own" fictions inside Chaucer's imaginary world of Canterbury pilgrims. In each scenario, the story reflects the teller in some way, and vice versa. While the pilgrims are first depicted in set pieces in the General Prologue, we learn more about them as characters share their stories, express their thoughts, and exchange insults. The Wife's prologue is by far the longest in the entire work (the Pardoner and the Canon's Yeoman are the only other pilgrims who have lengthy prologues). She shows herself more thoroughly than any other pilgrim in terms of the amount of what she says, but its muddled nature and lack of clarity make it difficult to understand.

Furthermore, her account shows a contradiction between what we believe to be true and what she wants her audience to think of her. Her ability to exercise sovereignty leads her to assert that she has it more thoroughly than the proof she lets slip supports.

Whereas most characters in Chaucer's tales have only one opening to articulate their point of view, the Wife has two: first, her claim based on real-life experience, and then in the model case in her novel. One provides persuasive evidence, while the other provides a simple fictional demonstration - the Wife's argument is made more forcefully by combining autobiography and fiction than by either alone.

### **The Prologue's point of view**

The Wife's reported goal is to discuss marital discord in general. Her true obsession is with "maistrie." Her woes have been caused by her struggle for this, particularly in her fourth and fifth marriages. In terms of war, she portrays all five. Whether or not the effort to achieve mastery succeeds, the division of sovereignty is not tolerated.

The first three marriages are unbalanced: the sharp-tongued, lustful, and vivacious woman, whose fortune is not so much her face as her energy and sexual prowess, wears out the elderly, rich, yet frail men (referred to collectively as "he"). Her fourth husband is a better fit for the Wife's now-not-so-young age: he's about her age, has a mistress, and doesn't seem to mind the Wife's flirtations.

The (unexplained) death of the fourth husband results in a reversal of the previous trend, as the Wife, now well-off, finds a man half her age to share the marital bed. In his misogynist outbursts, Jankin wields weapons of learning. The Wife appears to gain sovereignty here because she has more stamina: Jankin, conceding "maistrie," recognises her unwavering resolve and reveals a previously hidden wish for a quiet life. Jankin's yielding, according to the Wife, prompted her to treat him well; having "bought" a young husband, her ego demands that he know his position, and spoiling him is a demonstration of her superior status. However, she did not show the same generosity to the husbands who had "bought" her in previous marriages.

### **The Tale's central argument**

The Prologue is based on personal experience, but this is unique and not universal. The Wife gives the Tale a more universal application by setting it in the legendary golden age of King Arthur. The pagan environment reveals facts that are not taught by religion but are discovered in human nature's workings. The Arthurian world is not as it is, nor what it might have been or could have been - a better world than the one we live in now. Women renewing their youth in old age can

seem unlikely, but granting women autonomy is clearly possible - the ideal can be realised in part. Husbands who are "angry nigardes of dispense" are to blame if this does not happen.

The tale's propriety or appropriateness

Scholars have speculated that Chaucer originally intended the Shipman's Tale to be told by the Wife. The story of the knight and the vile lady is fitting in some ways but not in others. It's perfect for the Wife because it makes a case for women's autonomy. Although some details (such as the characters and setting) are sparse, other details recall the Prologue but are out of place in a romantic fantasy, such as the storey of Midas' ears (in which the Wife mixes mythologies) and the digression on "gentillesse," in which the Wife quotes Dante (not born in the supposed time of King Arthur; the Wife of Bath herself might be expected to quote this authority, but not the Fairy Wife of her Tale). Furthermore, the "gentillesse" issue is a contentious one. Furthermore, the controversy about "gentillesse" serves as a diversion from the main topic of "maistrie."

Chaucer doubtless recognises the Wife's flaws as narrator: the Pilgrims have had many excellent examples of various kinds before this, and many more will follow. The exceptions that show the rule are part of the work's talent and humour - one of Chaucer's two tales (the pilgrim, supposedly reporting the others' tales) is so boring that he has to abandon it and pursue another. In a narrator who is so enamoured with the real world, the fairy tale setting is unexpected. The account of "gentillesse" reminds us of the Wife's irrelevance, but this metaphysical statement does not seem authentic - her Prologue gives us no reason to think she values "gentillesse" at all.

It's possible that the Fairy Wife reflects what the Wife of Bath thinks she will become as she grows older ("the flour is gone"), while the renewal of youth is her wishful thinking. In the "faery" world, the transformation of the Wife of Bath's behaviour towards Jankin is symbolically represented as the transformation of external appearance.

As a result, the Tale becomes a reworking of the Prologue's final section, in which the husband grants his wife sovereignty and marital bliss ensues, "unto hir lives ende": unfortunately for Jankin, this came far too soon. It's also possible that we hear the real Wife of Bath in the Tale's (apparently improvised) opening lines, in which she praises friars' activities - ironically, as the ending demonstrates: "And he ne wel doon hem but dishonour."

### **Bath's Wife: A Character**

The Wife's character is revealed in two respects in the Tale's Prologue: first, we have her own account of the kind of person she has been and is; second, we see this substantiated by the manner in which she delivers her account of her past exploits. The Wife's account of herself tends to be entirely truthful, as she makes no effort to hide misdeeds and flaws that she enjoys recalling and hopes would amuse her listeners.

Whether or not we accept the astrological effect, the Wife's dominant characteristics are the two facets of her personality that she attributes to the zodiac. She tells her audience:

My ascendant was Taur, with Mars therinne, giving Venus "likerousnesse" and Mars "sturdy hardinesse," respectively. Venus has made her incapable of withdrawing (or, in this case, withholding) her "chambre of Venus from a healthy felawe." However, the less clearly feminine "mark" of Mars goes along with this "feminine" weakness. She has it both literally and figuratively (in the blemishes on her face and in "another privee place") and metaphorically, in the strength of character that pushes her to pursue supremacy over all of her husbands, most notably in her account of her battle with Jankin in her own novels.

The latter of these two characteristics, since it is a more forceful trait (there is a contrast between the Wife's avowed laxity in sexual relations and her inability to yield in any other field of a relationship with a man), hits the reader more forcefully. We can also see how quickly the Wife gains the whip hand by the way she delivers her prologue and silences interruptions (as the Friar finds out to his cost when the Wife begins her tale).

The Wife has easily oppressed her elderly husbands in her first three marriages, amusingly blaming them for their allegedly unfair criticisms (which the Wife later admits is entirely justified). The Wife has had more trouble gaining ascendancy with the fourth husband, who seems to have taken a more accommodating mate. To do so, she has resorted to the pretence (if it is pretence) of getting lovers, making him "of the same wode a croce" and frying him "in his owenegrece." Though she claims (using a third metaphor) that she made his shoe pinch in the end, it is unclear if she ever gained mastery over this husband.

Jankin has had an even more bitter battle, provoked by the Wife's stubbornness to gross sexism and persuaded by a compendium of classic examples of female evil. But, in the end, she triumphs over his bookish bigotry by cunning. It seems that tenacity, rather than wiliness, has played a role in this event. Jankin has given in to the inevitable and found, much to his delight, that the Wife has not abused her control over him, but has been a model of love and loyalty.

The Wife's immense vitality can be seen in both her sexual energy and her "sturdy hardiness." This seems to be almost inversely proportional to the number of husbands she has eaten, even as she welcomes

"thesixte, whan that ever he shall."

This vigour is also evident in her recounting of the Prologue. The Wife's Prologue is twice as long as her Story, while for the other pilgrims it serves as a more or less brief introduction to the stories. It could have been much longer, as the Wife briefly mentions things she could have told in greater detail. The Prologue's disorganised existence, which jumps from philosophical argument to personal reminiscence, and then back to the Wife's own evaluation of her own and others' characters, suggests that the Wife is eager to tell her audience everything at once, and is afraid of leaving any part of her storey untold for too long.

The Wife's forthrightness warrants further comment: she freely shares intimate details of her personal life, as shown by the numerous remarks on her "quoniam" or "chambre of Venus." This, we hear, is the best; embellished with "Martes mark"; and not to be withheld from

"any good felawe"

and the lamp, at which her husband does not object to any man lighting his candle (since his own light - i.e. enjoyment - is not diminished). She is forthright in sharing her earthly perspective on religious festivals and pilgrimages. This is evident in her account of her courtship of Jankin, but she openly admits it to a group of people, many of whom are going to Canterbury out of sincere loyalty, while others are at least pretending to be. (Though the Pardoner tells of his greedy manipulation of simple people to prove how clever and eloquent he is, and how dumb those whom he dupes are, we might compare her to her.)

The Wife appears to have had no secrets from her "gossib" in her fourth marriage (and, by implication, all of them). Alisoun "biwreyed" her "conseil everything" to her, in small and large matters, to the point that her husband reprimanded himself for ever confiding in her. Her candour, however, has a limit: she has apparently never told her husbands about the tricks she has used to gain control over them, though she now frankly reveals to her audience how she and other astute housewives have done so. It's worth noting that, despite the fact that she addresses herself to

"wise wives, that kanunderstonde" (line 225),

it's really only the men in her audience who can profit from her revelations because there are only two other women in the business, according to the General Prologue (the Prioress and the Second Nun). And they are unable to court because of their circumstances.

In her approach to worldly gratification, her straightforward speech, her lack of delicate euphemism in sexual or lavatorial situations, and her vivid use of metaphor, the Wife demonstrates that she is down-to-earth and free of affectation. Most of this seems to be proverbial (as in line 269's contrast of a simple woman to a "grey goose") or commonplace ("drunken as a mouse", l. 246, though in his Tale the more deliberately eloquent Knight also uses this phrase).

Her naturalness in speech could indicate a lack of education. We could cite the Wife's preference for worldly over intellectual pleasures - of love-making over Jankin's dry scholarship; of gossiping with Alisoun over attending to the finer points of religious ritual; we could cite the Prologue's lack of order, switching from subject to subject, interrupting herself unnecessarily, as when she begins to describe the Wife. She also seems to lose her thread on occasion, returning to a chosen subject with the expression "I seye" (as I was saying), and she believes she has lost the thread of her tale on one occasion, when, by her own loose standard, she has not done anything (l. 585-6).

Despite this, there is strong evidence that the Wife is intelligent, well-educated, and capable of complex reasoning. This is true not only in daily matters, such as her deception of her husbands or her "Purveiaunce" (foresight) in selecting her spouses. Her initial rebuke to those who oppose marriage demonstrates that she is well-versed in the scriptures and the Fathers. She is particularly knowledgeable about the Pauline epistles, quoting often from the apostle's first letter to the Corinthians.

Without a doubt, Jankin's influence (though the Wife only mentions his reading of anti-feminist writings) and of the Wife's numerous pilgrimages, festivals, and other events. She has clearly gained knowledge from her learned companions as well as the eloquent sermons she would have read. While her points are not always entirely fair, they are no less so than those she rejects, such as the absurd conclusion taken from Christ's (one and only) presence at a wedding, in Cana, Galilee.

She cites a wide variety of authorities and argues fluently and passionately. She demonstrates her debate wisdom in the ease with which she manages interruptions, whether it's the Pardoner's crude yet compassionate encouragement or the unedifying quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner. Her responses are often suitable for the nature of the intrusion, and she repays the Friar several times for his arrogance as she begins her Story.

The Wife's use of irony in her Prologue demonstrates her wisdom, as she derives humour from the fact that she has achieved mastery over her husbands by taking the offensive and rebuking them for



their (legitimate) criticisms of her (As a result, they can ignore or have trouble demonstrating that their complaints - for which she complains - are justified, while hers are not!

Finally, we should note that, despite her insatiable appetite for pilgrimage, festival, and any other kind of ecclesiastical ceremony, the Wife's primary motivations for attending these events are not religious: she goes to see, to be seen, to flaunt her finery (as the General Prologue makes clear, she is doing on this pilgrimage), and to ensure that she is not like the mouse with just one hole to run to (l. 572-4), but keeps an eye out for worthy bachelors in the weather. Both of these are meant to be social gatherings.

She is not as religious as the genuinely pious (the Knight, the Parson), but she is better than those who put on a show of piety to gain praise, money, or both. That Chaucer should make such compelling reasons for marriage and against chastity (or even monogamy, in the mediaeval sense) for such as herself shows that the poet sympathises with the Wife's normal and optimistic vigour, who does not hesitate to make use of what she considers to be the strongest and most pleasurable of the Creator's gifts.

### Marriage in the Prologue of The Wife of Bath and Tale

The Wife of Bath expresses her views on marriage in both the Prologue and Tale; whether they are also Chaucer's is debatable: other pilgrims tell tales on marriage, but none can speak from such extensive personal experience as the Wife of Bath, whose experience is the subject of her lengthy and chaotic prologue. The vitality of Chaucer's portrait of the Wife, as well as the assurance he gives her in asserting the argument for wives' superiority over their husbands, suggest that he sympathises with, if not agrees with, her point of view.

So, what are the thoughts of the Wife of Bath? First, she claims, based on scripture and personal experience, that marriage is a good thing. (despite its difficulties, to which she immediately alludes) is not a negative thing, and that widowed people should marry again. Arguments against marriage (such as the absurd interpretation of John's account of the wedding at Cana) can be refuted, as the Wife demonstrates, by showing how Biblical doctrine is ambiguous in some places and supports polygamy in others (The Wife conveniently overlooks the fact that the above are all found in the Old Testament). She demonstrates how St. Paul claims only to warn his readers in I Corinthians and explicitly notes that this advice is not a binding commandment. Most places (conveniently avoiding the Old and New Testament distinctions)

The Wife cites Biblical precedent for polygamy, starting with the obscure Lamech, continuing with Abraham and Jacob, and reaching absurd proportions with Solomon, who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (though the Wife does not count them) (I Kings 11.3). The Wife refers to

"wivesmo than oon"

in a witty understatement. She claims that the Bible doesn't provide a clear answer on the subject. She acknowledges that married life may fall short of chastity perfection, but points out that those who demand virginity from women do not demand perfection in other areas such as giving away one's entire fortune (which Christ commanded the rich young ruler). She may be implicitly or obliquely implying that those who take holy orders and remain (or profess to be) chaste have no right to criticise her sexuality if they are not guilty of seeking money. Despite the fact that she recognises that marriage isn't flawless, the Wife insists that it is an honourable estate. She compares it to household wooden vessels (as opposed to the golden vessels that reflect chastity) that can be cleaned and used by the householder.

According to the Wife, sexual intercourse is an important aspect of married life: she believes that she "wol use" her "instrument/as frely as" her "makere hath it sente," and that her husband will have it "bothe eve and morwe." She claims to have "the beste quoniam mighte be" on the authority of her husbands, and admits that she can "noghtwithdrawe" her "chambre of Venus from a good felawe." She enjoys brags like these, and she enjoys recounting her requests to her first three husbands.

"Unnethemighte they the statutholde,"

she tells us. Her joy in pressuring them to perform their marital duties as much as possible seems to be inversely proportional to their ability to do so. Each of these three was obviously a "detour" and a "thrall," and the Wife admits that she felt no need to

"dolenger diligence/To winnehir love"

because she had already secured their material resources. The Wife is perfectly willing to use marriage to secure material wealth and elevate her social status: her first four husbands are all affluent men; by the time she marries the

"jolly clerk, Jankin,"

she has amassed enough wealth that she no longer needs to pursue material benefit from the liaison. Indeed, Jankin's marriage to her is similar to her previous marriages in that he accepts an older partner for financial gain.

The fact that the Wife has had four husbands before Jankin will mean (if probability is being observed by Chaucer) that the Wife has purposefully chosen men who are old enough to die soon - though the fourth husband's taking a mistress suggests that he was not yet in his dotage. The first three husbands may have succumbed to the Wife's insatiable sexual appetite. Jankin's premature death is more shocking (we don't know why) because he is a young man, but premature death was not uncommon in Chaucer's time. The Wife has no pride in the fact that she could use marriages to amass money. She is more proud of her ability to secure "tresor" and "estate," as well as her ability to persuade her husbands to buy her gifts and trinkets from fairs.

Since the Wife views marriage as a source of sexual gratification (or embarrassment of an old and inept partner) and material gain, she views it as a competitive endeavour: she is constantly looking for ways to earn points or outsmart her husband. In the Prologue, she lays out the ruses she's using to achieve this goal, also giving her audience an example of the kind of verbal attack her husbands have endured: complaint is a big part of her strategy here. She blames her husband for innocuous acts or minor infractions, as well as any allegations he might have made about her (even though such complaints are wholly justified by her actions). She secures as much independence for herself as possible by remaining on the offensive.

Most of this is brazenly cheeked, as shown by her accusation of her husband's (apparently fourth) "false suspicion" of Jankin, of whom she says

"I wol him noght, if thou were dead tomorwe,"

when, in truth, she woos Jankin before her husband's death, and spends his funeral with him (when he obliges her by dying) admiring Jankin's shapely legs, she marries her late husband's clerk as soon as possible.

Other strategies she used in her battles with her husbands include withholding sexual favours (line 315: "The oon thou shalt forgo"), though one assumes this was not directed at her first three husbands, who would have welcomed the respite; pretending to have lovers, making her fourth husband

"a croce of the same wood"

as he had made her in taking a mistress; and using her gossip, her niece or tyrant. The topic of the Wife's Tale and the object of her attempts to get the best of her husbands is a desire for total dominance - in the partnership, "soverinetee" or "maistrie" She does not regard marriage as a caring and equitable relationship, and she cannot stand being oppressed by her husband. Just one individual has the power to rule the roost:

Oon of us two mostebowen, doutedees

And sith a man is mooreresonable

Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable

Man should listen to woman because he is more receptive to reason. That it is possible (for someone like her) to do this has been shown in four of her five marriages (though with some difficulties in the fifth), though her efforts to repay her fourth husband for his infidelity indicate that, in his case, she met her match for the first time. The Wife of Bath produces the universal agreement of the women of Arthur's court with the Fairy Wife's response to the question,

"What do women most crave?"

in the Tale as proof that this desire is not unique to her.

Surprisingly, the Wife demonstrates this sovereignty of womb through her marriage to Jankin and the knight and his spouse in the Story. This supremacy of wives over husbands is desired not only by wives, but also by husbands. She informs her audience that she handled Jankin well after wearing him down, and that she was

"askinde/ As any wyf from Denmark unto Inde."

Her subsequent marriage to Jankin was blissful and admirable.

Whether Jankin, who had to burn his beloved novel, would have agreed with this decision is debatable, but there is no doubt that Jankin's recognition of his wife's sovereignty strengthened the marriage. The knight in the storey is more likely to learn: after persuading his wife of her wisdom, he lets her choose if she wants to stay ugly and faithful or become stunning, with all the risks that entails.

"Have I gete of yow maistrie?"

he asks after giving her the choice. and he agrees that she has, resulting in her becoming stunning, remaining faithful to him, and the two of them living "in parfit joye" for the rest of their lives.

The Wife of Bath does not imply that such drastic outcomes are possible today (so that rapists, condemned to death, will be excused of their crimes and gain wise and beautiful young wives).

After all, her tale is set in a bygone era when the land was teeming with fairies. Nonetheless, she suggests that giving wives autonomy is beneficial to all partners in a marriage. Of course, the fact that this assumption can be achieved by self-interest bias must remain a stumbling block.

### Keywords/Glossary

**"Five husbands . . . at the church door"** In Chaucer's time, a wedding was performed at the church door and not inside the church or chapel.

**Mark can tell** The miracle of the loaves and fishes and the barley bread is actually John, not Mark (see John VI:9), but this is a slight error for a woman of the Middle Ages to make.

**Ptolemy . . . almagest** Ptolemy was a second century a.d. astronomer whose chief work was the *Almagest*. The Wife of Bath's quote shows that she is familiar with such a famous person.

**Dunmow Fliatcah** a prize awarded to the married couple in Essex who had no quarrels, no regrets, and, if the opportunity presented itself, would remarry each other. The Wife is still establishing the right of more than one marriage.

**Argus . . . pull his beard** a mythological giant with a hundred eyes whose duty was to guard a mortal (Io) whom Zeus loved. By Chaucer's time the word referred to any observant, vigilant person or guardian.

**Three Misfortunes, Things Three** reference to Proverbs xxx, 21-23.

**quoniam** a vulgar designation for the female pudendum, or vulva.

**Venerien . . . Marcien** astrological terms.

**Ecclesiasticus, Ecclesiaste** See xxv: 29.

**Valerie and Theofraste** a work attributed to Walter Map, a minor satirist who disparaged marriage. All the writers the Wife of Bath quotes have written something either antifeminist, satiric, or unpleasant about marriage.

**Valerius, Tullius, Boethius, Seneca** writers who espoused that gentility comes from within and not from outward appearances.

### Self Assessment

1. 'The Pardoner's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

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

2. 'The Shipmen's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

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

3. 'The Prioress's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

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

4. 'The Tale of Sir Thopas' Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:

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

5. 'The Melibeus' Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
- A. 20
  - B. 21
  - C. 22
  - D. 23
6. 'The Monk's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
- A. 20
  - B. 21
  - C. 22
  - D. 23
7. 'The Nun Priest's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
- A. 20
  - B. 21
  - C. 22
  - D. 23
8. 'The Manciple's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
- A. 20
  - B. 21
  - C. 22
  - D. 23
9. 'The Parson's Tale' fall on which number in the sequence of the narration:
- A. 13
  - B. 14
  - C. 24
  - D. 16
10. At what age was the Wife of Bath first married?
- A. 12
  - B. 13
  - C. 14
  - D. 15
11. Name two arguments that the Wife uses in her defense of the married state.
- A. God would not have given humans sexual organs if He did not intend for them to be used
  - B. Many people have too much sexual energy for the celibate state
  - C. None is correct
  - D. Both are correct
12. What is the Wife's "philosophy" of marriage?
- A. The wife must control the marriage in all areas
  - B. The husband must control the marriage in all areas.
  - C. The children must control the marriage in all areas.

- D. The neighbor must control the marriage in all areas.
13. How has the Wife changed as she was aged?
- She is less attractive
  - She is less energetic
  - None is correct
  - Both are correct
14. In what way were her fourth and fifth husbands different from the first three?
- The first three were old and easy to control
  - The last two were young and tried to control her
  - None is correct
  - Both are correct
15. What ongoing argument begins in this prologue?
- The feud between the Friar and the Parson
  - The feud between the Friar and the Summoner
  - The feud between the Parson and the Summoner
  - The feud between the Friar and the Yeoman

### **Answer for Self Assessment**

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

### **Review Questions**

- When did the Wife of Bath marry for the first time?
- Identify two claims used by the Wife to defend the married state.
- What is the Wife's marital "philosophy"?
- Has the Wife's personality shifted as she's become older?
- How did her fourth and fifth husbands vary from her previous three?
- In this prologue, what ongoing debate begins?
- What kind of storey is told by the Wife?
- What is the young knight's crime for which he is being punished?
- Why is it appropriate that the Wife of Bath tells this storey?
- How does the story's conclusion fit with the Wife's philosophy?
- Do you think Chaucer portrays the Wife of Bath's character as a jumble of contradictions?
- What stylistic and tonal differences have you noticed between the Wife's Prologue and her Tale?
- To what degree is the Wife of Bath depicted as an anti-religious and amoral figure in her Prologue and Tale?

14. Where do you see the Wife's vivacity and buoyancy offset by other qualities in the Prologue and Tale?
15. "The Wife employs phrases to both show and conceal." When do you think she does any of these, and where do you think she does them?
16. "The Wife of Bath's Tale is a romantic contrast to her Prologue's realism." Talk about it.
17. Do you think Chaucer accurately describes the Wife of Bath in her Prologue as "garrulous but truthful," or do you think she reveals more than she intends?



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### Web Links

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## Unit 04: John Milton: Invocation to Book I and Book IX

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### Objectives

- Analyse the basic historical, intellectual and literary context needed to understand and appreciate Milton's poetry and thought.
- Develop a critical approach to understanding Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
- Assess the poem's relationship to Milton's wider thought and historical role.
- Evaluate the merits of some influential critical views of the poem.
- Understand the historical context in which Milton's ideas were articulated.
- Adapt the importance of the verse form and the role of heroism in epic poetry.
- Discuss the basis for the influential idea that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*.

### Introduction

The Civil War, which resulted from a power struggle between the King and the Parliament, shaped the entire period. When James I was granted the privilege of royalty by an act of Parliament, he began to ignore Parliament. The common people viewed Parliament as an agent acting in their best interests. It had a firm grip on the King's exercise of authority, which could have easily devolved into autocracy. The citizens were still upset due to the loss of their personal liberty, so James I's failure to comply with Parliament's demands came as a shock.

The common people were loyal to the King, but they also inherited the Saxon love of the personal liberty. James I and his son Charles I lacked Queen Elizabeth's versatility, as well as her foresight, and were unable to see the shifting spirit of the period. The emergence of the merchant class necessitated economic individualism, and a rigid Puritan morality arose from common people's disdain for the Renaissance, which they claimed had given rise to profanity and licentiousness.

This dispute between the King and the Parliament resulted in civil war, which culminated in the execution of Charles I in 1649 and lasted until 1660, when the monarchy was finally restored by the execution of Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell. The Elizabethan period's literary passion was nearly lost during this time period, which lasted from 1600 to 1660.

Puritanism stifled the development of literature by closing theatres, but it also put an end to the Renaissance's profanity and licentiousness. In John Milton's works, however, the spirit of humanism and Reformation zeal could still be found. Literature lost its liberty but recovered its reputation and seriousness as a result of the religious based existence of this period.

Puritanism sought to liberate citizens from tyrannical rulers' shackles and to instil morality, integrity, and truth in politics, which they had long considered lacking. They sought to liberate people from religious and political shackles by combining individual righteousness with civil and religious liberty. Puritanism began with these lofty values, but it was unable to maintain them for long.

Following Charles II's restoration to the throne, the Puritans were branded as a party hostile to all forms of entertainment and amusement. Drama, which had flourished during the Elizabethan era, began to decline during the Puritan period and was later revived under Charles II. The Age of Milton's literature was characterised by a spirit of diversion from earlier periods, which was particularly evident in John Milton's writings.

#### **4.1 Subject Matter**

John Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London, on December 9, 1608. Milton's family represents the tension between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism, just as the era does. Milton's paternal grandfather, a devout Roman Catholic, disinherited his son and Milton's father, John Milton, who became a Puritan while studying at Oxford. The elder John Milton settled in London and began working as a scrivener or notary. Milton's father was a scholar, a musician, and a literary admirer in addition to being a wealthy businessman and a radical Puritan.

The elder John Milton, as a rebellious thinker, was dissatisfied with the current educational system. So, in addition to formal schooling, John Milton's father hired a teacher to guide his son in the direction he desired. Milton's first tutor and guide was Thomas Young, an Essex Clergyman. When Thomas Young was fifteen, he was persecuted for his faith and went into voluntary exile. His father's efforts gave young John Milton a unique perspective on the world and sparked an insatiable curiosity in art, music, and literature.

Milton's upbringing and education had a significant impact on his personality, providing him with a broad awareness and analytical understanding of not only religious and political issues, but also literature, art, and music. Almost all of Milton's works show this. John Milton attended St. Paul's School as a boy. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Christ's College, Cambridge in 1629 and a Master of Arts degree in 1632. He studied Latin, Greek, Italian, French, Spanish, and Hebrew, among other languages.

Milton attended Christ's College for seven years. He started writing most of his Latin poetry at Christ's College, Cambridge. There he met Edward King, whose untimely death he lamented in his Lycidas elegy. The curriculum at St. Paul's School was based on Erasmus and Colet's Humanist values. Many Renaissance Humanist values were upheld in the curriculum.

Milton's rebellious spirit was evident at Christ's College after reading those Humanist values at St. Paul's School. The logical and analytical mind that Milton's childhood instructors and teachers at St. Paul School instilled in him disapproved of Christ's College's educational tool of trivial scholastic disputation. Milton, like Bacon, often criticised and contradicted authority with his peculiar educational ideals. His defiance of the authorities and his battle over the Cambridge curriculum culminated in his dismissal from the university for a short time. During his time of rustication, Milton wrote his first Latin Elegies while staying at his father's house in London.

Milton's parents wanted him to become a priest in the Church of England. However, as someone who believed that education could lead to mental emancipation, Milton refused to join the Church and expressed his desire to pursue his studies. Milton's decision was aided by his father's open mind and financial situation. He moved to his father's country home in Horton, a small village about seventeen miles from London, for the next six years and began his deep research. Milton used to stay up until midnight studying as a child.

Milton read widely and covered the vast fields of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, and English Literature as an adult in his uninterrupted seclusion. He also studied music (following in his father's footsteps), astronomy, mathematics, and theology at the same time. These six years laid the groundwork for Milton's future success as an artist and scholar. Milton believed in the development of the mind as a whole. He realised that reading alone would not be sufficient for his holistic growth.

As a result, he left London in May 1638 and travelled to Paris and Italy. In August of 1639, he returned to London after a fifteen-month journey. Milton's poetic development was nourished not only by his imaginative mind, but also by his extensive reading and scholarly approach. His thorough study, scholarly approach, and travel experience, combined with his imaginative mind, resulted in a masterpiece that was exquisite in nature. From 1640 onwards, he was a fervent supporter of the Puritans in their fight against the Royalists.

In 1643, he married Mary Powell, a young daughter of a Royalist who was several years Milton's junior. Mary Powell left Milton shortly after their marriage due to a dispute and did not return to him for the next two years, disproving Milton's belief in marriage as the ideal spiritual, intellectual, and physical companionship. During this time, Milton published numerous divorce pamphlets. In 1645, however, the two reconciled their differences.

Mary Powell died after seven years, leaving three daughters behind. In 1656, he married Katharine Woodcock a second time. She died the next year as well. Milton married Elizabeth Mynshull for the third time in 1663, several years after she died. Due to his blindness, he had to suffer a lot in his

later years. His artistic faculty, however, was unaffected by the darkness of his solitary life. During this time, he created some of his most important works. In 1674, he died.

## Summary

John Milton is without a doubt one of the most well-known poets in English literature, best known for the religious and classical themes that run through his works.

"Nature shaped Milton to be a great poet,"

Matthew Arnold writes in a poem about Milton's immense abilities as a poet. Milton, a Puritan-Classicalist, drew influence from Greek dramatists such as Sophocles, Latin poet Virgil, and, of course, Homer, who, like Milton, was blind and saw events through the mind's eye. Despite the fact that he had specialised in the use of blank verse (which has since been referred to as "Miltonic verse" or "Miltonic epic"), He also wrote amazing sonnets, elegies, odes, and masques, among other things. He's also made it as a metrist, with elegance and precision in all of his measurements.

Milton started writing poems as early as his Cambridge studies. Milton wrote his first impressive ode, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," on December 25, 1629. This poem, which revolves around the importance of Christ's incarnation and how pagan forces were overthrown, displays the poet's imagination and upholds his poetic concerns, thus acting as a precursor to *Paradise Lost*. Shortly after, Milton wrote "On Shakespeare," which was published in the Second Folio of Shakespeare's plays in 1632.

This poem, originally titled "An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. Shakespeare," was composed of sixteen lines and suggested that there was no need for a monumental structure to pay tribute to Shakespeare because he had built an everlasting memorial for himself through his literary works. It's written in iambic pentameter and further divided into heroic couplets, which is a form of poetry Milton seldom uses.

"L' Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" were written around the same time in 1632. These companion-poems, which are pastoral in nature, complement each other as they discuss the contrasting states of the human psyche. "L' Allegro," also regarded as a pastoral lyric poem, focuses on the importance of joy and the necessity of celebrating on a spring day. In comparison, Milton rejects merriment in "Il Penseroso," calling it "deluding joyes," and accepts sadness, claiming that unhappiness and depression were essential for the enrichment of human experiences.

Milton's *Comus*, subtitled "A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634," was published in 1634. Milton's Puritan sensibilities are on full display in this piece. *Comus* was Milton's first dramatic representation of the conflict between good and bad, a theme that would recur in his later literary masterpieces.

A masque written in lyrical blank verse and often considered a prelude to *Paradise Lost*, *Comus* was Milton's first dramatic representation of the conflict between good and evil, a theme that would recur in his later literary masterpieces. The plot of this allegorical tale revolves around a good lady who becomes separated from her brothers in the woods after being led by *Comus*, an evil spirit disguised as a villager. The Lady, on the other hand, resists all sensual temptations and is rescued for her chastity by the Attendant Spirit and the river nymph Sabrina.

Then, in 1638, Milton published "Lycidas," a pastoral elegy written in memory of his beloved Cambridge friend Edward King, who drowned while on his way to Ireland. Milton was saddened by his friend's sudden death, and the realisation that death might strike at any moment, wiping away one's achievements, hurt him greatly.

Milton's own pain on the knowledge that death will cripple all of human accomplishments and ambitions is hidden underneath the obvious lament on his friend's death. However, Milton, in keeping with the Puritan temperament, acknowledges that the greatest bliss is found in appealing to the Almighty's will, and that the ultimate fulfilment is found in the domains of heaven. Despite its lyrical tone, the poem lacks spontaneity due to its uneven rhyme pattern and stanza series. The following lines will demonstrate Milton's elegy's passionate tone:

"Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding seas

Wash far away, - where'er the bones are hurled,

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides

Where thou perhaps, under the whelming tide,  
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;  
 Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,  
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
 Where the great vision of the guarded mount  
 Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold..."

Milton was the post-Elizabethan poet who resurrected the sonnet tradition by writing a few notable sonnets. One of Milton's earliest sonnets (written at Cambridge) is "On His Having Arrived at the Age of Twenty-three" (1632), in which he strives to cultivate his gifts and be a faithful disciple of God. He also wrote sonnets about the political and social turmoil of the period, such as "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont" (1655).

When it comes to sonnets, though, Milton is best known for his heartbreaking poem "On His Blindness." The Petrarchan sonnet, written in 1655 as he was going blind, depicts the poet's struggle to understand his destiny and God's will in making him blind.

The poem, written by a devout Puritan, depicts the greatest service to God as accepting His Will and surrendering to God. The sonnet depicts the poet's journey from disillusionment to enlightenment, culminating in the poet's restoration of faith in Almighty's will. Milton's unwavering confidence in God is shown in the following lines from this brilliant sonnet:

"...I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent  
 That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
 Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
 Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

Only after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 did Milton withdraw into his private life and devote himself to writing the grand storey he had always wanted to compose. Despite the fact that he began writing it in 1658, *Paradise Lost* did not reach its complete form until 1667, when it was written in ten volumes. Milton had gone totally blind at the time he wrote the epic poem. In reality, Elizabeth Minshull, Milton's third wife, penned the epic while Milton dictated it orally.

Even though the Arthurian legends that shroud British history inspired Milton, he chose the biblical theme for his grand composition because it would provide him with a universal narrative for incorporating the concepts of world existence, liberty, and equality, as well as God's supreme influence. He aspired to "claim everlasting providence/ And explain the ways of God to men," in his own words.

*Paradise Lost* is an epic poem written in blank verse that evokes the biblical story of the "Fall of Man," in which God's first human creations, Adam and Eve, disobeyed their Father by succumbing to Satan's (in the guise of a snake) temptations and were banished from the Garden of Eden, or Paradise. Milton's main goal was to demonstrate the ramifications of

"Man's First Disobedience"

and, in the process, emphasise the importance of yielding to God's will and grace. The biblical tale of Satan, or Lucifer, being defeated and exiled to hell, or Tartarus, is also depicted in the poem. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* so faithfully captures the Puritan ethos that it has been dubbed

"the dream of a Puritan falling asleep over his Bible."

The following section contains a synopsis of each of the twelve books in *Paradise Lost*:

"Book I" consists of the following chapters: The epic poem starts in Hell's Lake of Fire, where Lucifer and his rebel angels have fallen after God banished them from Heaven. Despite the heinous torment, Lucifer's spirit is not vanquished when he rises from the lake and confronts the Pandemonium's rebel angels. He seeks vengeance, aided by his faithful followers Mammon and Beelzebub, by poisoning the minds of God's new beloved creation, mankind.

"Book II" is the sequel to the first. The rebel angels, led by Lucifer, began debating whether to wage another battle against the Creator or to taint mankind. However, they were unsure about the human race's life at the time. As a result, one of them had to return to the realms of paradise to verify the presence of God's rumoured conception.

When no one else offered to help, Lucifer went forward and saw the "great gulf between Heaven and Hell" as he crossed the Hell-gate. Lucifer, like Odysseus and Aeneas, encountered all of the Abyss' dangers, and after a long journey through Chaos, he arrived at the outskirts of God's newly formed material world, and later, the Garden of Paradise.

"Book III" consists of three parts: God is seen seated with his Son (Christ) in heaven in the third book, and when he sees Lucifer fly into heaven, he foretells that Lucifer will be able to pervert mankind. God, on the other hand, was willing to forgive the human race's sins if anyone was willing to bear the burden of Man's sins and die for it. As a result of his willingness to die for the sins of the human race, the Son of God was sent to Earth as Christ, the Savior of mankind. Meanwhile, Satan impersonates a devout angel and fools Uriel, the guardian angel. Since Uriel is unable to understand Satan, he lets him into Paradise.

"Book IV" consists of four chapters. When Satan enters Paradise, he disguises himself as a vulture, and despite his pity for Adam and Eve, he is still envious of them. In Eve's dream, he appears to her and tempts her to disobey God by consuming the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Meanwhile, Uriel warns Gabriel, Paradise's guardian angel, of the evil spirit that has infiltrated the Garden. A signal was sent through heaven just as Gabriel and Satan were about to war, and Satan fled from paradise.

Eve is plagued by a terrifying dream in "Book V." Adam, on the other hand, consoles her, telling her that she has been given the freedom to choose and assert her willpower. Meanwhile, the all-powerful God sends Raphael, the archangel, to alert Adam, and warns him of the existence of an evil spirit who has come to afflict humanity. Raphael responds to Adam's question by recounting the events leading up to the creation of mankind.

"Book VI": Raphael elaborates on Lucifer's battle against his Creator, and how they were exiled from heaven and returned to hell after being defeated.

Book VII: Raphael continues to enlighten Adam about the material world's existence and why it was created in this book.

"Book VIII": This book focuses on Adam's thoughts on his creator, God. Recognizing God's grace, he tells Raphael how God provided him with everything he desired, including a companion, Eve. God had requested him not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree in exchange. After one more warning from Raphael about the dangers of succumbing to Satan's temptations, Raphael departs.

"Book IX" is the ninth book in the series. After returning to paradise and taking on the form of a serpent, Satan finally persuades Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in this novel. Adam hesitates as Eve coaxes him. When he realised Eve had already eaten the fruit and disobeyed the Creator, he decided to accept his beloved's fate. They are instantly cast out of the Almighty's favour after consuming the fruit. The first act of human disobedience was committed.

“Book X”: In heaven, mankind's sin is revealed, and the Son of God is sent to Earth. Adam apologises for his actions and advises Eve to seek forgiveness from God. Meanwhile, Lucifer returns to hell, and all the fallen angels are transformed into spineless serpents as they celebrate.

“Book XI”: Despite the Son of God's pleadings for Adam and Eve's forgiveness, God announces that they must leave heaven. The angels lead Adam and Eve up a hill and tell them all that will happen before the Great Flood.

“Book XII” is the title of the second book in the series. Michael narrates the future in this last novel, describing how the Son of God will be born and how he would die for the sins of the human race. He also tells Adam of the state of the churches on Earth before Christ's second coming. The epic concludes with Adam and Eve, hand in hand, leaving Paradise and wandering off into a new world. Milton wrote *Paradise Regained* in 1671, a long time later.

Here, Satan's desire to lure Jesus Christ is depicted in a straightforward manner, which was very radical for the Puritan disposition. Christ is depicted as a human being in this painting. He, unlike Adam, does not succumb to Satan's temptations, and therefore emerges victorious. This sequel, however, fell short of *Paradise Lost*'s glory, as it lacked much of the latter's dramatic and ornate theme.

Milton's only notable tragic – closet drama or verse drama, *Samson Agonistes* (1671), is his final significant work written. The epic poem *Paradise Regained* was written alongside the play. The dramatic poem, which draws heavily on Greek tragedy, tells the tale of Samson. After surrendering to Dalilah and being imprisoned as a Phillistine captive, the failed Israelite hero. The entire drama is said to take place inside Samson's soul, and his death is portrayed as both a triumph and a vindication. The unity of time, place, and action is preserved in this poem due to its structure.

The composition, on the other hand, lacks the ornate quality that Milton's dramatic poems are known for. Despite its flaws, *Samson Agonistes* is one of Milton's most impressive literary works, capturing his religious disposition and unwavering confidence in the Almighty once again. As a result, a close examination of Milton's works reveals that he was a skilled poet and an astute essayist capable of arguing about society's social injustices. Despite the importance of visual quality in Milton's poetry, Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge correctly described Milton as "not a picaresque but a musical poet."

Milton, influenced by Homer, “had a high standard for which he was constantly contrasting himself, nothing short of which could fulfil his jealous ambitions,” according to Hazlitt. Milton's determination and perseverance eventually led him to write some of the best works in English literature. Milton is now widely read in English all over the world or in translations since his works are as important to readers in the twenty-first century as they were to readers in his day. Indeed, his works' everlasting quality confirms his unfathomable excellence.

### Keywords/ Glossary

**frith** (919) a narrow inlet or arm of the sea.

**glozing** (93) [Obs.] to fawn or flatter. Used by Milton to describe Satan's lies.

**gripe** (264) [Archaic] to grasp or clutch; to distress; oppress; afflict.

**Hail** (385) a greeting, used by Raphael specifically to suggest the same greeting the angel of the Annunciation will use when he comes to Mary in Luke i, 28.

**harbinger** (13) a person or thing that comes before to announce or give an indication of what follows; herald.

**Hesperian** (632) may refer to the Cape Verde Islands which were called the Hesperides; or could, in context, simply mean the setting sun, which is the older meaning of the word.

**Hierarchies** (191) the leaders or chiefs of religious groups; high priests. Milton uses the term to represent all the angels who make up the Heavenly Host.

**hyaline** (619) transparent as glass; glassy.

**imperious** (287) overbearing, arrogant, domineering.

**impregnate** (500) impregnate.

**incarnate** (315) endowed with a body, esp. a human body; in bodily form. The Son will become *incarnate* to save Man.

**ineffable** (734) too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words.

**intercessor** (96) one who pleads or makes a request in behalf of another or others.

**irriguous** (255) moist, well-watered.

**jocund** (372) cheerful; genial.

**justify** (26) to show to be just, right, or in accord with reason; vindicate.

**lantskip** (491) landscape (a Dutch word whose form had not changed in English in Milton's time).

**Lazar-house** (479) a house of the diseased and dying, especially for lepers.

**Limbo** (495) in some Christian theologies, the eternal abode or state, neither heaven nor hell, of the souls of infants or others dying in original sin but free of grievous personal sin, or, those dying before the coming of Christ; the temporary abode or state of all holy souls after death.

**loath** (585) unwilling; reluctant.

**marish** (630) [Archaic] a marsh; swamp.

**nuptial** (339) of marriage or a wedding.

**obdurate** (205) stubborn; obstinate; inflexible.

**obliquities** (132) not level or upright; inclined.

**omnific** (217) creating all things.

**oracle** (182) any person or agency believed to be in communication with a deity.

**orison** (145) a prayer.

**ounce** (466) lynx or panther.

**Pandemonium** (756) any place or scene of wild disorder, noise, or confusion; here, the capital of Hell.

**patriarch** (376) the father and ruler of a family or tribe; Adam is identified in *Paradise Lost* as the *patriarch* of all Mankind.

**phalanx** (979) an ancient military formation of infantry in close, deep ranks with shields overlapping and spears extended.

**plebeian** (442) one of the common people.

**prevenient** (3) antecedent to human action.

**Prime** (170) a part of the Divine Office orig. assigned to the first hour of daylight; Milton uses Prime in the sense of dawn, the first hour of daylight.

**progeny** (503) children, descendants, or offspring.

**propitiation** (34) gracious.

**puissant** (632) powerful; strong.

**Purlieu** (404) orig., an outlying part of a forest.

**quaternion** (181) a set of four.

**redound** (739) to come back; react; recoil (*upon*).

**rue** (414) an herb with yellow flowers and bitter-tasting leaves.

**sagacious** (281) having or showing keen perception or discernment and sound judgment.

**sapience** (195) knowledge, wisdom.

**sedulous** (27) working hard and steadily; diligent.

**Seneschal** (38) a steward or major-domo in the household of a medieval noble.

**Seraph, Seraphim** (667) any of the highest order of angels.

**solace** (419) an easing of grief, loneliness, discomfort.

**spume** (479) to foam or froth.

**Stygian** (239) of or characteristic of the river Styx and the infernal regions; infernal or hellish.

**Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon** (577) the four rivers of Hell.

**Synod** (661) any assembly or council. Milton uses the word to describe a meeting or conjunction of the stars astrologically.

**transpicuous** (141) transparent; esp., easily understood.

**tumid** (288) swollen; bulging.

**umbrage** (1087) shade; shadow; foliage, considered as shade-giving.

**unctuous** (635) oily or greasy; made up of or containing fat or oil. Milton uses the word to describe one of the elements of *ignis fatuus* or *fool's fire*, a phenomenon like St. Elmo's Fire which often led the foolish astray.

**usurp** (421) to take or assume power, a position, property, rights, etc. and hold in possession by force or without right.

**vagaries** (614) an odd, eccentric, or unexpected action.

**vassal / vassalage** (253) a subordinate, subject, servant, slave, etc.

**verdant** (500) covered with green vegetation.

**visage** (116) the face, with reference to the expression; countenance.

**wanton** (211) [Now Rare] luxuriant (said of vegetation, etc.).

**welkin** (538) the vault of heaven, the sky.

**wicket** (484) a small door or gate, esp. one set in or near a larger door or gate. Used by Milton for Heaven's Gate.

**wont** (32) accustomed: used predicatively.

### Self Assessment

1. What do you understand by the word 'frith' on the basis of the poem 'Paradise Lost Book 1':
  - A. a narrow inlet or arm of the sea.
  - B. to fawn or flatter. Used by Milton to describe Satan's lies.
  - C. to grasp or clutch; to distress; oppress; afflict.
  - D. a greeting, used by Raphael
  
2. What does the word 'glozing' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:
  - A. a narrow inlet or arm of the sea.
  - B. to fawn or flatter. Used by Milton to describe Satan's lies.
  - C. to grasp or clutch; to distress; oppress; afflict.
  - D. a greeting, used by Raphael
  
3. What is 'gripe' in reference to the poem text discussion:
  - A. a narrow inlet or arm of the sea.
  - B. to fawn or flatter. Used by Milton to describe Satan's lies.
  - C. to grasp or clutch; to distress; oppress; afflict.
  - D. a greeting, used by Raphael
  
4. What is the meaning of the word 'Groan' in reference to the content discussed for the poem:
  - A. a narrow inlet or arm of the sea.
  - B. to fawn or flatter. Used by Milton to describe Satan's lies.
  - C. to grasp or clutch; to distress; oppress; afflict.
  - D. a greeting, used by Raphael
  
5. What do you understand by the word 'harbinger' on the basis of the poem:
  - A. a person or thing that comes before to announce or give an indication of what follows; herald.
  - B. may refer to the Cape Verde Islands which were called the Hesperides; or could, in context, simply mean the setting sun, which is the older meaning of the word.
  - C. the leaders or chiefs of religious groups; high priests. Milton uses the term to represent all the angels who make up the Heavenly Host.
  - D. transparent as glass; glassy.
  
6. What do you understand by the word 'Hesperian' on the basis of the poem 'Paradise Lost Book 1':
  - A. a person or thing that comes before to announce or give an indication of what follows; herald.
  - B. may refer to the Cape Verde Islands which were called the Hesperides; or could, in context, simply mean the setting sun, which is the older meaning of the word.
  - C. the leaders or chiefs of religious groups; high priests. Milton uses the term to represent all the angels who make up the Heavenly Host.



- D. transparent as glass; glassy.
7. What does the word 'Hierarchies' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:
- A. a person or thing that comes before to announce or give an indication of what follows; herald.
- B. may refer to the Cape Verde Islands which were called the Hesperides; or could, in context, simply mean the setting sun, which is the older meaning of the word.
- C. the leaders or chiefs of religious groups; high priests. Milton uses the term to represent all the angels who make up the Heavenly Host.
- D. transparent as glass; glassy.
8. What is 'hyaline' in reference to the poem text discussion:
- A. a person or thing that comes before to announce or give an indication of what follows; herald.
- B. may refer to the Cape Verde Islands which were called the Hesperides; or could, in context, simply mean the setting sun, which is the older meaning of the word.
- C. the leaders or chiefs of religious groups; high priests. Milton uses the term to represent all the angels who make up the Heavenly Host.
- D. transparent as glass; glassy.
9. What is the meaning of the word 'imperious' in reference to the content discussed for the poem:
- A. overbearing, arrogant, domineering.
- B. impregnate.
- C. endowed with a body, esp. a human body; in bodily form. The Son will become *incarnate* to save Man.
- D. too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words.
10. What do you understand by the word 'impregn' on the basis of the poem:
- A. overbearing, arrogant, domineering.
- B. impregnate.
- C. endowed with a body, esp. a human body; in bodily form. The Son will become *incarnate* to save Man.
- D. too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words
11. What do you understand by the word 'incarnate' on the basis of the poem:
- A. overbearing, arrogant, domineering.
- B. impregnate.
- C. endowed with a body, esp. a human body; in bodily form. The Son will become *incarnate* to save Man.
- D. too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words
12. What do you understand by the word 'ineffable' on the basis of the poem:
- A. overbearing, arrogant, domineering.
- B. impregnate.
- C. endowed with a body, esp. a human body; in bodily form. The Son will become *incarnate* to save Man.
- D. too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words

13. What does the word 'intercessor' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:
- too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words.
  - one who pleads or makes a request in behalf of another or others.
  - moist, well-watered.
  - cheerful; genial.
14. What is 'irriguous' in reference to the poem text discussion:
- too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words.
  - one who pleads or makes a request in behalf of another or others.
  - moist, well-watered.
  - cheerful; genial.
15. What is the meaning of the word 'jocund' in reference to the content discussed for the poem:
- too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words.
  - one who pleads or makes a request in behalf of another or others.
  - moist, well-watered.
  - cheerful; genial.

### **Answer for Self Assessment**

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

### **Review Questions-1**

1. In Paradise Lost, how does Milton represent Satan's leadership qualities?

**Ans.** While Satan is depicted as a military leader in Milton's first two books, Satan is primarily a deceiver. He speaks through Beelzebub to convince the other fallen angels of his scheme to corrupt mankind. His willingness to travel to Earth appears to be a sacrifice, but it is actually self-serving in order to ensure the success of his scheme. Satan spends a lot of energy and time arming his soldiers in the war with God's army, but he forgets that God can and will stop the battle at any time. Although he is a powerful speaker and a skilled warrior, he is driven by ego, which Milton is not Milton does not consider this to be a leadership attribute.

2. How are God's ways reconciled with the theme of free will in Milton's Paradise Lost?

**Ans.** Milton initially invites the reader to sympathise with Satan's plight, but he uses Satan, as well as the storey of Adam and Eve's collapse, as a warning about God's powers. Even though God is all-knowing and all-seeing, Milton is careful to point out that he has not decided anyone's destiny and has instead given all beings free will. Milton justifies God's ways in this way, arguing that all creatures have the ability to choose or not choose their acts. But Milton stresses that God is above all else, and to disobey him is to deserve whatever punishment he doles out, provided that he is just and just and forgiving.

"I made him just and right/Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall,"

God reminds the reader in Book 2. God is speaking of Adam here, and he is implying that, despite the fact that he made him and knows what he would do, he created him so that he could make his own decisions, good or bad. Milton's ultimate goal is to show his readers that Satan and Adam are sympathetic characters who ultimately make their own individual choices to disobey God. God's

ways are always just, even though they are incomprehensible. Since the Puritan Church was redefining man's intimate relationship with God, this reconciliation would have mirrored many of the theological anxieties of Milton's time. Milton seems to be arguing that the two ideas should coexist as long as God's supreme authority is recognised.

3. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, what claims can be made for God or Satan as the villain, or main character?

**Ans.** There are arguments to be made for both characters as the poem's hero. Milton devotes a significant portion of his epic to Satan's plight, which many readers have considered sympathetic. Satan is the epic's most charismatic character, and his struggle is recognisable. He has self-doubt and self-pity, and he sees himself as the protagonist, with God as the antagonist. God is the all-seeing, all-knowing lord of *Paradise Lost*' world.

Despite the fact that he knows the past, present, and future, he has given all of his creations free will, allowing them to choose whether to obey or disobey him. If God is the main character in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is the antagonist. Even though Satan sets up the fall of man, God has already seen that it has happened and is able to finally transform evil to good.

4. In *Paradise Lost*, how does Milton characterise Adam and Eve?

**Ans.** Milton portrays Adam and Eve as basically innocent, in love with each other and with God, in Book 4. Adam, according to the author, is the smarter and more powerful of the two, with the closest relationship to God. The line "He for God only, she for God in him" shows their relative distance from God. Milton portrays Eve as inferior to Adam. She is vain, frail, and her relationship with God is mediated by Adam. Until the collapse in Book 9, he portrays their relationship as good and innocent, but he points out that Adam is blinded by his love for Eve, which leads to him consuming the fruit.

5. How and why does Adam and Eve's relationship shift after the collapse in Milton's *Paradise Lost*?

**Ans.** After both Adam and Eve consume fruit from the Tree of Knowledge in Book 9, their relationship starts to deteriorate. Their relationship takes on a lusty hue, and both of them begin to feel ashamed of their nakedness. They blame each other for what has happened and have the first battle in human history. The Son then curses Eve to suffer pain during childbirth and submit to Adam in Book 10, as well as condemning Adam to toil for his bread. Michael depicts Adam's future generations and the pain they will face in Book 11. Because of their defiance, both Adam and Eve have lost their dignity, and their relationship has been permanently altered.

6. What does the depiction of Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* say about the author's ideas of gender?

**Ans.** Because of her appearance, Milton depicts Eve as inferior to Adam in Book 4. She is frailer, less intellectual, and unable to communicate directly with God. She is also the one who leads Adam to the Fall, as Milton points out in Book 9 when she eats the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge first and gives it to him, knowing that he will eat it to stay with her. Though modern readers may find Milton's depiction of Eve offensive, he is reflecting the prevailing beliefs of his time, especially religious beliefs, that women were the inferior sex and should submit to men in all matters.

7. What religious moral assumptions does Milton seem to be living under in *Paradise Lost*?

**Ans.** Milton seems to be working from the biblical moral premise that God is fundamentally decent, benevolent, and just. Despite the fact that God's ways are fundamentally unknown to man, man should believe that God is wiser and that adherence to his ways will be rewarded.

Another religious assumption that Milton seems to hold is that evil arises from man's (and angels') free will making mistakes. God grants free will to his creations in order for them to demonstrate that obedience is an option, not a law. Sin and suffering are also derived from the opportunity for free will, according to Milton's religious moral assumptions. These assumptions explain why Milton feels compelled to justify God's ways to men.

8. What is palace of Satan?

**Ans.** Satan and fallen angels created a palace called Pandemonium in "*Paradise Lost*." The fallen angels have gathered in this palace for a meeting.

9. How do you define epic?

**Ans.** An epic is a long narrative poem about the exploits of heroes and warriors on a grand scale.

10. What is the meaning of free verse?

**Ans.** Free verse is a form of poetry in which the metre and line length are not fixed. It is based on the normal rhythms of speech, as well as stressed and unstressed syllables.

11. What is the meaning of blank verse?

**Ans.** Blank verse is a type of iambic pentameter poetry that is not rhymed. Its metre is appropriate for the English language.

12. What is the meaning of the title "Paradise Lost"?

**Ans.** The biblical tale of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is referenced in the title of "Paradise Lost."

13. Where does "Paradise Lost" take place?

**Ans.** In the first two books of "Paradise Lost," the setting is Hell, and in the remaining books, the setting is mainly Eden.

14. What is the central theme of "Paradise Lost"?

**Ans.** Subject of "Paradise Lost" is the eviction of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

15. Who are the protagonists in "Paradise Lost"?

**Ans.** In "Paradise Lost," the main characters are Adam, Eve, Satan, Beelzebub, Angel Michael, God, and the Son.

16. What was the reason for Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise?

**Ans.** As a result of their consumption of the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve were kicked out of Paradise.

17. What is Eve's motivation for eating the forbidden fruit?

**Ans.** Eve consumes the forbidden fruit because Satan, disguised as a serpent, informs her that eating it would grant her the gift of voice.

18. Is Eve to blame for Adam and Eve's demise?

**Ans.** Since Eve eats through Satan's deceit and Adam eats forbidden fruit at Eve's order, it's difficult to blame just Eve for the fall.

19. What is the topic of "Paradise Lost"?

**Ans.** The disobedience of Adam and Eve, and their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden, is the subject of Paradise Lost.

20. What is the difference between Book I's Satan and Book IX's Satan?

**Ans.** Satan is most brave and hero-like in book one, but he is frail in book nine.

21. What was Satan's plot to exact vengeance on Adam?

**Ans.** Satan intends to exact vengeance on Adam because he sees him as an easy target.

22. What is "Paradise Lost's" main theme?

**Ans.** The biblical tale of Adam and Eve and their defiance is a significant theme in Paradise Lost.

23. Explain "to reign in Hell is better than serve in Heaven"?

**Ans.** These words spoken by Satan in book one. It means that law in hell is preferable to obedience to God.

## **Review Questions-2**

1. What is Milton's purpose?

2. What is the atmosphere of the poem's first scene?

3. Who is next in command to the archangel Satan?

4. What is Satan's mentality in the poem's beginning?

5. How does Milton's list of fallen angels resemble Homer's Iliad in any way?

6. Who is in charge of the fallen angels digging for gold in Hell? What is the reason for this?

7. What is the name of the temple that rose out of the ground in Hell?

8. According to Milton, what had many of the ancient gods been before the history of Man?

9. What are the primary sources for Milton's Paradise Lost?

10. At the end of Book I, what is the plan of action for the fallen angels and their leaders?

## Answers for Review Questions-2

1. Milton's goal is to "justify God's ways to men."
2. Satan and his angels are chained to the fiery lake of fire in Hell.
3. Satan's next-in-command is Beelzebub.
4. Despite his current condition in Hell, Satan is certain that he will never yield to God.
5. Milton's list of fallen angels follows an epic convention similar to Homer's Iliad's list of ships.
6. Mammon sends the fallen angels to Hell to search for gold. In terms of wealth, he wants Hell to be on par with Heaven.
7. The temple was known as Pandemonium and served as Satan's Hell headquarters.
8. Milton notes that the pagan deities had once been demons in Hell and, before their rebellion, angels in Heaven.
9. Milton imitates Homer and Virgil by writing an epic poem. For his theme and characterization, he refers to the Bible and classical literature.
10. Satan and his angels meet in Pandemonium, Satan's capital, to plan how they can avenge God.

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## Unit 05: John Milton: Invocation to Book I and Book IX

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### Objectives

- Evaluate the merits of some influential critical views of the poem.
- Understand the historical context in which Milton's ideas were articulated.
- Adapt the importance of the verse form and the role of heroism in epic poetry.
- Discuss the basis for the influential idea that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*.
- Analyse the basic historical, intellectual, and literary context needed to understand and appreciate Milton's poetry and thought.
- Develop a critical approach to understanding Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
- Assess the poem's relationship to Milton's wider thought and historical role.

### Introduction

As Milton had a thorough knowledge of several languages, he explored literature of all those languages and that gave him an outlook which was classical, humanitarian and scholarly at the same time. Besides the English works, his Latin poems were also admired by several scholars. Milton's works can be divided into three categories: Early Poetry, Prose and Later Poetry.

#### **Early Poetry**

Milton's early poetry presents him as a true inheritor of Elizabethan literature. In Milton's early poetry we can often trace the influences of Spenser, Ben Jonson and the Metaphysical poets. Like the Elizabethans, Milton's early poetry showcases a deep sense of beauty. But unlike his predecessors, Milton's poetry reveals the poet's dedication to form and coherence. Like Johnson, Milton appreciated classical convention but at the same time he had shown a balance between his scholarship and creative imagination. Along with a sense of beauty and a spirit of sincerity, dignity as well as seriousness, Milton's early poetry represents a stateliness of manner expressed thoroughly by the use of blank verse. If Marlowe and Shakespeare have explored and

developed the prospect of blank verse, it is Milton who has added grace to this form and taken it to a new height through his early poetry and later on through his other poems. Milton's early poetry can again be categorized into two stages: The College Period and The Horton Period.

**The College Period:** Showcasing his knowledge of Latin and English language, Milton's college poems were the experiment of the creative mind of a young poet. He wrote several poems during this period but the most important one was the ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (1629). He started writing his poems as an undergraduate student at Cambridge.

As the form of his poems, the poet used eight lines stanza closed by an alexandrine. The other remarkable poems of this period are *On Shakespeare* (1630) and *On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three* (1631). These poems might lack perfection but they present his maturity, sense of understanding

(literary as well as religious) and his command over diction. However, this period ended with his Cambridge career in 1632.

**The Horton Period:** After leaving Cambridge Milton denied to enter into the Church and spent almost six years in seclusion at his father's country home in Horton. There, along with reading extensively the literature of several languages, Milton also composed four famous poems. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1633), the twin poems in octosyllabic couplets unfolded the poet's moving comfortably between the world of Renaissance and Reformation.

*L'Allegro*, in describing a day in the life of a gay or happy man, used pastoral imagery while *Il Penseroso* represented the mood of contemplation of a thoughtful man. We are taken to the English countryside at sunrise, twilight and moonrise through these two companion poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* respectively. Through the contrasting images of these two men, Milton portrayed nature and art. The poet's romantic description of the rustic life blended with his religious sentiments provided his works a unique balance that can hardly be found in any other poet in English literature. *Comus* (1634) was a bold step taken by Milton towards the further development of his literary career. The literary form was called 'Masque' and opted by Ben Jonson during the Elizabethan period. This form belonged to a type of drama taken from Italy. Milton's rebellious spirit was at work when he adapted this drama form. But he used the dramatic form in this poem to express his religious understanding and sense of morality.

*Lycidas* (1637), an elegy, was written to mourn over the death of his college friend Edward King who was drowned on a voyage to Ireland. Amidst the expressions of doubt, fear, anger and pain caused by the death of his dear friend, this poem brings out Milton's firm belief in religion. He concludes the poem by showing a perfect reliance in God and mentioning that true fame can only be found in heaven with God. Like Spenser's *Astrophel* Milton in this poem has followed the style of the classic pastoral elegy. The Horton period comes to an end when Milton departed for the Continent in 1638. Milton's early poetry along with revealing his Puritan mind equally brings out his Renaissance spirit.

### 5.1 Subject Matter

After returning from the continent Milton became more involved in the political affairs of the time. As a Protestant he executed his right to stand against anything which he considered wrong. Most of his prose works were written during the middle period of Milton's life (1640-60). His prose works are marked by the author's directness of expression. In these works Milton was direct even when he was expressing his dissatisfaction or vehemence. As a true Puritan he was guided by a sense of righteousness which resulted into a merciless criticism of Milton's opponents. These writings lacked that coherence and unity which could be traced in his poetry. Because of this Milton himself has called his prose writings inferior. Milton's scholarship, political and religious sentiments along with his rich fancy made it difficult for the ordinary readers to understand, interpret and appreciate his prose works. In total Milton has written 25 pamphlets of which four are written in Latin and 21 pamphlets are written in English.

After a controversy with Bishop Hall over episcopacy, Milton started writing pamphlets. When his wife Mary Powell deserted him, that time he wrote two pamphlets on divorce (1643 and 44). Meanwhile when Milton was busy in writing these pamphlets, Parliament, which was then dominated by the Presbyterian party, passed an act by which it was required that all the books have to acquire a license by an official censor before being published. The Parliament's main motive was to keep a check over the views and the opinions of the opposition. Milton, who had expressed the necessity of personal liberty again and again in his writing, became furious to find

this act passed by the Parliament. As a protest he wrote *Areopagitica* in 1644 defending the liberty of press. The term 'Areopagitica' originated from 'Areopagus' or 'Forum of Athens' which was a platform for public appeal. As a plea for intellectual freedom, freedom of thought and speech—*Areopagitica* has an important place even today. His other prose works were mostly based on the political issues or on the actions of the Commonwealth Government. Milton also completed a *History of Britain*. As most of Milton's prose works based on some burning issues of his time, Milton hardly got any time to reexamine his prose works before publishing. Because of that most of Milton's prose works are disordered and lacked both humour and self-restraint. Milton's opinions recorded in these works were mostly subjective. From a personal situation Milton could develop general principles and almost all his prose works reflected that.

#### Later Poetry

Milton's efforts in scholarly endeavour put strain on his eyes from the very childhood. When he became completely blind, he used his pen more strongly to point out the vices around him and to



serve the society this way. The works written in this period reflected Milton's maturity. Milton began writing his great work *Paradise Lost* in 1658 and it was issued in 1667. *Paradise Lost* was an intellectual masterpiece of the poet. At first Milton divided the work into ten books but later, he revised it in the second edition and published in twelve books. The inspiration of the poem was the *Bible* as it talks about the fall of Adam and Eve. But in spite of being inspired by his Puritan sense of morality and religiosity, Milton never ceased to display his Renaissance spirit. His strong sense of righteousness helped him to be a humanist. *Paradise Lost* is one of the greatest epic poems of all time. Although he has dealt with a religious and Biblical theme, but Milton's rich imagination and unconscious dedication to humanist ideals have made Lucifer such a fascinating character that instead of scorning him, readers often fell in love with Satan. Milton's last volume of poetry, containing *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* was issued in 1671.

*Paradise Regained*, which dealt with the temptation of Christ, was a sequel to *Paradise Lost*. But in front of the magnificence of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* lacked the standard of its predecessor even with its greatness of thought and splendid imagery. *Samson Agonistes*, a dramatic poem, was written with the aim of composing a pure tragedy in English and it dealt with Samson, the wrestler of Israel. Critics often said that Milton chose Samson as he could identify with the blind, morbid and misunderstood existence of this Biblical hero. Whereas Renaissance was an intellectual and aesthetic movement, Reformation was a religious movement. Milton's writings talk about the mental liberty but what is unique about Milton's writing is that along with displaying Milton's creative imagination, his writings manifest his religious beliefs. Most of his works either have Biblical origin or they are prophesying morality and righteousness. One really wonders to think about the imagination of a person who has written *Paradise Lost* based on the *Bible* and at the same time has portrayed Satan in such a way that Satan appears more like a hero than a villain. If Milton's Reformation spirit has revealed his Puritan mind, then his Renaissance mind has tried to beautify, uplift and add value to human existence. The combination of Reformation and Renaissance spirit is evident in almost all his later writings including few other elegies, odes and mask. As a dramatic poem, the form of *Comus* itself was an act of rebel shown by Milton in a time when drama was completely banned. The setting of his companion poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the elegy *Lycidas* and few other odes is pastoral. Milton's careful record of the details of pastoral setting and his portrayal of nature display his Romantic spirit. As a Puritan, Milton has also promoted his views on morality and righteousness through the same works. Milton's deeply religious and profoundly artistic mind could never stay away from exploring the mysteries of life. This makes Milton unique in the entire history of English literature.

John Milton, who has been regarded as one of the significant figures of English literature since his days of writing, was a prolific writer, composing numerous poems, pamphlets and theo-political as well as polemical writings. Like his predecessor Shakespeare, Milton's works showcase a strong reverence for the ideas of freedom, forbearance and perseverance, thereby alluring readers, critics and academics since times immemorial. His writings often carry an essence of the Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser's philosophy that was derived from Plato and later, refashioned by the ideas of virtue and beauty during the Renaissance. The influence, however, could also be because both the poets wrote at a time of political crisis in England and both were extremely sensitive in nature. However, his debts are hardly notable when one takes into account the enormity of his contribution to English poetry, thereby dwelling as one of the indelible figures of English literature. Indeed, to quote Tennyson, Milton was the "God-gifted organ-voice of England". In this chapter, the primary aim revolves around outlining the important literary works of John Milton, thereby showcasing how these writings contributed in the contemporary society of England. Prose and poetry will be distinctly separated into two sub-sections and will be elaborated on chronologically for the benefit of the readers.

## Summary

Though Milton had written prose profusely, he himself believed that he was primarily a poet, engaged in writing prose with his "left hand" while securing the right hand for his ultimate vocation of creating poetry. His prose writings were mostly polemic in nature, extremely controversial and primarily dealt with the political issues of the age. Unlike his poetry, his prose works are disorganized and aggressive in tone, sometimes studded with lengthy and complex sentences that made it difficult for the reader to comprehend. Straightforward in style, his prose compositions lacked humor, thereby failing to appeal to a wide range of readers. However, today his prose works serve to enlighten us on the social, economical and political issues of the contemporary time and are of immense significance to scholars of humanities and social sciences.

The first prose works written by Milton were in the form of prolusions or articles that he wrote as part of assignments during his study at Cambridge. "*Oratio pro Arte*" (1632) or "Oration as a substitute of Art", which was his last article written at Cambridge, elaborates on the contentment that is derived from learning and also talks about the necessity of friendship between compatible minds in academic arenas. It is to be mentioned here that like Spenser, Milton was writing at a time of political instability and having been rooted in England as a civilian as well as a public servant (he was appointed as the *Secretary* for the Foreign Tongue in 1649), he voiced his opinions through his writings. In par with other seventeenth century intellectuals, Milton's ideologies on politics are greatly influenced by his religious views. In fact, his prose works are so fine and detailed in their construction that they can be referred to trace the history of England during the 1640s and 1650s. His Anti- Prelatic pamphlets, which were also his first prose-works in public print, vehemently argues against the crown's authority to exercise power over the church. The five anti-prelatic essays written by him are: "Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England" (1641), "Of Prelatical Episcopacy" (1641), "Animadversions: An Apology" (1641), "The Reasons for Church Government" (1642) and "An Apology against a Pamphlet" (1642). In "Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England", Milton, using a complex and labyrinthine language, strongly critiques the Episcopal system and its hierarchical order, thereby seeking to dismantle the authority of the monarch and reestablish the church to its egalitarian state. "An Apology against a Pamphlet" was written as a response to Bishop Hall's "A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions", where Hall had critiqued Milton's vitriolic remarks on episcopacy in "Animadversions: An Apology".

After being deserted by his young wife Mary and dissatisfied with his marriage in 1642, Milton began speculating on marriage, writing tracts that argued in favor of legalizing divorce. The four tracts written on this topic are: "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" (1643), "The Judgment of Martin Bucer" (1644), "Tetrachordon" (1645) and "Colasterion" (1645). Through biblical references, he tried to showcase that when a man and wife are incompatible, it was better to part ways. However, in the seventeenth century, marriage was perceived as a holy bond and his radical perceptions on divorce were criticized by the contemporary society for inducing immorality.

One of the most significant of Milton's prose works is *Areopagitica; A speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England* (1644). It is a polemical prose that urged the parliament to revoke the "Licensing order" of 16th June, 1643. As an ardent supporter of free speech, Milton condemned the order as it aimed to bring the earlier independent publishing under the authority of the government. His unforgettable and passionate plea is echoed in the following extract:

...And yet on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit; embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

*Areopagitica*

Soon after that in 1644, the Puritan education reformer Samuel Hartlib requested Milton to give his perceptions on education. To this, Milton wrote "Of Education" (1644) in the form of a letter to Hartlib, where he stressed that the purpose of learning is primarily "to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright". He also outlined the importance of harking back to the ancient Greek and Roman authors. Milton, aware of the turbulent times and the ongoing civil war, also recommended heavy, military training for the youths aged between twelve and twenty-one.

Another of Milton's remarkable work is *Eikonoklastes* (1649) which was written in order to refute *Eikon Basilike*, a spiritual autobiography that is credited to the executed King Charles I of England. In fact, Milton was appointed as The "Secretary for the Foreign Tongue" and commissioned to pen down a suitable reply to the autobiographical text.

In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton engages in shattering the image of King Charles I as portrayed in the autobiography by showcasing the hypocritical nature of the monarch. It was a polemical and radical tract as it not only critiqued King Charles I but also questioned all monarchical systems that wield the power to enslave, punish, torture or exploit its population. Again, soon afterward, Milton wrote "A Defense of the People of England" (1652) as a rebuttal to Salmasius' "Defense of the King".

In the later years, Milton's *History of Britain* (1670) was published. The prose work, which is said to be unfinished, portrays Milton's thorough knowledge on the history of England and also reflects on his extensive reading. He chalks the history of the Anglo-Saxon period by studying the works of

Bede as well as Geoffrey of Monmouth. He also studied *Holinshed's Chronicles* and chronicles provided by William Camden. Thus, what can be perceived is that Milton's oeuvre of prose works can be used to decode the contemporary social, economic and political sphere.

### Key words/ Glossary

**Alexa abash't** (595) embarrassed and ill at ease; abashed.

**abyss** (405) *Theol.* the primeval void or chaos before the Creation.

**Adamantine** (48) of or like adamant; very hard; unbreakable.

**alchemy** (516) an early form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages, whose chief aim was to change base metals into gold and to discover the elixir of perpetual youth. Milton uses the word in this instance in its meaning of "metal."

**Amarantin** (78) dark purplish-red.

**ambrosial** (245) of or fit for the gods; divine.

**Apocalypse** (2) any of various Jewish and Christian pseudonymous writings (c. 200 B.C.-c. A.D. 300) depicting symbolically the ultimate destruction of evil and triumph of good.

**apostate** (172) one who has abandoned his belief, faith, cause, or principles.

**Archangel** (41) a chief angel; angel of high rank.

**arede** (962) advise.

**arrogate** (27) to claim or seize without right.

**Atlantean** (305) of or like Atlas; strong.

**behemoth** (467) a large beast mentioned in the *Bible*; in Milton's time the term probably referred to the elephant.

**blasphemed** (411) to have spoken irreverently or profanely of or to God or sacred things.

**bower** (734) a place enclosed by overhanging boughs of trees or by vines on a trellis; arbor.

**brand** (643) [Archaic] a sword.

**catarrh** (483) inflammation of a mucous membrane, esp. of the nose or throat, causing an increased flow of mucus.

**Causey** (415) a causeway.

**Champaign** (2) a broad plain; flat, open country.

**Chaos** (421) the disorder of formless matter and infinite space, supposed to have existed before the ordered universe Milton personifies.

**Cherub** (157) one of the winged heavenly beings that support the throne of God or act as guardian spirits.

**colloquy** (455) a conversation, esp. a formal discussion.

**contemned** (432) to treat or think of with contempt; scorn.

**Cope** (215) a large, capelike vestment worn by priests at certain ceremonies; anything that covers like a cope, as a vault or the sky.

**corporeal** (109) physical; bodily; not spiritual.

**dalliance** (1016) flirting, toying, or trifling. Milton uses the term as a euphemism for sex.

**descry** (228) to catch sight of; discern.

**discount'nanc't** (110) ashamed or embarrassed; disconcerted.

**effeminate** (634) having the qualities generally attributed to women; unmanly; not virile. Milton uses the term in the sense that a man allows a woman to take his place in the natural hierarchy in which, for Milton, women were inferior to men, especially in terms of reason and intellect.

**efficacy** (660) effectiveness.

**Empyrean / Empyrean** (430) the highest heaven; among Christian poets, the abode of God.

**enthrallment** (171) [Now Rare] enslavement.

**Ethereal** (45) not earthly; heavenly; celestial.

**euphrasy** (414) eyebright; any plant of the figwort family having pale lavender flowers in leafy clusters.

**fealty** (344) loyalty; fidelity.

**Fiend** (430) here, Satan.

**firmament** (261) the sky, viewed poetically as a solid arch or vault.

**foreknowledge** (118) knowledge of something before it happens or exists; prescience.

### Self Assessment

1. What do you understand by the word 'Alexa abash't' on the basis of the poem:
  - A. embarrassed and ill at ease; abashed.

- B. *Theol.* the primeval void or chaos before the Creation.  
C. of or like adamant; very hard; unbreakable.  
D. an early form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages
2. What do you understand by the word 'abyss' on the basis of the poem:  
A. embarrassed and ill at ease; abashed.  
B. *Theol.* the primeval void or chaos before the Creation.  
C. of or like adamant; very hard; unbreakable.  
D. an early form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages
3. What does the word 'Adamantine' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:  
A. embarrassed and ill at ease; abashed.  
B. *Theol.* the primeval void or chaos before the Creation.  
C. of or like adamant; very hard; unbreakable.  
D. an early form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages
4. What is 'alchemy' in reference to the poem text discussion:  
A. embarrassed and ill at ease; abashed.  
B. *Theol.* the primeval void or chaos before the Creation.  
C. of or like adamant; very hard; unbreakable.  
D. an early form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages
5. What do you understand by the word 'Amarantin' on the basis of the poem:  
A. dark purplish-red.  
B. of or fit for the gods; divine.  
C. any of various Jewish and Christian pseudonymous writings (c. 200 B.C-c. A.D. 300)  
D. one who has abandoned his belief, faith, cause, or principles.
6. What do you understand by the word 'ambrosial' on the basis of the poem:  
A. dark purplish-red.  
B. of or fit for the gods; divine.  
C. any of various Jewish and Christian pseudonymous writings (c. 200 B.C-c. A.D. 300)  
D. one who has abandoned his belief, faith, cause, or principles.
7. What does the word 'intercessor' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:  
A. dark purplish-red.  
B. of or fit for the gods; divine.  
C. any of various Jewish and Christian pseudonymous writings (c. 200 B.C-c. A.D. 300)  
D. one who has abandoned his belief, faith, cause, or principles.
8. What is 'apostate' in reference to the poem text discussion:  
A. dark purplish-red.  
B. of or fit for the gods; divine.  
C. any of various Jewish and Christian pseudonymous writings (c. 200 B.C-c. A.D. 300)  
D. one who has abandoned his belief, faith, cause, or principles.

9. What do you understand by the word 'Archangel' on the basis of the select section of the poem *Paradise Lost Book 1* discussed in the lecture:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.
10. What do you understand by the word 'arede' on the basis of the video lecture:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.
11. What does the word 'arrogate' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.
12. What is 'Atlantean' in reference to the poem text discussion:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.
13. What do you understand by the word 'Archangel' on the basis of the select section of the poem *Paradise Lost Book 1* discussed in the lecture:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.
14. What do you understand by the word 'arede' on the basis of the video lecture:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.
15. What does the word 'arrogate' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:
- A. a chief angel; angel of high rank.
  - B. advise.
  - C. to claim or seize without right.
  - D. of or like Atlas; strong.

**Answer for Self Assessment**

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

**Review Questions****1. What is Satan's attitude toward God at the beginning of Milton's *Paradise Lost*?**

In Book 1, Satan's attitude toward God at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* is an attitude of a petulant child raging at a parent out of jealousy or a sense of unfairness. Satan is jealous of the Son, and that he will become King of Heaven. As one of the higher archangels in Heaven, Satan feels that he deserves more; this is the sense of pride that leads to his downfall. Milton argues that no one is more powerful than God and therefore no one should question God's actions. But that is exactly what Satan does. And though his jealousy and yearning for independence is understandable, readers see that his reaction is overwrought and unjustified.

**2. In *Paradise Lost*, what does Satan mean in Book 9 when he says, "Revenge at first though sweet/Bitter ere long back on itself recoils"?**

Revenge against God and Heaven has been Satan's sole aim up to this point, and the idea of it has been the only thing that has brought him pleasure. But here Satan contrasts the "sweetness" of revenge to another, more unpleasant taste: bitterness. Here, Satan seems to be admitting that, ultimately, his revenge was futile and that his aim will turn against him eventually. What Satan doesn't yet know is how true his statement will become when God turns him and the other fallen angels into snakes as punishment for their acts.

**3. Who is most responsible for the fall in *Paradise Lost*: Man or Satan?**

In Book 9, according to Milton, man bears most of the responsibility for the fall. Even though they were tempted by Satan, both Eve and Adam chose to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge by their own free will, despite knowing that this would be disobedient to God. Although it can be argued that God had foreknowledge of their mistake and could have intervened, his intervention would only have proved that man has no free will, and is therefore not responsible for his choices. Satan bears some responsibility in his temptation of Adam and Eve, but like God, he can't control their ultimate decisions.

**4. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, why is the battle between God's army and Satan's army futile?**

In Books 1 and 6 the battle in Heaven between God's and Satan's armies is an example of dramatic irony, when the readers know something that the characters do not. God only allows his army to have the same number of soldiers as Satan's army in order to make it fair. However, Milton makes a point to let readers know that angels are immortal; they can be wounded but they cannot be killed. This means that the battle could go on forever. Satan's army spends a great deal of time fashioning weapons such as cannons that have little to no deterring effect on God's army. Ultimately God calls the battle off after the third day, a decision he can make at any time because he is the ruler of Heaven. This makes Satan's rebellion essentially pointless, although Satan, ruled as always by pride, is surprised by the "repulse" of his force.

**5. In what ways can *Paradise Lost* be seen as a political allegory for Milton's era?**

In many ways *Paradise Lost* reflects the political anxieties and questions of Milton's era. Milton himself was sympathetic to not only the religious revolutionaries of his time, but to political revolutionaries as well. He felt that rulers such as Charles I were ineffective and too absolute. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton questions what makes a good leader and ruler, and it's clear that he believes

that justness and allowing for individual free will are paramount. Milton holds God up as an example of a wise, benevolent leader who allows his creatures individual choice. For Milton, this was exactly the kind of leadership that Britain needed in order to succeed.

**6. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, how is the Garden of Eden before the fall similar to Heaven itself?**

In Book 4 Milton portrays the Garden of Eden as earthly paradise. All creatures are vegetarian so there are no predators or prey. It is beautiful and lush, full of food and gentle animals. Adam and Eve face no threats, and their only work is to tend to the Garden. Eden is difficult for a modern reader to envision and this is Milton's point: after the fall of man, the world became a more dangerous and contentious place. He wants readers to understand the complete innocence and purity of Adam and Eve's existence before the fall. Like Heaven as described by Raphael, it "surmounts the reach/Of human sense."

**7. What difficulties could a modern reader encounter in understanding the context of *Paradise Lost* and can it be understood simply as a poem?**

Modern readers of *Paradise Lost* may find themselves lost in the many biblical references that Milton makes throughout the text. In order to fully understand the nuances of the poem and the relationships between the characters, some prior knowledge of the Bible is essential. The language of *Paradise Lost* is also from an earlier time, making it harder to understand and make inferences from. Milton also uses many dramatic poetic devices, such as character development, invocation to muses, and climactic scenes that invite the reader to understand and enjoy the poem without necessarily needing a deeper understanding of the biblical context.

**8. In *Paradise Lost*, how does Milton succeed in making Satan a sympathetic character while at the same time condemning his actions?**

In several books, including Books 1, 2, and 4, Milton succeeds at making Satan a sympathetic character by portraying him as complicated, interesting, and with human flaws of jealousy, doubt, and pride. Readers can relate to those feelings, as well as the justification by Satan that God is being unfair in his punishment of the fallen angels. Yet Milton also shows how erratic and inconsistent Satan's logic becomes, and how by choosing evil instead of redemption, he punishes not only God but all of mankind, which is unwarranted. The poet shows a clear distinction between the contrite Adam and Eve, who will "pardon beg, with tears," and the unrepentant Satan.

**9. How is Milton's biography reflected in *Paradise Lost*?**

Milton's background informs a great deal of his writing of *Paradise Lost*. Like most people of his era, Milton grew up in a religious household, and Puritan religious beliefs influenced him greatly. At one point Milton intended to become a minister, though he was suspended from his studies after disputing his teachers on their curriculum. This foreshadows the ways in which Milton went on to write a "different version" of the biblical story of Satan's fall from heaven. Milton's disputes with the ministry also led him to discover his passion for writing poetry—a discovery that ensured his style of writing of *Paradise Lost*. Milton also had an ongoing fascination with the scientific discoveries of his era, which is what lends Book 8 of *Paradise Lost* its questioning theme about the limits of knowledge.

**10. Which elements of the epic form does Milton include in *Paradise Lost* to align it with epics from earlier eras?**

In Books 1, 3, and 7, Milton makes use of the invocation of muses, which is an epic tradition that can be found in ancient Greek tales such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In Books 1 and 6, Milton also positions the warfare of God and Satan to be on par with that of the warfare covered in ancient tragedies, though his warfare involves immortals who cannot be killed. In Book 3 Milton refers to himself as a blind prophet in the vein of Homer and Homer's blind characters Tiresias and Phineas. Milton hoped to write the definitive English epic, and felt that the largest scope he could cover was the struggle and fall of all humankind—a story with a big enough topic to be considered epic.

**11. In *Paradise Lost*, how can the lines "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" be interpreted concerning Satan's choices?**

In this famous quote from Book 1, Satan says that the mind can decide what is Heaven and what is Hell—that humans have the power to create misery or happiness wherever they go. This supports Milton's depiction of God's creatures as having free will. Here, Satan is reconciling himself to his new dwelling place in Hell and, characteristically, comparing himself to God with his mind that is "in its own place." Yet when Satan finds himself in the Garden of Eden, he admits to himself that he brings Hell wherever he goes: "which way I fly is Hell." While he wants to believe this is a choice, it is not, since Satan is now beyond redemption. In a way, this brings up a conundrum that many have pointed out: If Satan is beyond God's redemption (and has therefore sealed his fate), how can his choices still be of his own free will? The quote implies that the mind can make the choice to be a Heaven or Hell, but Satan has no choice other than Hell at this point. In this light, Satan's free will is an illusion, as is his belief that he has control over his mind's "own place."

**12. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, what case might be made for the claim that God is portrayed as a tyrant?**

It would be easy to make the case that God is portrayed as a tyrant in *Paradise Lost*, since he appears at first to have absolute control over the universe and his creations. At various points in the epic the "scales of God" appear in the sky to remind God's creatures and the reader that God is the one who gets to decide what is just and what isn't when he weighs punishments and rewards on the scale. God also claims to offer all his creatures redemption if they ask for it, but Milton hints that Satan is "beyond redemption." It would seem that if God was really a benevolent ruler, he would allow Satan endless chances to repent. However, Milton also portrays God as fair and just. For example, in Book 1 when Satan goes to war with him, God ensures that his own army not exceed Satan's. God also remarks that Adam "had of Me/ All he could have; I made him just and right"—in his own image. To be just with his creatures seems to be God's highest priority.

**13. In *Paradise Lost*, what difficulties does Milton face in turning a religious entity such as God into a literary character?**

Milton's biggest hurdle in depicting God as a literary character lies in the fact that God is one of the most recognizable religious names, and most people—religious or not—have a preconceived notion of him as a religious figure. Though it may seem blasphemous to reduce a divine entity to a character in a book, Milton needed to depict God as a character in the same way he had to depict Satan as a character. If he left God as an abstract religious concept, readers would have a difficult time understanding the relationship and battle between God and Satan. However, Milton faces the possibility of criticism from readers who might disagree with his depiction of God or his interpretation of his actions.

**14. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, why didn't Adam or Eve take accountability for their actions during the fall and are they right to blame each other?**

In Book 9, by having Adam and Eve refuse to take accountability for their individual roles in the fall, Milton seems to be suggesting that it is the fall itself that has corrupted their ability to own responsibility for their actions. They both willingly ate the fruit for different reasons and therefore blaming each other is incorrect. Eve eats the fruit because she is tempted by Satan in the form of a snake and also because of her desire for knowledge. However, Adam eats the fruit because he is weakened by his love for Eve. Milton hints here that this is the beginning of deception.

**15. Based on the portrayal of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, how could Milton be considered anti-feminist?**

Milton's stance on feminism is a matter of interpretation. Milton reflects the gender and religious beliefs and prejudices of his era, when a woman was considered the property of her husband and was expected to submit to his will. At the same time, in Book 9 Milton shows Eve as desirous of knowledge in a bid to become Adam's equal, though she is ultimately punished for this desire. The Bible also portrays Eve as weak and less wise than Adam, and for Milton to rewrite the story otherwise would have been unacceptable to his readers.

**16. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, why does God allow Satan to wage a war in Heaven?**

In Books 1 and 6 it seems paradoxical that God would allow Satan to wage a war in Heaven when he has the power to stop it at any time. It's likely that God wants Satan to realize the futility of his rebellion—since all angels are immortal, there is no way that Satan can "defeat" God's army of angels and overthrow him. As Abdiel, the only fallen angel to return to God, points out in Book 5,



God "formed the Powers of Heav'n/Such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being." In fact, God even limits the number of his soldiers to match Satan's to make the battle more fair.

**17. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, how does Satan's physical transformations over the course of the poem reveal his character?**

Milton is careful not to fully describe Satan when the reader first encounters him in Hell in Book 1. Milton describes Satan as large, but his scale is unknowable. From that point on, Satan shrinks in his transformations. He disguises himself as a cherub, or a small angel, and then as a bird, a mist, and finally a snake in Book 9. Each transformation reveals something about Satan's capacity for deception, and also how much he himself has fallen from his time as an angel—from a being with wings to a serpent that slithers on the ground. This diminishing aspect of Satan's physical form also shows how much power he loses over the course of the poem.

**18. How does the story of *Paradise Lost* differ from the story of God, Satan, Adam, and Eve told in the Bible?**

One way in which *Paradise Lost* differs greatly from the Bible is that Milton never claims that *Paradise Lost* should be read as a religious text, but rather that it is an epic work of fiction and that his characters are literary and allegorical. The additions he makes are his own interpretation and authorship, and he uses them to convey his ideas. One departure that Milton takes from the Bible is that of the story of the serpent tempting Eve. In Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan is in disguise as a snake, but in the Bible it is not made clear how the serpent became evil or that it is Satan. Additionally, at no point in the Bible is Satan ever depicted as a sympathetic character—something that Milton hints at throughout *Paradise Lost*. In many ways, by taking some artistic license Milton made a familiar biblical story seem new and interesting by developing the characters and their struggles as more complex.

**19. How does Milton's sequel *Paradise Regained* continue the themes in *Paradise Lost*?**

*Paradise Regained* carries over both the theological themes as well as the blank verse poetic structure of *Paradise Lost*. Since *Paradise Lost* ends with the fall of man after Adam and Eve are tempted to sin, *Paradise Regained* picks up with their attempts at redemption. Even though Adam was shown the suffering his act would cause future generations, he was also offered a path to redemption, so *Paradise Lost* ends on a hopeful note. Milton wanted to show that what was lost could be regained. *Paradise Regained* begins with the story of Jesus, and the theme of temptation is carried through by depicting the temptation of Christ.

**20. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, what are the functions of the muses?**

In Books 1, 3, and 7, Milton calls upon various muses to help him tell the story of *Paradise Lost*, beginning with an invocation to Urania to help him tell his "heavenly tale." By doing so, he aligns his tale with previous epics, such as those of ancient Greece. The role of muses is to help inspire and guide writers to tell their stories, and Milton by turns calls upon various muses, such as astronomy, when he needs help telling a particular part of the story. The muse of astronomy helps Milton tell the story of Raphael and Adam's conversation about the origin of the planets, sun, and stars.

**21. In *Paradise Lost*, how does Milton alter the traditional religious depiction of the Holy Trinity?**

In traditional Christian theology, God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all depicted as facets of the same entity. Since *Paradise Lost* is written with an emphasis on characters and their interactions and developments, Milton ran into a problem when trying to depict one character with three hard-to-differentiate parts. In the poem he makes God and the Son separate but related characters, with the Son often carrying out God's actions on his behalf. Milton does convey that he believes God and the Son are part of the Holy Spirit, but in order to keep them as understandable and distinct characters he needed to distinguish them. It is Satan's jealousy of the Son that spurs his rebellion of God, which sets the action of the poem into motion.

**22. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, does Satan's boast that it is "Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav'n" come true for him?**

This is the famous line uttered by Satan in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*. While it's true that Satan no longer needs to answer to or obey God, he still is not as powerful as God, nor as all-seeing or all-knowing. Satan has admitted that his is full of jealousy, rage, doubt, and anguish, and his envy is sparked by briefly wishing that he could enjoy the innocence of Paradise. While he does have command over his council in Hell, he seems to also realize what he is missing out on by no longer serving God. Ultimately, Satan and the other fallen angels are punished again by God in Hell, turned into serpents and doomed to eat fruit that turns to ashes. Even if he still reigns there, he and the other fallen angels are miserable.

**23. In *Paradise Lost*, what is the effect of Milton's use of blank verse rather than writing the poem in rhyme?**

Even though *Paradise Lost* is not written in rhyme, it still has the rhythm of *iambic pentameter*, in which certain syllables are stressed in a pattern. The effect of this technique is that the poem reads more like prose, and the dialogue between characters is depicted more naturally since most people don't speak in rhyme. This also has the effect of making characters like Satan and God more relatable and complex and allows Milton more freedom in describing actions and settings. Additionally, Milton's use of blank verse highlights his skillful use of language and phrasing, since it is rarely apparent in the poem that the repeated rhythm of iambic pentameter can be monotonous.

**24. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, why did Satan choose to tempt Eve instead of Adam?**

In Book 9 Satan chooses to tempt Eve instead of Adam because he (and Milton) sees her as the weaker of the two of them and therefore more open to manipulation. Satan knows that flattery is the way to get to Eve, while also exploiting her desire to be Adam's equal, and he tells her that eating "it gives you life/To knowledge." Satan knows that for Eve, having equal knowledge to Adam is power. Satan also correctly banks on the fact that, while Adam may be too smart to eat the fruit out of his own curiosity, his weakness is his love for Eve. Therefore, once Eve eats the fruit, Satan knows that Adam will, too, and the fall will be complete.

**25. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve both respond to temptation, but are they equally responsible for the fall?**

In Book 9, even though Eve eats the fruit first, she and Adam bear equal responsibility for the Fall. God gave them free will and it is their independent choice to eat the fruit knowing the consequences. Adam hesitates over leaving Eve alone, worried that she will be a prime candidate for Satan to tempt, and he is right. Eve lets herself be persuaded by the disguised Satan, and selfishly decides to offer Adam the fruit so that he will fall with her. Adam still has the agency to decline, but he willingly eats the fruit so that he can stay with Eve. In this way, they bear equal responsibility.

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## Unit 06: Alexander Pope: Rape of the Lock

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### Objectives

- Extract the plot and setting of *Rape of the Lock*
- Appreciate Pope's Role as a Central 18th Century Satirist
- Analyze literary devices like Mock-Epic, Social Satire and the Heroic Couplet in reference to the prescribed text
- Justify the function of Supernatural Machinery in a Mock Epic
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### Introduction

Mock-heroic is a term used to describe poems that use a grand and formal style to describe a popular or trivial topic. Since the poem's style is mismatched with the subject, it has a comic impact. Example:

- A poem about a hero fighting monsters (such as Beowulf) is heroic, and it can also be epic if it is long enough.
- Mock-heroic poetry is one in which the central character is not courageous or has no real adventures, such as some parts of Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24).
- The mock-heroic poem's style closely resembles that of the epic poem, particularly in its use of embellished, formal language and elevated vocabulary. The mock-heroic poem, on the other hand, will exaggerate to the point of bathos, resulting in a comic effect. The mock heroic style is similar to the mock-epic, in which a poem's style mimics the formal properties of epic poetry for comic effect. • Like classical epics, the poem is long and divided into cantos in the mock-epic style.
- Epic conventions, such as formal invocations, epic similes, and detailed combat descriptions, are mocked.

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- Epic conventions, such as formal invocations, epic similes, and detailed combat descriptions, are mocked.

- Pope's magnum opus the goddess Dulness and her takeover of England are described in mock-heroic style in *The Dunciad* (1729). The poem begins with an epic invocation, mocking the monotony that Pope sees emerging in the United Kingdom.
- *Don Juan*, a poem by Lord Byron, is both mock-epic and mock-heroic. Based on the legends of the womaniser Don Juan, Byron's version portrays a weak-willed antihero whose adventures are more amorous than threatening.

## 6.1 Subject Matter

The 18th century saw the exaltation of wit and reason in literature in the form of Horatian and Juvenalian satires, which revealed the superficial follies and moral hypocrisy of society during the neoclassical period in Britain through keen observation and sharp nimbleness of thinking. Society adopted a widespread fixation with "decorum," a façade of existing values and vanities, as well as an inherent sense of spiritual and political superiority, underneath the enlightenment ideals of reason, order, and wisdom.

During this time, satires sought to expose society's flaws by ridiculing accepted norms of thinking, exposing Britain's shortcomings and chastising the time's hypocrisy. Enlightenment writers Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift used various styles of satire, different types of argument, and different targets of mockery to shed a light on different facets of British culture, offering much-needed critique of a society that seemed to forget the true values of its era at times.

Pope and Swift, both known for their razor-sharp wit, drew inspiration from rhetorical masters of the logical, classical past and their respective satirical archetypes. The sound of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is Horatian, holding up a mirror to the upper class's follies and vanities, delicately chastising society in a sly yet refined voice. Pope does not directly criticise the British aristocracy's self-importance, but rather approaches it in such a way that the reader gains a new viewpoint from which to quickly dismiss the story's behaviour as foolish and ludicrous. Pope is a gentle mockery of the upper class, more graceful and lyrical than his harsh counterpart, but he is nevertheless able to successfully illuminate the public's spiritual decay.

Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, on the other hand, is a classic Juvenalian satire, surprisingly exposing an often-overlooked aspect of British colonialism, savage mockery and disdainful scorn with respect to the Irish. Swift's morbid storey, a bitter assault on indifference to the poor, delineates an unethical and twisted solution to Ireland's economic problems using strange but beautifully logical reasoning and a detached sound. Swift's satirical style is much more acerbic than his counterpart's, relying on realism and harshness to convey his message, ideally demonstrating Juvenalian satire's potential to shock and ridicule.

*The Rape of the Lock* satirises a seemingly petty egotistical elitist quarrel thus incorporating the masterful qualities of a heroic epic. Epic poems like John Milton's *Paradise Lost* were highly regarded during this period of literary prosperity because of their important subject matter, convincing heroes, and rich text. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope continues in this grand vein, achieving a whimsical mock epic through his mix of the trivial and timeless. Despite its resemblance to historical epics, this work has a light and playful tone that highlights the poem's unique central dispute, the Baron stealing, or "rapping," Belinda's illustrious lock of hair. "Forever and ever, the holy hair dissevers from the fair head at the meeting points!

Then the living lightning flashed from her eyes, and the terrified skies were ripped apart by cries of terror" (Pope 153-156). The basic elements of Horatian satire used in this mock epic are exemplified by this embellished and exaggerated quotation. Personification is used to emphasise Belinda's terror's seemingly transcendent consequences, as her screams "rend the affrighted sky." As written, this example mocks the conventional epic by implying that the removal of Belinda's lock has dire and almost divine consequences. Pope employs personification often in the poem, adding to the poem's heroic tone and elevating the subject matter in general.

Swift's *A Modest Proposal* is modelled after a conventional staid economic proposal for inclusion in British government policy, in comparison to Pope's epic style in *The Rape of the Lock*. Swift, on the other hand, flips the script, basing his bold plan on ruthless, unrestricted economic gain at the expense of Britain's Irish colony. Ireland was in shambles when the plan was anonymously published in 1729, having been effectively "eaten," or consumed, by the British Empire. The protestant British suppressed the Catholic Irish minority and paid little attention to the plight of the country's vast poor population.

As a result, Swift penned this scathing satirical suggestion, proposing that the Irish sell their children as food to alleviate their financial woes. "With a population of one million and a half souls

in this kingdom, I estimate that there are about two hundred thousand couples whose wives are breeders" (Swift 1115). This quote reflects Swift's economist persona, leading the reader to conclude that the suggestion is serious in nature and intended to be taken literally. Swift uses real Juvenalian humour and inherent irony in the proposal, but due to its formal, scholarly nature, he doesn't use any other literary devices.

Both Pope and Swift must have had a reason for writing their two convincing but disparate satirical works. The characters of Belinda and the Baron were modelled after Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre, Catholic British aristocrats who were obsessed with decorum during the neoclassical era. These characters play the roles of pseudo-heroes in *The Rape of the Lock* since they reflect a facsimile of 18th century British personal ideals.

Pope uses his intricate mock epic to act as a metaphor for the futile and shallow time of British history, more so than Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. The poem was written to capture the attention of aristocrats and socialites alike causing them to laugh at their own mistakes and sparking a cultural change. Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, on the other hand, is a political work that criticises the British Empire's occupation and treatment of the Irish. The plan is outlined in a logical order and seems to have been well calculated. The "shock value" of the allegations and secret charges acted as a testament to the British moral failings and unbridled political conduct. Swift chose to publish the work under a pseudonym in order to prevent any negative repercussions.

These two satirical works express their writers' deep frustration with society. Literature that promotes social or political change serves as a dialectic power, as does entrenched tradition; it is the synthesis of what is and what is desired that steers society in a particular direction. Pope and Swift both used their immense literary skills to illuminate modern society, causing them to admit the neoclassical period's shortcomings. Pope and Swift hoped to change the British mentality of their time through *The Rape of the Lock* and *A Modest Proposal*, respectively, and encourage it to leap forward into a new period of true enlightenment in terms of social and political morality.

## Summary

"*The Rape of the Lock*" is a brilliant and amusing satire on England's aristocratic society, with its social scandals, follies, trivialities, and vanities of trendy men and women in general. "The true end of humour is the amendment of vice by correction," as Dryden put it, and that is exactly what Pope aimed for in his "*Rape of the Lock*." Pope mocks his society's deviations by using burlesque, satire, and irony.

The satire in "*The Rape of the Lock*" can be classified as social satire because it satirises culture as a whole in ways that are still applicable today. Furthermore, it is a satire on the follies and vanities of fashionable men and women in general, rather than on any person. Pope satirises the glamorous women of the period through Belinda, and the aristocratic gentlemen of the time through Baron. However, the following is why Pope's "*The Rape of the Lock*" can be classified as a social satire:

In reality, the poem is a satire on female frivolity. Pope also exposes the readers to a number of "Female Errors." Pope satirises Belinda's late rise as an aristocratic woman right from the start. When Belinda opened her eyes to fall asleep again, it was twelve o'clock.

"Now Lap-dogs give themselves the rowzing Shake,  
And sleepless Lovers, just at Twelve, awake:"

The poet then proceeds to mock women's vanity. The poet mocks the aristocratic ladies of the time for their excessive fondness for gilded chariots and ombre. These vanities, he claims, do not end with the woman's death:

"Think not, when Woman's transient Breath is fled,  
That all her Vanities at once are dead."

These ladies' weakness for amusement and labelled balls is also expressed by the poet. The following lines are obviously satirical:

"With varying Vanities, from ev'ry Part,  
They shift the moving Toyshop of their Heart"

In short, women are all frivolous beings with a sincere interest in making love, and the love letters they received piqued their interest. The poet mocks Belinda by claiming that when she finally awoke from her long slumber, "Thy eyes first opened on a Billet doux" in which the lover had spoken at charms. He satirises by claiming that young ladies' favourite pastime was making love.



They wanted the lovers to pay them attention and give them presents, but their love was inconsistent.

In a popular satirical passage, the poet also mocks women's excessive devotion to self-adornment and self-decoration. Belinda is said to be getting ready to go to the bathroom. Belinda is represented as beginning her toilet operations with a prayer to the cosmetic force, and her dressing table is littered with puffs and powders:

“Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,  
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.”

The Bibles are normally set in the middle of her beauty aids, which is another source of satire in the arrangement of items on the table. However, the Bible is a holy book that should be kept apart. So, to Belinda, the Bible is just as significant as everything else. Pope satirises this kind of mentality toward religion.

The poet then satirises how chastity and seriousness can be lost in philanderers' culture. For them, honour was just a word with no real significance, and reputation was more valuable than honour. Missing a ball is as serious as forgetting her spirit, and a lady's honour is no more serious than her staining new brocade. As Elwin points,

"The relative importance of things, the little with them is great, and the great little. They attach as much importance to a china jar as to their honour as much to religion as to dances and masquerades, as much to their lap-dogs as to husbands."

"Not louder shirks to pitying Heaven are cast  
When husbands or when lap dogs breathe their last"

Pope satirises Belinda as well as the pretended innocence of all trendy women in this poem. She was punished as a result of her phoney purity. Ariel notices that Belinda isn't too keen on maintaining her virtue, so she leaves the scene. The Pope mocks Belinda by saying that she could save his hair if she tried hard enough, but only from the outside, not from the inside. Pope satirises the aristocratic men of his day as well. They're just as obnoxious as the girls. The trendy society of the period is represented by Lord Peter and his associates. They're all bored, empty-headed people who seem to have nothing better to do than make love or flirt with ladies, which the Pope mocks.

The satire in the portraits of sir Plume, another trendy gentleman, with his snuff emptiness, is not easily forgotten. When his beloved Thalestris asks him to convince Lord Petre to hand over Belinda's precious hairs, he speaks phrases that are unsurpassed in their emptiness, and pore mocks this emptiness:

“With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face,  
He first the snuff-box open'd, then the case,  
And thus broke out – "My Lord, why, what the devil?  
"Z – ds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil!  
Plague on't! 't is past a jest – nay prithee, pox!  
Give her the hair" – he spoke, and rapp'd his box.” (593-598)

This little speech by Lord Plume exemplifies the smart set's loyalty and unthinking stupidity more plainly than anything else. Not only that, but the poet has mocked the legal system. Judges rush to sign the sentence at four o'clock in the afternoon so that they can eat dinner on time. This demonstrates their sense of duty to these judges. Pope mocks the justice system of his day. He has this to say about them:

“Mean while, declining from the Noon of day,  
The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray;  
The hungry Judges soon the sentence sign,  
And wretches hang that jury-men may dine;”

Even Pope Francis has slammed the idea of friendship. Friendships are shallow and fleeting. Thalestris, Belinda's mate, is as shallow as the age she lives in. Belinda dislikes being named her friend after her popularity has faded, so it would be a shame to be recognised as her friend in the future.

Alexander Pope wrote *The Rape of the Lock*, which was first published in 1712 and then reworked and republished in 1714. The poem is a mock-epic that mocks London's upper crust at the time. The lead character, Belinda, has a lock of hair cut off at a social party, and the plot revolves around her. Belinda is enraged that her strand of hair has been cut by a stranger, despite the fact that it might seem insignificant to others.

Pope uses Belinda and the Baron to ridicule two of his acquaintances, Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre, in the *Rape of the Lock*. The poem recounts the events of the previous night, culminating in Belinda's "horrific" defeat.

The Story behind the story. In response to a letter from his friend John Caryll, an influential Roman Catholic at the time, Pope wrote *The Rape of the Lock*. Caryll demonstrated that a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair had been cut off by his uncle, Lord Petre. The families had been feuding since the incident. Pope wrote *The Rape of the Lock* to make fun of the situation.

"The stealing of Miss Belle Fermor's hair, was taken too seriously, and caused an estrangement between the two families, though they had lived so long in great friendship before. A common acquaintance and well-wisher to both, desired me to write a poem to make a jest of it, and laugh them together again. It was with this view that I wrote the *Rape of the Lock*." (1).

Arabella Fermor, who is she? Arabella Fermor, the daughter of Henry Fermor, was born into a wealthy family. She was the belle of London society in the early 18th century, known for her elegance. Her family was offended when she told them about the incident involving her lock of hair, and they became distant from their once close friends, the Petres. Belinda is the personification of Arabella Fermor in Pope's poem.

The Poem's History. *The Rape of the Lock* was written in 1711 and published in 1712, but it went through several stages before becoming the poem we know today. The first version was just two cantos long, but the tale grew longer with each subsequent version. Pope built on his work a year later by polishing it and incorporating supernatural elements. This edition, however, was not published until 1714. Finally, in 1717, while preparing a compilation of his work for publication, Pope published the version we know today. This version has five cantos and contains Clarissa's voice, which helps to describe the poem's morality. However, by the time Pope finished the new edition, Lord Petre had died of smallpox and Arabella had married, so the feud that the poem was about had ended so the feud which the poem was originally written to mend was no longer relevant.

### Key words/ Glossary

- Duty of Zephyretta - to after the flattering fan
- Brillante- to look- ear- drops
- Momentila to look after watch.
- Crispissa - charge of Belinda's lock.
- Belinda- Fashionable name of Arabella Fermore
- Shock - Name of Belinda' s dog
- Betty- Belinda' s maid servant
- Ariel - Belinda' s guardian Sylph\
- Fellow spirit of Ariel - Sylphs; Sylphids; nymphs; fays; fairies; genii.
- Balmy rest - comfortable rest & sleep
- Birth - night
- Beau - aristocratic gallant dressed up foe ceremonious occasion.
- Inferior priest- refers to Betty
- Billet-doux - Love letter
- Light Militia - an army of airy spirit
- Denizens- - inhabitants
- Squadrons- orderly bodies of spirits
- " Seven folded fence" - Petticoat made of seven fold
- John Caryll - friend of Pope
- Elves- fairies
- earthly vehicles - human body ( vehicle of the soul)
- 'Beauteous mould'- beautiful body of women
- Ombre - a popular game of cards
- Termagants- Women of tumultuous & fiery nature.
- Salamander- Spirit of fairy women

- Yielding minds - Women of gentle nature
- Gnomes - spirit of prim & affected women
- Prude- Women of affected modesty
- Coquettes- Flirting women ( becomes Sylphs)
- Reject mankind- discards young lover
- Masquerads- Masked dance
- Celestial -heavenly
- Ogling - casting amorous glance
- The Baron - Lord Petre
- Infidels - lively
- Phoebus - Sun God.
- Rival of his beams- Belinda' s beauty excelled the glory of the sun
- China jar - Vessel made of china clay

### Self Assessment

1. Which character among the following reflects to after the flattering fan:
  - A. Duty of Zephyretta
  - B. Brillante
  - C. Momentila
  - D. Crispissa
  
2. Which one among mentioned below was supposed to look after the ear drops of Belinda:
  - A. Zephyretta
  - B. Brillante
  - C. Momentila
  - D. Crispissa
  
3. Which sylph has to look after the watch of Belinda
  - A. Zephyretta
  - B. Brillante
  - C. Momentila
  - D. Crispissa
  
4. What is the duty of Crispissa in 'The Rape of the Lock'
  - A. flattering fan
  - B. to look- ear- drops
  - C. to look after watch.
  - D. charge of Belinda's lock.
  
5. What is the actual name of Belinda
  - A. Brillante
  - B. Momentila
  - C. Crispissa
  - D. Arabella Fermore
  
6. Which character among the following is a dog:
  - A. Shock
  - B. Betty

- 
- C. Ariel  
D. Sylphids
7. Which one among mentioned below is a servant:  
A. Shock  
B. Betty  
C. Ariel  
D. Sylphids
8. Which sylph has to look after as a guardian of Belinda  
A. Shock  
B. Betty  
C. Ariel  
D. Sylphids
9. Who is/are fellow spirit/s  
A. Shock  
B. Betty  
C. Ariel  
D. Sylphs; Sylphids; nymphs ; fays; fairies; genii.
10. What does 'Balmy rest' means  
A. Name of Belinda' s dog  
B. Belinda' s maid servant  
C. Belinda' s guardian Sylph  
D. comfortable rest & sleep
11. Which word among the following reflects 'birth':  
A. night  
B. Beau  
C. Inferior priest  
D. Billet-doux
12. Which one among mentioned below signify aristocratic gallant dressed up for ceremonious occasion:  
A. Birth  
B. Beau  
C. Inferior priest  
D. Billet-doux
13. Which word refers to Betty:  
A. Beau  
B. Inferior priest  
C. Billet-doux  
D. Light Militia
14. What does Billet-doux mean in 'The Rape of the Lock'

- A. night
- B. aristocratic gallant dressed up for ceremonious occasion.
- C. refers to Betty
- D. Love letter

15. What is the actual meaning of Light Militia
- A. night
  - B. aristocratic gallant dressed up for ceremonious occasion.
  - C. Love letter
  - D. an army of airy spirit

### **Answer for Self Assessment**

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

### **Review Questions**

1. How effective is Ariel in protecting Belinda?

**Ans.** Since Belinda has lost her lovely lock, Ariel completely fails to protect her.

2. What part does Ariel play in "The Rape of the Lock"?

**Ans.** Ariel's position in "The Rape of the Lock" is to protect and direct Belinda.

3. What happened to Belinda's lock?

**Ans.** Belinda's lock reaches the lunar sphere at long last.

**4. Who is Betty and what are her responsibilities?**

**Ans.** Betty is Belinda's maid servant and assists her in the bathroom.

5. What is the name of Belinda's pet dog?

**Ans.** Shock is the name of Belinda's pet dog.

6. What exactly is a mock-epic?

**Ans.** A mock-epic is a long satirical poem written in the high and exalted style of an epic but dealing with a trivial matter.

7. What is an epic?

**Ans.** An epic is a long narrative poem about the exploits of heroes and warriors on a grand scale.

8. How do you define allegory?

**Ans.** An allegory is a plot, character, or occurrence that has two meanings: one that is obvious and the other that is hidden or figurative.

9. How do you define satire?

**Ans.** Satire is a formal concept that typically refers to written works. It is the mocking of human foibles and vices in order to bring about change.

10. Address the role of a self-contained part of *The Rape of the Lock* (such as Belinda's morning routine or Umbriel's descent into the Cave of Spleen) and discuss its function within the poem as a whole.

**Ans.** Pope develops the mock-heroic motifs that run throughout the poem with Belinda's morning routine. He imagines her toilette as the pre-battle training of an epic hero. As a religious sacrament, the scene starts. The goddess appears in Belinda's reflection in the mirror, and Belinda herself preside over the ceremony (I.127). Within Pope's epic model, the "sacred rites" she performs—in truth, the basic act of dressing herself—act as a prayer to the goddess for battlefield success (I.128). Belinda's battleground is, of course, the courtly party at Hampton Court Palace. Following the sacraments, Pope depicts Belinda's toilette as a rite of passage. Arming the hero is a ritual. The combs, buttons, "puffs, powders, patches" that Belinda uses to prepare herself are reimagined as the epic hero's weapons and armour by Pope (I.138). Belinda, on the other hand, is not a fierce warrior like Achilles or Hector, but rather a lovely coquette. Pope reveals the fading of epic subject matter, a core concern of his social criticism, by replacing the martial hero with a charming lady and the battlefield with a palace. The energies that were once spent on religious devotion and "mighty tournaments" are now squandered on the upper classes' vanity and frivolous amusements (I.2).

11. How does Pope use the reversal of gender roles to further his mockery of the political system in "The Rape of the Lock"?

**Ans.** To highlight the comic irony of his subjects' actions, Pope reverses conventional gender roles. Pope reflects on the poem's heroine in *The Rape of the Lock*, imbuing her with the masculine qualities of the typical epic hero. Belinda needs the recognition that combat will get her at the start of the third canto's card game: "Belinda now, whom hunger of glory invites, / Burns to meet two adventurous knights" (III.25-6). Belinda's conduct is also far from ladylike. After she wins the game, she exults, "the nymph exulting fills the sky with shouts" (III.99). The other women in the poem behave in the same way.

During the battle over the lock, Thalestris easily defeats all of the men, with the women being the aggressors. Men, on the other hand, are mostly foppish and frail. Even the poem's nominal hero, the Baron, adopts subservient postures and requires Clarissa's assistance in obtaining a sword. The reversal of conventional gender roles reveals how far society in the eighteenth century has strayed from epic ideals. Women tend to overreact to minor slights, while men are pathetic fops who lack bravery. Instead, they waste time gossiping and engaging in pointless activities.

12. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope satirises which aspects of society? Take note of his use of the mock-heroic genre.

**Ans.** Pope's satire *The Rape of the Lock* focuses on the upper classes' foibles. These members of society, according to Pope's poem, are only involved in trivial matters, a point he emphasises in his portrayal of the card game as an epic war. In fact, the "battlefield" of ombre serves as an excuse for gambling and flirting, but it also serves as the only way for these young aristocrats to gain heroic recognition. The Pope confirms the upper classes' powerlessness by revealing their ignorance of the world beyond Hampton Court Palace. "One speaks the glory of the British Queen, / And one describes a charming Indian screen," he says of the British Empire and trade (III.13-4). The nobles seem to be happy to drink coffee—an obvious import from British trading networks—while debating trivial matters like "who gave the ball, or paid the last visit" (III.12). As a result, Pope reveals the upper classes' arrogance and idleness.

13. In *The Rape of the Lock*, what is the sexual allegory?

**Ans.** The cutting of Belinda's hair has a sexually suggestive connotation, as the poem's title implies. Pope uses the terms "power" and "ravish" in his portrayal of the Baron's schemes to steal Belinda's hair, reinforcing the theme of infringement introduced in the poem's title. The Baron also expresses his desire to obtain the lock "by deception betray," implying that he is comfortable exploiting Belinda's innocence (II.32). The sexual allegory is further advanced by Ariel's suspicion that the foretold "dire tragedy" would be a sexual assault. Belinda would "stain her honour or her new brocade," he fears (II.107). The staining of Belinda's honour has overt sexual connotations, while the staining of her dress suggests both sexual maturity and virginity loss.

Hair has sexual connotations in and of itself. Pope allows for a secondary interpretation of Belinda's curls as pubic hairs, emphasising the sexual violation theme. Belinda's virtue is in

greater danger, according to Pope's sexual allegory, than the simple act of stealing her ringlet implies.

14. In *The Rape of the Lock*, discuss Pope's criticism of the sexual double-standard for women.

**Ans.** In order to find a suitable husband in the eighteenth century, a woman was supposed to draw the attention of men. Naturally, society expected a woman to remain a virgin until she married. A woman who squandered her virtue in the search of a husband was typically shunned by her friends and lost her face in respectable society. The depiction of Belinda's petticoat, which effectively acts as a fortification to preserve her chastity while her curls attract male admirers, highlights this double-standard.

15. How do supernatural powers (Sylphs, Gnomes, etc.) play a part in *The Rape of the Lock*?

**Ans.** The divine powers in *The Rape of the Lock* play a similar role to the gods and goddesses in epic poems like *The Iliad*. In *The Iliad*, the gods alter the course of the Trojan War, and Pope's mythic creatures have an effect on the poem's action. Belinda's otherworldly protector, Ariel, warns her of impending dangers and protects her during her adventures. However, it appears that Ariel's ability to protect Belinda is minimal.

A love letter distracts Belinda from Ariel's warning of imminent danger in the first canto. Similarly, he retreats when he notices Belinda's attraction to the Baron in "the deep recesses of the virgin's thought," unable to protect her (140). While it is Ariel's responsibility to preserve Belinda's virtue, he appears to be unable to completely protect her from the perils of love. Although Ariel's position is similar to that of a godly guardian—similar to Athena's guidance of Diomedes—Umbriel poses a threat to Belinda, exacerbating her pain. As a result, his position is similar to Aphrodite's sabotage of the Greeks.

16. In *The Rape of the Lock*, discuss Pope's attitude toward religion. What does this mean for his social criticism?

**Ans.** Pope describes a world that is all-too-willing to worship beauty, which he portrays as religious perversion, in *The Rape of the Lock*. This sacrilege is encapsulated in his portrayal of Belinda's cross. Although the cross is clearly a Christian emblem, it serves a decorative rather than a religious purpose. It's still so secular that "Jews can kiss" and "infidels adore" it (II.8). Pope also sexualizes the cross by placing it on Belinda's "white breast," implying that her breasts, not the cross, are the subjects of worship (II.7). The Pope's desecration of religious worship is a criticism of society's emphasis on appearances over morality.

17. What is the significance of Clarissa's moralizing speech in *The Rape of the Lock*'s fifth canto? Be sure to talk about some of the interpretive issues that come with it.

**Ans.** Clarissa's speech raises concerns about how society values looks, especially female beauty. She observes that men worship women as angels without evaluating their moral character, and that the beauty they admire is fleeting: "frail beauty must decay" (V.25). She claims that because beauty does not last, women must have other attributes to keep them going after their physical appearance fades. Despite the fact that Clarissa's conclusions reflect a part of Pope's vital agenda, reading Clarissa's speech as Pope's core moral oversimplifies the poem. Her acts in the poem raise further questions about the moral superiority she claims in this address. Clarissa's self-righteousness is tainted by her involvement in the "rape" of Belinda's hair. Pope's conclusion also contradicts her core claim that beauty is ephemeral. Pope immortalizes Belinda's beauty by transforming her severed hair into a star that people will admire for all time.

18. Explain the real-life event that inspired "The Rape of the Lock."

**Ans.** *The Rape of the Lock* is based on a true story in which a British nobleman, Lord Petre, cut off a strand of hair hanging tantalizingly from the head of the lovely Arabella Fermor. The daring stealing of the lock by Petre sparked a feud between the Fermor and Petre families. A friend of Pope's and the warring families, John Caryl, convinced the great writer to write a literary work mocking the absurdity and silliness of the conflict. As a result, one of the greatest satirical poems ever written was born. Pope also drew on ancient classical sources while writing the poem, especially Homer's great epics, *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*—as examples of style and sound to follow.

He also looked up epics from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Comment on "... Scylla's Fate/ Changed to a bird, and sent to flit in the air/ She dearly pays for Nisus's injured fur". In lines 121-124 of Alexander Pope's mock heroic narrative poem "The Rape of the Lock," the narrator advises the Baron not to carry out his intentions by referring to the tale of Scylla and Nisus, Pope reminds us of this with an allusion to Greek mythology. Scylla was a princess, and her father was Nisus. When she fell in love with a rival king, he had a lock of purple hair that made him invincible. She snipped the lock in order for her lover to beat her father in battle. Her lover despised her actions and dumped her, during which the gods transformed her into a seagull.

19. What poetry genre does "The Rape of the Lock" belong to? Establish the genre.

**Ans.** Pop describes "The Rape of the Lock" as a "heroi-comical poem" at the start of the poem. The poem—along with others like it—is now known as a mock-epic, as well as a mock-heroic. To poke fun at human follies, such a work parodies the extreme, exalted style of the classical epic poem—such as Homer's *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*. As a result, a mock-epic is satire. It addresses ordinary people and incidents as if they were exceptional or heroic, as if they were the great heroes and events of Homer's two great epics. Comment on the setting of "The Rape of the Lock." Pope imitated the features of Homer's epics, as well as later epics such as Vergil's *The Aeneid*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

On a single day in the early 1700s, the action takes place in London and its environs. The tale starts at noon (Canto I) at Belinda's London home, where she is meticulously preparing for a gala social gathering. The scene then changes to a boat transporting Belinda up the Thames (Canto II). She seems as majestic to onlookers as Queen Cleopatra did when she sailed in her barge. Except for a short scene in Canto IV that takes place in the Queen of Spleen's cave, the rest of the tale (Cantos III-V) takes place where Belinda debarks—Hampton Court Palace, a former residence of King Henry VIII on the outskirts of London.

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## Unit 07: Alexander Pope: Rape of the Lock

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- 
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### Introduction

William J. Long praises Alexander Pope, writing that he was "the poet" of a great nation at the time (265). Pope was regarded as one of the most skilled satirists, and he even perfected the heroic couplet rhyme scheme (a rhyme scheme consisting of lines written in iambic pentameter used mainly in narrative and epic poems). He was unquestionably one of the most influential exponents of the Neoclassical literary creed, which focused on imitating the works of the classical masters while attempting to rationalize poetry. Pope not only used words beautifully, but he also projected his time in a simple and appropriate manner. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Pope was devoted entirely to literature and was able to maintain his status as a respected literary figure despite religious biases and physical obstacles.

### 7.1 Subject Matter

Alexander Pope was born in a Roman Catholic family in the year 1688. While his father was a wealthy linen draper, Pope was denied entry to public schools because of his religious beliefs, as the Protestant William the Orange's accession to the British throne ensured that Catholics were excluded from attending public schools and public events in and around London. As a result, despite being an avid reader, the self-taught Pope grew up with inaccurate information on a variety of topics. In *A Critical History of English Literature*, David Daiches writes about Pope's disadvantages: "Pope was a Roman Catholic at a period when Roman Catholics in England mostly suffered Civilism, sickly and malformed" (622). Daiches, on the other hand, believes that these drawbacks may have contributed to Pope's special individuality, "as opposed to what one may call social and Augustan qualities" (622).

Pope's early literary career was hampered by his lack of rights as a child, and his lack of formal education is reflected in his early works such as *Pastorals* (1709) and *Essay on Criticism* (1711). His audacious Homer translations propelled him to fame and fortune, allowing him to move from the modest Binfield to the more aristocratic Twickenham, where he lived the rest of his life. After overcoming some initial obstacles, Pope went on to become the most famous poet of his day, known for his didactic and satirical poems. "There is hardly an ideal, a belief, a doubt, a fashion, a

whim of Queen Anne's time, that is not neatly expressed in his poetry," Long says of Pope's poetic achievements (264).

Despite his reluctance to making open political statements, Pope was a man of his time who used poetry to express his political views. Pat Rogers observes how his works represent the most critically discussed issues of the moment, such as war and peace, the environment, and so on.

The Jacobite uprisings, the South Sea Bubble, the Atterbury conspiracy, the Excise crisis, and the emergence of patriot opposition to Walpole are only some of the topics discussed. Windsor- Forest stood almost alone in mentioning the infamous slave contract that was part of the diplomatic bargain when he wrote a poem on the extremely controversial Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, along with hundreds of eager poetasters. (2)

Literary historians classify Pope's works into three general categories for ease of reference: the early, middle, and late phases. Pastorals (1709), Windsor Forest (1713), and other minor poems were written early in Pope's literary career (a kind of descriptive poetry or local poetry), *Messiah: A Sacred Eclogue* (1712) (combined Virgil's fourth Eclogue with the messianic portions of Isaiah in couplet verse of heavy formal gravity. (624)), *Essay on Criticism* (1711), and *The Rape of the Lock* (1712). The popular Translations make up the second period of his literary career, while works like *The Dunciad* (1728-1743) and the *Epistles* make up the third. *Essay on Criticism* and *The Rape of the Lock* are two of his first-phase works that merit critical consideration.

While Pope's Homer translations would later bring him financial success, the publication of *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) marked the true birth of a genius. Despite the fact that it was written when Pope was only 24, *The Rape of the Lock* is generally regarded as one of Pope's greatest achievements. Pope was living in Binfield, Windsor Forest, when the first edition of this poem was written.

The young Pope became acquainted with the Blounts of Mapledurham, a neighbouring Catholic family. Martha, nineteen, and Patty, seventeen, were the family's two younger sisters. One of the Blount family's cousins was Arabella Fermor (Belinda), a lively lady, and one of the family's distant relatives was Lord Petre (Baron), whose family and the Fermors had a strong relationship before Lord Petre stole a lock of Arabella's hair in 1711.

There was a chasm between the families as a result of this. After being asked by John Caryll, a catholic friend of Pope's and Martha's godfather, Pope agreed to compose a poem that would bring the two families together. "[H]e wrote the poem very quickly, in two weeks, and probably gave manuscript copies of the poem to Arabella's family and some of his own friends," Harriet Raghunathan writes in a 'Introduction' to the poem (xviii). This mock-heroic poem on the above-mentioned incident, despite its haste, is a work of "delicate imagination, subtly ironic wit, mock-heroic extravagance, the most perfect control over cunningly manipulated verse..." 628 (Daiches 628).

Making a drawing room debacle into a (mock) epic poem takes genius, and Pope's ability to do so demonstrates his abilities; as David Daiches points out, "The Rape of the Lock is more than a jest; it is, in Arnold's word, a critique of life" (629). The poem, which predates Dryden's *Macflecknoe* (1678), Boileau's *Le Lutrin* (1674), and Garth's *The Dispensary*, is perhaps the most polished example of the mock-heroic literary tradition.

The mock-heroic tone is formed from the start, with a 26-line invocation, and the fifth line, "Slight is the subject, but not so the praise," solidifies it. The scene then shifts to Belinda's bathroom, where she is getting ready, or rather arming herself, to face the world. It's worth noting the imagery, which is straight out of the epic poetry cupboard:

And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd,

Each silver vase in mystic order laid.

First, rob'd in white, the nymph intent adores

With head uncover'd, the cosmetic pow'rs. (Pope 13)

However, it is the subtle subversion of epic diction, such as the use of terms like "cosmetic" instead of "cosmic," that distinguishes this poem as a mock-epic par excellence. The mock-obvious heroic's intent is to project mundane events in a way that can be compared to epic poetry's grand events. However, any mock-epic poem must contain satire, and Pope's poem succeeds admirably in this regard.

"Pope's intention was to laugh at the quarrelling families...together again," Harriet Raghunathan suggests in this sense. When he portrays their feud in absurd terms, with the silver bodkin from Belinda's hair replacing Agamemnon's sceptre... The disparity between the two societies is what makes the situation so amusing" (xxiii).

The poem's colossal accomplishment is the poem's relentless juxtaposition of the serious and the trivial, whether through the game of ombre or Umbriel's journey into the cave of spleen.

The Rape of the Lock, which is divided into five cantos, is significant as a commentary on current social realities and traditions, as well as a high-class satire. However, the first edition, published in 1712, only had two cantos, and the poem's enormous popularity inspired him to add three more cantos. However, as Harriet Raghunathan points out, the enlargement, which was primarily accomplished by introducing supernatural creatures such as guardian angels, was not merely a whim.

“According to Warburton, Pope needed ‘some quite extravagant system’ as the basis for his epic machinery, or supernatural beings, as only such a system would enable the poem to be ‘intentionally debased’ as the mock heroic requires” (xxix).

Le Comte de Gabalis, a short novel by Abbe Montfaucon de Villars, was the main source of Pope's supernatural machinery. The work was written in 1670 and translated by P. Ayres in 1680.

“satire on the Rosicrucians who, although they claimed medieval origins, were essentially a loosely organised society of educated men...dating from the early 17th century” (Raghunathan, xxix).

Although Pope draws inspiration from Villars' work, he adds and changes things as he sees fit. Unlike the more influential supernatural figures of epic poetry, the sylphs were unable to protect Belinda despite possessing supernatural abilities, allowing Pope to create his mock-heroic style more convincingly. When it comes to the use of supernatural machinery, Alastair Fowler wonders whether they should be taken seriously (189). One is inclined to believe that these devices are invoked primarily for the purpose of decoration and subversion of epic form. The baron approaches with the scissor to hack off Belinda's head in the third canto of this epic parody. Despite anticipating an imminent danger to Belinda, Ariel retreats helplessly. The inability of Ariel emphasises the supernatural agents' limitations:

Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought  
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;

.....

Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,  
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.

The rest of the poem demonstrates Pope's command of language and structure, as some parts, such as the Cave of Spleen episode, “adds just the touch of gravity required to bring out the moral echoes...[of] the poem as a whole” (Daiches, 631). Furthermore, the poetic form helps him to satirise many of today's prevalent practises and use it as a forum for social and political analysis. However, feminist commentators have recently examined the poem as an accusation of Pope's sexism. Belinda's projection is unquestionably problematic when viewed through feminist eyes, as Ellen Pollak demonstrates. The “vision of the heroine worshipping her own portrait in the mirror” contains a “embodiment of self-enclosed narcissism” (159). Women in literature have been portrayed as narcissists since time immemorial, and Pope makes no effort to make Belinda an exception.

The portrayal of Belinda as a self-contained narcissist and a frivolous woman exposes Pope's covertly misogynistic mentality and takes him closer to all those writers whom Kate Millet criticises in *The Sexual Politics* for patriarchally and sexistly projecting women. Furthermore, Belinda's narcissism can be compared to what Ellen Pollak refers to as “a show of booty by a man” (Pope 175). Such comparisons are unmistakably proof of Pope's brazen misogyny. Even when Pope invests in Belinda's heroic attributes and appears to glorify Belinda's authoritative forces (for example, in Canto-III), the poem's mock-heroic structure reinstates the apparent triviality of all her actions. Such predictions are likely to have sparked a debate about how women should be viewed in social and domestic spheres, with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, serving as the culmination of this debate.

### The Pope's Translations and the Second Phase

Pope's achievements continued with the publication of Homer's classics translations for “interpret[ing] Homer in the elegant, artificial language of his own day” (Long 267). Long goes on to explain how, in order to appeal to modern tastes, “Homeric characters lose their courage and become trendy men of the court” (267). As a result, some critics fail to praise Pope's translations as masterful and authentic; rather, the greatness of these works lies in Pope's use of Heroic grandeur to entertain the people of his time.

Aside from becoming an accomplished interpreter, Pope also joined the Scriblerus Club, a tory philosophical group that included Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, John Arbuthnot, and Pope himself in the 18th century. The primary goal of this club was to ridicule society by employing literary hack Martin Scriblerus, who specialised in using pretentious jargons. Only Pope and Swift lived to see the publication of *Memoirs* (1741), which was the result of their collaboration.

**The Epistles and the Third Phase**

Pope devoted the majority of his life to writing moral and satirical works such as *An Essay on Man* (1733-34), *The Dunciad* and *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735). (published in three different versions between 1728 to 1743). Apart from *The Rape of the Lock*, the former is Pope's best-known and most-quoted work. The aim of this work is to subvert Milton's popular declaration at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, "justify the ways of God to man," by writing "vindicate the ways of God to Man." Pope wrote four epistles "concerning man's ties to the cosmos, to himself, to humanity, and to happiness" because he didn't have a definitive answer to the question (Long 268). The text, like the 'Essay on Criticism,' is full of wonderful lines like:

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast;  
Man never Is, but always To be blest.  
The soul, uneasy, and confin'd from home,  
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.",  
"Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.",  
"All Nature is but art, unknown to thee  
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good"

and so on. *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* is a sarcastic biographical apologia written for his friend Dr. John Arbuthnot. He says that even though he is a peaceful man, fools and knaves force him to write satires. This appears to be a poetic expression of anger stemming from unjustified criticism directed at his translation of *The Illiad* after its publication. This dissatisfaction is expressed in a scathing manner right from the start:

The dog-star rages! nay 'tis past a doubt,  
All Bedlam, or Parnassus, is let out:  
Fire in each eye, and papers in each hand,  
They rave, recite, and madden round the land.  
(qtd. From *Poetry Foundation*)

The poem's intimate address to 'John' Arbuthnot establishes a conversational atmosphere that continues throughout the poem (Daiches 637). The projection of Atticus and Sporus, as well as Addison's and John Harvey's satirical portrait, are the most discussed parts of the poem. Addison is portrayed as a gifted but jealous man, while Harvey is portrayed as a sexually perverse, vindictive, and malicious person. The poem's use of heroic couplets is another notable aspect. David Daiches writes about the poem's masterful use of rhyme scheme, "[T]he heroic couplet is used with a versatility and a playful yet deadly wit to a degree not easily found in Pope's earlier work is a moving benediction."

Pope's earlier work is a heartfelt benediction to his friend, who died less than two months after the *Epistle to him* was published" (638). Furthermore, by disparaging many other poets for their lack of talent, Pope tries to set himself apart from his contemporaries by "frequently associating himself with Horace and other great writers," as Ebahim Zarei and Hossein Pirnajmuddin put it, "from those 'puppy'-like poets who endeavour to fulfil the needs of the patrons" (71). (70). "He does not think himself pretentious like those poets who satisfy their patrons by grovelling gestures," Zarei and Pirnajmuddin continue. In reality, he despises the race of writers who pay homage to and flatter patrons like Bufo" (71).

*The Dunciad*, on the other hand, is Pope's longest-running satirical piece. It's an assault on the half-witted critics who failed to appreciate his talent, just like the poem before it. Pope was inspired to write this poem after reading Lewis Theobald's *Shakespeare Restored* (1726), in which he criticises Pope's edited works of Shakespeare, in which he attempted to portray Shakespeare in a way that would appeal to a contemporary audience. The poem is a series of many episodes rather than an orchestrated mock-heroic poem like *The Rape of the Lock*.

Techniques used in epic poetry, such as the invocation, are employed. For example, Pope begins Book I with an invocation and often uses epic-style language. The poem is filled with a sense of impending disaster, and it also ends with the same feeling, as if Pope had lost all hope for humanity. Though beautifully published, future generations of readers may be perplexed as to why Pope chose to spend so much of his time arguing with his critics. As David Daiches points out, "The *Dunciad* may have been mainly a blow by Pope against his enemies in its day; but it persists as a blow for civilization—" (643).

In the wake of contemporary literary theory, Pope is viewed as a misogynist by some, especially because of the feminists' projection of Belinda. As a result, despite being a master of his craft, any discussion of Pope elicits divisive responses. However, in the field of satire, he was a true eclectic genius who never stopped pushing the boundaries; and it is mainly as a master satirist that his legacy would live on; and, like *The Dunciad*, his legacy would live on as a "blow for humanity" (Daichess 643), and that is exactly how his legacy lives on.

## Summary

Pope starts by giving a general description of the situation: a baron has committed a heinous crime against a young lady, but we don't know what the crime is yet.

- Ariel, a sylph or spirit, warns a young woman named Belinda that she will be the victim of an offence, but she doesn't say where or when.
  - Belinda, obviously a woman of high social status, gets ready for a social function by applying makeup and generally dressing up.
  - She goes to the social event and is found to be more attractive than anyone else; her hair, in particular, is often admired.
  - A baron, enamoured of Belinda's beautiful golden locks of hair, has resolved to attempt to cut off a lock of her hair, believing it to be the finest treasure he could hope to possess
  - He was so desperate for this lock that he even prayed to the gods and lit an altar fire; the absurdity of such behaviour for just a strand of hair is a good example of Pope's satire
  - Everybody plays a card game called Ombre, and despite the fact that it appears that the Baron will win, Belinda remains hopeful.
  - This game is portrayed as a near-life-or-death situation; Pope portrays the card game as a major war, effectively mocking high society for equating a card with death.
  - Clarissa fetches a pair of scissors for the Baron to cut Belinda's hair
  - The Baron cuts a lock from Belinda's hair, infuriating her
  - Umbriel, a gnome, flies down to the underworld to bring Belinda a bag of sighs and a vial of tears
- The presents were brought to console Belinda
- Clarissa tries but fails to reassure Belinda
  - Belinda throws a handful of snuff at the Baron and a "fight" ensues
  - The battle ends and the lock of hair is nowhere to be found

The following are some of the main characteristics of Augustan literature:

1. the use of poetry models from ancient Greece and Rome.
2. Poems were thought to be written to educate and entertain the public.
3. the notion that human society should be orderly, balanced, and logical, just as the world was thought to be; any disruption to nature's delicate equilibrium could have disastrous consequences.
4. the use of humour to expose inconsistencies in human nature and culture (Satisfaction was used to ridicule such behaviours; authors hoped that by pointing them out and mocking them, people would correct them)

In *Rape of the Lock*, Pope makes extensive use of two of these writing styles: the use of classical models and the use of humour to correct human weaknesses.

Classical Models- Pope's piece is written in the style of classical Greek and Roman epics, and it is a spoof of Helen of Troy's abduction in Homer's epic *The Iliad*, in which the theft of Belinda's lock is compared to Helen's abduction. Classical epics also have the following characteristics:

Pope's poem is divided into five Cantos (or books).

Sylphs, or miniature gods and goddesses, are present in this poem; they are similar to the gods and goddesses found in Greek epics.

Underworld- Epics often have scenes set in the underworld; in Pope's poem, Umbriel is seen visiting the underworld.

Soldiers preparing for war- Epics also detail the armour and arms that soldiers use in battle, and Pope uses this approach to depict Belinda preparing herself with combs and pins in *Rape of the Lock*. "Here files of pins stretch their sparkling rows / puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux / now terrible Beauty puts on all its arms," he says (lines 137-139). By portraying Belinda's pins, etc. as if they were weapons she would be fighting with, he is simply insulting her training.

In this poem, Pope employs satire to paint a portrait of England at the time and to highlight its moral shortcomings. The analogy of Belinda's stolen lock to Helen of Troy's kidnapping is, of course, the most obvious satire. Pope is insulting his culture by making such a big deal out of something so insignificant. Many of England's flaws, he argues, stem from the fact that British culture is too preoccupied with frivolities and trivialities, as well as becoming rather self-absorbed. If the only concern these people have is a girl's hair being stolen, then they're doing pretty well, and Pope uses this poem to hold up a mirror to his own culture. He needs them to see that their "wrongdoings" aren't as bad as they think "Woes" aren't really woes, and they should start thinking about more important things in life because the life they're living now is meaningless; the people in it exist primarily to dress up and compete in petty wars.

Pope's work is also noteworthy because it was the first mock-epic, which is essentially a hybrid of classical styles and satire. Pope based his poem on his own version of Homer's *The Iliad*, a classical Greek epic, but he added humour to make it a mock-epic. Because the nature of the problem, Belinda's stolen strand of hair, is so minor, the satire that forms the "mock" portion of the mock-epic is created by Pope's insistence that it is indeed of the utmost importance.

**Characters list**

Belinda: She is a lovely young lady with amazing hair, two strands of which hang in graceful curls.

The Baron: Belinda's young admirer who plots to sever one of her locks.

Belinda's guardian sylph, Ariel (supernatural creature).

Clarissa: The young lady who hands the Baron the scissors to cut the lock off.

Umbriel is a sprite who seeks assistance for Belinda in the Queen of Spleen's cave.

Queen of Spleen: Underworld goddess who bestows gifts on Belinda by Umbriel.

Belinda's friend Thalestris. Sir Plume is urged by Thalestris to protect Belinda's reputation.

Sir Plume: Thalestris' Beau. He chastises the Baron.

**Character Analysis of the Major characters**

Belinda- A conceited upper-class woman who is always the focus of attention. Her society holds her in high regard and lavishes praise on her whenever possible. When given the scissors by Belinda's mate, Clarissa, the Baron steals a curl of Belinda's hair. Belinda, who is normally cool and collected, erupts in a terrible rage when The Baron removes the curl from her head. She demands that her hair be returned to her right away, but The Baron is unable to locate the curl. It is said to have travelled into the stars and is now a well-known constellation.

It appears that Pope intended for this mock-epic work to reflect society's obsession with upper-class people. Everyone admired Belinda's appearance, and many were envious of her (The Baron, Clarissa). These characters reflect the tensions between upper-class citizens, as well as the struggle to take another person's power. Pope uses satire to equate a minor incident in his poem to incidents in epic poems. The events depicted in this poem demonstrate how the culture portrayed has lost all ability to determine which issues should be taken seriously and which should be ignored.

The Baron- The Baron is a reflection of Lord Petre, a friend of Pope's.

Clarissa is Belinda's envious friend who wants to injure her by taking a strand of her hair. Clarissa, following the poem's mock-epic theme, assumes that cutting a tiny curl of Belinda's hair would be disastrous, despite the fact that many worse things could happen.

**Upper Class**

The upper class serves as the foundation for Pope's poem; they are ridiculed because Pope thinks they are unconcerned about important issues, have narrow-minded views of the environment in which they exist, and lack the ability to see beyond trivialities. Since Pope exaggerates the situation too much, upper class readers will notice the mockery and feel ashamed that they behave in such a manner when Belinda's lock is stolen. Pope specifically used the upper class to point out their shortcomings by satire and mock-epic. The closing, in which Pope writes, "It's all about sarcasm," is one of the most sarcastic parts of the book.

"When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,  
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust;  
This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,  
And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name!"

- Pope ends the poem by saying that the lock will be immortalised, which is a nonsensical and obviously ironic statement; Pope's goal is to leave one last impression on the upper class reader. He hopes to bully them into changing their ways and thinking for things other than their appearance and social status.

- Trivialities-Pope stresses the importance of focusing on the most important things in life rather than on trivial things like the loss of a strand of hair. He also believes that being able to laugh at oneself and at life on occasion is an important part of living a happy life. In Canto 5, Clarissa discusses these concepts.

"But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,  
Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to grey,  
Since painted or unpainted, all shall fade,  
And she who scorns a man must die a maid;  
What then remains, but well our pow'r to use,  
And keep good humor still whate'er we lose?  
And trust me, dear! good humor can prevail,  
When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding fail."

- Clarissa believes that beauty never lasts, so it's important to think about things that matter more; she also believes that maintaining a sense of humour will allow people to laugh at themselves and their often petty actions, and eventually understand that getting angry about something or taking small things too seriously will only lead to more conflict and the destruction of society.

Pope is reflecting on the arrogance and triviality of high society during his period by making fun of a real-life case. Pope claims that culture lacks a sense of importance, treating the insignificant with the same seriousness as the critical. The Lock's Rape was published by In the fervent hope that

Pope's fellow citizens, like the Fermors and Petres, will benefit from their follies and be able to distinguish between what matters and what doesn't.

### Key words/ Glossary

- Fellow spirit of Ariel - Sylphs; Sylphids; nymphs ; fays; fairies; genii.
- Balmy rest - comfortable rest & sleep
- Birth - night
- Beau - aristocratic gallant dressed up for ceremonious occasion.
- Inferior priest- refers to Betty
- Billet-doux - Love letter
- Light Militia - an army of airy spirit
- Denizens- - inhabitants
- Squadrons- orderly bodies of spirits
- "Seven folded fence" - Petticoat made of seven fold
- John Caryl - friend of Pope
- Elves- fairies
- earthly vehicles - human body ( vehicle of the soul)
- 'Beautious mould'- beautiful body of women
- Ombre - a popular game of cards
- Termagants- Women of tumultuous & fiery nature.
- Salamander- Spirit of fairy women
- Yielding minds - Women of gentle nature
- Gnomes - spirit of prim & affected women
- Prude- Women of affected modesty
- Coquettes- Flirting women ( becomes Sylphs)
- Reject mankind- discards young lover
- Masquerads- Masked dance
- Celestial -heavenly
- Ogling - casting amorous glance
- The Baron - Lord Petre

### Self-Assessment

1. Which word among the following reflects 'inhabitants':
  - A. Denizens
  - B. Squadrons
  - C. "Seven folded fence"
  - D. John Caryl
  
2. Which one among mentioned below signify 'orderly bodies of spirits':
  - A. Denizens
  - B. Squadrons
  - C. "Seven folded fence"
  - D. John Caryl
  
3. Which word refers to 'Petticoat made of seven fold':
  - A. Denizens
  - B. Squadrons
  - C. "Seven folded fence"
  - D. John Caryl



4. What does friend of Pope mean in 'The Rape of the Lock':
  - A. inhabitants
  - B. orderly bodies of spirits
  - C. Petticoat made of seven fold
  - D. John Caryl
  
5. What is the actual meaning of 'Elves':
  - A. fairies
  - B. earthly vehicles
  - C. 'Beautious mould'
  - D. Ombre
  
6. Which word among the following reflects 'human body':
  - A. Elves
  - B. earthly vehicles
  - C. 'Beautious mould'
  - D. Ombre
  
7. Which one among mentioned below signify beautiful body of women:
  - A. fairies
  - B. earthly vehicles
  - C. 'Beautious mould'
  - D. Ombre
  
8. Which word refers to a popular game of cards:
  - A. Elves or fairies
  - B. human body or vehicle of the soul
  - C. 'Beautious mould'
  - D. Ombre
  
9. Which word among the following reflects 'Women of tumultuous & fiery nature':
  - A. Termagants
  - B. Salamander
  - C. Yielding minds
  - D. Gnomes
  
10. Which one among mentioned below signify Spirit of fairy women:
  - A. Termagants
  - B. Salamander
  - C. Yielding minds
  - D. Gnomes
  
11. Which word refers to Yielding minds:
  - A. Women of tumultuous & fiery nature
  - B. Spirit of fairy women

- C. Women of gentle nature  
D. spirit of prim & affected women
12. What does Gnomes mean in 'The Rape of the Lock'  
A. Women of tumultuous & fiery nature.  
B. Spirit of fairy women  
C. Women of gentle nature  
D. spirit of prim & affected women
13. What is the actual meaning of 'Prude':  
A. Women of affected modesty  
B. Flirting women ( becomes Sylphs)  
C. discards young lover  
D. Masked dance
14. Which word among the following reflects 'Flirting women':  
A. Prude  
B. Coquettes  
C. Reject mankind  
D. Masquerads
15. Which one among mentioned below signify 'Masked dance':  
A. Prude  
B. Coquettes  
C. discarding  
D. Masquerads

### Answer for Self Assessment

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

### Review Questions

- 1) What is the meaning of the title 'The Rape of the Lock'?

**Ans:** The title of the poem can be perplexing before we look into the etymology of the word "rape." In Pope's day, "rape" also meant to take something from someone by force in the 18th century. The term "lock" refers to a woman's hair tresses, curls, or ringlets.

- 2) Where does 'The Rape of the Lock' take place?

**Ans:** On a single day in the early 1700s, the action takes place in London and its environs. Belinda's London home is the setting for the novel. The action then moves to the River Thames. Except for a short scene in the Queen of Spleen's cave, the remainder of the story takes place at Hampton Court Palace.

- 3) 'The Rape of the Lock' is referred to as a mock epic poem. What is the reason for this?

**Ans:** "The Rape of the Lock" begins with a declaration of intent and an invocation to the Muse, as is customary in epics. It is written in heroic couplets and is divided into Cantos. There is also the use of supernatural machinery. This epic, however, has a satirical twist. It mocks the aristocratic ladies and gentlemen's absurdities and frivolities. As a result, this poem is classified as a "mock epic."

4) Explain what an allegory is.

**Ans:** An allegory is a metaphor in which abstract ideas, concepts, and values are expressed by characters, figures, and events in a way that viewers, readers, or listeners may understand. The novel "Animal Farm" by George Orwell, for example, is a political allegory.

5) What is the concept of a heroic couplet?

**Ans:** A heroic couplet is a typical English poetry form that is often used in epic and narrative poetry. It's a kind of poem made up of rhyming pairs of lines written in iambic pentameter. "Know then thyself, do not presume God to scan/ The proper study of Mankind is Man," for example.

6) What are "The Rape of the Lock's" satirical targets?

**Ans:** The absurdities and frivolities of the fashionable circle - aristocratic ladies and gentlemen - of 18th century England are the main satirical targets of "The Rape of the Lock."

7) What are some of the recurring images in the poem "The Rape of the Lock"?

**Ans:** The sun is the first image that appears repeatedly. It stresses the dramatic unity of the story and marks the passage of time in the poem. China is another picture that appears often. Delicate dishes that are delicate, fragile, and strictly luxurious are an appropriate complement to an ornamental environment. The pictures of gold and silver reflect the true worth of the underlying glistening and hypnotic surfaces.

8) In the poem "The Rape of the Lock," what are the names of the women?

**Ans:** In the poem, there are five main female characters. The poem's protagonist is Belinda. Belinda has a friend named Thalestris. Belinda's maid is Betty. Clarissa is a member of the Hampton Court Party's staff. Spleen is the queen of bad tempers and the root of vile human characteristics.

9) In "The Rape of the Lock," what is Belinda's full name?

**Ans:** Belinda is the protagonist of Alexander Pope's poem "The Rape of the Lock." She bears the name of a real person: Arabella Fermor, an influential Roman Catholic cathode ray, was a member of Pope's inner circle.

10) Who was Belinda's guardian spirit?

**Ans:** Ariel serves as Belinda's guardian spirit. He's a sylph, by the way. He warns her that something terrible could happen and erects a sylph guard to shield her, but he is unable to avoid the loss of the lock of hair.

11) What spirit does Pope invoke to assist him in writing his poem?

**Ans:** Typically, a poet would invoke one of Zeus's "nine daughters" to sanctify his poetry. In "The Rape of the Lock," however, Alexander Pope invokes his catholic friend John Caryll as a muse to grant him blessings to tell a tale about a rich, vain woman named Belinda, rather than a great hero.

12) To whom is Pope's poem "The Rape of the Lock" dedicated?

**Ans:** This poem is dedicated to John Caryll by Pope. Arabella Fermor (Belinda) and Pope were friends. He was the one who commissioned Pope to compose this poem.

13) Who doesn't love Belinda's "sparkling cross" around her neck?

**Ans:** This cross is adored by non-believers. Pope is emphasising the fact that the cross has the same significance for Belinda as it does for someone who is not religious. The cross is adored by infidels and kissed by Jews, but there is no mention of priests or gallants in relation to the cross.

14) According to Pope, women's souls live on until they die. What are the four potential manifestations of these spirits?

**Ans:** When quarrelsome women die, their souls are consumed by fire and transformed into Salamanders. When polite and submissive women die, their spirits reincarnate as Nymphs and

return to the sea. Gnomes are born as the spirits of proud and serious-minded women descend to Earth. Flirty and coquette women's souls travel to the air and transform into Sylphs.

- 15) What modern-day feminine rite does Pope associate with ancient Greek and Roman sacrifice?

**Ans:** In Greek and Roman religious rites, sacrifice was a necessary component. Pope is equating the feminine dressing practise with ancient Greco-Roman culture. Belinda's morning routine is comparable to a hero's ritualised pre-battle practise. Belinda's reflection in the mirror transforms into a goddess, while her maid worships at the altar as the 'inferior priestess.'

- 16) Choose a self-contained section of *The Rape of the Lock* (such as Belinda's morning ritual or Umbriel's descent into the Cave of Spleen) and discuss its function within the poem as a whole.

**Ans.** With Belinda's morning routine, Pope establishes the mock-heroic motifs that occur throughout the poem. He figures her toilette as the preparation of an epic hero before battle. The scene begins as a religious sacrament. Belinda's reflection in the mirror is the image of the goddess while Belinda herself presides over the ritual (I.127). The "sacred rites" that she performs—in reality the simple act of dressing herself—act within Pope's epic paradigm as a prayer to the goddess for success on the battlefield (I.128). Belinda's battleground is, of course, the courtly party at Hampton Court Palace. Following the sacraments, Pope depicts Belinda's toilette as the hero's arming rite. The combs, buttons, "puffs, powders, patches" that Belinda uses to prepare herself are reimagined as the epic hero's weapons and armour by Pope (I.138). Belinda, on the other hand, is not a fierce warrior like Achilles or Hector, but rather a lovely coquette. Pope reveals the fading of epic subject matter, a core concern of his social criticism, by replacing the martial hero with a charming lady and the battlefield with a palace. The energies that were once spent on religious devotion and "mighty tournaments" are now squandered on the upper classes' vanity and frivolous amusements (I.2).

- 17) How does Pope use the reversal of gender roles in *The Rape of the Lock* to promote his epic parody?

**Ans.** To highlight the comic irony of his subjects' actions, Pope reverses conventional gender roles. Pope reflects on the poem's heroine in *The Rape of the Lock*, imbuing her with the masculine qualities of the typical epic hero. Belinda wants the attention that fighting will offer her at the start of the third canto's card game:

"Belinda now, whose desire for glory tempts her,  
Burns to meet two daring knights" (III.25-6).

Belinda's conduct is also far from ladylike. After she wins the game, she exults, "the nymph exulting fills the sky with shouts" (III.99). The other women in the poem behave in the same way. During the battle over the lock, Thalestris easily defeats all of the men, with the women being the aggressors. Men, on the other hand, are mostly foppish and frail. Even the poem's nominal hero, the Baron, adopts subservient postures and requires Clarissa's assistance in obtaining a sword. The reversal of conventional gender roles reveals the extent to which eighteenth-century society was socially stratified. Women tend to overreact to minor slights, while men are pathetic fops who lack bravery. Instead, they waste time gossiping and engaging in pointless activities.

- 18) In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope satirises which aspects of society? Take note of his use of the mock-heroic genre.

**Ans.** Pope's satire *The Rape of the Lock* focuses on the upper classes' foibles. These members of society, according to Pope's poem, are only involved in trivial matters, a point he emphasises in his portrayal of the card game as an epic war. In fact, the "battlefield" of ombre serves as an excuse for gambling and flirting, but it also serves as the only way for these young aristocrats to achieve hero status. The Pope confirms the upper classes' powerlessness by revealing their ignorance of the world beyond Hampton Court Palace.

"One speaks the glory of the British Queen,  
And one describes a charming Indian screen,"

he says of the British Empire and trade (III.13-4). The nobles seem to be happy to drink coffee—an obvious import from British trading networks—while debating trivial matters like "who gave the ball, or paid the last visit" (III.12). As a result, Pope reveals the upper classes' arrogance and idleness.

19) In *The Rape of the Lock*, what is the sexual allegory?

**Ans.** The cutting of Belinda's hair has a sexually suggestive connotation, as the poem's title implies. Pope uses the terms "power" and "ravish" in his portrayal of the Baron's schemes to steal Belinda's hair, reinforcing the theme of infringement introduced in the poem's title. The Baron also expresses his desire to obtain the lock "by deception betray," implying that he is comfortable exploiting Belinda's innocence (II.32). The sexual allegory is further advanced by Ariel's suspicion that the foretold "dire tragedy" would be a sexual assault. Belinda would "stain her honour or her new brocade," he fears (II.107). The tarnishing of Belinda's honour has overt sexual connotations. The staining on her dress, on the other hand, denotes both sexual maturity and the loss of virginity. Hair has sexual connotations in and of itself. Pope allows for a secondary interpretation of Belinda's curls as pubic hairs, emphasising the sexual violation theme. Belinda's virtue is in greater danger, according to Pope's sexual allegory, than the simple act of stealing her ringlet implies.

20) In *The Rape of the Lock*, discuss Pope's criticism of the sexual double-standard for women.

**Ans.** In order to find a suitable husband in the eighteenth century, a woman was supposed to draw the attention of men. Naturally, society expected a woman to remain a virgin until she married. A woman who squandered her virtue in the search of a husband was typically shunned by her peers and lost her standing in society. The depiction of Belinda's petticoat, which effectively acts as a fortification to preserve her chastity while her curls attract male admirers, highlights this double-standard.

21) How do supernatural powers (Sylphs, Gnomes, etc.) play a part in *The Rape of the Lock*?

**Ans.** The divine powers in *The Rape of the Lock* play a similar role to the gods and goddesses in epic poems like *The Iliad*. In *The Iliad*, the gods shift the tide of the Trojan War, and Pope's mythic creatures have an effect on the action. Belinda's otherworldly protector, Ariel, warns her of impending dangers and protects her during her adventures. However, it appears that Ariel's ability to protect Belinda is minimal. A love letter distracts Belinda from Ariel's warning of imminent danger in the first canto. Similarly, he retreats when he notices Belinda's attraction to the Baron in "the deep recesses of the virgin's thought," unable to protect her (140). While it is Ariel's responsibility to preserve Belinda's virtue, he appears to be unable to completely protect her from the perils of love. Ariel's position is similar to that of a godly guardian, similar to Athena's guidance of Diomedes. Belinda's suffering is exacerbated when Umbriel acts as a threat to her. As a result, his position is similar to Aphrodite's sabotage of the Greeks.

22) In *The Rape of the Lock*, discuss Pope's attitude toward religion. What does this mean for his social criticism?

**Ans.** Pope describes a world that is all-too-willing to worship beauty, which he portrays as religious perversion, in *The Rape of the Lock*. This sacrilege is encapsulated in his portrayal of Belinda's cross. Although the cross is clearly a Christian emblem, it serves a decorative rather than a religious purpose. It's still so secular that "Jews can kiss" and "infidels adore" it. It's (II.8). Pope also sexualizes the cross by placing it on Belinda's "white breast," implying that her breasts, not the cross, are the subjects of worship (II.7). The Pope's desecration of religious worship is a criticism of society's emphasis on appearances over morality.

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## Unit 08: John Keats: Ode to Autumn

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### Objectives

- Evaluate the Reincarnation of Pastoral in the poetry of John Keats
- Consider John Keats as a Disjoint between Early and Late Romanticism
- Analyze the poetic craftsmanship of John Keats

### Introduction

John Keats' poem "Ode to Autumn" is a short poem that is regarded as the poet's culmination of concerns about beauty, reality, and permanence. Via a voluptuous depiction of autumn, the poem instantly appeals to the physical senses. Nature is seen bringing forth her fruition in a subtle but steady manner, leading to a final seasonal maturity. The entire scene takes up a large portion of the visible room. Through the stanzas, a series of relaxed and languorous movements culminate in the recognition of the autumnal music, which is a bliss in and of itself.

However, such a straightforward impression of the poem is deceiving since it hides the poet's complicated thought processes. Autumn, not as a natural occurrence, but as an embodiment of the poet's conception of maturity, is the poem's central theme. It is a faultless haven of safety in an ever-changing environment. Within the order of experience, Keats seeks to overcome the dichotomy between the realm of the ideal and the world of truth by such a conception.

Keats continues to cling to this conviction in his poem "Ode to Autumn." Rather than connecting the fine autumnal day to the seasons, or comparing its dropping beauty with the bleak winter or the joyful rebirth of spring (as Shelly does in his "Ode to the West Wind"). He manages to catch the whole season. Autumn is like a frozen season, unaffected by time or transition. The physical reality of the season is far removed from such a conception. "While the barred clouds bloom the soft dying day," there is a practical acceptance of the summer that has passed and the winter that is coming.

Maturity entails more than just death and extinction; it also entails fulfillment. The poem's entire structure, which begins at high noon and ends at dusk, is indicative of transience. The transitive and quite uncommon use of the verb "bloom," with its obvious connection to spring, is also quite unique. Furthermore, despite the image's persuasive use, the combination of "stubble plain" and "rosy hue" points to a similar incongruity.

In the context, there seems to be a transition from maturity to death. Even though he was well aware of the cost, Keats was clearly preoccupied with the concept of permanence. "It is a perfect utterance of truth found in the magical words 'ripeness is all,'" Middleton Murray remarks. This reality is only accessible through the spiritual elevation of Romantic Imagination, not through fancy. This isn't just an acknowledgement of transience; it's also an embrace and celebration of its fulfillment virtue. He doesn't look past the present moment for vernal music; instead, he considers autumn's music equally pleasing and unique: "Thou hast thy music too."



Autumn is defined in such a way that such a celebration is implied. The same timeless repose can be found in all four images: "thou watchest the last oozing, hour by hour." Autumn, personified, sits unconcerned with time and transition, her hair softly lifted by a faint breeze that can't shake her statuesque poise. She's "drowning in the odour of poppies." If there is such a thing as time, she prefers to ignore it. Autumn has a permanence that the poet sought to access during because of this desire to ignore temporality.

Permanence, which is beyond physicality's reach, is an essence. Transience, on the other hand, is an experience that is felt by the senses. The perfect universe of permanence can only be reached through the sensuous world of truth. This alone offered sustenance for a young romantic like Keats, who felt the fear of extinction even at a young age due to his declining health and consumptive lungs. "To Autumn" soothes his troubled spirit, allowing him to recognise the true order of things in a peaceful manner. From his fears of extinction, he comes to understand the value that his existence, no matter how brief, can hold.

## **8.1 Subject Matter**

### **The Full Text of "To Autumn"**

- 1 Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
- 2 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
- 3 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
- 4 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
- 5 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
- 6 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
- 7 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
- 8 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
- 9 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
- 10 Until they think warm days will never cease,
- 11 For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.
- 12 Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
- 13 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
- 14 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
- 15 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
- 16 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
- 17 Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
- 18 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
- 19 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
- 20 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
- 21 Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
- 22 Thou watchest the last ooziings hours by hours.
- 23 Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?
- 24 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
- 25 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
- 26 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
- 27 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
- 28 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
- 29 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
 31 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
 32 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
 33 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

John Keats wrote "To Autumn" on September 19, 1819, and it was published in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* (1820). It's the final poem in a collection of poems known as the Great Odes of 1819, and it's one of his most well-known works. Despite struggling to write poetry in 1819 due to personal issues, he was inspired to write "To Autumn" after walking along the Itchen River near Winchester two days before.

The poem is significant for two reasons: it represents the height of Keats' poetic career, a highlight of his *annus mirabilis*; and it represents what many scholars consider the pinnacle of Keats' poetic career, a highlight of his *annus mirabilis*. It also marks the end of Keats' main poetic output, as he no longer could afford the lifestyle required to devote himself to poetry. It has been referred to as a "complete poem" by critics, and it has been reprinted many times over the years as an exemplar of both Keats' poetry and Romanticism as a whole.

The structure of "To Autumn" is based on the standard sonnet, but it has been tweaked to highlight the season's special thematic aspects. The poem consists of 33 lines divided into three stanzas, each describing the tastes, sights, and sounds of autumn with a different focus as the poem progresses from beginning to middle to end, representing seasonal level, an annual level, and a lifelong level.

## Summary

Many of Keats' main odes were written in the spring of 1819, including "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode on Indolence," "Ode on Melancholy," "Ode to a Nightingale," and "Ode to Psyche." After May, he turned his attention to other forms of poetry, including the verse tragedy *Otho the Great*, which he co-wrote with friend and roommate Charles Brown, the second half of *Lamia*, and a return to his unfinished epic *Hyperion*. From spring to fall, his entire focus was on pursuing a career in poetry; he alternated between writing long and short poems, and his daily aim was to write more than fifty lines of verse. To further his own thoughts, he read Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Despite the fact that Keats managed to write a large number of poems in 1819, he felt that his literary production was hampered by his struggle with a large financial burden during the year. This was compounded when his brother George, who had emigrated to the United States, ran out of money. These issues caused Keats to consider giving up poetry altogether, and it was impressive that he was able to compose "To Autumn" in September 1819. As a result, the poem marks the end of his poetry career, and he moved on to more lucrative ventures. In addition to his financial difficulties, Keats' deteriorating health and personal commitments added to the challenges he faced in his poetic endeavours, prompting him to abandon all poetic endeavours, including in his spare time.

"To Autumn" was written after a particularly enlightening experience. Keats was drawn in by the sights and sounds around him as he walked along the River Itchen near Winchester on September 19, 1819. On September 21, Keats wrote a letter to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds, describing how the scene had affected him:

How beautiful the season is now – How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it [...] I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now [...] Somehow a stubble plain looks warm – in the same way that some pictures look warm – this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.

Not all on Keats' mind at the time was positive; in September, he realised he would have to leave *Hyperion*. As a result, Keats included a note in his letter to Reynolds stating that he had abandoned his long poem. Keats did not send "To Autumn" to Reynolds, but he did include it in a letter to his publisher and friend Richard Woodhouse, dated the same day.

The poem was revised and published in Keats' collection *Lamia, Isabella, St. Agnes' Eve, and Other Poems* in 1820. Despite the fact that the publishers Taylor and Hessey were concerned about the same negative reviews that had dogged Keats' 1818 edition of *Endymion*, they proceeded with the publication after removing any remotely controversial poems in order to avoid any politically motivated attacks.

### Structure

The poem follows the form of an odal hymn, as do many of Keats' 1819 odes. While earlier 1819 odes refined techniques and allowed for variations that occur in "To Autumn," Keats eliminates certain elements from previous poems (such as the narrator) and ensures that the poem only deals with specific concepts. "To Autumn" lacks the dramatic movement of the earlier poems, and it tends to address the literary phase without a development of the temporal scene, a concept Keats referred to as "stationing." Some of the poem's vocabulary is reminiscent of phrases from earlier Keats poems, and there are parallels between the lines of "To Autumn" and lines from *Endymion*, *Sleep and Poetry*, and *Calidore*.

To control the flow of the poem, Keats uses monosyllabic words and consonantal sounds – especially bilabial consonants – as well as long vowels. His vocabulary is devoid of hiatus, and the poem contains only one instance of medial inversion of an accent. He does, however, use the Augustan inversion (the reverse of an accent at the start of a line) about 4.2 percent of the time. Spondees appear in approximately 13.9 percent of Keats' verses, according to his measure.

The verse differs from his previous odes in that it uses 11 line stanzas instead of 10, with a couplet put before each stanza's final line. The rhyme scheme starts with a Shakespearian ABAB pattern and then moves on to a CDEDCCE rhyme scheme. In the second and third stanzas, however, the rhyme scheme in the eighth and ninth lines is reversed, resulting in an ABABCDECDDE pattern. The rhyming words are often monosyllabic, and no feminine endings are used.

Between the manuscript and the published version of "To Autumn," Keats refined the poem's vocabulary. The shift in line 17 of "Drows'd with red poppies" to "Drows'd with the fume of poppies," which emphasises the sense of smell rather than sight, is one of Keats' improvements that critics have emphasised. As shown by the shift in line 25 from "While a gold cloud" to "While barred clouds," the later version relies more on passive, past participles.

Other improvements include phrase strengthening, such as the transformation of the phrase "whoever seeks for thee may find" in line 13 into "whoever seeks abroad may find." Many lines in the second stanza were fully rewritten, especially those that did not follow a rhyme scheme. Minor revisions included adding punctuation that was absent from the original manuscript copy and adjusting capitalization differences between copies.

### The Meaning of the Poem

Unlike the later stanzas, which rely mainly on sensual observations, the first stanza of the poem addresses the workings of natural processes. The union of maturation and development, two related but opposing forces within the work, is highlighted in particular, and this combination gives the reader the impression that the season will not end:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun  
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
 Until they think warm days will never cease,  
 For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells. (lines 1-11)

The second stanza describes the process of harvesting, in contrast to the first stanza's images of development. Autumn is not harvesting, despite being compared to a harvester. Instead, it seems to be stuck in a rut: "sitting carelessly," "drowsy," "keep steady." There is a glimmer of movement at the end of the stanza:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
 Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
 Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours. (lines 12-22)

As the poem comes to a close, audio imagery takes centre stage. There are signs that the year is coming to a close, and there is an anticipation of a possible death that will coincide with the year's end. However, the season takes on a sense of completion and perfection as "Autumn" is turned into a picture of life in general:

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,-  
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. (lines 23-33)

### Themes

Many of Keats' 1819 odes are thematically related to "To Autumn." For example, his poem "Ode to Melancholy" explores the idea of accepting life's phase, which is revisited in "To Autumn." The ideal and the real come together in a way that leads to fulfilment. "To Autumn" is the most accurate description of an actual paradise among Keats' poems, concentrating on the archetypal images associated with autumn. Autumn is a season that represents development, maturation, and finally death in the poem. In a similar vein to Keats' "Ode on Indolence" and "Ode to Psyche," the poem also defends art's role in assisting society.

Nature and culture are two different parts of the world in "To Autumn," and nature is transformed into culture by an artist. Man's ability to use nature for agricultural production has aided civilization. The artist, like the farmer, must transform nature into a consumable object that provides sustenance to people. The poem concludes with a song as nature gives way to humanity, symbolising both nature and the artist's self-sacrifice for society.

The three stanzas of "To Autumn" will imply both a transition from summer to early winter and the transition from day to dusk. This progression is joined by a change from contact to sight and then to sound, forming a three-part symmetry that is absent from Keats' other odes. While the poem contains method and the suggestion of motion, there is no movement. Autumn is metaphorically portrayed as an exhausted labourer in lines 14-15 of the second stanza. The gleaner's stillness in lines 19-20 at the end of the stanza highlights the poem's motionlessness. Individuals are either burdened or simply observe what is going on around them. The poem as a whole conjures up an image of death and a welcoming finality in the mind's eye.

There are no other odes from 1819 that express opposing viewpoints. Instead, "To Autumn" suggests that development is no longer required because maturation has taken over, and growth and death are in perfect harmony. Along with this harmony, the couplet's placement before the end of each stanza establishes a poetic suspension of closure. The poem's suspension emphasises the theme of continuity.

Although historical events were implicitly affected by the poem, Jerome McGann stated in a 1979 essay that Keats had purposefully overlooked the political landscape of 1819. In response, Andrew Bennett, Nicholas Roe, and others concentrated on the poem's political elements, with Roe arguing for a direct link to the 1819 Peterloo Massacre. Later, Paul Fry explicitly questioned McGann's position, saying,

"It scarcely seems pertinent to say that 'To Autumn' is therefore an evasion of social violence when it is so clearly an encounter with death itself [...] it is not a politically encoded escape from history reflecting the coerced betrayal [...] of its author's radicalism. McGann thinks to rescue Keats from the imputation of political naïveté by saying that he was a radical browbeaten into quietism."

Other political elements of Keats' ode were viewed by post-colonial critic Alan Bewell in the form of British imperialism. He said that "To Autumn" favoured Britain's temperate climate over tropical climates.

### Key words/ Glossary

- bosom-friend: close friend, confidant
- thatch-eaves: the overhanging edges of roofs made of thatch (straw or leaves)
- o'er-brimm'd: filled to overflowing
- clammy cells: the honey-filled partitions of the honeycomb
- winnowing: the separation of wheat from chaff by tossing it into the wind so that the heavy grain falls back down whilst the light refuse is blown away
- Drows'd with the fume of poppies: Keats is probably thinking of the drug made from opium poppies.
- hook: could refer either to the curve of the scythe or a reaping-hook/sickle which is a traditional curved cutting tool for grass and grain
- swath: the quantity of corn that can be cut with one stroke of a scythe or reaping-hook
- gleaner: someone who gathers up left-over grain stalks after the harvesters have bundled the main crop into sheaves
- cider-press: a machine for extracting juice from apples in order to make cider (an alcoholic drink)
- wailful choir ... mourn: the faint sound made by the insects' wings has a mournful effect
- willows: low growing, shrubby willow trees
- hilly bourn: hills which limit how far the eye can see
- red-breast: the robin, a bird which has distinctively red breast feathers. It is a common garden bird and its appearance and song are especially associated with the winter months.
- gathering swallows: Swallows congregate in large numbers before they migrate south in the autumn.

### Self-Assessment

- 1) When was John Keats born?
  - a) 22 June 1750
  - b) 16 August 1785
  - c) 31 October 1795
  - d) 31 December 1800
- 2) Where was John Keats born?
  - a) Paris
  - b) Berlin
  - c) Moscow
  - d) London
- 3) Which school did John Keats attend?
  - a) St. Peter's School
  - b) Gable School
  - c) Clarke School
  - d) St. Albert's School
- 4) For which profession John Keats had licence but never practised it?
  - a) Apothecary
  - b) Architect
  - c) Engineer
  - d) Lawyer

- 5) Who published the sonnet O Solitude written by John Keats?
- Richard Abbey
  - John Sandell
  - Leigh Hunt
  - William Wordsworth
- 6) Which magazine criticized Endymion written by John Keats as nonsense?
- The Plain Truth
  - Blackwood's Magazine
  - The Wanderer
  - Philadelphia Review
- 7) Which of the following books was translated by John Keats?
- Aeneid
  - Iliad
  - Odyssey
  - Vulgate
- 8) When did John Keats die?
- 23 February 1821
  - 28 June 1825
  - 14 March 1828
  - 4 April 1850
- 9) Where did John Keats die?
- London
  - Liverpool
  - Rome
  - Hampshire
- 10) What caused John Keats' death?
- Malaria
  - Tuberculosis
  - Pneumonia
  - Typhoid
11. 'bosom-friend' suggests:
- close friend, confidant
  - thatch-eaves
  - o'er-brimm'd
  - filled to overflowing
12. Which name among the following suggests 'the honey-filled partitions of the honeycomb':
- winnowing
  - clammy cells
  - separation of wheat
  - heavy grain falls
13. In reference to the poem 'Drows'd with the fume of poppies' means:
- could refer either to the curve of the scythe or a reaping-hook
  - sickle which is a traditional curved cutting tool for grass and grain
  - Keats is probably thinking of the drug made from opium poppies
  - addiction
14. 'the quantity of corn that can be cut with one stroke of a scythe or reaping-hook' is called in the poem as:
- gleaner
  - left-over grain
  - stalks after the harvesters

British Poetry

d) swath

15. 'A machine for extracting juice from apples in order to make cider (an alcoholic drink)' is called in the poem as:

a) cider-press

b) shallows

c) hilly bourn

d) red-breast

Answers for Self Assessment

1. C      2. D      3. C      4. A      5. C

6. B      7. A      8. A      9. C      10. B

11. A      12. B      13. C      14. D      15. A

Review Questions

1. What distinguishes "To Autumn" from a typical ode?

**Ans.** Rather than simply admiring autumn, the speaker conveys a nuanced understanding of the season marked by its inconsistencies. Autumn may bring "mists and mellow fruitfulness," but it also ushers in "the soft-dying day" and the mournful cries of animals and insects throughout the landscape. Autumn isn't put on a pedestal by the speaker's tough praises. Rather, he tries to balance the joys of the season with the sorrows it foreshadows and promises. Similarly, although the poem communicates a personal perspective on the season through its vocabulary, imagery, and sound, the 'I' is absent from the poem's stanzas, generalizing the experience. Rather than linking the poem's feelings to a single persona, generalize them.

2. By the end of the poem, what inference has the speaker reached?

**Ans.** In stanza three, the speaker discovers that wishing for spring in the middle of autumn is pointless: time passes, and it's best to enjoy the present moment rather than ruminate on the past or lament the future. While the specifics he uses could easily be found in both spring and summer, the fact that autumn is the last season before winter adds a mournful, fatal aspect to them. Everything is not lost, however: seasons cycle inexorably through one another, and spring will still return. There is always time for those who are in the autumn of their lives to appreciate the beauty that surrounds them, without interfering with it with fantasies of an improbable history and future.

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## Unit 09: William Wordsworth: Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey

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### Objectives/Expected Learning Outcomes

- To consider French Revolution and its Effect on the prescribed poem
- To evaluate the impact of Romanticism on Wordsworth's poetry
- To analyze the various characteristics of Lake school of poetry

### Introduction

Memory, youth, nature, and human love are all explored in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." It was first published in *Lyrical Ballads*, a 1798 compilation by Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The speaker (also Wordsworth) returns to a location in the English countryside a few miles upstream from Tintern Abbey's ruin. He adores the view of hedgerows, fields, and wooded terrain. Despite the fact that he hasn't seen the landscape in five years, he believes its ways have sustained him and may have even inspired him to perform acts of "kindness and affection." He then hopes that his current experience will have a similar influence on him, keeping him going and affecting him in the future.

He admits that his passion for nature was not what it is now five years ago, but he insists that he is indeed "a lover of the meadows and forests." Finally, he tells his sister that a similar memory of the landscape will sustain her and link her to his own spirit.

Wordsworth was born in 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland, England, to a prominent local aristocrat and his second wife. His mother died in 1778, and his father died in late 1783, all while he was still a child. Wordsworth and his three brothers were sent to a boarding school in Hawkeshead after their father died. Dorothy, their niece, was sent to Halifax to live with cousins. Wordsworth developed a keen appreciation of nature in the rural surroundings of Hawkeshead, in the beautiful Lake District, which would influence most of his later writing. He received a formal education and showed an early aptitude for poetic writing. In 1787, Wordsworth enrolled at St. John's College, Cambridge.

### 9.1 Subject Matter

Graduating in 1791, but restless and without definite career plans, he lived for a short time in London and Wales and then travelled to France. The French Revolution was in its third year, and, although he previously had shown little interest in politics, he quickly came to embrace the ideals of the Revolution. During his stay in France he fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon,

and with her fathered a child, Anne-Caroline. Too poor to marry and forced by the outbreak of civil war to flee France, Wordsworth reluctantly returned alone to England in 1793.

Although troubled with feelings of despondency over the degenerating course of the Revolution and fears for the safety of Annette. Wordsworth finally settled with his sister at Racedown in 1795, with Annette and his daughter. A small bequest from a friend allowed him to devote himself entirely to writing; he now spent much of his time reading contemporary European literature and writing poetry, living modestly but contentedly. Dorothy's lifelong commitment was an important factor in Wordsworth's success: she promoted his attempts at composition and looked after the specifics of their everyday lives. In 1797, Wordsworth encountered poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which was the most important occurrence in his literary apprenticeship. Coleridge had been writing to Wordsworth for many years, and when he came to see him at Racedown, they exchanged letters.

Their chemistry was instantaneous, as was their shared admiration. The Wordsworths relocated to Nether Stowey to be closer to Coleridge. Wordsworth began a time of extraordinary innovation in the intellectually stimulating atmosphere he and Coleridge developed there. During this period, Coleridge had a huge influence on Wordsworth, and his astute criticisms gave the young poet guidance and aided his creative growth. Coleridge worked hard to promote Wordsworth's growth as a creative thinker capable of writing metaphysical poetry in particular. To that end, he introduced him to the philosopher David Hartley's writings, whose ideas had a significant influence on Wordsworth's poetry.

Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson in 1802. The innovative and experimental zeal of his youth had worn off by this point. In the years following the Revolution, he denounced French imperialism, and his English nationalism grew stronger. In his later works, the pantheism of his early nature poetry gave way to orthodox religious sentiment. Wordsworth's transition appeared complete when he accepted a role as Westmorland county's stamp dealer, a political appointment that guaranteed his continued prosperity. Wordsworth's admirers included Percy Bysshe Shelley, who had previously regarded him as a reformer of literary diction.

He was now looked down upon with contempt and a sense of betrayal. After 1810, Coleridge and Wordsworth became estranged. Wordsworth continued to write in his later years, and after becoming a well-known literary figure in the 1830s, he was honoured with honorary degrees from the Universities of Durham and Oxford, as well as the title of Poet Laureate in 1843. He moved to Rydal after obtaining a government pension in 1842. Wordsworth, one of England's most famous poets at the time, died in 1850. The *Prelude*, his greatest novel, was published shortly after his death.

## Summary

### Poem Text

Five years have past; five summers, with the length  
Of five long winters! and again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
With a soft inland murmur. — Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
That on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion, and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
The day is come when I again repose  
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view  
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,  
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves  
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,  
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke  
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!  
With some uncertain notice, as might seem  
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire  
The Hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,  
 Through a long absence, have not been to me  
 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
 But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them  
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
 And passing even into my purer mind,  
 With tranquil restoration: – feelings too  
 Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
 As have no slight or trivial influence  
 On that best portion of a good man's life,  
 His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust  
 To them I may have owed another gift,  
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
 In which the burden of the mystery,  
 In which the heavy and the weary weight  
 Of all this unintelligible world,  
 Is lightened: – that serene and blessed mood,  
 In which the affections gently lead us on, –  
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
 And even the motion of our human blood  
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul:  
 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
 We see into the life of things.

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft –  
 In darkness and amid the many shapes  
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir  
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,  
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart –  
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,  
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,  
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half extinguished  
 thought,

With many recognitions dim and faint,  
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,  
 The picture of the mind revives again:  
 While here I stand, not only with the sense  
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
 That in this moment there is life and food  
 For future years. And so I dare to hope,  
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when  
 first

I came among these hills; when like a roe  
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
 Wherever nature led: more like a man  
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one  
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then  
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,  
 And their glad animal movements all gone by)  
 To me was all in all. – I cannot paint  
 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colors and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite; a feeling and a love,

That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 By thought supplied, nor any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past,  
 And all its aching joys are now no more,  
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts  
 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
 To look on nature, not as in the hour  
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
 The still, sad music of humanity,  
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean, and the living air,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
 And mountains; and of all that we behold  
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
 Of eye, and ear, — both what they half create,  
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize  
 In nature and the language of the sense,  
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
 Of all my moral being.

Nor perchance,

If I were not thus taught, should I the more  
 Suffer my genial spirits to decay:  
 For thou art with me here upon the banks  
 Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,  
 My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch  
 The language of my former heart, and read  
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while

May I behold in thee what I was once,  
 My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,  
 Knowing that Nature never did betray  
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,  
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold  
 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon  
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;  
 And let the misty mountain-winds be free  
 To blow against thee: and, in after years,  
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured  
 Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind  
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,

Thy memory be as a dwelling-place  
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,  
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,  
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts  
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,  
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance –  
 If I should be where I no more can hear  
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these  
     gleams  
 Of past existence – wilt thou then forget  
 That on the banks of this delightful stream  
 We stood together; and that I, so long  
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came  
 Unwearied in that service: rather say  
 With warmer love – oh! with far deeper zeal  
 Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,  
 That after many wanderings, many years  
 Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,  
 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
 More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

## **Poem Summary**

### **Lines 1–8**

The rephrasings of time – first five years, then five summers, then five winters – give the reader a sense of the passing of time's duration. The speaker's sense impressions begin almost immediately: first, the sound of water, which conjures up images of a deep and hidden source; second, the sight of the cliffs, which conjures up images of a secluded and hidden place.

### **9th line**

With a pun on the word "repose," which means both to rest and to "pose again," this line indicates the poetic mind's strength.

### **Lines 10 to 18**

We can see the poet's creativity at work in these lines. All is unified: the plots of land fade into the landscape, all vegetation is the same shade of green, hedgerows (which would usually divide the plots) have grown wild and no longer divide the parcels of land, and wreaths of smoke link the earth to the sky. The good poet, according to Wordsworth, frames, interprets, and unifies the landscape in the same way that he or she frames, interprets, and unifies all experience. And all of these photographs show the poet's imagination's cohesive performance.

### **Lines 19 and 22**

The title of the poem is important. Tintern Abbey is a monastery or convent that has been turned into a ruin. The fact that the Abbey is a ruin, unfit for human habitation, raises the question of where the spiritual individual now lives. The speaker imagines "vagrant dwellers" and "hermits" making their homes in the woods after seeing the wreaths of smoke. They are the holy people of today, and they have mastered the art of living in the forests. This interpretation is based on the poet's active imagination: he deduces the existence of these people and imagines details of their lives using only the smoke as a clue.

### **Lines 23 to 50**

In the second verse stanza, the speaker claims that what he now sees and imagines has sustained him for the past five years. They aren't memories; rather, they are memories that have left us with warm feelings long after the memories have faded. It's as if they're memories of memories. It's a subtle force, but it's no less significant because of it. Since the poet is speaking about things that have no common names in these lines, he must make his way as he goes; his language is careful and precise. His acts of kindness and affection, which are themselves "unremembered," are influenced by his memories of memories. In the end, it seems that the world's good is kept together by powers that are almost too subtle to be considered "forces." The language here is heavily influenced by religion: "blessed," "corporeal," and "soul."

The speaker, perhaps only half-consciously, is substituting a religion of the natural world for the Abbey's religion. He acknowledges in line 36 that he acquired an experience of the sublime from these memories of memories, the state that allows him to transcend everyday life. It's worth noting that Wordsworth's explanation of the experience is made up of a collection of phrases that keep the reader guessing. He starts by attempting to describe the term "mood." The sentence isn't finished for fourteen and a half lines because such a description is so complicated. This state also causes vision to shift inward; the world seems to fade away, breath and heartbeat cease, and one is transformed into a "living soul."

#### **48th line**

The self-reflective mind, or the mind that is contemplative and simply reflects back on itself, is referred to as this eye by Wordsworth. The poem "I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud" by Wordsworth has similar themes and uses the image of a "inward eye."

#### **Lines 51 to 59**

The speaker starts to doubt himself and comes to a halt. We're back in the realm of religious contemplation. Wordsworth recalls that he has always had this recollection of a memory, but this time he pinpoints the source of his inspiration to a single feature of the landscape: the River Wye. He refers to it as a "wanderer through the woods," implying that, like the "vagrant dwellers" and "hermits," it has no permanent home. It seems to have been a spiritual haven, much like them.

#### **Lines 60 to 67**

The speaker is now pondering his current state of mind, which is a combination of memories and a vague depression. There seems to be an appreciation of how memory works once more. The speaker believes that, just like the previous experience five years ago provided spiritual sustenance in the years following it, the current experience will provide spiritual sustenance in the years to come.

#### **Lines 68 to 85**

The speaker believes he has changed since he was five years ago. His feelings for the woods were "coarser" back then. His personality resembled that of an animal, founded on instinct rather than logic.

#### **Lines 86 to 104**

The speaker admits that he doesn't lament the passage of time because the speaker's passionate emotions have given way to more reflective feelings. He describes a spirituality within himself in line 104 in much the same language he used to describe the sound of the waters in the first verse paragraph. He implies, obliquely, that his faith is influenced by the sound of the waters.

#### **Lines 105 to 109**

The speaker believes that the mind is responsible for "half-creating" the universe. He sees evidence of this in the obvious changes in the landscape since his last visit—changes he knows to be (and have been) predictions in his own mind; things that have remained unchanged a year later.

#### **Lines 110 to 113**

He ends his thinking with a declaration and assurance that he is indeed a nature lover. In reality, nature has evolved into everything a religion is, including a moral compass. Nature, as a new religion and a substitute for the Abbey, is noteworthy in that it is not static. It is "A motion and a spirit," like the river and maybe portrayed by the river. Wordsworth describes the kind of maturation mentioned by Augustine and countless saints in these lines: a youth of indiscretion, conversion, and eventually, a deep and enduring faith.

#### **Lines 114 to 136**

In the final verse paragraph, the speaker—as Wordsworth—focuses on his girlfriend, Dorothy, who is currently with him. He detects in her a sensibility that he recognised in himself five years before, and he recognises his "former pleasures" in her "wild eyes." For a brief moment, he laments the loss of his youthful desires and seems to ask to see (in her eyes) his younger self.

#### **137-162 lines**

The suggestion of faith is made clear here: the natural world's religion is given a prayer. The speaker recounts and wishes Dorothy the influence of nature on memory, perception, and action

(which he began to understand in the first verse paragraph). He and his sister have a "confidence" that nature is full of "blessings," according to him.

As indicated in the first verse paragraph, Wordsworth transfers his subject from the natural world to the self, as that which conveys the natural world, specifically through his powers as a poet whose mind unifies experience. He hopes that his sister's lasting memory of him on this day will sustain her, just as he hopes his memory of her will sustain him.

The poet suggests that, like the river, the human mind is both strong and fluid. As the poem progresses, this mind takes on the position of a new faith to replace the one symbolised by the ruined Abbey. The poet wrote these lines "over" the Abbey, which literally means "upstream" from the Abbey. They are also "over" the Abbey in the sense that, like the River Wye and memory, they supersede or substitute the Abbey as a spiritual resting place.

## Themes

### **Transformation and Change**

Wordsworth wrote "Tintern Abbey" after returning to the location after a five-year absence, as the poem's subtitle and first line indicate. The place still has the endearing natural quality he recalls from his first visit, but as a more seasoned observer, he notices a special harmony between man and nature that has its own kind of beauty. This understanding is evident in the first stanza, where the poet juxtaposes man-made and natural images from the scene, often in the same line.

As a result, we see "sportive wood run wild" (nature) and "these rural farms" (man), "groves" (man) and "copses" (nature), and "wreaths of smoke" (man) "from among the trees" (nature). These juxtapositions contrast with the poet's memory of his first visit, when his attention was drawn solely by nature: "Wherever nature led me." In most of the third stanza, we see the poet's more youthful, "remembered" individual contact with nature—with the hills, mountains, lakes, rocks, and forests. The younger man came to nature without reflection, as if compelled by a "appetite" or "passion"; The call was "rougher" and "cat," but it was also "haunted" by an unknown "dread."

The first visit was intense, with "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures," but it was difficult to describe. Those feelings "are no longer" for the returning adult, but they are replaced by a more "serious enjoyment"—the pleasure of wisdom, the ability to make sense of and give expression to youthful desires that have faded with time. The hauntedness is lessened as a result of such wisdom: it has been called and known, allowing a person to come to nature in search of "the thing he loves" rather than "flying from anything he dreads."

The speaker has clearly been through a lot in the intervening years. He has discovered life cannot be one continuous state of "dizzy raptures"; if it were, such moments would not seem remarkable and would not be called raptures. He has known solitude both in "lonely spaces" and "mid the noise of towns and cities." Instead, he'd learned about the "dreary intercourse of everyday life," its "weariness" and "fever," loss and pain, and the "strong and tired weight of all this unintelligible universe," while also discovering the crux of his own Romantic sensibility. A individual is un-separated from nature in his or her youth, when "all [is] in all" and "all [is] in all."

Simply put, one "lives." However, in a less innocent state, one realises that those "dizzy raptures," the pinnacles of the youthful soul's life, are "food" for the adult soul. They are the times when the "ghost" seeks light and purpose. They show a deeper "force of joy" and encourage one to "see into the life of things," revealing a harmonious relationship between man's spirit and the spirit of the natural world once embodied by the mature mind.

### **The Meaning of Nature**

But what exactly is the poet's concept of "harmony" between man and nature? If "thoughtless youth" has disappeared, "other gifts"—gifts of thought and a broader perspective—have replaced it—what would he see in Tintern now that he couldn't before because of these gifts? He calls what he's discovered in the second half of the fourth stanza in words that seem obscure at first: a "presence that disturbs me with joy of elevated feelings," "a sublime sense," "action," and "spirit" that "impels all thinking things" and "rolls through all things."

While such ambiguous words may imply a mystical or religious connotation, the poet makes no mention of God or any transcendental belief system. Instead, the poet perceives the harmony "in



nature and the language of the senses" –that is, by perception of the world around him and his logical, rather than supernatural, effort to comprehend it.

But, just as the adult mind struggles to make sense of a reality that seems in some ways unknowable, Wordsworth's generation struggled to reconcile the mystical and mechanical dimensions of the universe. Newton's laws of motion demonstrated that the planets' motions and all physical events on Earth are governed by the same rules, or "motion and spirit." The "setting sun," the ocean, the air, and even "man's mind" are all part of the same "sublime" structure in this way: they are all harmonious. The mystery of a single moment in existence is universal in the cosmos, and therefore free of the alienating element of the youthful experience (the "dread"), which excludes everything beyond. "Any interest unborrowed from the eye" refers to something beyond unthought experience.

Not through youthful rashness, but through "the language of the senses, the anchor of my purest feelings," the mystery becomes understandable. Coming to terms with the "sense," on the other hand, is not about losing touch with "the life of things," but rather about conceiving of it in a different way that connects the observer to nature. This is where Wordsworth's Romantic movement differs from the previous century's scientific thought, which regarded the mind as a passive force separate from the objects it contemplated.

If the mind, like the movements of the planets and all other natural things, is a manifestation of the same "natural spirit," then the mind not only perceives but also "half create[s]" external reality, according to Wordsworth. In any given experience, it is not passive but aggressive. As a result, the poet is indeed a true "lover of the meadows." Thinking has been "the guide" and "the soul of all my spiritual being," if not "dizzy rapture."

### Style

Good poetry, according to Wordsworth, is "the accidental overflow" of sentiment, meaning that a good poem must be free of constricting rhyme, verse structure, and other laws. While critics disagree about how spontaneous Wordsworth's writing process was, it is clear that his poetry aspires to appear spontaneous. Wordsworth also said that poetry should be composed of "true men's words." In keeping with this, the poet wrote "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" in blank verse, which is unrhymed iambic pentameter with a metre that imitates natural speech rhythms.

The poem is divided into verse paragraphs, which are groups of lines that share a common theme, much like the sentences that make up a prose paragraph. The term "and the" has the appearance of an incantation, which is a recitation of a phrase designed to induce hypnosis. There are several examples of alliteration, as well as several rhythmic variations.

### Historical Background

"Tintern Abbey," published in 1798, is included in the volume (Lyrical Ballads) that marks the start of England's Romantic period. Romanticism, like all movements, identified itself in opposition to the theories and methods that came before it. Wordsworth and his friend Coleridge's new poems marked a stylistic break from the past, a break that most described the movement as "revolutionary."

In terms of ideas, however, poems like "Tintern Abbey" are more like a reinterpretation of ideals that, in Wordsworth's view, had been given too little thought for far too long. Wordsworth was concerned not with what men thought, but with how they thought: logical at the expense of reality, academic at the expense of sense. Despite the fact that scientific theory had woven a vast web of apparent accuracies, Wordsworth believed it had not taken men any closer to a true understanding of what it meant to be alive. At the same time, it had made the true meanings of the pure-science discoveries it was attempting to answer irrelevant. As with several pivotal figures, Wordsworth not only ushered in a new era but also assisted in its demise. As a result, the body of work that includes "Tintern Abbey" is more than just a starting point: it's also a link between two perspectives.

The eighteenth century was a time of transition to a rapid series of scientific and natural discoveries. The 1500-year-old belief in a Ptolemaic concept of the universe –with the earth at the core of a vast number of "spheres" around which the sun, moon, planets, and stars circled –had been questioned by the Polish astronomer Copernicus in the field of cosmology who proposed the

first modern heliocentric model in 1543. In the seventeenth century, German Kepler updated the Copernican method, which was later advanced by the Italian Galileo, who also discovered the first laws of inertia.

The physical properties of the universe were set in stone in 1687 by Englishman Isaac Newton, whose "Principia" defined the relationships between force, mass, and acceleration that regulate nature's workings. Most importantly, Newtonian mechanics provided the physics needed to describe a cosmology in which the earth was only one of many planets orbiting the sun and, as a result, man no longer held a central position in the universe.

Newton, on the other hand, had shown that the universe had a beauty and symmetry that had previously been impossible. The divine hand could be seen in the movements of the planets in the Newtonian universe, according to Newton himself, in the plain perfection of such rules as Force equals Mass times Acceleration, which could decide the movement of not only a planet in the heavens but even an apple falling from a tree.

Newton's mechanical world, despite his own magical view of the mechanism, had the opposite effect on others. Newton's laws, along with advances in chemistry, electricity, and medicine in the eighteenth century, demonstrated that observational science, rather than revealed truths of faith or mysticism, would gradually provide man's primary perspective on existence. Philosophy started to take on a more scientific bent. A new rationalism swept the society, founded on the mechanical world as the supreme truth, enabling the Industrial Revolution and causing an explosion in the field of social thought, which sought to make a rapidly evolving culture understandable. John Locke was inspired by Newton's laws, and he developed a social theory focused on man's "contractual rights."

David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, and Edmund Burke, among others, used Locke's writings as a starting point for their own. Neo-classicism was fashionable in literature and sculpture, and emotional spontaneity gave way to style and shape. All of these cultural elements came together to form the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, a time marked by great ideas but also by staleness and conformity in many ways, particularly at its peak.

However, developments in the years leading up to Wordsworth's career had started to shift views in a different direction. The American and French revolutions adopted Enlightenment ideals as their tenets, then expanded them in ways that contradicted the Enlightenment's goals. By asserting individual freedoms and breaking down the ordered social system, the French revolution in particular gave rise to a kind of emotionalism that later Romantics found appealing.

The fight for order—against the political classes and against old cultural forms—captured the imaginations of Englishmen who were not born into money. In poetry, a new language was thus needed. Wordsworth calls for a more commonplace literature in the preface to a later edition of *Lyrical Ballads* one that, while celebrating daily words and experiences, does so in a poetic manner. As seen in "Tintern Abbey," such an approach does not eliminate justification, but rather transforms it, enabling the individual's active dialogue with nature and experience to articulate his own inner workings.

### **Key words/ Glossary**

lofty-of imposing height; especially standing out above others

impress-produce or try to produce a vivid mental image of

seclusion-the quality of being removed from the presence of others

repose-relax or recline in a comfortable resting position

clad-wearing or provided with clothing

copse-a dense growth of trees, shrubs, or bushes

sportive-given to merry frolicking

pastoral-idyllically rustic

vagrant-continually changing as from one abode to another

hermit-one who lives in solitude

din-a loud, harsh, or strident noise  
tranquil-free from disturbance by heavy waves  
trivial-(informal) small and of little importance  
sublime-inspiring awe  
serene-not agitated  
corporeal-characteristic of the body as opposed to the mind or spirit  
suspend-make inoperative or stop  
vain-unproductive of success  
fretful-nervous and unable to relax  
sylvan-relating to or characteristic of wooded regions  
cataract-a large waterfall; violent rush of water over a precipice  
rapture-a state of being carried away by overwhelming emotion  
recompense-payment or reward, as for service rendered  
ample-more than enough in size or scope or capacity  
chasten-correct by punishment or discipline  
subdue-hold within limits and control  
genial-diffusing warmth and friendliness  
prevail-prove superior  
solitary-lacking companions or companionship  
sober-dignified and serious in manner or character  
exhortation-an earnest attempt at persuasion  
hither-to this place  
zeal-a feeling of strong eagerness

### **Self-Assessment/Evaluation**

1. When was William Wordsworth born?  
7 April 1770
2. Where was William Wordsworth born?  
Cockermouth
3. Which college did William Wordsworth attend?  
St. John's College
4. What was William Wordsworth's and Annette Vallon's daughter's name?  
Caroline
5. When were William Wordsworth's first poems *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk* published?  
1793
6. Which poem of William Wordsworth is considered his greatest autobiographical epic?  
*The Prelude*
7. When did William Wordsworth marry Mary Hutchinson?  
1802
8. When was William Wordsworth appointed poet laureate?  
1843
9. When did William Wordsworth die?  
23 April 1850
10. Where did William Wordsworth die?  
Rydal Mount

## Review Questions

1. Make the pictures stand out by contrasting them. In Stanza 4, Wordsworth compares his youthful recollections of the same location to those in the first stanza. How do the specifics show the speaker's evolution over the last five years? Which terms, in each case, aid in illuminating the observer's state of mind?
2. Wordsworth turns to the person he is addressing, his sister Dorothy, in the final stanza. He claims that by watching her, he can "catch/ the language of [his] former heart?" What does he mean by this, exactly? What part does she play in the poem's creative experience? Why would her presence make "these steep forests and lofty cliffs" "more precious" to him?
3. Write a two-page story in which you revisit a spot from your history and reflect on how you've changed in the last five years. Consider how the specific meaning of the transition could be symbolised or expressed by information from the location itself. How has time and development changed your perspective of the location?
4. Does Wordsworth, as he said in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," use "the true language of men" in "Tintern Abbey"? Do you believe people in 19th-century England talked differently?
5. Is the speaker's connection to nature something that anyone can achieve?
6. Why does the speaker refer to Dorothy's "wild eyes" (119, 148) so frequently? What's up with her crazy eyes? Is that meant to be a positive thing?
7. Does the "still, sad music of humanity's" (91) consciousness have to come from a near connection with nature, or could it come from somewhere else?
8. Do you think the speaker's impressions will improve if he returned to the Wye's banks for a third time?

## Further/Suggested Readings



- Juliet Barker. *Wordsworth: A Life*, HarperCollins, New York, 2000, [ISBN 978-0060787318](#)
- Hunter Davies, *William Wordsworth: A Biography*, Frances Lincoln, London, 2009, [ISBN 978-0-7112-3045-3](#)
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- Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Later Years, 1803–1850 v. 2*, Oxford University Press, 1965, [ISBN 978-0198116172](#)
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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCvKdPxRqtY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVlgrLiOoM>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5r80WIZoEw>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0a\\_EBiJhtM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0a_EBiJhtM)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v7-96r6Bxg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dlh0YoVL-so>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85bZyluGTr8>

## Unit 10: Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Kubla Khan

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### Objectives/Expected Learning Outcomes

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- To discuss the concept of Fancy and Imagination with reference to Kubla Khan
- To appraise Coleridge's Dream Vision of Romanticism in Kubla Khan
- To interpret the Social Theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in reference to Romantic poetry .

### Introduction

The younger of the two English poets known as the older romantics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772–25 July 1834), is credited with laying the basis for the Romantic Movement with William Wordsworth. Romanticism is a change in attitude, a sharpened sensibility, an awakened imagination, and a vein of individuality never felt before in poetry, spanning the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the Romantic poets were meditating on natural phenomena, believing that they held the key to understanding human experiences and problems. Despite the fact that the Romantic Movement was never a coherent movement, it did produce an alternative aesthetics of democracy and individualism, fueled by the French Revolution's progressive values.

The longing for the glory of the imperfect replaced the neo-classical preference for the ideal. Coleridge was a poet, literary critic, and supremely gifted philosopher, and he was one of the few who attempted to achieve a balance in his writing between science, politics, and religion, which had previously been at odds. Coleridge was the most widely read of all the Romantics, and he was perhaps the only English poet who knew a lot about German theologians.

### Subject Matter

Coleridge was the son of a Devonshire parson, born and raised in London, educated at Christ's Hospital and Cambridge, and inspired to cultivate a greater affinity with books and philosophy by these circumstances.

“Seeing none of nature but the sky and stars, and taking no such pleasure as Lamb did in the city crowds,” Grierson and Smith write. He dreamed, read, and conversed...” (395).

Coleridge regarded intelligence as a province to be explored and conquered. Coleridge's biggest failing was his lack of stamina and inability to endure the spasmodic bursts of creativity that flashed through his mind and body.

Some of his best poems were illuminated with amazing creativity. Critics and biographers have harshly portrayed him as a weak-willed man ruined by an uncontrollable opium addiction.

Coleridge's addiction resulted from his reliance on laudanum to relieve him of the discomfort of physical illness, so this view could only be partially true. Another of his personal tragedies was that he became reckless towards his wife Sarah Fricker and family while stuck in a loveless marriage. Coleridge was unwittingly sucked into a whirlpool of adverse conditions, which deprived him of his creative spirit. Nonetheless, he is widely regarded as one of the most musical of them. Nonetheless, he is regarded as one of the most musical of English poets, and is regarded as the high priest of romanticism for his supreme flights of imagination and extraordinary versification.

### **Summary**

Since they lived in Cumberland's Lake District, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge became known as the Lake Poets or Lakers, while Francis Jeffrey used the term derogatorily in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1817. Let's take a look at Coleridge's career path.

#### **First Phase**

Coleridge was so enthralled by the fervour of the French Revolution while at Cambridge that he abandoned his studies and enlisted in the Light Dragoons. However, this fervour only lasted two months. On his return, Coleridge met Robert Southey, with whom he worked on the writing of a tragedy called *The Fall of Robespierre*, as well as planning a Utopian commune called the Pantisocracy to be built on the banks of the Susquehanna River in America, based on William Godwin's ideal of equality. Coleridge became engaged to and married Sarah Fricker, Southey's sister-in-law, which proved to be his biggest blunder. By 1794, Coleridge had started writing poetry, with his first poems appearing in *The Morning Chronicle*.

*Ode on the Departing Year* and *Ode on France*, for example, show him channelling the spirit of eighteenth-century poets such as Collins and Gray. He mastered this difficult lyrical genre, though he also attempted sonnets in a more straightforward style. These poems are referred to as "Effusions" by Coleridge, and their ebullience (a term he coined) was provided by a combination of themes on love, politics, and philosophy. These poems, which Wordsworth referred to as "poems of sentiment and reflection," lack the astonishing vitality of his later poems, which are the source of his popularity.

#### **Second Phase**

After meeting Wordsworth in 1797 at Nether Stoway, Coleridge underwent a transformation as a man and a poet, which resulted in one of the most intimate and lasting partnerships between any two poets and the blossoming of Coleridge's genius. Wordsworth's greatest admirer, Coleridge, absorbed Wordsworth's appreciation of nature at first. The mentality of Wordsworth can be seen in poems like "Frost at Midnight" and "Fears in Solitude." Their relationship flourished, as shown by the publication of "The Lyrical Ballads" in 1798, widely regarded as a watershed moment in the revival of romantic poetry.

Coleridge's friendship with the Wordsworths (William and his sister Dorothy) was important because it allowed him to express himself completely, resulting in poems such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan." The magic in the poems of the time may be a reflection of Coleridge's own personal feelings at the time. Another parallel influence on Coleridge's mind that created a hallucinatory state may have been the morphine, which he had begun taking on a daily basis to cure his physical and mental condition and which eventually crippled his creative abilities.

Coleridge's marriage to Sarah Fricker failed, but his relationship with Wordsworth took him into the limelight. Sara Hutchinson, a friend of Wordsworth and with whom Coleridge fell in love, was a deep passion in Coleridge's life. However, Coleridge's problem of being in an unhappy marriage had a profound effect on him and contributed to his growing opium dependency, severely disrupting his mental peace and incapacitating his creative faculties.

#### **Third Phase**

Wordsworth and Coleridge travelled to Germany in September 1798, where Coleridge dedicated himself to the study of philosophy in Hamburg, and from there he gradually moved away from poetry and toward metaphysics. Coleridge wrote his ode on Dejection in 1802 as a synthesis of his personal trials and emotions, his newfound recourse in philosophy and metaphysics, and, in some ways, his departure from Wordsworth's earlier held mutual views on the position of nature. Coleridge's artistic powers had waned by this time due to his opium addiction. He went into exile

from his family and friends and spent two years in the Malta Civil Service during World War II, during which period he wrote his confessional Notebooks. When he returned, he officially divorced his wife and moved in with Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson for six months.

Coleridge began giving lectures to esteemed audiences, and his 18 lectures at the Royal Institute on Poetry and the Principles of Taste reflect his growing interest in the genre. His Shakespeare lectures, published in two volumes as *Shakespearean Criticism* in 1907, are a watershed moment in the development of the novel concepts of "organic" type and "epiphenomena," which convey the idea of a poet's work as the unique outpourings of a single creative mind. In *The Friend*, which ran for 28 issues and was published in book form in 1812, Coleridge came close to realising his dream of a literary synthesis of a literary, moral, and political document.

#### Fourth Phase

Coleridge was at a crossroads in his life at this time, having broken up with Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson. He wrote a few poems, including *The Visionary Hope*, *The Suicide's Argument*, and *Time, Real and Imaginary*, as well as political articles and a reworked version of his early play *Osiris*, which was staged at Drury Lane in 1813 as *Remorse*. In 1813, Coleridge had a physical and mental breakdown for which he needed treatment. In 1814, he completed the commentaries to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, as well as his best work on literary criticism, *Biographia Literaria*, which has been appropriately characterised as "a kaleidoscope of philosophy, criticism, and autobiography, and one of the main texts of English Romanticism" (Ousby 190).

Coleridge's literary career was over, but he thrived as a philosopher, lecturer, and critic, expounding mature opinions on society, religion, and culture. All of his earlier reading and learning paid off, and his two *Lay Sermons* (1816-17), lectures on the *History of Philosophy*, *General Course on Literature*, and *Aids to Reflection* are all systematic discourses on various branches of learning, concrete and scientific in approach. Coleridge is best known as a poet, but his literary knowledge extends to almost all existing literary forms and genres. He made significant contributions to criticism and philosophy. Coleridge anticipated contemporary intellectual and psychological critique of the arts in works like *Biographia Literaria*.

#### Technique of Narration

Coleridge's literary output is not comprehensive, but the poems that bear his name have a sense of transport that is lacking in even the best of English poets. Poems like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Christabel* hypnotise and transport the reader to another world. Through flights of imagination and the association of supernatural forces, Coleridge's metaphysical mind has given these poems a dream-like atmosphere.

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, an exquisite tale centred on an old sailor's hallucinatory hallucinations, is a near-perfect example of the ballad genre. The near fantastical tale is saved from becoming a phantasmagoria by the moral profoundly rooted in it. When Coleridge was writing these poems for the *Lyrical Ballads*, he and Wordsworth agreed that while Wordsworth would be responsible for making the ordinary seem strange and exceptional through creative interpretation, Coleridge would be responsible for making the supernatural and extraordinary seem real through the power of the dramatic reality of the emotions portrayed.

Coleridge was able to do this admirably by using what he referred to as "willing suspension of disbelief." It's not that Coleridge didn't think the supernatural was supernatural; it's that he saw it as a normal part of the whole, and he was asking his readers to do just that – to put aside their cloak of disbelief that kept them from accepting the world of faeries and spirits as a part of their own, and enter the magical world of phantom ships and haunted figures with a sigh of relief.

#### Kubla Khan

He was a tyrant who ruled. *Kubla Khan* is an unfinished poem that was published in 1816 in *Christabel and Other Poems*. Coleridge named it *A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment* because he saw it as a fragment of something larger, but critics have treated it as a complete poem and, in spirit, a definition of Coleridge's poetry. It has fifty-four lines divided into two stanzas, and according to Coleridge, it is a record of his dream – a daydream caused by the opium he was prone to taking. Coleridge was recuperating at a lonely farmhouse in the Purlock village in 1797, and on that particular afternoon he sat down to read Samuel Purchas' *Pilgrimage*.

Coleridge was fascinated by travel literature, and after reading Purchas Pilgrimage, he became interested in Oriental tales, especially those about Kubla Khan, the grandson of Chengiz Khan, the Yuan dynasty's Mongol, who created the city of Shang-tu, which is immortalised in Coleridge's poem Xanadu. "Here the Kubla Khan ordered a palace to be constructed, and a stately garden there unto," he said as he read these exact lines. And thus ten miles of fertile garden is encircled by a wall," he fell asleep in his chair and wrote 200 to 300 lines of a poem in his sleep, which he began to write when he awoke, but he was called away by someone from Purlock at the same time, and he could not remember the poem.

The poem's magic of phrase and cadence supports the poet's argument that while writing it, his mind was closed to the mundane reality of his worldly situation and he was truly lost in the magical realm of dream and poetry. The poem unravels both an enchanted place in terms of wonder and miracle, as well as the frantic state of the birth of art, in an unintentionally fluid movement. The poem depicts the coherent incoherence of a dream, which contains the core of Romantic poetry in itself.

The poem's first stanza begins with a description of Kubla Khan's "stately pleasure dome," which he had ordered constructed in Xanadu, his summer capital. The walls (or boundaries) encircled colourful gardens with fragrant blossom-laden flowers, and the palace's towers overlooked ten miles of fertile land. "Sunny patches of greenery" were encircled by the forests, which reached almost to the tops of the hills. The palace was built on the banks of the Alph River, which has no geographical significance and is therefore solely a work of the poet's imagination.

This stanza introduces the poem's first dichotomy, which is an integral part of the poem's thematic structure. The sunless sea through which the Alph falls through dark caverns that are beyond man's measuring ability, and the open gardens bright with the warmth of the sun where beauty abounds.

Coleridge enthralls the reader in the second stanza with his near-magical depiction of the awe-inspiring "deep romantic chasm" beneath the ancient forest's cedarn shield. The strongest elements of romanticism have come together here; the beauty of nature combined with a vivid imagination produces mysticism of the highest order:

"A savage place! As holy and enchanted  
As ever beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon lover!"

"Remember that in all the millions permitted, there are only five-five little lines-of which one can say: "These are the pure magic," Rudyard Kipling said, combining these three lines with two of Keats' famous lines on the magical casements. These are the unadulterated visions. All else is just poetry." (Fifteen Poets, Ridley, 257) "A mighty fountain" erupted from this haunted chasm. The images used in the depiction of the birth of this spring may be indicative of the complex energy of birth and creation; the earth's constant chaos and seething with pent-up force, like a human panting under the pressure of a tremendous physical exertion, pushing out a stream of water and rock fragments that bounced back like hail or "chaffy grain under the thresher's flail".

This birth is of the same holy river, the Alph, or maybe a new stream that joins the river as it passes through the woods and valleys in a meandering, mazy motion before tumultuously collapsing into a dead ocean through the measureless caverns. The poet uses the same juxtaposition of antithetical symbols to describe the birth and death of the river, summarising its entire course from beginning to end in four lines. The river seems to be dramatic in its own right, almost overshadowing the poem's central character. Coleridge has subtly inserted himself into Kubla Khan's story a portrayal of nature in all of its amazing forms and colours, and it almost seems as if the poet has fallen under the spell of nature's splendour in the true Romantic spirit.

However, the poet shows mastery over his incredible imagination, softly bringing us back to Kubla Khan being forewarned of imminent battle by the voices of his ancestors heard in the roar of the river as it flows into the sea. This is a subliminal reminder of man's compulsions, which drag him away from his fantasies. The second stanza concludes with a synopsis of both stanzas, reiterating the image and feature that connects it to the last stanza—the dome of pleasure. It is not an ordinary palace floating on the waves, situated between the fountain and the caves icons of life and death, development and destruction, it is a "miracle of rare device" a summer palace situated next to ice caves! The final lines are filled with mutually incongruent ideas such as miracle (supernatural) vs. device (human planning), and sun vs. sunlessness.

In the third stanza, Coleridge recalls a dream he had of an Abyssinian maid singing on a dulcimer, yearning for her homeland, and he longs to be able to remember the symphony and song so that he



can reproduce it in his writing. Kubla Khan's miraculous pleasure-dome; "The sunny dome! those ice caves!"

The poet would achieve this ability during a poetic inspiration, and the state of frenzy into which he would go with "his flickering eyes, his floating hair," would give him the appearance of being charmed by a spirit. Coleridge is referring to the power of the human imagination, which, through the creative process, turns meaning impressions into reality; this is his famous theory of the imagination, according to which poetry emerges from within the poet through the concept of organic unity. To ordinary humans, a poet in a fit of rage is a terrifying sight.

Since the poet is actually one who has consumed the ambrosia of heavenly inspiration, they will have to perform acts of respect and attempt to protect themselves from this obvious evil power by weaving a circle around him thrice and closing their eyes in terror. Kubla Khan is primarily written in iambic pentameter and tetrameter, with a few anapests and trochees thrown in for good measure.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was an important figure in the English Romantic Movement. He was a member of the Lake Poets as well. Kubla Khan, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and Christabel are three of his most well-known Romantic poems. The ideas of the French Revolution had a huge impact on him. The last of his poems, Ode of France, was written under the influence of the French Revolution. His critical writing *Biographia Literaria* is also well-known.

Coleridge used the term "willing suspension of disbelief" in Chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* to describe "the state of receptivity and credulity desirable in a reader or member of an audience." The reader must be convinced to believe the poet's clearly made-up plot. Coleridge may have gotten the idea from Francois de la Monte La Vayer, a French sceptic (1588-1672), who coined the term "cette belle suspension d'esprit de la sceptique" to describe the sceptic's wisdom. Cuddon, J.A.

There are two potential topics for poetry, according to him.

Coleridge acknowledged that the Lyrical Ballads scheme was devised with the intention of focusing his poetry on defining people and characters, as well as supernatural events in nature. 'It was decided, that my endeavours should be guided to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; but so as to move from our inner existence, a human interest and a semblance of reality, sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination, that willing suspension of disbelief for these shadows of imagination. Poetic confidence is the willing suspension of disbelief for the sake of the moment.

The philosophical definition of a poem and poetry, according to Coleridge, is the most contentious topic. Coleridge discovered cardinal points of poetry when conversing with William Wordsworth. The first is the ability to elicit sympathy and sincere emotions from the audience. The second is the ability to pique the reader's attention by presenting something different using imaginative colours, such as "sudden beauty," an interplay of light and shadow, or the way the moonlight and sunset alter the landscape's appearance.

He called these descriptive imaginations "nature poetry." Poems can be written in two ways, according to Coleridge. A poem's subjects, agents, or events must all have some supernatural quality. The subjects should be drawn from everyday lives and characters, as well as real-life events. His approach was often aimed at achieving excellence based on the fact that the reader would perceive such dramatic reality of such emotions and circumstances as genuine. The reader's curiosity will be piqued by the poet's dramatic portrayal of those emotions. This will naturally occur in circumstances that the readers perceive to be genuine. They will be so genuine that they will be deluded and forced to believe them under the supernatural agency.

### **Key words/ Glossary**

stately-impressive in appearance

decree-issue an authoritative order

cavern-a large cave or a large chamber in a cave

sinuous-curved or curving in and out

incense-a substance that produces a fragrant odor when burned

chasm-a deep opening in the earth's surface

athwart-across, especially at an oblique angle

waning-of the period when the visible surface of the moon decreases  
 turmoil-violent agitation  
 seething-in constant agitation  
 chaff-material consisting of seed coverings and pieces of stem  
 thresh-beat the seeds out of a grain  
 flail-an implement with a handle and a free swinging stick  
 meander-move or cause to move in a winding or curving course  
 dale-an open valley in a hilly area  
 prophesy-predict or reveal, as if through divine inspiration  
 damsel-a young unmarried woman  
 dulcimer-a trapezoidal zither whose strings are struck with hammers  
 beware-be on one's guard; be cautious or wary about; be alert to

### Self-Assessment/Evaluation

#### **1. What is the total number of stanzas in Kubla Khan?**

1) Stanza: The poem is divided into two sections of four stanzas each. These undefined stanzas are written in a combination of tetrameter and pentameter by the poet.  
 2) Rhyme Scheme: Since the poem is not structured in any way, the rhyme scheme varies from stanza to stanza.

#### **2. What does the name Kubla Khan imply?**

Here's the famous opener, as decreed by a stately pleasure dome. This line does a large amount of work in a short amount of time. It introduces us to the poem's main character (Kubla Khan) and starts to explain the poem's incredible environment (Xanadu). He had a very fancy and magnificent palace constructed thanks to the "stately pleasure dome order."

#### **3. Is there a real place called Xanadu?**

Shangdu ("Upper Capital"), near present-day Duolun in Inner Mongolia, was the location of the real Kublai Khan's relocation of the seat of Mongol government in the early 1260s. The term Xanadu was popularised by Coleridge.

#### **4. Who was Kubla Khan's real name?**

Kublai Khan, also written Khubilai or Kubla, temple name Shizu, was a Mongolian general and statesman who was the grandson and greatest successor of Genghis Khan. He was born in 1215 and died in 1294.

#### **5. What is Kubla Khan's tone?**

The poem's vocabulary incorporates a burst of energy similar to that of the river, which bursts out and flows with a strong energy. The stanza starts with a jarring "But oh!" and contains a slew of other exclamatory words, as well as lengthy sentences that span several lines.

#### **6. What is the meaning of the poem Kubla Khan's title?**

The poem "Kubla Khan" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is named after a real Mongolian general who conquered China and lived on an opulent estate. This is a significant guide for a number of reasons.

#### **7. Can you tell me why Kubla Khan is a romantic poem?**

Kubla Khan by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a Romantic Poem The poem "Kubla Khan" is specifically about romantic love, according to Bowra's essay. This is supported by Bowra's claim that Romantics believe in fantasy and the shaping of vanishing visions. Romantics believe in the power of imagination and the transformation of vanishing dreams into tangible forms (Bowra 292).

#### **8. Is Kubla Khan a poem or a story?**

Coleridge's masterful use of iambic tetrameter and alternating rhyme schemes result in the chant-like, musical incantations of "Kubla Khan." The first stanza is written in tetrameter with an ABAABCCDEDE rhyme scheme, with staggered rhymes and couplets alternated.

**9. What is the location of Kubla Khan's palace?**

PLEASURE DOME Sacred river of "Kubla Khan" (4) ALPH Kubla Khan's work at Xanadu (8-4)

**10. Who was the one who interrupted Coleridge?**

Coleridge claimed to have seen the whole poem in a dream (possibly an opium-induced haze), but was interrupted in the middle of writing it by this visitor from Porlock. Kubla Khan was never finished because it was only 54 lines long.

**11. What is the concept of a pleasure dome?**

A resort is a spot where you can have fun and relax.

**12. What does Xanadu stand for?**

If you're asking about Xanadu from the perspective of literature, it's the location where Kublai Khan, the Mongol Emperor, built his summer capital. Shangdu is the Chinese name for it. Samuel Taylor Coleridge popularised the word "Xanadu" in his poem Kubla Khan: "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan."

**13. In the poem Kubla Khan, who is the speaker?**

The poem's unnamed speaker describes how a man named Kubla Khan travelled to the Xanadu territory. Kubla discovered a fascinating pleasure-dome in Xanadu that was "a wonder of rare device" because it was made of ice caves and was situated in a sunny location. Xanadu's contrasting composition is defined by the speaker.

**14. Is Kubla Khan a piece of the puzzle?**

"Kubla Khan" is a fragment because the author claimed to friends that there was more, but it was lost to a business sales call and could not be written down. Coleridge had consumed a tonic that most likely contained opium. He was reading poetry when he fell asleep.

**15. What exactly is paradise's milk?**

Kubla Khan is the subject of the poem, and he is the one who drank "the milk of paradise." He is equal to the gods since he eats honey-dew and milk of paradise, which are similar to the ambrosia and nectar that Greek gods were said to eat.

**16. How does Kubla Khan build his utopia?**

Kubla Khan, the Mongolian emperor, ordered his servants to construct an impressive domed building for leisure and relaxation on the banks of the holy river Alph, which flowed through a series of caves so large that no one could calculate them and then down into an underwater ocean in a location called Xanadu.

**17. Where is Xanadu?**

China

**18. Which word among the following reflects 'impressive in appearance':**

- a. stately
- b. decree
- c. cavern
- d. sinuous

**19. Which one among mentioned below signify 'decree':**

- a. impressive in appearance
- b. issue an authoritative order
- c. a large cave or a large chamber in a cave
- d. curved or curving in and out

**20. Which word refers to 'cavern':**

- a. impressive in appearance
- b. issue an authoritative order
- c. a large cave or a large chamber in a cave
- d. curved or curving in and out

**21. What does 'sinuous' mean in 'Kubla Khan'**

- a. impressive in appearance
- b. issue an authoritative order
- c. a large cave or a large chamber in a cave
- d. curved or curving in and out

**22. Which word among the following reflects 'a substance that produces a fragrant odor when**

- a. burned':
- b. incense
- c. chasm
- d. athwart
- e. waning

**23. Which one among mentioned below signify 'chasm':**

- a. a substance that produces a fragrant odor when burned
- b. a deep opening in the earth's surface
- c. across, especially at an oblique angle
- d. of the period when the visible surface of the moon decreases

**24. Which word refers to 'across, especially at an oblique angle':**

- a. incense
- b. chasm
- c. athwart
- d. waning

**25. What does 'waning' mean in 'Kubla Khan'**

- a. a substance that produces a fragrant odor when burned
- b. a deep opening in the earth's surface
- c. across, especially at an oblique angle
- d. of the period when the visible surface of the moon decreases

**Self-Assessment/Evaluation Answer**

18.	a	19.	b	20.	c	21.	d
22.	b	23.	b	24.	c	25.	d

**Review Questions**

1. Are there moments where it feels like Coleridge is describing something real, or does this seem like a hallucination to you?
2. Have you ever tried to write down or describe an epic dream? Is it hard to bring it into the real world?

3. Many of the images and the words in this poem get pretty fancy, and the setting jumps around a lot. Do you find yourself getting caught up in the excitement, or do you wish Coleridge would dial it down a notch?
4. How about the images of the river and the fountain? Do they make a concrete picture in your mind, something you could describe, or do they give you a more general feeling?
5. If you could rewrite this poem would you make any changes? Would you try to make it easier to understand, or make it even more mysterious?

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## Unit 11: Robert Browning: Porphyria's Lover

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### Objectives/Expected Learning Outcomes

- To consider Porphyria's Lover as the Predilection for the Outrageous
- To discover psychological angles in poetic diction of the select poem
- To analyze Porphyria's Lover as a Dramatic Monologue
- To interpret the poem as a masterpiece of Victorian compromise

### Introduction

Robert Browning (1812 -1889) lived during the Victorian era, which spanned approximately 1830 to 1900. A number of changes occurred in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres during this period. For starters, it was the era of Queen Victoria's long and uninterrupted rule, which saw great imperial expansion and ensured England's political stability. This was mirrored in the social climate, where Victorianism became an ethos in and of itself, implying a collection of public conduct expectations. With zeal, decorum, propriety, correctness, and spiritual righteousness were preserved. It was also an era of great economic prosperity for some, but great hardship for factory workers and others.

The Industrial Revolution exacerbated the divide between the bourgeois and working classes. Authors, thinkers, and artists were caught in the middle of this tumultuous environment. Some praised England's general success, while others criticised the unfair structure. Darwin's theory of human evolution became the focal point of controversy between complacent confidence and critical questioning as scientific advancement and new findings exacerbated the divide. Tennyson, the poet laureate, praised his country's greatness while also acknowledging that change was "halting on palsied feet." Matthew Arnold was torn between faith and unbelief, and he became "enlisted."

Despite being aware of all of these trends, Browning kept his work relatively clear of them, concentrating on his own creative creation. Furthermore, after his elopement and marriage to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a prominent poet of the time, he had moved to Italy. Browning experimented with a variety of themes and styles against the backdrop of such complex trends, which were distinctly different from the mellifluous poetry that people in England had been used to since the Romantics and then Tennyson. Browning, with his daring innovativeness, had to wait a long time to find his rightful place in the world of contemporary literature, having been born in this age of contradictory circumstances.

Browning's contemporary, Tennyson, had fifty years of success, while Browning had just twenty years of success after his collected volume of 1849. Victorian England took a long time to understand the range of Browning's poetry because it stuck to traditional norms. In poems like "My Last Duchess," "Porphyria's Lover," and "Home Thoughts from Abroad," Browning was a poet ahead of his time, foreshadowing new methods like impressionism and psychoanalysis. For the complacent Victorian world, his intellectual study of the human psyche was a startling aspect.



## Subject Matter

"Porphyria's Lover," first published in 1836, is one of Robert Browning's earliest and most surprising dramatic monologues. The poem's speaker stays in a small cottage in the countryside. His lover, a beautiful young woman called Porphyria, comes in from the rain to light a fire and cheer up the cottage. She hugs the speaker and extends her bare shoulder to him. He claims that he does not communicate with her. Instead, he claims, she starts telling him about how she has temporarily conquered social constraints in order to be with him. He knows she is "worship[ing]" him right now. Recognizing that she will inevitably succumb to society's pressures and desiring to savour the moment, he strangles her by wrapping her hair around her throat.

He then plays with her body, opening its eyes and propping it against his hand. He spends the entire night with her body in this position, with the speaker remarking that God has not yet moved to punish him. Although the language in "Porphyria's Lover" is normal, it lacks the colloquialisms and dialectical markers found in some of Browning's later poems. Furthermore, although the poem's cadence resembles natural expression, it is written in highly patterned verse that rhymes with "ababb." The pattern's complexity and asymmetry allude to the madness hidden underneath the speaker's rational self-presentation.

This poem is a dramatic monologue, or a fictional speech portrayed as the musings of someone other than the author. This dramatic monologue, like most of Browning's others, captures a moment after a major event or action. When the speaker starts, Porphyria is already gone. This type of poem aims to freeze the mind of a moment, just like the nameless speaker tries to stop time by killing her. Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" begins with a scene straight out of early-nineteenth-century Romantic poetry. The speaker sits in a cosy cottage as a storm rages outside, demonstrating nature at its most sublime.

A cottage by a lake, a rosy-cheeked child, and a roaring fire – this is the image of rural simplicity. The poem, however, jumps into the modern world as Porphyria begins to remove her wet clothes. She exposes her lover's shoulder to him and starts to caress him, a degree of blatant sexuality not seen in poetry since the Renaissance. The scene becomes not only erotic, but also transgressive, when we discover that Porphyria is defying her family and friends to be with the speaker. Illicit sex outside of marriage was a major source of concern for Victorian culture, and the famous Victorian "prudery" was merely a reaction to what had become a common fascination with the subject.

Stories about prostitutes and unwed mothers were common in the newspapers at the time. In "Porphyria's Lover," on the other hand, sex tends to be normal, appropriate, and almost wholesome: Porphyria's girlishness and affection take precedence over any hints of immorality. Modernity meant numbness to the Victorians: city life, with its endless overstimulation and newspapers full of scandalous and horrifying tales, had made people immune to shock. Many people assumed that the relentless attack on the senses and the onslaught of amorality could only be countered by an even greater shock. In "Porphyria's Lover," Browning follows this idea.

In view of recent scandals, the sexual transgression may seem minor; thus, Browning breaks through his reader's likely complacency by making Porphyria's lover kill her, eliciting some moral or emotional response from his supposedly numb audience. This is not to suggest that Browning is attempting to shock us into criticising Porphyria or the speaker for their sexuality; rather, he is attempting to remind us of the contemporary psyche's troubled state. In reality, "Porphyria's Lover" was first published under the title *Madhouse Cells*, along with another poem, implying that the new "modern" world's circumstances served to blur the distinction between "ordinary life" – and "extraordinary life".

Consider the poem's domestic environment – and insanity – as exemplified by the speaker's actions. Sex, aggression, and aesthetics are all conflated in this poem, as they are in most of Browning's work. Browning, like many Victorian authors, was attempting to push the limits of sensuality in his writing. How is it that culture finds female body beauty to be immoral while never challenging the morality of language's sensuality – which is always most evident in poetry? Why is it that both sex and abuse are considered transgressive in our society? What is the connection between them? Which is the "worse" of the two? These are some of the issues posed by Browning's poetry.

And he usually doesn't respond to any of them. Browning isn't a moralist, but he's not not a libertine. He is perplexed by his society's simultaneous acceptance of moral righteousness and a desire for sensation as a reasonably liberal man; "Porphyria's Lover" discusses this paradox.

## Summary

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, England, on May 7, 1812. He started his writing career with 'Pauline, a fragment of a Confession'. In 1834-35, he wrote 'Paracelsus,' followed by 'Strafford,' his first verse drama, and 'Sordello,' in 1840. Browning published a collection of pamphlets called "Bells and Pomegranates" between 1841 and 1846, which included his poems and plays. The third volume of 'Bells and Pomegranates' contained the stories 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess' (1842). Following a dramatic elopement in 1846, he married Elizabeth Barrett, a well-known poetess and an invalid, and moved to Italy. In 1855, he published 'Men and Women,' which included several of his earlier poems.

Browning moved to England with her twelve-year-old son after Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861. *Dramatis Personae*, a collection of his poems, was published in 1864. Browning's verse novel, 'The Ring and the Book,' (1868-69), founded him as a leading writer of his time. On the day of his death, December 12th, 1889, his final book, 'Asolando,' was written. 'Dramatic Lyrics' (1842), 'Dramatic Romances and Lyrics' (1845), 'Men and Women' (1855), and 'Dramatis Personae' (1864) are Browning's four main volumes of poetry, all of which contain poems previously published as well as new parts. In 1849, he published his first Collected Volume.

## The Dramatic Monologue and Browning

Browning mastered the Dramatic Monologue in the course of his experiments with various styles of poetry and verse drama. A speaker uses this technique to explain his own stance and persuade the audience of his point of view and behaviour. The majority of his dramatic monologues are set in a specific setting and period. For a proper understanding of the poem, the historical setting is important. The setting of late Renaissance Italy is crucial to our understanding of the Duke's character in "My Last Duchess," especially his fine sensitivity to art and, on the other hand, his feudal, uncompromising, materialistic disposition.

A soliloquy is not the same as a dramatic monologue. In the first, the speaker's attention is focused outward, on the audience he is attempting to persuade. In the latter, the speaker's attention is largely focused inwards, as he attempts to reconcile his thoughts and feelings, and it consists entirely of internal debate, as in Hamlet's popular soliloquy, "To be or not to be." Furthermore, the message conveyed by a soliloquy is the same as what the speaker intended to convey. In a dramatic monologue, the speaker attempts to impose his pre-existing point of view, but fails miserably. The reader/response listener's is the polar opposite of what the speaker intended.

A dramatic monologue is typically delivered at a time of historical crisis, when the speaker is desperate to persuade his audience, as in 'My Last Duchess,' or attempting to escape a sticky situation, as in 'Fra Lippo Lippi,' or attempting to explain his convoluted psychology, as in 'Porphyria's Lover.' A dramatic monologue incorporates elements of suspense by making the presence and responses of the listener/audience palpable, despite the fact that it is delivered by a single speaker. The presence and answers of the ambassador are conveyed to us in 'My Last Duchess.' As in 'Porphyria's Lover,' there is a feeling of movement and action unfolding.

Browning's dramatic monologues delve into the speaker's internal nuances, where the speaker unintentionally exposes his character while attempting to deceive the audience. Browning uses diction/language, photographs, metaphors, turn of phrase, and other techniques to make the speaker expose his true nature when defending and illustrating his position. In reality, Browning pioneered the technique of 'point of view' in prose fiction well before Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and others did so in the twentieth century. The development of dramatic speakers and dramatic circumstances was Browning's primary concern. In the poems that have been assigned to you. Any of the best examples of Browning's dramatic monologue can be found here.

'Porphyria's Lover' is a story about a man who falls in love with Porphyria. This poem was first published in the journal *Monthly Repository* in 1836 as 'Porphyria.' As in the journal, it was re-published in the collection *Dramatic Lyrics* alongside 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation' under the general title of 'Madhouse Cells.' When it was used in *Dramatic Romances* in 1863, it was given its current title. John Wilson's 'Extracts from Gosschen's Diary,' a tale of a gruesome murder in 'Blackwood's Magazine, volume iii (1818), and Barry Cornwall's poem 'Marcian Colonna' are all possible sources for the poem.

**Text of the poem**

The rain set early in to-night,  
The sullen wind was soon awake,  
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
And did its worst to vex the lake:  
I listened with heart fit to break.  
When glided in Porphyria; straight  
She shut the cold out and the storm,  
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
Which done, she rose, and from her form  
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
And, last, she sat down by my side  
And called me. When no voice replied,  
She put my arm about her waist,  
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
And all her yellow hair displaced,  
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,  
Murmuring how she loved me – she  
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,  
To set its struggling passion free  
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,  
And give herself to me for ever.  
But passion sometimes would prevail,  
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain  
A sudden thought of one so pale  
For love of her, and all in vain:  
So, she was come through wind and rain.  
Be sure I looked up at her eyes  
Happy and proud; at last I knew  
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise  
Made my heart swell, and still it grew  
While I debated what to do.  
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,  
Perfectly pure and good: I found  
A thing to do, and all her hair  
In one long yellow string I wound

Three times her little throat around,  
 And strangled her. No pain felt she;  
 I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
 As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
 I warily oped her lids: again  
 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.  
 And I untightened next the tress  
 About her neck; her cheek once more  
 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
 I propped her head up as before,  
 Only, this time my shoulder bore  
 Her head, which droops upon it still:  
 The smiling rosy little head,  
 So glad it has its utmost will,  
 That all it scorned at once is fled,  
 And I, its love, am gained instead!  
 Porphyria's love: she guessed not how  
 Her darling one wish would be heard.  
 And thus we sit together now,  
 And all night long we have not stirred,  
 And yet God has not said a word!

Browning's first brief dramatic monologue is titled "Porphyria's Lover." It is spoken by a lover who strangles his beloved to death in order to immortalise "the moment" when she was "perfectly pure and healthy." Porphyria 'glided in' on a stormy night and 'straight/ She shut the cold out and the storm', the poem starts. She lit the fire in the grate, then took off her "dripping cloak and shawl" and set her "soiled glove" aside. She then sat beside the host, calling out to him as she "untied her hat" and "let the damp hair fall." 'When no voice answered,' she put her arm around her waist and forced him to rest his cheek on her bare 'smooth white breast' and 'spread o'er all, her yellow hair'.

She murmured to him, unable to express her love in her weakness, having left behind a "gay feast" to come to him "so pale/ For love of her." She'd come to him, laying down her pride and her "vainer bonds." The speaker then learns that Porphyria 'worships' him, and his heart 'swells' with surprise as he 'debates what to do.'

He realised she was all his - reasonable, perfect, and nice - and he found 'A thing to do.' He made a string out of her long yellow hair and wrapped it 'three times around her little throat' before strangling her! He is certain that 'she felt no pain' because he has discovered a way to stop time at a specific, perfect moment. He carefully opens her eyelids and discovers that they do not contain any discomfort, but that they 'laughed without a stain.'

When he untangles her hair from around her neck, he notices that the colour has returned to her cheeks, which are now "burning bright underneath his kiss." He'd previously 'propped her head up,' but this time it was his shoulder that bore her head. He believes that 'the smiling little head' is pleased that all obstacles to her love have been removed, and she has earned him, her love. Porphyria's "one wish," to be with him, has been granted, according to the speaker, and they sit together "all night long." The final line - 'And yet God has said nothing!' - could be an indication of justification for his heinous act.

Browning's dramatic monologue "Porphyria's Lover," first published in 1836, is one of the earliest and most surprising of his dramatic monologues. The speaker is a country girl who lives in a cottage. His lover, a beautiful young woman called Porphyria, comes in from the rain to light a fire

and cheer up the cottage. She hugs the speaker and extends her bare shoulder to him. He claims that he does not communicate with her. Instead, he claims, she starts telling him about how she has temporarily conquered social constraints in order to be with him. He knows she is currently "worship[ing]" him. He covers her hair because he knows she will inevitably succumb to society's stresses and wants to maintain the moment.

He strangles her by wrapping her hair around her throat. He then plays with her body, opening its eyes and propping it against his hand. He spends the entire night with her body in this position, with the speaker remarking that God has not yet moved to punish him.

Although the language of "Porphyria's Lover" is normal, it lacks the colloquialisms and dialectical markers found in some of Browning's later poems. Furthermore, although the poem's cadence resembles natural expression, it is written in highly patterned verse that rhymes ABABB. The pattern's complexity and asymmetry allude to the madness hidden underneath the speaker's rational self-presentation.

### Observations

"Porphyria's Lover" begins with a scene straight out of early nineteenth-century Romantic poetry. The speaker sits in a cosy cottage as a storm rages outside, demonstrating nature at its most sublime. A cottage by a lake, a rosy-cheeked child, and a roaring fire—this is the image of rural simplicity. The poem, however, jumps into the modern world as Porphyria begins to remove her wet clothes. She exposes her lover's shoulder to him and starts to caress him, a degree of blatant sexuality not seen in poetry since the Renaissance. Porphyria is then revealed to be defying her family and friends in order to be with the speaker.

The scene has evolved into one that is not just erotic, but also transgressive. Illicit sex outside of marriage was a major source of concern for Victorian society; the famous Victorian "prudery" was merely a reaction to what was in fact a common fascination with the subject: articles about prostitutes and unwed mothers dominated the newspapers of the day. In "Porphyria's Lover," on the other hand, sex is presented as something normal, appropriate, and almost wholesome: Porphyria's girlishness and affection take precedence over any hints of immorality.

Modernity meant numbness to the Victorians: city life, with its endless over-stimulation and newspapers full of scandalous and terrifying tales, meant numbness. Citizens who have been immunised against shock. Many people assumed that the relentless attack on the senses and the onslaught of amorality could only be countered by an even greater shock. In "Porphyria's Lover," Browning follows this theory. In view of recent scandals, the sexual transgression may seem minor; thus, Browning breaks through his reader's likely complacency by making Porphyria's lover kill her, eliciting some moral or emotional response from his supposedly numb audience.

Browning is not attempting to shock us into opposing Porphyria or the speaker for their sexuality; rather, he wishes to remind us of the moderator's troubled state. In reality, "Porphyria's Lover" was first published under the title *Madhouse Cells*, along with another poem, implying that the new "modern" world helped to blur the distinction between "ordinary life"—for example, the domestic setting of this poem—and insanity, as evidenced by the speaker's behaviour.

Sex, aggression, and aesthetics are all conflated in this poem, as they are in most of Browning's work. Browning, like many Victorian authors, was attempting to push the limits of sensuality in his writing. How is it that culture finds female body beauty to be immoral while never challenging the morality of language's sensuality, which is always most evident in poetry? Why is it that both sex and abuse are considered transgressive in our society?

What is the connection between them? Which is the "worse" of the two? These are some of the issues posed by Browning's poetry. And he usually doesn't respond to them at all: Browning isn't a moralist, but he's not not a libertine. He is perplexed by his society's simultaneous acceptance of moral righteousness and a desire for sensation as a reasonably liberal man; "Porphyria's Lover" discusses this paradox.

This is a dramatic monologue delivered by someone with a peculiar type of psychology. Here's a lover who murders his wife in order to interrupt time at a beautiful moment of bliss. The lover's ramblings reveal the strange thought patterns that go on in his head. His reaction to beauty and love is borderline psychotic, and the manner in which he commits the murder is almost ritualistic in nature.

We listen to the speaker's account of Porphyria coming to him on a night of storm and rain in the first half of the poem, putting aside worldly thoughts of propriety. He's staring at her, not saying anything. Porphyria is the active agent, performing a variety of tasks while silently obeying her commands. Although he remained passive, she 'made his cheek lie' on her shoulder. Any move appears to be part of a creative process. When he looks into her eyes, he sees a kind of romantic idolatry.

He is undecided about what to do when he observes her worship. In the following episode, we see a horrifying scene in which he strangles her in a ritualistic way, commensurate with her "worship." The repetitive mention of her hair adds to the ritual feel. There seems to be an imitation of artistic imagination here as well. We are startled to learn that we are being watched by a killer. He attempts to justify his actions by saying Porphyria's "darling one wish."

His assertion that she wished to die and that she "saw no pain" has a hint of Romantic egotism. Perhaps the unnatural act was motivated by a fear of losing her to the universe. The speaker is redefining Porphyria's and his own positions through his narration of events. She takes on the role of passive receiver, while he assumes the role of doer, transforming Porphyria into an everlasting object of adoration. Even God, he believes, has been silenced as the masterful agent. The mention of God's silence, on the other hand, elicits a feeling of unease. This poem is unique as a dramatic monologue in that it is not addressed to a specific audience.

There is no definitive time or place. The setting and circumstance are reminiscent of Keats' poem "The Eve of St. Agnes," in which lovers meet in stormy weather at night. The speaker's emotions are projected into the natural world. The utterance is rendered at a time of historical crisis, as in his other dramatic monologues. There's also the usual attempt at explanation, but the reader is left to draw his own conclusions.

Porphyria is the active agent in charge of the action in the first half of the poem, followed by a neat reversal of roles in the second half. Browning employs implicit contrast by replacing the first part's soiled gloves with eyes "without a stain," as if his murder has purified her forever. She'd even forced him to lean her cheeks against her shoulder, and he 'propped her head' on his later. There are several small details that work together to highlight the protagonists' shifting roles. It's worth noting that the speaker is addressed in the first half and speaks in the second.

The ababb rhyme scheme contributes to the effect of a scene being acted out. Browning makes heavy use of transferred epithets, such as "sullen wind" and "cheerless grate," and does so effectively. The language is plain, but it has a hypnotic effect, vividly capturing the romantic setting before the artistically executed murder. The poem's dramatic action is arranged in such a way that it subtly highlights the speaker's abnormal psychology.

There is a sense of dramatic movement in the poem's unfolding, as is characteristic of a dramatic monologue. Porphyria arriving at her lover's house, setting aside her wet robe, letting her wet hair fall to the ground, putting his hand around her waist, forcing him to rest his head on her shoulder – all of these gestures are meticulously outlined in the first half, as both the speaker and the audience wait in anticipation.

When the speaker notices the worshipful adoration in her eyes, things take a drastic turn. The speaker now performs the acts in the drama, and the audience is hypnotised into a state of shock by Porphyria's artistically performed murder. This is Porphyria's lover, then! Furthermore, the monologue is delivered in a crisis, as is characteristic of Browning's tragic monologues, where the lover has just murdered his beloved and is forced to explain his actions to the world. Furthermore, the listener or reader's reaction differs significantly from what the speaker wanted to elicit.

Unlike Browning's other dramatic monologues, however, the audience's reaction isn't registered or suggested in the poem. In addition, unlike his other poems, the location and period in which the poem is set are not stated. However, it is one of Browning's shortest and most beautiful dramatic monologues, allowing for a wide range of psychological interpretations and responses.

### **Key words/ Glossary**

Sullen – bad-tempered and silent

Spite- desire to hurt someone

Endeavour – labour, hard work

Dissever –break, cause to separate

Prevail – be more powerful, hold sway

Restrain – keep under control

Tress - a long lock of hair

Droops –bend or hang downwards

Scorned –treat with contempt, look down upon

Stirred –moved slightly, woke up

### **Self-Assessment/Evaluation**

#### **1. Who was Robert Browning married to?**

- a. Mary Wollestonecraft
- b. Lady Frances Wedderburn-Webster
- c. Elizabeth Barrett
- d. Augusta Leigh

#### **2. What kind of poem is 'Porphyria's Lover'?**

- a. A haiku
- b. A dramatic monologue
- c. A villanelle
- d. A sonnet

#### **3. What technique does Browning use in the first stanza to help set the mood?**

- a. Alliteration
- b. Emotive language
- c. Strophe
- d. Pathetic Fallacy

#### **4. How does Porphyria enter the cottage?**

- a. She glides in
- b. She rushes in
- c. She slams the door
- d. She's warm

#### **5. What is the first thing Porphyria does when she enters?**

- a. She lights a fire
- b. She takes off her hat and gloves
- c. She sits next to the narrator
- d. She dries her hair

#### **6. What word most commonly starts a line in the poem, and signifies the narrator's disordered state of mind.**

- a. And
- b. More
- c. Give

- d. What

**7.What part of Porphyria's body is the narrator seemingly obsessed with?**

- a. Her hair
- b. Her neck
- c. Her legs
- d. Her hands

**8.What does the narrator think Porphyria wants?**

- a. To give herself to him forever
- b. A one night stand
- c. Some peace and quiet
- d. To be murdered

**9.Where was Porphyria before she came to the cottage?**

- a. A party
- b. A feast
- c. The pub
- d. At home

**10.How does the narrator describe the effects of loving Porphyria on him?**

- a. He has become pale
- b. He has become obsessed
- c. His blood has become thin
- d. He has lost interest in the world

**11.Finish the quote:**

"At last I knew Porphyria ..... me"

- a. worshipped
- b. hated
- c. loved
- d. despised

**12.The use of the word 'worshipped' implies that the narrator thinks she see's him as:**

- a. a god
- b. a father
- c. a husband
- d. an animal

**13.How does the narrator kill Porphyria?**

- a. He strangles her
- b. He poisons her



- c. He hits her head
- d. He breaks her neck

**14. What does the narrator seem to be afraid to look at after he kills Porphyria?**

- a. Her eyes
- b. Her hair
- c. Her parents
- d. God

**15. What does the narrator compare her eyes to?**

- a. Marbles
- b. Closed flower buds
- c. Jelly
- d. Sunlight

**16. How long does the narrator sit with Porphyria's dead body?**

- a. An hour
- b. Until he falls asleep
- c. All night
- d. A day

**17. Who does the narrator say has not commented on the murder?**

- a. God
- b. Porphyria
- c. Himself
- d. Porphyria's mum

**18. How does Porphyria move?**

- a. glided
- b. stomped
- c. flew
- d. walked

**19. What is the weather like at the start of Porphyria's Lover?**

- a. snow
- b. mist and fog
- c. wind and rain
- d. sunshine

**20. What did Porphyria's Lover want in the poem?**

- a. To marry Porphyria
- b. To kill Porphyria because she had an affair
- c. To be with a different woman
- d. Complete control over her

**21. Porphyria's lover describes her as**

- a. 'not mine'
- b. 'my love'
- c. 'mine, mine'
- d. 'my soul'

**22. Porphyria's Lover - which quote is correct**

- a. 'Only, I put my head on her shoulder'
- b. 'Only, this time my shoulder bore her head'
- c. 'Only, this time I was in control'
- d. 'Only this time her head was on my shoulder'

**23. What does Porphyria's Lover say about the decision murder?**

- a. 'I found a thing to do'
- b. 'I'd planned it all along'
- c. 'I wanted to kill her'
- d. 'I didn't know what to do'

**24. Porphyria is a disease that can lead to....**

- a. sickness
- b. insomnia
- c. madness
- d. dysentery

**25. What happens to Porphyria in the poem?**

- a. She becomes mentally disturbed
- b. She murders her lover
- c. She is strangled with a rope
- d. She is strangled with her own hair

**26. How can the form of the poem be described?**

- a. A romantic monologue
- b. A dominant monologue
- c. A dramatic monologue
- d. A melodramatic monologue

**Self-Assessment/Evaluation**

1.	c	2.	b	3.	d	4.	a	5.	b
6.	a	7.	a	8.	c	9.	d	10.	a
11.	c	12.	a	13.	a	14.	d	15.	b
16.	c	17.	a	18.	a	19.	c	20.	d
21.	c	22.	b	23.	a	24.	b	25.	d
26.	c								

**Review Questions**

1. Examine Browning's treatment of the dramatic monologue in "Porphyria's Lover."
2. Try to evaluate 'Porphyria's Lover' critically.
3. Talk about how Browning uses vocabulary in the poem. Is it special in comparison to other Victorian poets' language? How do you do it?
4. To what extent can Browning be described as a "usually" Victorian poet? With the aid of examples from the two poems, have a discussion.
5. Give an account of Porphyria's murder as told by the speaker.
6. Discuss the speaker's personality in "Porphyria's Lover."
7. Think of the poem as an experiment in abnormal psychology.
8. In 'Porphyria's Lover,' how does the speaker justify his actions?
9. Why did Porphyria's lover kill her?

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## Unit 12: Alfred Tennyson: Ulysses

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### Objectives/Expected Learning Outcomes

- To produce the poem as an ancient myth
- To justify the poem as a blank verse
- To draw the poem as a dramatic monologue
- To execute the critical interpretation of the text
- To explain the zeal of Victorian age
- To recall the historical contexts of Tennyson's age

### Introduction

Alfred Lord Tennyson, the future Poet Laureate of Great Britain, wrote "Ulysses" in 1833. Ulysses, a character who also appears in Homer's Greek epic *The Odyssey* and Dante's Italian epic *The Inferno*, delivers a dramatic monologue in the poem (Ulysses is the Latinized name of Odysseus). Ulysses/Odysseus struggles to return home in *The Odyssey*, but in Tennyson's "Ulysses," an ageing Ulysses is dissatisfied with domestic life and longs to set sail again and begin exploring the world. While Dante appears to denounce Ulysses' rashness as an adventurer, Ulysses' boundless curiosity and unflinching spirit are lauded in Tennyson's poem.

### Subject Matter

#### Text of the Poem

It little profits that an idle king,  
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.  
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink  
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd  
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those  
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when  
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades

Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;  
 For always roaming with a hungry heart  
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men  
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;  
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,  
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.  
 I am a part of all that I have met;  
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
 Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
 For ever and forever when I move.  
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
 As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
 Were all too little, and of one to me  
 Little remains: but every hour is saved  
 From that eternal silence, something more,  
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle, —  
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil  
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild  
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.  
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
 Of common duties, decent not to fail  
 In offices of tenderness, and pay  
 Meet adoration to my household gods,  
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:  
 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,  
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me —  
 That ever with a frolic welcome took  
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed

Free hearts, free foreheads – you and I are old;  
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;  
 Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.  
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:  
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep  
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
 'T is not too late to seek a newer world.  
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
 Of all the western stars, until I die.  
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
 We are not now that strength which in old days  
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Ulysses laments how tedious and futile his life as king of Ithaca, imprisoned on the rocky island of Ithaca, has become. His wife is elderly, and he must devote his time to implementing ineffective laws while attempting to rule people he finds illiterate and barbaric. All his people do, in Ulysses' opinion, is try to accumulate money, sleep, and eat. They have no idea who Ulysses is or what he has been through in his life. Ulysses also wishes to fly around the world as he once did. He doesn't want to quit doing the things that, in his opinion, make life worth living as long as he is alive. He claims that he found joy in every moment he spent travelling, even when he was suffering.

He was happy when he was with his loyal crew members and when he was alone; when he was on land and when he was sailing through rainstorms on the sea. He became well-known around the world as an adventurer who was always on the move and eager to learn more. Ulysses reflects on how much he has seen and heard about all the places where people live, their lifestyles, traditions, and methods of self-government. He was treated with dignity and reverence wherever he went. When he fought in battles far from home in the Trojan War, Ulysses found pleasure in fighting alongside his fellow soldiers, men he admired and valued.

Ulysses believes that every person and place he has met, as well as himself, has been affected by the experience. But none of these encounters have quenched his desire to travel; rather, each encounter has piqued his interest in seeing more of the world. There is still something to see, no matter how much of the world he sees, and it is these unknown regions that he strives to explore. Ulysses exclaims that staying in one place and stopping doing the things that characterised his life is dull and unsatisfying, comparing himself to a sword that has been left to rust ineffectively rather than being used gloriously in combat.

Simply existing does not imply that you are actually living. Ulysses believes that many lifetimes will still be insufficient to accomplish all of his goals, and he is nearing the end of the one he has. Nonetheless, each hour he has left to live until he dies holds the promise of new opportunities for action. It would be a shame, he believes, to stay at home and only try to feed and stay alive for a few more years, when his greatest ambition, even as an elderly man, is still to travel the world and learn more. He wants to go beyond what humans have seen and experienced.



If a shooting star falls and vanishes from view, it appears to go beyond the horizon. After that, Ulysses begins to describe his son, Telemachus, who will succeed Ulysses as ruler of the island when he dies. Ulysses declares his love for his son, who is reflective and conscientious about how he can best carry out his duties as ruler. Telemachus would strive to civilise the fierce, wild people of Ithaca, making them more gentle and eventually teaching them to devote their lives to fruitful civic activities, with patience and judgement. Ulysses can't find anything wrong with Telemachus. He devotes his life to his role's duties, pays due reverence to his people and ancestors, and will continue to give fitting sacrifices to the gods that Ulysses most revered after his father dies. Telemachus is well-suited to the position of emperor, just as Ulysses is well-suited to the role of explorer.

Ulysses gazes out the window at the dock, where the wind is blowing through his ship's sails and he can see the vast, dark sea. He's now speaking to his former crew, the men who travelled with him around the world and learned new things with him. He reminds them that no matter what their journeys brought them, whether trouble or good fortune, they still welcomed it joyfully and proudly met every challenge with resolve and courage.

Ulysses then admits that he and they have grown older, but maintains that they can still work hard and win respect even as old men. They will die soon, and their opportunity to do great deeds will be gone; however, they can still do something heroic before they die, something fitting for men who once fought the gods. The people of Ithaca are starting to light candles in their homes as night falls; the moon is rising in the sky; and the sea is murmuring almost as if it is speaking to Ulysses.

Ulysses implores his crew to accompany him on one last voyage, claiming that they are still young enough to discover some unknown part of the globe. Since Ulysses still has the dream of sailing beyond the horizon, as far as he can go, before he dies, he invites them to board a ship, drive away from shore, and man the oars so they can beat the waves. The waves may sink their boats, but they may also find their way to the place where the blessed souls go after death, he admits. There's a chance they'll run into their old pal, the experienced warrior Achilles. Many of their heroic qualities have deteriorated with age, but they have not entirely vanished.

They may not have the same physical strength or prowess as younger men fighting epic, world-changing wars, but Ulysses declares that they are essentially the same men they have always been on the inside. In the face of threat and challenges, their minds and hearts remain courageous and composed. Their bodies have aged as a result of old age, which is something that all humans must face, but their souls remain as powerful as ever. They are adamant about working hard, pursuing and achieving their goals, and never giving up.

## Summary

### **Death and Aging**

Ulysses is unhappily confronted with his old age and imminent death from the beginning of the poem. He responds by attempting to relive his exciting younger days, rather than calming down to relax. Although he acknowledges by the end of the poem that ageing has weakened him, he resolves to use whatever youthful heroism he has left as he embarks on one final journey. The noble answer to time and mortality, according to Ulysses, is to resist them – to squeeze every last drop of wisdom and adventure out of life, even if it means dying sooner.

Ulysses starts by lamenting the fact that he is now an elderly man, confined to his home rather than travelling the globe. Being king brings Ulysses little pleasure. It is of "little profit" to him. He feels "idle" rather than finding purpose in serving his people. He also seems to be unhappy with the fact that he is getting older. He dismisses his wife as "ageing," and if he doesn't like her getting older, he probably doesn't like getting older himself. Finally, he is unhappy because he "cannot stop travelling." Rather than accepting his responsibilities as king – and thereby setting aside his youthful ambitions – he wishes he could still be a young man discovering the world.

Settling down isn't relaxing and rejuvenating for Ulysses; it's suffocating, an unwanted reminder of his imminent death. The conventional wisdom suggests that the aged Ulysses relax in order to extend his life, but this is not what he desires. Ulysses declares it disgraceful to "store and hoard" himself, sitting comfortably in one position to stretch his life "for some three suns." A life like this isn't worth living. As a result, even though Ulysses' spirit has grown "grey," or old, he still longs to travel and "follow wisdom" as much as ever.

Ulysses invites his former crewmates to accompany him on a final, risky voyage to see the "untraveled world" at the end of the poem. He acknowledges that they are older and weaker, but

insists that defying time and death is the only honourable answer. If he has to die, he will do so with as much heroism as he can muster. "You and I are old," Ulysses admits, but he maintains that age does not rule out heroism: "Old age hath yet his honour." He believes that honour comes from doing everything possible to reclaim one's youth, not from embracing a new way of life in old age. When they were younger, these men "strove with Gods," and Ulysses now wishes to find "some noble work of note" that is equally heroic.

Similarly, though Ulysses admits that "much is taken" from their abilities, he stresses that "much is taken" from their abilities rather than "much abides." While he and his crew have lost some of their courage, their character has not changed: "that which we are, we are." And their determination to "strive, search, discover, and not yield" defines their character. Even if the gulfs "wash them down" on this journey, Ulysses is determined to stay the heroic figure he was as a young man. Still, Ulysses suggests that it is preferable to die fighting to recover one's youthful courage than to embrace old age and live a sheltered, sedentary life. He refuses to give in, not only to his opponents on the battlefield, but also to time and age.

### Information and Adventure

Odysseus/Ulysses struggles for years in Homer's *Odyssey* to return to Ithaca. However, in Tennyson's poem, Ulysses discovers that his home is insufficient to make him happy. His years spent travelling to return home, ironically, did not make him love his home; instead, they made him love travel and adventure. Ulysses implores his crewmates to join him on a final, great voyage so that he can regain his true identity as an adventurer who is always searching for more, particularly to learn more. Ulysses acknowledges that the quest for information is never complete in this way. Despite this—or perhaps because of this—the desire for new experiences and information is what determines a fulfilling life for Ulysses.

Ulysses is irritated and dissatisfied in Ithaca when the poem starts. He's itching for a new adventure. Even though he is king, Ulysses feels "idle" because his position keeps him trapped by a "still hearth." He is disappointed that his people do not "know" him and that he "cannot rest from travel." This dissatisfaction indicates that Ulysses' real identity is that of an adventurer rather than the king of Ithaca. Indeed, when he says he's become famous for "roaming," he means it. He claims that his entire sense of self is derived from his travels rather than his life on Ithaca. If he has "pause[d]" and "made an end" in one position, merely being alive—simply "breath[ing]"—is insufficient to make his life meaningful.

Since there are seemingly infinite things to learn, Ulysses' desire for adventure and discovery can never be fully satisfied; he knows that his understanding of the world—all human knowledge, really—touches on just a small portion of all that there is to know. Years spent attempting to return home only fueled his desire to travel more, as and new experience reminded him that there are still "untravell'd world[s]" to discover. Ulysses, in particular, aims to gain more knowledge from his explorations. "Follow intelligence like a falling star / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought," he says. Going where no one else has gone allows you to grasp concepts that no one else has grasped.

Ulysses implores his crewmates to accompany him on a final journey to unknown lands, reclaiming their identity as explorers who never stop looking. His search for knowledge may never be complete, but that is part of what makes it worthwhile, he claims. Ulysses wishes to do some "honourable job," which he believes entails discovering a "newer planet."

This newer universe will also include "the Happy Isles," where the blessed dead's souls live. He'd be able to learn things that (living) humans couldn't. Ulysses plans to continue his quest for new worlds "until [he] die[s]." Since Ulysses will never be able to complete his search for wisdom, he will never be able to stop and "put an end" to it. He will always be on the move, and for him, that is what determines a fulfilling life.

Ulysses articulates his true identity at the end of the poem: a man who is constantly striving, seeking, and finding. Only when you have a dream that can never be completely realised can you devote your entire life to achieving it. That kind of mission, seeking new worlds and new information, helps Ulysses to be the kind of man he wishes to be.

### Caution vs. Imprudence

Telemachus, Ulysses' son, is described by Ulysses as a cautious and conservative man. Ulysses seems to despise his son for lacking the same courage, curiosity, and creativity that he possesses. As

compared to Ulysses' irresponsibility and recklessness, Telemachus' prudence can seem more admirable. While a king, Ulysses has little regard for his subjects and is willing to forego his duties as ruler in order to embark on a journey with his former crewmates.

Even for those beloved crewmates, Ulysses shows little concern, admitting that the journey may kill them. He is willing to put them all in danger because he would rather die adventuring abroad than peacefully at home. Although the poem depicts Ulysses as a heroic figure, it also warns the reader about the dangers and selfishness that come with his brand of heroism.

Ulysses shows no regard for the people of Ithaca at the start of the poem. He defines them as "savage[s]" who "hoard, sleep, and eat," as if they were a herd of grazing animals. Serving as their king is not relevant or ennobling to Ulysses; it "no benefits" him. Similarly, when Ulysses introduces Telemachus, his son, he shows little regard for Telemachus' character. Telemachus is adamant about his responsibilities to the people, and he is determined to "fulfil this labour" of governing, no matter how long or "slow" it takes. Instead of ingenuity and boldness, he demonstrates "prudence" and "reliability" in "simple duties." Ulysses, on the other hand, does not hold Telemachus in high regard for his cautious commitment to service. Telemachus is "blameless" rather than praiseworthy, and he will "not... fail" rather than succeed. Telemachus, according to Ulysses, is not carrying on his own legacy, but rather following a different path: "He works his work, I mine."

Ulysses has more courage and creativity than Telemachus, but these attributes lead him to rule recklessly and irresponsibly. Ulysses describes how he travelled around the world "hungry" to see and learn new things, and how he found "delight" in war. He also wants to see the "untraveled country," where no one has been before. Ulysses, on the other hand, reveals that he is willing to forego his duties as ruler of Ithaca in order to pursue his own personal interests when he asks his former crewmates to join him on another voyage.

Ulysses is also rash and careless when it comes to his crew. He is able to put them in danger and death—risks the Tennyson's source texts, Homer's *The Odyssey* and Dante's *Inferno*, made true. Ulysses warns his crewmates in the poem that "the gulfs [may] wash us down," implying that the voyage will destroy them all. If readers are familiar with other Ulysses stories, the chance of death appears to be even greater. Several of Odysseus' crewmates die as a result of Odysseus' ambition and pride in *The Odyssey*. Ulysses even encourages his crewmates to accompany him on a journey into unknown waters in the *Inferno*, and the sea swallows the ship and drowns all on board. These source texts imply that Ulysses' visions of travel and glory could have led to the deaths of his men in this poem. He is not only courageous and bold, but also arrogant and careless of other people's lives.

### Overcoming Limitations and Heroism

Ulysses expresses his dissatisfaction with the restrictions placed on him by his status as a monarch as well as his advanced age. He longs for the glory days of his childhood, when he bravely fought in wars and travelled the globe. He encourages his former crewmates to join him on a journey to transcend the limits of time and age and regain some of their youthful bravery. However, as the poem progresses, it becomes apparent that their heroism stems from their shortcomings. What makes Ulysses and his men impressive is that despite being older and weaker than they once were, they are still willing to take on tasks as challenging and dangerous as those they faced when they were younger. They appear as heroic figures at the end of the poem because they recognise their own shortcomings and persist in spite of them.

Ulysses is frustrated by the limitations of life in Ithaca. Ulysses is dissatisfied with his life because he is surrounded by people who just "hoard, sleep, and eat." Being king of a people like this provides little mental stimulation and definitely no potential for heroic deeds. Worse, his position as king traps him in one place, luring him into the same pit as his subjects, where he is tempted to "stock and hoard [himself]." Ulysses then reflects on his youth, recalling how he "enjoyed / greatly" his early days spent travelling and finding "delight" in heroic war deeds. It would be like reliving the glorious heroism of his childhood if he can flee Ithaca and embark on another voyage.

As a result, Ulysses invites his former crewmates to join him on a final voyage. He recognises that they are older and weaker, but he assumes they are still capable of heroic deeds. Indeed, their bravery and courage stem, at least in part, from the fact that they are older and weaker, as they continue to strive despite these limitations. Even though he wishes they could go back to their heroic days, Ulysses knows they can't: "you and I are old," he admits, "made frail by time and fate." However, it is precisely these limitations that allow for a new kind of heroism. They don't have the

physical strength that they did in the "old days," but they do have a different kind of strength: their physical weakness shows that they are "solid in will."

since they refuse to be held back by their limitations Despite their age and frailty, they will continue to "strive, search, and discover." It is most courageous, as Ulysses puts it, "not to yield" when you have limitations that tempt you to yield and give up the battle.

### Type of a blank verse

Blank verse is iambic pentameter verse that is not rhymed. This indicates that the rhythm is skewed toward an iambic pattern in which an unstressed syllable is preceded by a stressed one, and that each typical line has ten syllables, five of which are stressed (pentameter). Here's an example of a standard iambic pentameter line:

*It little profits that an idle king ..*

The syllables in bold are those where the emphasis (stress) is placed.

The pattern of stresses, on the other hand, has a lot of space for variation. The lines that follow the previous example are as follows:

*By this still hearth, among these barren crags  
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.  
From Ulysses by Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

There are deviations from the strict iambic pattern at the beginning of each of the first two lines. In the two lines that follow, it asserts itself once more.

### Characteristics of Blank Verse

Any number of lines can be used in blank verse poetry. For long narrative poetry and verse drama, it is the standard metre. It's also common for descriptive and reflective poetry, as well as dramatic monologues (poems in the form of a single character's speech).

Enjambment is a system that is commonly used in well-handled blank verse. A grammatical unit (such as a sentence or clause) is carried over to the next line in this manner. Two examples of enjambment can be found in these lines:

*I cannot rest from travel: I will drink  
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd  
Greatly...*

The caesuras are the breaks in these sections. The caesura is put at a different point in each line: after seven syllables in the first line, after four in the second. Enjambment, or the skillful placement of caesuras, helps to keep blank verse from being monotonous. It also aids in the appearance of natural expression.

### The origins of Blank Verse

The Earl of Surrey brought blank verse to England about 1540. It's the main metre in Shakespeare's plays, Milton's epic poems, and many other major works of poetry.

## Key words/ Glossary

idle-not in action or at work

hearth-an area near a fireplace extending into a room

barren-providing no shelter or sustenance

unequal-lacking the requisite qualities or resources to meet a task

hoard-save up as for future use

lees-the sediment from fermentation of an alcoholic beverage

scud-run or move very quickly or hastily  
vex-disturb, especially by minor irritations  
peer-a person who is of equal standing with another in a group  
margin-the boundary line or area immediately inside the boundary  
burnish-polish and make shiny  
eternal-continuing forever or indefinitely  
yearn-desire strongly or persistently  
bound-the greatest possible degree of something  
scepter-a ceremonial or emblematic staff  
discern-detect with the senses  
prudence-discretion in practical affairs  
rugged-very difficult; severely testing stamina or resolution  
subdue-put down by force or authority  
sphere-a particular environment or walk of life  
office-activities assigned to or expected of a person or group  
port-where people and merchandise can enter or leave a country  
mariner-a person who serves as a sailor  
toil-work hard  
unbecoming-not in keeping with accepted standards of what is proper  
strive-exert much effort or energy  
wane-grow smaller  
smite-inflict a heavy blow on, with the hand, a tool, or a weapon  
furrow-a slight depression in the smoothness of a surface  
abide-dwell  
heroic-having qualities appropriate for brave figures  
yield-give in, as to influence or pressure

### Self-Assessment/Evaluation

#### **1. Who was Ulysses, and where did he come from?**

Ulysses is the Roman name for Odysseus, the legendary Greek hero. We learn about him in bits and pieces in Homer's Iliad, and he is the Odyssey's main protagonist. He ruled Ithaca, a Greek island in the Ionian Sea.

#### **2. "It is of little consequence that an idle king/By this still hearth, amid these barren crags/Match'd with an aged queen, mete and dole/Unequal laws unto a savage race,/That hoard, sleep, and eat, and know not me." - Clarify.**

Ulysses, the Greek hero and king of Ithaca, has returned from the battle of Troy to discover that he cannot reconcile himself to a mundane and domestic existence, matched as he is with his elderly wife Penelope and forced to live. He encounters primitive people and imposes unjust rules to rule them. These men go through the motions of life but do not share his ideals or aspirations.

#### **3. "I can't stop travelling: I'm going to drink/Life to the Lees;" - Who is the person speaking? The sentence's annotations.**

Ulysses (Roman name), also known as Odysseus in Homer's Odyssey, is the speaker. Ulysses, whose wanderlust is described as a desire for adventure and experience that leads to knowledge,

feels claustrophobic in Ithaca, where he is married to an elderly woman and rules over a primitive race. He advocates going deeper and experiencing life to the fullest by drinking it to the dregs, by engaging in activities and businesses that can contribute to greater awareness and saving him from death.

**4. What does Ulysses mean when he says, "I have enjoyed/Greatly, have suffered greatly"?**

Ulysses is referring to his travels on shores and seas, where he both enjoyed and endured alone and in the company of his fellow mariners, including when the haydes – a group of seven stars in the head of the constellation Taurus whose rising and setting are thought to be accompanied by rains – created tempests on the oceans.

**5. "Much have I seen and known; cities of men/And manners, climates, councils, governments,/Myself not least, but most honor'd of them all;" – Explain.**

Ulysses is elaborating on his extensive and diverse travel experiences in the course. As he has met new races, manners, climates, councils, and governments, his horizons have widened. He has been treated with respect and awe there.

**6. Explain, "And intoxicated delight of war with my peers,/Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy."**

Ulysses is alluding to the great Trojan War, which they had battled and triumphed in. The bells were ringing to celebrate their triumph over the Trojans, and Ulysses had shared in the joy of the great victory with his peers.

**7. Explain, "I am a part of everyone I've met."**

His wide range of experiences is an inseparable part of who he is.

**8. "However, all knowledge is an arch wherethrough/Gleams the untraveled universe, whose margin fades" – Clarify.**

The mysterious world of information that can be seen beyond the arch of experience, but whose margin recedes the further one moves forward to meet it, is what Ulysses is alluding to. Despite the inevitability of his inability to achieve his ideals, Ulysses' vast experience makes him hunger for the world of information and drives him to walk into it to discover its unexplored regions.

**9. "Life on top of life/Were all too little, and of one to me/Little remains: but every hour is saved/From the everlasting silence" – What does it say about the speaker's motivations?**

Ulysses considers 'Lift' to be the most important thing in his life. He wants to live an active life, but Ithaca forbids him from doing so. He laments his advanced age. Nonetheless, he believes that any moment spent in search of wisdom is saved from death's everlasting silence.

**10. "And this grey spirit yearning in desire/To pursue intelligence like a falling star/Beyond the utmost bound of human thought," says the narrator. – Clarify.**

Ulysses is implying that his spirit has grown grey with age and experience beyond any humanly conceived limit.

**11. Explain, "This is my son, my own Telemachus."**

These lines are laced with irony, since Telemachus, though adored and admired by Ulysses, does not share his outlook on life. Telemachus is a competent ruler who rules a barbaric race in a friendly and cautious manner, attempting to civilise the people in small steps. He is blameless, follows his household's path, and performs tenderness, governance, and household Gods' duties. Ulysses, on the other hand, proposes that in order to overcome death, one must live a life of action in search of knowledge.

**12. "– you and I are old;/Old age has yet his honour and toil;/Death closes all" – Explanation**

Ulysses is issuing a clarion call to his mariners to embark on a never-ending search for wisdom, considering their advanced age. For him, old age is not a time to retire into dignified leisure, but rather a time to overcome the limitations of old age.

**13. "For my intention is to sail beyond the sunset and the baths/Of all the western stars before I die," says the narrator. – Clarify.**

Ulysses suggests that he embark on a never-ending search for wisdom beyond the western horizon, where the sun vanishes from view. The western horizon is often referred to as the baths of the

western stars. Both phrases allude to man's insatiable need for adventure and never-ending search for knowledge.

**14. "It's possible the gulfs will wash us away;/It's possible we'll touch the Happy Isles,/And see the great Achilles, whom we knew./Though much is taken, much remains;" – Clarify.**

Ulysses suggests that they live a life of activity in search of wisdom, perhaps even to the shores of death, where they might encounter Achilles, the greatest of Greek warriors, who resides at the Happy Isles, a fortunate island located in the Atlantic Ocean, west of Africa, and popularly known as the Greek Paradise. Ulysses is willing to accept death in order to seek wisdom and a life of activity. These lines express Ulysses' resolve as well as the Victorian spirit of enterprise and adventure.

**15. "One fair temper of valiant hearts,/made frail by time and fate, but firm in will/to strive, pursue, discover, and not yield." – Clarify.**

Ulysses and his companions have bravely faced countless adventures and are now equally determined to embark on a relentless search of wisdom, despite being weakened by time and misfortunes. Their determination to pursue information inexorably and assiduously, without yielding to time or fate, is unwavering.

**16. What do you understand by the word 'idle' on the basis of the poem:**

- not in action or at work
- an area near a fireplace extending into a room
- providing no shelter or sustenance
- lacking the requisite qualities or resources to meet a task

**17. What do you understand by the word 'hearth' on the basis of the poem:**

- not in action or at work
- an area near a fireplace extending into a room
- providing no shelter or sustenance
- lacking the requisite qualities or resources to meet a task

**18. What does the word 'barren' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:**

- not in action or at work
- an area near a fireplace extending into a room
- providing no shelter or sustenance
- lacking the requisite qualities or resources to meet a task

**19. What is 'unequal' in reference to the poem text discussion:**

- not in action or at work
- an area near a fireplace extending into a room
- providing no shelter or sustenance
- lacking the requisite qualities or resources to meet a task

**20. What is the meaning of the word 'hoard' in reference to the content discussed for the poem:**

- save up as for future use
- the sediment from fermentation of an alcoholic beverage
- run or move very quickly or hastily
- disturb, especially by minor irritations

**21. What do you understand by the word 'lees' on the basis of the poem:**

- save up as for future use
- the sediment from fermentation of an alcoholic beverage
- run or move very quickly or hastily
- disturb, especially by minor irritations

**22. What do you understand by the word 'scud' on the basis of the poem:**

- save up as for future use
- the sediment from fermentation of an alcoholic beverage
- run or move very quickly or hastily
- disturb, especially by minor irritations

**23. What does the word 'vex' reflect in relation to the context of the poem:**

- save up as for future use
- the sediment from fermentation of an alcoholic beverage
- run or move very quickly or hastily
- disturb, especially by minor irritations

**Self-Assessment/Evaluation Answer**

16.	a	17.	b	18.	c	19.	d
20.	a	21.	b	22.	c	23.	d

**Review Questions**

- How does Tennyson's portrayal of Ulysses compare to the Homeric and Dantesque depictions of the legendary hero? What impact does one's decision on that relationship have on the poem's topic and meaning?
- In this poem, Tennyson expands on a belief he developed after Hallam's death: "that life without faith leads to personal and social dislocation" (Chiasson 165). What elements of the poem lend credence to this interpretation?
- Chiasson claims Tennyson's persona in "Ulysses" is a dramatic rendering of the noble and resourceful hero of Homer's *Odyssey* "of a kind of human being who holds a collection of ideas that... [are] destructive of his society's entire fabric" (165-6). What proof from the poem would you use to support or refute Chaiasson's claim?
- Tennyson expresses his realisation in "Ulysses" that "Ulyssean determination and bravery... are to be admired only if they lead to the good life, personal and social," according to Chiasson (172). Thus, if we are to think positively of Tennyson's persona, we must consider his final voyage as a potentially fruitful journey of discovery. What contemporary figures could Victorian readers have associated Tennyson's persona in "Ulysses" with, and why?
- While this poem is classified as a dramatic monologue, there is a change in the implied audience(s) and sound. Tennyson's persona's language has "a rough and incisive consistency,... a toughness that includes the surprising and un-Tennysonian connubial insensitivity of the phrase 'match'd with an aged wife'" at first (Chiasson 167). What other instances of "a rough and incisive" language would you find in the poem's first section? What is the point at which the tonal consistency begins to change? What exactly is the essence of this shift?



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## Unit 13: T.S. Eliot: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

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### Objectives/Expected Learning Outcomes

- To consider the select text as a benchmark of Modernism
- To discover different tenets of poetry in the select poem
- To analyze allusions in the select poem
- To interpret various influences on Eliot and his thematic concerns

### Introduction

T.S. Eliot (September 26, 1888 – January 4, 1965) was a towering figure of the twentieth century who worked as an essayist, playwright, publisher, and literary and social critic in the English literary field. In 1948, Eliot received the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize in Literature for his significant contribution to modern poetry.

"The world became a lesser place"

when T. S. Eliot died, wrote Robert Giroux. Igor Stravinsky praised Eliot as

"not only a great sorcerer of words but as the very key keeper of the language,"  
describing him as

"not only a great sorcerer of words but as the very key keeper of the language."

"The man known as 'T. S. Eliot,' the model poet of our day, the most quoted poet, and incarnation of literary correctness in the English-speaking world," according to Alfred Kazin. Northrop Frye expresses himself succinctly:

"Anyone interested in contemporary literature must have a detailed understanding of Eliot. It makes no difference whether you like him or not; he must be read."

"A poet must take as his content his own language as it is actually spoken around him," Eliot wrote in 1945. In contrast, the poet's responsibility

"is only indirectly to the people,"

as Eliot put it in a 1943 lecture,

"his direct obligation is to his language, first to conserve, and second to expand and develop."

As a result, he dismisses poetry's so-called "social feature." "To be very intelligent," Eliot once wrote, is the only "form." As a consequence, according to A. Alvarez, his poetry

"has all the advantages of a highly analytical habit of mind; there is a coolness in the midst of involvement; he uses texts exactly for his own purpose; he is not carried away."

As a result, the poems are complete and untouchable. What he does in them can't be taken much further.... [One gets] the feeling that whatever he put his mind to, he'd do equally well."

"The strength of Eliot's intellect lies in its training; it is the result of a perfectly orthodox academic education,"

Alvarez claims.

"Eliot knows so much philosophy and theology that I do not see how he can write poetry at all," Jacques Maritain once told Marshall McLuhan. Eliot, on the other hand, never saw a conflict between scholarly and artistic endeavours.

"The type in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue combined with the later Elizabethan drama; and I do not know anyone who started from exactly that point,"

Eliot has said of his early work.

"The kind of poetry that I wanted, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it could only be found in French,"

he said elsewhere, and Leonard Unger concludes that

"the kind of poetry that I needed, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it could only be found in French. It was exclusively and emphatically the poetry of Laforgue insofar as Eliot began from an exact point."

Other Symbolists, mystical poets, Donne, Dryden, and Dante inspired him to a lesser degree. "His love of Shakespeare was subject to his moral or religious scruples," writes Sir Herbert Read. Eliot shared "a trust in God and the fear of death" with Samuel Johnson, whom he "honoured above all other English authors," according to Sir Herbert. "I should suggest that in one's prose reflections one can legitimately be occupied with morals," Eliot wrote in *After Strange Gods*, "whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality."

"Poetry is the medium par excellence for making a complete situation – for letting us know what it feels like to take a particular action, hold a particular opinion, or simply to look at something with creative compassion,"

Cleanth Brooks elaborates. According to Brooks, Eliot is "committed to turning the unpoetical into art" and "fusing the matter-of-fact and the magical." However, for Eliot, the sense of "truth" is unique, occurring often "at the edge of nothingness," where, as B. Rajan writes, "the birth of meaning... occurs in a manner both imaginative and ancient." Poetry cannot report on an occurrence; it must be the event itself, as experienced by the poet lived out in a way that can talk for itself while being completely self-contained.

This is a task at least as daunting as it sounds, and if the poem succeeds, it is because, despite the fact that it recalls past drowning deaths, it generates its own life in the face of its own inquisitiveness. "Eliot showed that a poet's business is not only reporting feeling, but expanding feeling, and making a shape to express it," writes Herbert Howarth. According to Rajan, Eliot's poetry is a method of "living through feeling." "Eliot declined his citizenship in St. Louis, Missouri, and relocated to the United Kingdom, where he became a British citizen in 1927. He died at his home in Kensington, London, on January 4, 1965.

### **Subject Matter**

Although it was completed in 1910 or 1911, Eliot's first major work was published in *Poetry* magazine in 1915. By Eliot's friend Ezra Pound's persuasion, the poem was published in the journal. This literary piece was later published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*. The poem was written before the outbreak of the First World War, at a time when Britain was regarded as the most modern nation on the planet.

### **The Title**

The poem's original title was "Prufrock among the Women," but it was changed to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" before it was published in *Poetry* magazine. The titular character, Mr Prufrock, is the subject of this narrative poem, which depicts an incident in his life. Eliot based the character's name on an advertisement for the William Prufrock Furniture Company, a company based in Louis, Eliot's hometown. The poet came up with the two initials on his own. The words "love song" were used by Eliot in reference to Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Love Song of Har Dyal," which appeared in the collection *Plain Tales from the Hills*.

### As a Dramatic Monologue

This dramatic monologue-style poem is written in the style of a modernist poem. Dramatic Monologue is a type of character study that tells the story of an incident in which the narrator / speaker relates a subject, thus revealing the speaker's inner feelings to the listeners, both intentionally and unintentionally. The main goal of this type of narration is to include as much personal information about the speaker as possible, rather than the topic/subject that the speaker is discussing.

Eliot has added an epigraph to the poem, which is taken from Canto 27 of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* by Renaissance Italian poet Dante Alighieri. The epigraph is a six-line quote that tells the story of Dante, who has lived an immoral life and is aided by the good people of heaven. To keep Dante from committing any more sins, heaven enlists the aid of another poet named Virgil to guide him through the horrors of hell.

Guido da Montefeltro, one of the characters in the eighth circle of hell, says the epigraph's quote. When Dante asks Guido to share his story, Guido responds with this quote, implying that if he had the chance to leave hell, he would not have told Dante his story. However, since Dante is trapped in Hades, Guido's tale, like his thoughts, will remain unspoken in the world of the dead, which will still be a mystery.

### Summary

T.S. Eliot uses the distinctly modernist style of Imagism to create his poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by bombarding readers with an almost disjointed collage of pictures. Imagism, a literary movement associated with modernism, is founded on the idea that poetry should be composed of precise representations of concrete images. Imagists speak in a simple and precise manner. Only terms that are absolutely required to enhance the description should be used in poetry, according to them. "We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry can make particulars exactly," said Ezra Pound, one of the most influential Imagist poets and not depend on broad generalisations, "however beautiful and sonorous."

Given Eliot's participation in this movement, the reader will value his use of imagery and description even more. His use of precise language encourages readers to pay careful attention to each word and picture. The reader must dissect Eliot's imagery, examine its symbolic significance, and look for thematic trends in order to comprehend the meaning of this poem. That is exactly what this website aims to do. I hope to gain some insight into Eliot's use of imagery to relate the key themes of this poem by highlighting a few dominant images and allusions in the poem.

Although the explications of the images on this page follow the same disjointed pattern of organisation as Eliot's images,

"I hope to demonstrate that, although each image or image cluster may appear to be unrelated at first glance, they are linked by thematic elements. In this poem, Eliot uses imagery and allusion to address themes that revolve around the frail and self-conscious human condition, including feelings of inadequacy, sexual discomfort, and mortality terror."

### Baldness and thinning hair

*With a bald spot in the middle of my hair-  
[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]...  
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin-  
[They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!" (40-44)]*

The reader's attention is drawn to the theme of self-consciousness in this poem by the recurring picture of baldness, as well as Prufrock's obsessive concern about his own thinning hair. During his dramatic monologue, Prufrock alludes to his own baldness or thinning hair four times, as noted by critic Margaret Blum. Prufrock's paranoia about his own baldness, as well as his body's frailty, may be linked to his obsessive fear of ageing and death. Prufrock repeats this theme:

"I have seen the Eternal footman keep my coat,  
and snicker, And in short, I was afraid" (lines 85-86).

Prufrock shares his conviction that death mocks itself in this passage. In his old age, he is mocked. Eliot shows Prufrock's self-consciousness and anxiety as he approaches the end of his life in this passage. The protagonist's intense introspection and fear of death establishes the theme of human

life's mortality and fragility. Prufrock's obvious concern for his appearance and how the guests at the party view him helps to illustrate his problems and anxieties about human contact, a theme that is repeated throughout the poem in different photographs.

### Michelangelo

*In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo (13-14)*

Michelangelo is one of the most popular artists of all time. The women's frequent mention of Michelangelo in J. Alfred Prufrock's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is more than just idle talk. According to Tepper's article "Nation and Eros," this allusion emphasises the theme of sexual distress. Michelangelo, a world-famous painter, sculptor, and poet, is the quintessential "Renaissance figure," the male ideal of perfection. Michelangelo's sculpture of David, perceived to be the embodiment of male physical beauty, is also associated with him. When Prufrock is confronted with the idea of ageing and death, he also experiences extreme sexual anxiety.

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### Individual Female Body Parts

*And I have known the eyes already, known them all-  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase...  
And I have known the arms already, known them all-  
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare...  
Arms lie along a table, or wrap around a shawl. (55 – 66)*

Prufrock's self-consciousness and fear of human contact, especially with women, causes him to "reduce [female] bodies to arms and legs," according to literary critic Michelle Tepper, who adds to the poem's sexual anxiety theme. According to Prufrock's monologue, the female attendees of the tea party are often reduced to "weapons that lie along a table" or "eyes that fix you in a formulated expression." This division of female body parts, in a Petrarchan sense, produces a blazon – a poetic device in which the poet celebrates individual parts of a woman's body, often using flowery, figurative words. Despite the fact that this system appears to complement the poem's female subject isn't entirely a harmless type of flattery. The objectification and denial of a woman's status as a whole human being is accomplished by dividing her body into mere parts. Prufrock's separation and objectification of female body parts, on the other hand, does not seem to be deliberate.

Prufrock is unable to consider the females he associates with as entire human beings because of his anxiety in his relationships with others. Instead, he would perceive them as separate body parts. Prufrock's anxiety also contributes to self-objectification, further complicating the consequences of his fear of human contact. As shown by his self-perception and interpersonal interactions. The protagonist's propensity to see himself and others as broken, objectified entities reflects both his sexual anxiety and the challenges of human interaction. Modernist authors and poets are known for their theories about a disconnect of human contact and communication failures. Prufrock's dramatic monologue is used by Eliot to illustrate the poem's characteristically Modernist theme of a divide in human interaction.

### Allusions to Hamlet and "Ragged Claws"

*I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas (73-74)*

This illustration of "ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas" echoes the poem's previous themes of ageing and death, and can also be interpreted as a reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet, which is mentioned many times in the poem. However, several critics, such as Robert Fleissner, claim that the picture has an inherent significance that fits well with the ideas woven together in this poem before analysing it as an allusion in the form of Hamlet. The use of this crustacean, according to Fleissner, is a metaphor of growing old and futile. The crab, in particular,

conjures up images of futility, of moving slowly and with great difficulty – images that are often associated with the ageing process and on the verge of death.

In a figurative sense, this depiction of the crab conjures up images of "crabbiness," or irritable petulance, which is also associated with ageing and senility. While one interpretation of this picture is based on its placement in the poem, others claim that when interpreted as an allusion to Hamlet, it takes on a more fully formed meaning. Many critics interpret Eliot's mention of "ragged claws scuttling" as a reference to Polonius's line to Hamlet,

"if, like a crab, you could go backward" (2.2.205-206).

In this light, his association of Prufrock with a crab alludes to the protagonist's feelings of self-consciousness and regret reflects his preoccupation with "decisions and revisions." Prufrock turns fretfully inward as he approaches the end of his life and begins to struggle with his own mortality, wishing regretfully to be able to revise his own history. As can be seen in both interpretations of this picture, it continues Eliot's theme of ageing and death, as well as the anxiety and self-consciousness that comes with it.

### The Peach

*Shall I part my hair from behind? Do I dare eat a peach? (122)*

Although Eliot only mentions the peach briefly in this poem, it has become one of the most hotly debated images in terms of interpretation. Robert Fleissner devotes an entire chapter in his book *Ascending the Prufrockian Stair* to various interpretations of "Prufrock's Peach." To begin, he considers whether the peach in this context may be a reference to the biblical Creation story's Forbidden Fruit. Prufrock is forced to choose between immortality and intelligence in this interpretation.

Prufrock's ongoing battle with his own mortality is mirrored in this struggle. Prufrock believes that he has already consumed the biblical fruit and now must face the consequences: a nagging sense of the world around him, as well as his own impending death. Prufrock's fear of ageing is also addressed in another interpretation by Fleissner. Prufrock's apprehension about biting into the peach, he believes, stems from his fear of losing his teeth. Prufrock is afflicted by self-consciousness and panic that his body will fail him even in daily activities such as feeding, similar to his obsession with his thinning hair. Finally, many critics accept that the peach can be interpreted as a sexual image, representing Prufrock's recurring feelings of sexual inadequacy and anxiety when interacting with people.

Prufrock revisits his feelings of inadequacy, which he expresses in his inability to equate to Michelangelo's David, with the picture of the peach representing female sexuality, and particularly with his self-doubt in deciding whether to eat the peach. The peach, in particular, is used to objectify women and female sexuality. This objectification is a product of Prufrock's fear when confronted with human contact, as previously explained with the speaker's propensity to represent women as mere body parts. When it comes to the possibility of sexual intercourse, it seems that this fear is amplified. Although there is no definitive consensus on the peach's definition, The majority of critical interpretations agree that this picture adds to the themes of Prufrock's fear of ageing and death, his feelings of inadequacy and self-deprecation, or his anxiety while engaging with other people in any way.

### Allusion

Allusions are references or passages that are referenced indirectly. To depict the feelings and contradictions that exist inside Prufrock, Eliot used a lot of allusions. These allusions have helped to create the poem's hopelessness and pessimism. The first stanza makes a reference to Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. Count Guido, who lives in the Eighth Circle of Hell, is connected to Prufrock, who is also living a hellish life on Earth, receives the Eighth Circle of Hell. These lines also said that Count Guido is unafraid to speak his mind. Prufrock is the same in this poem, as he bares his soul.

*"S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse  
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.  
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo  
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,*

*Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo."*

Eliot appropriated a lot of phrases and transformed them into his own. James Cooper's novel *The Pioneers* is referenced in the term "overwhelming query." The word "dying crash" was also borrowed. It's a reference to *Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare. Act I, Scene I2 ("That strain again, it had a dying fall") contains this. The lines

*"Women come and go in the room  
Talking of Michelangelo" are also borrowed."*

make a reference to the work of Jules Laforgue. "In the bed, the women come and go, talking of the Siennese Masters," as the lines were originally written in French. Most of the lines were translated and borrowed, and he fashioned them into his own by injecting them into various contexts.

Prufrock is terrified of being rejected. His self-doubt prevents him from making a move, so he doesn't try children. The lines

*"In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo"*

exemplified this terror. The poem's women are well-cultured, as shown by this allusion to Michelangelo. This intimidates Prufrock, who believes he is unsuitable in comparison to Michelangelo, a well-known artist.

Prufrock's allusions in the poem have helped to distinguish him from other novel characters. To *His Coy Mistress* by Andrew Marvell is alluded to in the lines below:

*There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;*

The speaker of this poem attempts to convince his mistress to seize the day. This poem's first line, "Had we but world enough, and time," implies that there isn't enough time. Prufrock, on the other hand, does not take any steps toward his target and justifies his actions by claiming that there is still time for anything. To explain his inaction, he repeats the phrase "There will be time." Prufrock is paralysed by his indecisiveness and procrastination, which prevents him from doing what he really desires. "There will be time" may also be a reference to Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, where the phrase "there is a time for everything" appears.

Hesiod's *Works and Days* were referenced in the expression "works and days." It's yet another example of using allusions to distinguish between individuals. *Works and Days* emphasises the importance of putting in long hours to achieve results. Prufrock, on the other hand, is paralysed by fear and is unable to make decisions. He is forever trapped in his dilemma because he is afraid to take a stand.

In the line "And I have seen the eternal Footman keep my hat, and snicker," the eternal Footman alludes to death, considering his definition of "eternal," and how the Footman can be seen as a servant who waits and helps people cross the afterlife. Prufrock's anxiety about other people's feelings is highlighted in the following lines. Death, he believes, would mock his life.

Andrew Marvell and James Cooper inspired Eliot. The lines below are a mash-up of "Let us roll with all our might and all." To *His Coy Mistress*'s "our sweetness up into one ball" and *The Pioneers*' "overwhelming query" This act of stealing and recreating has resulted in the creation of a new work that is distinct from the original. These lines also demonstrate Prufrock's desire to do something. He, on the other hand, believes it is pointless to try because he would fail anyway.

*Would it have been worth while,  
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,*

Using allusions often makes it simple to reproduce the original writing's intended emotions and meaning. Prufrock has been compared to John the Baptist, Lazarus, and Hamlet, for example.

Prufrock's self-deprecation is evident in these allusions. The following lines allude to the Bible:

*"Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,  
I am no prophet – and here's no great matter;"*

John the Baptist was a prophet who had his head severed and used as a trophy. Unlike John the Baptist, however, he believes that even though his head is cut off, it cannot be considered a prize because he feels insignificant to say:



*"I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all – "*

is a reference to the Bible. Lazarus is a biblical character who rose from the dead. This is important to Prufrock since he believes he is dead. He wonders if being vibrant and vigorous is worth it because he feels lifeless.

The lines below make a reference to Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Hamlet and Prufrock are similar in that they are both self-conscious and indecisive. Prufrock, on the other hand, pales in comparison to Hamlet. He says he's more of a supporting player. He reminds me of Polonius, which is another Hamlet reference. Polonius is an attendant lord who makes himself look smart by using highfalutin vocabulary. They are similar in the way that they are both limited by how others view them. Prufrock even believes he is nothing more than The Fool, a court jester. This is a reference to Yorick, a bumbling dead man from Hamlet.

*No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use,  
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –  
Almost, at times, the Fool.*

Without the need for interpretation, allusions provide meaning. The lines "I've heard the mermaids singing, each to each," "I don't think they'll sing to me," and "I've heard the mermaids singing, each to each," are a reference to the mermaids in Homer's *Odyssey*. Mermaids prey on men by using their voices to entice them to the sea. The tale of mermaids was created to help seamen cope with their fear of dying by giving them hallucinations. Prufrock tries to flee his reality, but is dragged back. This highlights Prufrock's impotency and inability to move, as well as his low self-esteem, as he does not deserve even the story's mercy.

J. Alfred Prufrock's Love Song is about a self-conscious Prufrock and his impotency. Via allusions and images, he expresses how incomplete and unsatisfactory his life has become. In modernist literature, this self-examination is a recurrent theme. Modernism, unlike romanticism, does not exalt the individual's state.

### **Keywords**

etherize-anesthetize with ether  
 tedious-so lacking in interest as to cause mental weariness  
 insidious-intended to entrap  
 overwhelming-so strong as to be irresistible  
 linger-be about  
 indecision-doubt concerning two or more possible alternatives  
 descend-move downward and lower, but not necessarily all the way  
 modest-marked by simplicity; having a humble opinion of yourself  
 assert-insist on having one's opinions and rights recognized  
 disturb-change the arrangement or position of  
 presume-take liberties or act with too much confidence  
 formulated-devised; developed according to an orderly plan  
 sprawl-sit or lie with one's limbs spread out  
 digress-wander from a direct or straight course  
 scuttle-move about or proceed hurriedly  
 malingering-avoid responsibilities and duties  
 crisis-a crucial stage or turning point in the course of something  
 prophet-someone who speaks by divine inspiration  
 eternal-continuing forever or indefinitely  
 snicker-laugh quietly  
 swell-increase in size, magnitude, number, or intensity  
 advise-give advice to  
 deferential-showing courteous regard for people's feelings  
 politic-agreeable and courteous with a degree of sophistication  
 meticulous-marked by extreme care in treatment of details

obtuse-slow to learn or understand; lacking intellectual acuity  
wreath-decorate or deck with wreaths

### Self-Assessment/Evaluation

1. **When was Thomas Stearns Eliot born?**  
c) 26 September 1888
2. **Where was Thomas Stearns Eliot born?**  
b) St. Louis
3. **Where did Thomas Stearns Eliot study Sanskrit?**  
d) Harvard
4. **What did Thomas Stearns Eliot teach at the Highgate School?**  
b) French and Latin
5. **Where did Thomas Stearns Eliot work as a clerk?**  
b) Lloyds Bank Ltd
6. **What did Thomas Stearns Eliot receive for his resistance work against Germans during World War II?**  
c) Croix de Guerre
7. **Which poem of Thomas Stearns Eliot made him world famous?**  
b) The Waste Land
8. **When did Thomas Stearns Eliot get Nobel Prize for Literature?**  
d) 1948
9. **When did Thomas Stearns Eliot die?**  
a) 4 January 1965
10. **Where did Thomas Stearns Eliot die?**  
d) London
11. **T.S. Eliot's full name is what?**  
A. Thomas Stearns  
B. Toran Samuel  
C. Tom Stevens  
D. Terrence Soran
12. **Eliot was a huge cat lover**  
A. True  
B. False
13. **Eliot's favorite habit was what?**  
A. Writing  
B. Reading  
C. Smoking  
D. Long Walks
14. **Eliot used to smoke for close to how many hours a day?**  
A. 3  
B. 9  
C. 22  
D. 14
15. **In his famous poem 'The Wastelands' Eliot uses how many languages?**  
A. 9  
B. 10  
C. 6

D. 1

**16. Eliot began school at what prep school?**

- A. Smith Academy
- B. Washington Academy
- C. Becky Academy
- D. The Andrea School for The Blind

**17. After Smith Academy where did Eliot attend?**

- A. Washington University
- B. TCU
- C. University of Missouri
- D. Yale

**18. Eliot studied Portugese at Smith Academy**

- A. True
- B. False

**19. In what year did Eliot have a nervous breakdown and was forced to leave his job in London?**

- A. 1921
- B. 1908
- C. 1934
- D. 1955

**20. After the divorce, Eliot's wife was put in a mental institution where she remained the rest of her life.**

- A. True
- B. False

**21. The church which the ashes of Eliot were interred at was in New Castle, England.**

- A. True
- B. False

**22. Eliot never won a Noble Prize.**

- A. True
- B. False

**Self-Assessment/Evaluation Answer**

- |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |
|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| 11. | A | 12. | A | 13. | C | 14. | D | 15. | C |
| 16. | A | 17. | C | 18. | A | 19. | C | 20. | A |
| 21. | A | 22. | B |     |   |     |   |     |   |

**Review Questions**

1. What does the name J. Alfred Prufrock imply? What adjectives would you use to describe him? What socioeconomic class does he belong to? What one line captures the essence of his past life the best?
2. What do you think the Dante's Inferno epigraph's intention is? What is the significance of the Lazarus relation and illustration (lines 94-95)?
3. What does Prufrock want to accomplish? (Can you tell me where he's going? What does he plan to do when he arrives?) What is his demeanour like? What is his opinion of himself? Can he do what he sets out to do, or does he fail to do so?

4. Who are the "you" in the first line and the "we" in the last two lines? For the speaker and/or listener, critics usually offer three options: a) the Ego, the shy, repressed self, conversing with the ID, the amorous, desirous self; b) a man conversing with a woman; or c) a man conversing with a friend. What makes you believe it's a, b, or c? Is Prufrock's essence ambiguous?
5. What does the mock-heroic couplet "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo" mean?
6. Discuss the poem's imagery. What are the most popular images? Is there a pattern? What do you think of the picture of "a patient etherized on a table" in the first scene?
7. or any other imagery that evokes an emotion consistent with J. Alfred Prufrock's traits and plight, such as the image of the somnolent cat, or sea imagery (especially sea imagery) – or any other imagery that evokes an emotion consistent with J. Alfred Prufrock's traits and predicament?
8. What are the parallels and distinctions between Prufrock and Hamlet?
9. If there is some secret logic in the paradoxical ending, explain it: "Until we are awakened by human voices and drown."
10. In this poem, what part does frustrated desire play? Are there any concrete examples or just hints?
11. In this poem, what part does time play? Are there any concrete examples or just hints?
12. What part of the poem does drowning play? Are there any concrete examples or just hints?
13. In this poem, what part does inactivity and passivity play? Are there any concrete examples or just hints?
14. What is this poem's climax? Why is this the turning point?
15. Examine the numerous literary allusions, as well as the striking or rare figures of speech and pictures. What do they say about Prufrock's personality?
16. Consider this quote from T.S. Eliot's essay "The Role of Criticism" in relation to "Prufrock":  

"The romantic is deficient or undeveloped in his ability to distinguish between fact and fancy, whereas the classicist, or adult mind, is thoroughly realist—without illusions, without day-dreams, without hope, without bitterness, and with an abundant resignation."

Which is the Eliot of "Prufrock"? the romantic or the classicist? Which is the persona, Prufrock, of the poem?
17. Eliot wished for modern poetry to absorb and transform great poetry from the past in order to meet the needs of the present, particularly metaphysical poets. In his essay on metaphysical poets, he offered a rationale for the course his poetry took:  

"Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning."

Relate this to his technique in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

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## Unit 14: W. B. Yeats: The Second Coming

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### Objectives/Expected Learning Outcomes

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### Introduction

William Butler Yeats wrote "The Second Coming" in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, and it was originally published in the American magazine *The Dial* in November 1920. It was later included in a collection titled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). It was composed during a time when Yeats was perplexed by acts of violence such as the Easter Rising of 1916, the Irish Civil War that followed, and the European Great War of 1914-1918. And, according to his historical philosophy, a new era in world history was about to begin. He believed that a full circuit of the wheel, i.e. the moon, corresponded to about 2000 years in time.

A new dispensation is introduced at the start of each of these two thousand year periods. This pattern may be traced back to around the year 2000 B.C. in world history. The egg of Leda is said to have hatched out in that year. Leda was the mother of Helen, Castor, Pollux, and Clytemnestra in Greek mythology. These were her offspring from her marriage to Zeus, the mighty god who appeared to her and made love to her in the disguised form of a swan. The earliest known age of the world began on the day Zeus appeared to Leda. When Homer sung about it, the age had reached full maturity (full Moon) about the year 1000 B.C.

The Leda-Zeus era ended around the time of Jesus' birth (another divine intervention in human affairs), and the Christian era began. That Christian era, in turn, was coming to an end in the twentieth century, and the poet believed that a new era was required. You may not agree with the poet's system, but if you ignore it, some of his most essential poems will become incomprehensible. 'The Second Coming,' for example, was written with the Irish difficulties, the Great War, and other crises in mind, and it demonstrates his philosophy of *A Vision*, which he would articulate and organise in 1925.

### Subject Matter

This strong poem arose from the poet's belief that Christian civilization was nearing the end of its two-thousand-year allotment, and that a new phase, in nature diametrically opposed to it, was about to emerge. The conviction evolved as a result of Europe's rising division, of which the First World War and the political unrest in Ireland were explosive manifestations. As a result of the

widespread murder and bloodshed in Ireland during the Easter insurrection of 1916, the poet's mind was filled with doom. The civil conflict in Ireland that followed the Great War of 1914-1918, as well as other events in Europe, only contributed to the melancholy.

The poem is the result of a mental state plagued by terrible forebodings. The poem's title alludes to a new manifestation of God to man. According to him, we don't know what the new shape of things will be, but it must be terrifying for us simply because it would entail such a radical shift. We've already seen the breakdown of the old assumption in the Great War and civil wars, as well as the development of mob tyrannies: the dark forces of the pre-Christian era will reawaken.

### Summary

In 1865, William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin. When William was two years old, his father, a portrait painter, moved the family to London, and he spent most of his boyhood alternating between the freezing cityscape and the warm countryside of County Sligo, Ireland, where his mother's parents lived. Yeats, an aesthete since childhood, began writing poetry at a young age and published his first work in 1885. Yeats lived in Ireland during a turbulent period marked by the rise and collapse of Charles Stuart Parnell's political career, the Irish Revival, and the civil war. He rose to literary prominence swiftly and was instrumental in the founding of the Abbey Theatre, one of Ireland's most important cultural organisations.

Augusta Gregory and dramatist John Synge were among the celebrities with whom he collaborated. Yeats was given the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923 and died at the age of 73 in 1939. Most of his best poems – from *The Tower's* crushing power to the eerie mysticism of the *Last Poems* – were written in the years following his Nobel Prize, demonstrating the force and passion with which he dedicated himself to putting his inner existence into poetry. He composed outstanding poetry in every decade of his life, and his influence has spanned six decades; he is widely acknowledged as the greatest poet of the twentieth century today.

Yeats spent years developing a complex mystical explanation of the cosmos, which he lay forth in his book *A Vision*, and which interpreted history, imagination, and mythology in light of an arcane set of symbols (usually considered important today only for the light it sheds on some of his poems). This notion arose from Yeats' longstanding curiosity in the supernatural and mystical, as well as his sense of responsibility to organise his experiences inside an organised religious system. The system is incredibly intricate and has no long-term significance – except for the impact it had on his poetry, which is incredibly long-lasting.

The historical hypothesis expressed by Yeats in *A Vision* is based on a schematic of two conical spirals, one inside the other, with the widest part of one spiral ringing around the narrowest section of the other, and vice versa. Yeats believed that this image (which he dubbed "gyres") reflected the opposing motions inherent in the historical process, and he separated each gyre into specific regions that represented different historical times (and might also reflect psychological stages in an individual's growth). Even when his poetry appear obscurely imagistic or conceptually abstract, Yeats' own experience is never far from his works.

and once one understands how the poet's personal experiences link to the poem under consideration, the veil of ambiguity and abstraction is typically lifted. Despite his profound individualism, Yeats remains one of the most universal writers to have ever lived in that sense. W.B. Yeats is regarded as the "granddaddy" of Modernism in many aspects. In some ways, he's like the originator of it all. He was of a different generation than many of the Modernist poets we know now, yet he had a huge influence on them. He's older, and he's like a giant grandfather figure. Ezra Pound actually spent a few winters with him in a cottage in southeast England, where they hung out, wrote poetry, and fought over who left the dishes in the sink.

And this poem in particular, 'The Second Coming,' is significant not just as a work of Modernist poetry but also as a work that explicitly remarks on the socioeconomic situation that prompted the birth of Modernist poetry following World War I. It's significant in two ways. It was published in 1920, at the end of Yeats' career (he died in 1939). He's getting to be a bit of a senile old man at this point.

The First World War ran from 1914 to 1918. Because old ways of fighting war, like as trenches, were mixed with modern technology, such as improved cannons, it was noteworthy for being unexpectedly ferocious and devastating, resulting in fights that went nowhere and killed everyone. As you can see from the title, 'The Second Coming' is a clear religious connection; you couldn't hear that term without thinking of Christ's Second Coming. (I've been a lapsed Episcopalian for most of my life, and I still hear that. Perhaps you don't.) But that's exactly what Yeats is striving for: a direct Jesus connection.

So, what is Yeats' purpose in using this theological jargon, and how does it relate to World War I? That's something we'll look into. We'll start by looking at the poem. We're not going to break it up



because it's short and it seems blasphemous (no pun intended...) to do so, so we'll just read it all at once:

**Text of the poem**

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight; a waste of desert sand;  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?  
Where to start?  
The Widening Gyre*

First and foremost, what is this expanding gyre that Yeats mentions in the first line? This is a reference to Yeats' admittedly strange philosophy of history. Do you remember how we used to think of history as a timeline? Maybe you'll get one for yourself. My timeline starts with my birthdate and includes hash marks for graduation, getting my car, and first seeing Lord of the Rings - similar to how the A.D. (or C.E. for 'common era') chronology starts at the birth of Jesus - Year 0.

For the development of history, Yeats had a much stranger model. Essentially, he sees it as two massive cone-shaped constructions facing opposite directions in space, overlapping so that one's nose rests in the centre of the other.

One's nose is positioned in the centre of the other's mouth. A 'gyre' is the path that would be created if you spiralled outward on the cone. So the notion behind 'Turning and turning on the spreading gyre' is that as history progresses, we're going round and round, and the circling gets broader and broader. 'Why does this matter?' I can almost imagine you sitting there, pounding your head against the keyboard.

It important because Yeats believed that 1920, or post-World War I in general, was the moment when they were transitioning from the outer to the inner gyre - so we're about to circle around and head back to the narrow point of the second one. That's in the first one's huge mouth.

**Analysis of the First Stanza: A New Era Has Arrived**

It's basically simply a big metaphor for 'things are changing,' implying that the character of the next age will be different from that of the previous one. It's important to remember that every generation believes the world is about to end in a handbasket. You've definitely heard a lot of studies claiming that today's college students lack empathy, have a short attention span, and so on. And the Internet is destroying the earth, turning us all into robots!

We are not the first to believe that the world will be devastated forever. Yeats was neither the first nor the last to write poetry. Post-World War I, the Modernists writing at the time believed that something significant was happening in terms of the character of the age and the character of the period.

The gyre model implies that there is a certain level of rising disorder - things get looser and looser until it collapses back down - because it widens and then collapses in onto the point and goes the other way on the other cone. So we get to the next phrase ('the falcon cannot hear the falconer'), and we realise that, technically, the falcon cannot hear the falconer.'

That first description could have been about the falcon's flight route - this falcon flying in an expanding circle - but the metaphor still works. The world has gotten out of hand. The sight of the falcon and falconer contributes to the impression that communication is completely impeded by the

gyre's spread. Things are going to get away from us - loose falcons soaring everywhere - chaotic times, turmoil, and a widening gyre - that's what it all signifies.

When we go to the next section, we see "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold," which really emphasises the point. The gyre becomes too large to comprehend and limit, and there is no longer any feeling of where the centre is. If the phrase "things fall apart" sounds familiar, it's because it's the title of a renowned book by Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe called *Things Fall Apart*, which you may have had to study in school. It concentrates on the changes that the Igbo people went through as colonists and missionaries entered their world, and it's utilised to represent a similar type of transition that Yeats is addressing in his poem.

The word 'loosed' appears twice more in the next two lines ('mere anarchy is loosed' and 'The blood-dimmed tide is loosed'), reinforcing the impression that we're hurling things around - that things are becoming further apart and no longer linked together. It also alluded to the release of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, who are mentioned in Revelation as being loosed into the globe (that book in the Bible that describes the Second Coming - again, lapsed Episcopalian - I know this stuff, kind of).

In any case, it's a disaster. Clearly, the losing is horrible. All of these imagery are extremely violent, gloomy, and warlike in nature, which makes sense both in the context of World War I and in the context of Revelation. Since things deteriorate in that section of the Bible (I hear):

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

This emphasises how the world is turned upside down. There's a reverse going on - perhaps the individuals we think are the best are floundering and unsure what to do, while the individuals we think are the worst have gained traction - they're the sharp end of the new gyre heading that way.

#### **Analysis of the Second Stanza: The Second Coming**

The poem's title appears at the start of the next stanza, thus it must be a nice section:

*Surely some revelation is at hand.  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight*

So he's saying that all of this indicates that something significant is about to happen, some sort of 'revelation,' and then he goes on to suggest that it's the 'Second Coming,' but this appears to irritate him. The Latin word 'Spiritus Mundi,' which appears there, means 'soul of the world.' It's a term used by Yeats to describe a shared notion of knowledge. As I previously stated, he had a slew of hocus pocus theories about history, society, and other topics, and this is just another one of them. So he's arguing that when he declares this 'revelation' to be the 'Second Coming,' he sees a troubling 'vast image' that appears to come from 'the soul of the world' - the 'Spiritus Mundi,' which causes his vision to be troubled. He goes on to describe this vision in the following lines. He portrays a barren desert inhabited by a sphinx-like beast. He declares:

*A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.*

This vision has a really apocalyptic feel to it. With the sphinx and the desert birds, we're also harkening back to Egypt - it's kind of representing a world that's quite distinct from our own, as well as one that's in the past and pre-First Coming of Jesus, which I believe is very significant. We're highlighting the two-way motion of the gyre, implying that we might be returning to a previous state as we go forward. He goes on to say:

*The darkness drops again but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

And now we have clear parallels to Jesus' birth - Bethlehem, the rocking cradle - but Jesus isn't going to be born again - it isn't Yeats' image of what 'the Second Coming' will be like. It will be a strange creature - a 'rough beast' - who heralds the dawn of the new era. 'Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born,' is a great way to put it. It's such a striking image - this shadowy dark thing slinking towards the birthplace of Jesus, rather than walking. It's moving in a strange way, and I believe that's why 'slouching' is so important. It isn't walking, jogging, or any other activity that we may perceive as a mode of transportation.

### The Meaning of the Poem

That concludes the poem. The poem comes to a close at this point. So, what did Yeats actually say? The world around us is changing. It appears chaotic and uncontrolled because of the way change occurs (we move from the spreading outer gyre to the tip of the inner gyre, then back the other way). Things seem to be unravelling. Something must be on the way to solve everything, something that we might mistake for the Second Coming of Christ, given all of the apocalyptic material that is supposed to presage the Second Coming. However, if we believe that the herald of the new century will be someone we know, we are mistaken.

That's what Yeats is saying: we're completely wrong. The future will appear scary because it will be different and entirely foreign, and it will seem different because it will be different. So, despite the title, it's not really about Christ's Second Coming; it's about how catastrophic it feels to live in a world in change. So, what's the point of using a religious metaphor? What motivates him to do it?

I've been building these lectures to appeal to you by reading a book called *Made to Stick*, which is a trade secret.

which is essentially about how to organise an argument in such a way that it sticks and you remember what I say. One of the strategies it promotes is the usage of a 'schema' to aid in the explanation of a concept. A schema is essentially something your audience already knows and can relate to what you're trying to communicate.

Let's pretend you already know how to dance (which could be a large assumption depending on the individual...), and then I tell you that learning to drive a manual transmission automobile is similar to dancing in that you must react to your current conditions and respond with a sequence of motions. I'm going to use your dancing schema to teach you how to drive. What are the advantages of utilising a schema? You can typically teach anything a lot more efficiently than if you had to do it from begin. To portray his fear about the new environment, Yeats relies on the reader's Christian paradigm.

All of the horrible stuff he describes in the first stanza - things breaking apart and such - sounds a lot like what's meant to happen before the Second Coming, according to Revelation. So he refers to that schema in the next stanza, calling it up and saying directly, "Second Coming." However, even in the beginning, he implies that he may later contradict this thesis - the 'Surely' in 'Surely the Second Coming is at Hand' appears to be a touch dishonest. Maybe the Second Coming isn't so imminent after all. So, though we might expect something pleasant to happen, Yeats shows us that something strange and even catastrophic is about to happen. He builds up this expectation and then breaks it, demonstrating how the situation he's describing varies from the one you might be familiar with from the Bible and Christianity.

And this sends us on a bigger trip of discovery, cementing his message in our minds more firmly than if he simply said, "Things are different and unusual!" which is hardly poetry. Because, when you think about it, poetry is all about expressing clearly, effectively, and poignantly (via images like these wheeling birds, the slouching toward Bethlehem, and concepts like the Second Coming). I could just write something, but if I turn it into a poem, I'll be able to get more done in less time because poems are brief and don't take up a lot of room. I'm attempting to make every word matter, and Yeats' mastery of this is what distinguishes him as a great poet. What makes 'The Second Coming' such a fantastic poetry.

### The poem's meaning

This poem of twenty-two lines begins as if the poet is witnessing a vision. Yeats observed widespread socioeconomic problems and remarked on a world spinning out of control. The poet imagined a gyre or cone spinning quickly around a fixed centre, as if in a trance. Its circumference grows larger and larger, until even the centre loses control of its movements. "Things come apart: the centre can no longer support." The falconer has lost control of his falcon, which is not responding to his calls. The falcon represents man's intelligence, while the falconer represents his spiritual and emotional makeup.

We have too much intellect, which includes science, technology, and rationality, and it is leading us to extinction. As a result, the globe has been thrown into complete chaos. On all sides, there is violence and bloodshed. Line 2 alludes to technology progressing beyond humanity's control. The issue was obvious to Yeats 80 years ago, and it has only become worse since then. Yeats expresses his concern that technology has progressed to the point where people can easily cause a tremendous deal of evil.

The world had never witnessed damage like World War I, and most people were stunned by the large number of people who died as a result of the conflict. Line 5: "The blood-dimmed stream" evokes blind desire and conjures up images of the Great Biblical Flood, a calamity that generated purity and innocence but is now threatened with extinction everywhere. The best, the brightest, the aristocrats have lost all faith and conviction, while the worst, the masses and fanatical, senseless

individuals, are full of violence, according to lines 6 and 7. The rulers of the globe at the time of Yeats' writing were engrossed with imperialism and expanding circles of power to the point where they would go to any length to achieve their objectives. The vicious power brokers were vociferous and numerous, and there appeared to be no end in sight.

Few, in the name of peace, dared to speak out against them. This calamitous upswing in anarchy portends the arrival of a new civilization. When the Greco-Roman civilization fell apart two thousand years ago, God incarnated Himself in the person of Christ, and the second coming of God appears to be on the horizon. The poet sees a vision of some odd shape emerging out of the 'Spiritus Mundi,' a kind of repository of pictures in Yeats' philosophy, as soon as the thought crosses his mind. The body of a lion and the head of a human combine in this monstrous shape.

It is seen emerging from a far desert and moving slowly, clumsily, and ungainly towards Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ. The sphinx, according to Yeats, is rising to bring forth the end of the world. For 2000 years, the sphinx slept in a nightmarish world. The human race's upheavals were the source of the nightmares (line 20). The figure is so terrifying and terrifying that the birds flee in terror in front of it. The creature has a terrible, blank expression, as if it were a metaphor of fate's terrible and unforgiving nature. It is the genesis of contemporary civilisation, and it represents a careless and brutal cruelty. As a result, Yeats expresses his dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. As a result, Yeats offers no hope for humanity's survival.

### Style and Structure

The poem is divided into two verse paragraphs, the first of which of eight lines and the second has fourteen. As a result, the poem has an unbalanced air to it, with one section receiving more attention and detail than the other. When we consider that Yeats' poems follow a specific stanza pattern, this fact becomes even more significant. It is an artistic masterwork distinguished by the careful selection of precise details and imagery, precise phrases with their resonance, and a solemn rhythm to create the dreadful mood of the Apocalypse suitable for the picture of enormous destruction and equally monstrous rebirth.

The poem "The Second Coming" is written in a blank-verse pattern in a very rough iambic pentameter, but the metre is so loose, and the exceptions are so numerous, that it reads more like free verse with frequent strong stresses. The third and fourth lines, for example, rhyme with consonants. Only fourteen of the twenty-two lines have near-ten syllables, which means that up to eight of the twenty-two lines are different, disrupting the pattern. Eight enjambments (for example, fifth line, seventh line, eleventh line) and eight caesuras contribute to the absence of organisation (as in the eleventh line).

The rhymes are also erratic; aside from the two couplets that begin the poem, the poem has only fortuitous rhymes such as "man" and "sun." Special sound methods are also used by Yeats, such as the three stressed syllables in a row in line 21: "what rough beast"; and the repetition of phrases, such as in the first two lines of the second stanza at the beginning and finish of the poem "surely...near hand."

This produces a lot of confusion in the reader's mind because the poetry ignores the framework all the time, which adds to the intricacy and shock that the metaphors generate in the reader's mind when they're read. As a result of not adhering to the structures and mixing patterns, Yeats' poetry is considerably more perplexing, heightening the impression of chaos and loss of control that the poem conveys figuratively.

### Critical Appreciation

"The Second Coming" is one of Yeats' most famous and anthologized poems because of its spectacular, horrific imagery and horrific ceremonial language; it is also one of the most thematically confusing and hardest to grasp. The poem's structure is straightforward—the first stanza summarises the current state of affairs in the world (things falling apart, anarchy, etc.). The second concludes that a terrible Second Coming is imminent, not of the Jesus we know, but of a new messiah, a "rough beast," the slouching sphinx awakening itself in the desert and marching toward Bethlehem.

Yeats wanted "The Second Coming" to represent the current historical moment (the poem was published in 1921) in terms of these gyres. As history neared the end of the outer gyre (to put it loosely) and began travelling through the inner gyre, Yeats believed the world was on the verge of a catastrophic revelation. Richard J. Finneran quotes Yeats' own annotations in his authoritative version of his poems:

"The end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to its place of greatest contraction... The revelation

[that] approaches will... take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre..."

In other words, the world's trajectory along the gyres of science, democracy, and heterogeneity is now disintegrating, like the falcon's frantically widening flight-path after losing contact with the falconer; the next age will take its character not from the gyres of science, democracy, and speed, but from the opposite inner gyre—which presumably opposes mysticism, primal power, and slowness. The speaker's vision of the rising sphinx is his picture of the new world's character; the "rough beast" slouching toward Bethlehem is the symbol of this new age. The poem "The Second Coming" is a great declaration about the opposing forces at work in the world. history, as well as the battle between the ancient and modern worlds. The aesthetic experience of its passionate language is powerful enough to ensure its value and significance in Yeats' overall work.

### **Key words/ Glossary**

gyre—a round shape formed by a series of concentric circles  
 falcon—a diurnal bird of prey  
 anarchy—a state of lawlessness and disorder  
 conviction—an unshakable belief in something without need for proof  
 revelation—an enlightening or astonishing disclosure  
 pitiless—without mercy or sympathy  
 reel—revolve quickly and repeatedly around one's own axis  
 indignant—angered at something unjust or wrong  
 vex—disturb, especially by minor irritations  
 slouch—walk slovenly

### **Self-Assessment/Evaluation**

1. **What historical background does "The Second Coming" reflect at the time it was written?**

"The Second Coming" was written just after World War I, in response to the Irish War of Independence as well as the Bolshevik Revolution. These were intellectual battles that called into question the basic foundations of society. The Bolshevik Revolution was a revolutionary movement led by Vladimir Lenin that overthrew Tsarist rule and ushered in the Soviet Union. This revolution occurred in the aftermath of World War I, another conflict that shattered established state borders and international order.

The poem was also composed during a period of civil strife in Ireland. Yeats was a passionate and frequent writer on conflict, notably strife in Ireland, and he was especially wary of mob control, such as that which elected authoritarian governments in Russia and Italy.

Throughout his career, Yeats wrote on the rise and fall of civilizations, bemoaning both the inconsistencies and instability of the era in which he lived, as well as the bitterness and disillusionment that afflicted so many people at the time. This ideas war—jadedness and love, dread and hope—arose from a turbulent period in history, inspiring the tension, perplexity, and emotional intensity that characterised the period. "The Second Coming" exemplifies this.

2. **How (and why) does "The Second Coming" use mythology and ancient ideas to symbolise modernity's onset?**

"The Second Coming" is a poem that works in a circle, so it finishes up where it began in some senses. By incorporating mythological elements such as a reference to Latin (with "Spiritus Mundi") and a sphinx to represent the future, Yeats is implying that Christianity's reign is coming to an end, and the world is reverting to a primal, pagan state similar to that which existed prior to the rise of Christianity and modern civilization. In this poem, mythology portrays polytheistic religions as well as a lack of organisation and order.

3. **Discuss the influence of Yeats' "The Second Coming" on a number of works. Why has "The Second Coming" remained so popular in popular culture?**

Several works, notably Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Joan Didion's essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," have been inspired by "The Second Coming." *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe is an apocalyptic, world-changing set of events that, unlike Yeats' original poem, concentrates on the West's encroachment on Africa rather than the West's own breakdown. The West and colonialism are "rough creatures" in Achebe's narrative, coming in a deadly wave to transform the globe forever.

"Slouching Towards Bethlehem," by Joan Didion, is the title of a collection of essays she wrote in the 1960s while living in San Francisco's Height-Ashbury neighbourhood during the hippie era and coping with her own existential worries. It focuses on the counterculture's large-scale consequences, which questioned predetermined orders while simultaneously causing chaos, as well as moral problems about modernity and consumerism.

Both pieces riff on Yeats' original gloomy prophetic vision, twisting it to comment on their own times and histories while sharing its sense of dread and horror. Because of this, Yeats' "The Second Coming" has remained so popular. It manages to express the existential terror of living in a world where headlines describe horrible atrocities on a daily basis. It conveys a common fear of change and detachment, and as technology and new forms of violence continue to shatter traditional institutions of order, it has become more pertinent. It also manages to convey the sense of promise and promise that these new structures and mindsets might engender.

**4. Is the "rough beast" always a bad thing?**

The "rough beast" appears to be bad at first glance, but a closer examination reveals that it could also be a very good thing, leading to creation from destruction. After all, Yeats never explicitly states that the rough beast is a negative force. He claims that what is going on in the world right now—the floods of violence, the annihilation of innocence—are awful things, but that they could be signs of a death that will lead to rebirth. The world could be destroying itself in order to be reborn in Bethlehem, and all of the violence may be a tide similar to the Biblical flood, which destroyed the world (save for Noah and his ark) in order to reconstruct and improve it.

One of the poem's most striking features is Yeats' lack of moral judgement. No civilisation, according to Yeats, was superior to another, as well as

"The historian talks of Greece as an advance of Persia, of Rome as something or other ahead of Greece," he wrote. On the other hand, I believe that at their best, all civilizations are equal."

After all, the first appearance of Christ must have been

"monstrous and dreadful to those whose superstition it surpasses,"

as commentator Leonard Nathan put it. The rise of Christianity resulted in the extinction of old cultures and civilizations. Perhaps the "tough beast" may one day be revered as the world's rescuer. People are naturally averse to change, but change is unavoidable in a world that is a "widening gyre," a moving, cyclical organism.

**5. Yeats, especially with a poem like 'The Second Coming,' is considered an early figure in which artistic movement?**

- a. Realism
- b. Futurism
- c. Romanticism
- d. Modernism

**6. What is the 'gyre' to which Yeats refers?**

- a. A beast that is coming
- b. A timeline of history
- c. The aftermath of World War I
- d. A large clock

**7. What historical event is considered largely responsible for the sentiment expressed in 'The Second Coming'?**

- a. World War II

- b. World War I  
c. Irish independence  
d. The Industrial Revolution
8. **The title 'The Second Coming' is a reference to what event?**  
a. Ireland's independence  
b. World War I  
c. The Modernism Era  
d. The return of Jesus Christ
9. **All of the following are themes of 'The Second Coming' except:**  
a. The future is menacing  
b. The world is changing  
c. Things are falling apart  
d. Christ will save humanity
10. What is 'indignant' in reference to the poem text discussion:  
a. revolve quickly and repeatedly around one's own axis  
b. angered at something unjust or wrong  
c. disturb, especially by minor irritations  
d. walk slovenly
11. What is the meaning of the word 'vex' in reference to the content discussed for the poem:  
a. revolve quickly and repeatedly around one's own axis  
b. angered at something unjust or wrong  
c. disturb, especially by minor irritations  
d. walk slovenly
12. What do you understand by the word 'sloch' on the basis of the poem:  
a. revolve quickly and repeatedly around one's own axis  
b. angered at something unjust or wrong  
c. disturb, especially by minor irritations  
d. walk slovenly

### Answer

5. d      6. b      7. b      8. d  
9. a      10. b      11. c      12. d

### Review Questions

1. Why do you believe Yeats used so many ambiguous symbols in the poem? When using symbolism, many poets try to make everything relate to each other. But what does falconry have to do with a sphinx or a "blood-dimmed stream," or with a sphinx and the "indignant desert birds"? The majority of individuals who read this poetry seek to connect these ideas to something real in the world. However, we must keep in mind that Yeats did not intend for his poem to be interpreted in this way.

2. How would you interpret the poem's biblical connection? The majority of the symbols are universal and ageless, reminiscent of something from the Book of Revelation. However, it's also clear that this isn't the Bible, after all. For one reason, Christ does not appear at the end of the storey, but rather a "rough beast." Is the poet a religious man, and if so, what kind of religion?
3. What makes Yeats see history as a churning vortex, the gyre? Does the fact that the gyre is moving out from its centre imply that things are always getting worse? It's worth noting that Yeats' concept was very innovative and not universally accepted. Even today, there are many people who believe that history is linear (save for a few blips like wars) and that civilization is always progressing.
4. Is it feasible that the appearance of the "rough beast" will ultimately be beneficial to the world? After all, things can't get any worse if the world is already so violent that "innocence is drowning." Perhaps Yeats compares it to demolishing an old structure and erecting a new one. But, on the other hand, the poetry says nothing about society repairing itself.
5. Do you believe the poem is intended for Christian Europe specifically, or could it be applicable to the entire world? People from various civilizations, such as the Middle East, have found this poetry to be extremely intriguing. They've moulded it to match their own historical perspectives. Perhaps it is most directly addressed at those who have a "apocalyptic" viewpoint and believe that major, sweeping changes are on the horizon.

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