Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Humanities

BEGC - 107
British Poetry and Drama: 17th and 18th Centuries

Block

2

JOHN MILTON: *LYCIDAS, SONNET XIX, L'Allegro, Il Pensoroso*

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The period between the 17th and 18th centuries, that is to be studied in this block is a hundred years and a very interesting period as we witness the movement away from an age that believed in faith entirely, to an age that now turned towards reason. We also know that **Queen Elizabeth I** ruled Britain from 1558 to 1603 and that the **Elizabethan Age** is known even today as the golden age in English history. The English *Renaissance* was at its height then and saw the flowering of English literature and poetry. **William Shakespeare** (1564 – 1616) and the Elizabethan theatre flourished during this age. It was an age of expansion and exploration overseas, and a period of relative internal peace. In spite of the civil unrests brought on by the English Reformation, the clashes between the Protestants and the Catholics; and the battles between the Parliament and the Monarchy that engulfed 17th century England, it was still a period of relative peace.

In retrospect, the Elizabethan Age was viewed very highly primarily because of the contrasts between the periods before and after the reign of **Queen Elizabeth**. In 1603 **King James VI of Scotland** became **James I** of England, **King James**, (if you remember) was also the King of Scotland. It is interesting to note that though King James VI of Scotland became James I of England, England and Scotland remained separate countries till the 1707 Acts of Union. The ascension of King James I started the Jacobean era or the years of the reign of **King James I** in England from 1603 – 1642. The Jacobean period/ the rule of **King James I,** was the age between the Elizabethan Age and the Caroline Age. The Caroline era is the years of the reign of **King Charles I** over both countries, from 1625—1642. This age was followed by the English Civil War (1642–1651) and the English *Interregnum* (1651–1660), when there was no king in England.

John Donne and **John Milton** belonged to this period. Their works deal with 'English issues and perspectives' and deal with other common themes of love, religion, and political points of view. In this block we will deal with 17th Century British Literary History, the Life and Works of John Milton and examine some of his major works/ poems in detail.

Block 2: John Milton: *Lycidas, Sonnet XIX, L'Allegro, Il Pensoroso*

Unit 1: The 17th Century: An Introduction

Unit 2: John Milton: Life & Works

Unit 3: John Milton: *Lycidas, Sonnet XIX on His Blindness*

Unit 4: John Milton: *L'Allegro, Il Pensoroso*

Do try and read any History of English Literature for a better understanding of the age and kindly ensure that you read *Lycidas, Sonnet XIX On His Blindness, L' Allegro* and *Il Pensororso.* If you wish to read more of Milton's works then do give at least Book I of *Paradise Lost* a read. Good Luck with your work. For most of these poems you'll probably find them on Project Gutenberg if you so desire to read a soft copy.

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UNIT 1 THE 17TH CENTURY: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall try and provide an understanding of the following aspects that made this century the period it was:

- brief history of the rulers and the political scenario of 17th century England
- brief socio-cultural background of the age,
- Literary achievements of the century,
- Metaphysical and Cavalier Poets and Poetry

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we delve straight into Milton's life and works, it will be better to have an understanding of the age in which he wrote. Let us get a feeling of 17th century England and in order to do that we would need to know what went on before the reign of **King James I** of England and the beginning of our period of study. We know that **Queen Elizabeth I** ruled Britain from 1558 to 1603 and the Elizabethan Age is known even today as the golden age in English

literary history. England was gradually moving away from the age of faith to the age of reason and the English *renaissance* was at its height, and saw the flowering of English literature and, in particular poetry. Prominent writers such as **Thomas Kyd** (1558–1594, *The Spanish Tragedy*); **Edmund Spenser** (1552–1599, *The Faerie Queene*); and **William Shakespeare** (1564–1616), the most notable and famous of all dramatists/ writers of British Literature flourished along with the Elizabethan theatre during this age. The period also nourished the development of many poets and playwrights, such as, **Ben Jonson** (1572–1637). Among his major plays are the comedies *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *Volpone* (1605), *Epicoene; or, The Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), *and Bartholomew Fair* (1614). However, it must be noted that Ben Jonson's literary career lay more in the **Jacobean** age that followed it, than during the reign of **Elizabeth I**. This introduction gives you a very basic but good sense of what preceded the Jacobean age or the age of Milton, the period under study in this block. The 17th Century as we shall see begins with the ascension of King James VI of Scotland to the English throne as King James I of England and continues with the Caroline Age, the formation of the Commonwealth, the Interregnum years, the Restoration and finally with the Augustan age. However, since this block deals with Milton we shall merely look at the other ages as a passing reference. In the next section, we shall begin with King James I's ascension of the throne of England.

1.2 THE JACOBEAN AGE

The Elizabethan age was not only an age of expansion and exploration overseas, but also a period of largely internal peace. Queen Elizabeth belonged to the **Tudor** Dynasty; with her death in 1603 this dynasty was brought to an end. James VI of Scotland, the son of **Mary Stuart**, who was a Protestant and a descendant of **Henry VII** of England, ascended the throne as James I. The period of internal peace that prevailed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth was to end soon with the ascension of **King James VI of Scotland**. It is interesting to note that England and Scotland remained separate till the *1707 Acts of Union* almost a hundred years later. Since King James I was a descendant of Mary Stuart some people also refer to his age as the Stuart period, however, we call it the Jacobean age. Thus, began the *Jacobean* era or the years of the reign of King James I in England from 1603 – 1625 or the beginning of the 17th Century.

1.2.1 James I (1603-25)

Even though the reign of James I, continued to be an era of uninterrupted and continued literary achievements, disputes over religion kept occurring. Apart from religious disputes and differences, the Jacobean age was to witness major debates on the rights and prerogatives of the English Parliament and the Crown. The first signs of these new tensions occurred soon after the arrival of James I in England with, the presentation of the *Millenary Petition* by the English Puritans. Before we begin discussing what the *Millenary Petition* was, we need to understand the history of the Puritans. Needless to say, we shall once again turn to history and go back a few centuries in time to get a better understanding of the Puritans and how this was to eventually lead to such a great conflict that it would threaten the reign of King James and his son **King Charles** of the Caroline Age.

1.2.2 Brief History of the Puritan Movement in England

Who were the Puritans? And what role did they play in British Literary History and later in American History? – are the first questions that come mind when we talk about the Puritans.The Puritan movement began during the late 16th century in the Church of England. Like I said earlier, we will need to go back even further in time to get an idea of what this movement was all about. So let's take a leap to a hundred and seventy years before our period of study, before Queen Elizabeth's time and see what went on then. The Puritan movement is said to have begun during the 1530s when Henry VIII (1509 - 47) was still the King. Henry VIII separated the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534. However, the Puritans felt that the Church of England still retained many features and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. The next English monarch Edward VI (1547- 53) too supported the cause of the Protestants. However, by the time Queen Mary (1553–58), ascended the throne, England returned to the Roman Catholic Church, and many Protestants were forced into exile. Coming back to our time line, during Queen Elizabeth's time (1558 -1603), there was a sort of peace established within the religious lives of the people of England. They expected many reforms in the Church but she did not permit too many drastic departures from established tradition. In the meanwhile, the Puritans were becoming more and more morally and religiously earnest in their dealings and they were seeking to reform the Church as a whole. Their religious zeal was to eventually lead to the civil war that we will touch upon later.

1.2.3 James I and the Puritans

Going back to where we left off the discussion in section 1.2.1, the *Millenary Petition* was a series of requests for greater reforms in the Church of England. However, as mentioned earlier in sub section 1.2.2, in the religious conference of 1604, that King James I convened to consider the requests of the Church of England, he rejected most of these demands. This rejection by King James I paved the way for the beginning of the alienation between the King and his Puritan subjects that would steadily deteriorate over time. The Gunpowder Plot of 1605, (a plan supposedly masterminded by the Catholics to blow up the Houses of Parliament in Westminster), led to the persecution of the country's Catholic minority. In the years that followed, James I and his son and successor **Charles I** (1625–1649) were constantly at logger heads with the country's ruling elite, as they tried to rule without parliamentary consent (by levying extra taxes), like the European absolute monarchs did. The friction between the English Parliament and King James I was well known. King James I dissolved two Parliaments in 1610 and 1624 and imposed custom duties on the merchants without the consent of the Parliament, thereby, posing a threat to the Parliament's control over the finances of the government. Needless to say, this made him highly unpopular particularly when he got the courts of law to proclaim his imposition of customs duty as law (1608) after the Parliament had refused to enact them. King James I of England or Great Britain as he liked to call himself died in 1625 and is buried in Westminster Abbey. He was succeeded by his son and heir Charles I, King of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1625.

1.2.4 Puritanism and the Crisis of the Crown

The hopes of the Puritans were raised again when King James I of England succeeded Queen Elizabeth in 1603. In 1604, it became obvious at a religious

conference that King James I would not support the cause of the Puritans. During the reign of Charles I (1625-49), the Puritanical zeal continued to spread and finally culminated in the civil war that was to break out. Let us look at the reign of King Charles I next.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Recreate a brief history of the Puritan movement in the 17th Century.

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1.3 CHARLES I (1625-49)

In the beginning Charles I was very popular with his subjects but, after a while, he became more and more whimsical and impulsive, moreover, he married a Catholic Princess, and he also dissolved three Parliaments in four years, all these actions made the public very bitter towards him and finally Charles I was forced to concede the *Petition of Right* in 1628. The *Petition of Right*, 1628, according to the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, is a statement of civil liberties sent by the English Parliament to Charles I. *The Petition of Right*, initiated by **Sir Edward Coke**, was based upon earlier statutes and charters and asserted four basic principles: no taxes could be levied without the consent of the Parliament; no subject could be imprisoned without cause shown (reaffirmation of the right of *habeas corpus*); no soldiers could be quartered upon the citizenry; and martial law could not be used in times of peace. In return for his having accepted the *Petition of Right* in June, 1628, King Charles was granted subsidies. This petition was important as it helped protect the civil liberties of the people/ citizens but King Charles began violating the terms of the petition and continued collecting both tonnage as well as poundage duties without the authorisation of the Parliament. King Charles I also continued prosecuting citizens in an arbitrary manner. We must remember that this petition had been created to prevent the King from levying additional taxes on the people without having it discussed in Parliament. The petition was also meant to prevent the abuse of royal prerogative but it failed to do so. By the 1630s the Puritans were already gathering support from the members of the public engaged in commercial activities, those opposed to the monarchy and the Presbyterians. Charles I tried hard to dissolve the Parliament but he could not do so and gradually they became a major force to reckon with and their zeal and might lead to the First English Civil War (1642- 46).

1.3.1 Civil War (1642-1648)

The whole country was divided into two groups - one group consisted of the Royalist including the Cavaliers, the Church and the northern gentry and the other group was comprised of the Parliamentary forces including the Puritans, the middle class, and the artisans. This tussle was so deeply entrenched that they defeated Prince Rupert {the grandson of King James I (his daughter Elizabeth

Stuart's son)}, in 1644 and annihilated the royal army in 1645. The King surrendered to the Scots in 1646 and was handed over to the English Parliament in 1647. King Charles I was eventually beheaded in 1649 and the Commonwealth came into being.

Eventually, the New Model Army, seized power and England came to be under the control of **Oliver Cromwell**, who was the military leader of the Civil War. Cromwell's *Commonwealth* favoured the Puritans to an extent. Between the years 1649 – 60, (the *Interregnum Period*), the Church of England was run along Presbyterian lines but the Presbyterian Church never did manage to establish a stronghold in England. After Cromwell's death in 1658, the highly traditional and conservative Puritans supported the restoration of King Charles II. Most of the Puritan clergy left the Church of England after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and the 1662 Uniformity Act. Under the Act of Uniformity 1662, the Church of England was restored to its pre-Civil War constitution with only minor changes, and the Puritans found themselves entirely sidelined.

Despite these troubles—that ultimately led to the outbreak of the English Civil War of the 1640s and to Charles I's execution in 1649—the early **Stuart** period was a time of continued literary achievements. These accomplishments were to be found in the vitality of the London stage as well as in the poetry and prose of the era. Looking back, the Elizabethan Age is viewed very highly primarily because of the contrasts between the periods before and after the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The Jacobean period/ the rule of King James I, was the age between the Elizabethan Age and the Caroline Age. The Caroline era is the years of the reign of King Charles I over Scotland and England, from 1625—1642. This age was followed by the English Civil War (1642–1651) and the English *Interregnum* (1651–1660), when there was no king. Eventually, King Charles II who was King of Scotland from 1649 until his deposition in 1651, ascended the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1660 with the restoration of the Monarchy and ruled till his death in 1685.

John Donne (1572 – 1631) and **John Milton** (1608 – 74) belonged to this period and their works deal with the themes of love, religion and political points of view. In this block we will look at the life and works of John Milton and examine some of his major works/ poems in detail. In the next section, we shall look at the creation of the Commonwealth (1644 – 53).

Check Your Progress 2

1. How did the Civil War come about?

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1.3.2 Formation of the Commonwealth (1644-1653)

England was declared a Commonwealth in 1649. When Scotland proclaimed **Charles II** the king of Ireland, Scotland and England, Oliver Cromwell immediately took steps to break Scotland's resistance. The years of the

interregnum, (the period in English history from the execution of Charles I in 1649 to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660), the Commonwealth to 1653 and the Protectorate after that, is the story of Oliver Cromwell's personal rule, marked by strict military administration and obviously the enforcement of the Puritan moral code. After his death and the short-lived rule of his son, **Richard Cromwell**, the Commonwealth was revived for a brief and chaotic period. It ended in 1660 with the Restoration of Charles II. The Restoration period was not a continuation of the *Renaissance*. In the Elizabethan age, and the Caroline age, (particularly the reign of Charles II and his successors), the development of physical and mental power was the guiding principle. All activities that were in an earlier age, a huge source of entertainment, such as horse-racing, bear baiting, the sport of cock-pit and theatrical performances were condemned by the puritans and banned. The Puritans disliked the Cavaliers because of their sensuousness - a quality which affected the senses i.e. hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting. Puritanism also impacted drama and literature in a big way. The free renaissance spirit was to change into the controlled attitude of the puritans, plays were no longer encouraged and finally the theatre shut down in 1642. From 1642 to 1660 there were no theatrical productions and John Milton was the only notable poet of those dark years who wrote in blank verse.

In 1660 with the restoration, came King Charles II who was received very warmly by his subjects who were by now longing for Puritanical rule to end. But with King Charles's reign also came the Plague and the famous Great Fire of London (1665-56) that destroyed much of London. In literature the Restoration was a period of novelty, and change rather than of great writing.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Describe the formation of the Commonwealth. Do you think it was justified?

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1.3.3 Socio-Cultural Setting of 17th Century England

In the early 17th century, the rich people of London, built houses along the Thames between the two cities of Westminster and London particularly in the west of London while the working class built their houses to the east of the city. Soon London came to be divided into the affluent west end and the poor east end. Shortly after, piped water was available to the individual houses on the west side of London as the rich could afford to pay for this luxury – a connection to the main water supply line. Furniture was also plain and heavy but towards the late 17th century, more comfortable and finely decorated furniture began to be made of walnut (1680s onwards) or mahogany. Furniture was veneered, inlaid, lacquered, and also carved out and inlaid with mother of pearl. Furthermore new types of furniture were introduced during this period, and in the mid 17th century chests of drawers became common, as did Grandfather clocks. The bookcase was to make an appearance later in the century, and chairs too were modified and

made more comfortable as upholstered (padded and covered) chairs became common in the homes of the wealthy people. The first real armchair appeared in the 1680s.

Horse drawn carriages were available in London, and the streets were lit with oil lamp street lights from the 1680s onwards, and gradually towns became larger as employment was more readily available. But the movement from the rural areas and villages to the towns and cities caused overcrowding and that doubled with poor hygiene amongst the poor in London, lead to the breaking out of Plague in 1603, 1636 and in 1665. The three onslaughts of Plague killed a large number of people, but there were always many poor ones who would come and take their place in towns. Banking developed then, as England became a more commercial country. The Bank of England was founded in 1694. In the early years of the 17th century people began eating using forks for the first time, and new foods such as bananas and pineapples as well as chocolate, tea and coffee were introduced into England for the rich. However, the poor ate the normal plain and monotonous food, subsisting on bread, cheese, onions, and pottage/ a kind of porridge with some vegetables and (if you could afford it) pieces of meat or fish. The rampant belief in witchcraft and magic also declined gradually as a scientific basis and understanding began to gain ground and the last known person to be executed as a witch in England was in 1684. Women accused and convicted of practicing witchcraft were hanged in England and not burned like in America. These were some of the socio cultural changes taking place in England but at the same time as mentioned before, it was also the age of reason and we shall look at the scientific revolutions that were taking place during 17th century England next.

1.3.4 The Scientific Revolution in 17th Century England

Towards the end of the16th century and the early years of the 17th century, people stopped taking things at face value and instead began to conduct experiments to see if the theories of the Greek philosophers about the world were true. In England **Sir Francis Bacon** (1561-1626) argued for careful observation and experimentation to finding out how the natural world worked. This new method of understanding the world and its natural phenomenon caught the imagination of the people and by the late 17th century a scientific approach had begun by examining and explaining things. Scientists began carrying out careful observations and experiments and in 1645 a group of philosophers and mathematicians began holding meetings to discuss science or natural philosophy. Charles II was deeply interested in science and in 1662 he founded the Royal Society or what was then named *The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge*. This century was also to see many important scientists such as the chemist **Robert Boyle** (1627–91) and his famous book *The Skeptical Chemist* (1661); the great physicist **Isaac Newton** (1642–1727), whose great work *Principia Mathematica* was published in 1687. But it was just not the Natural Sciences that flourished then, the arts too flourished with the great architect **Christopher Wren** (1632-1723) having designed many buildings including the most famous St Paul's Cathedral, and our poet of study **John Milton** (1608-1674) having published his masterpiece *Paradise Lost*. It was also the era of the great English composer **Henry Purcell** (1659-1695). In the next subsection, we shall look at the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Write a note on the socio cultural environment that prevailed in the 17th Century.

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1.3.5 The Glorious Revolution of 1688

In 1603 King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England as we have discussed earlier. He began a new dynasty - the Stuart dynasty. James I however, was not as charismatic as Elizabeth I, nor was he as popular. But he has to his credit the ending of the long, drawn out war with Spain (1604). He was also responsible for a new translation of the Bible, more widely known as the *King James Version*, published in 1611. In 1660, we know that Charles II ascended the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland but once he died in 1685, and given that he did not have any sons, his brother **Prince James**, *Duke of York* became king. But Charles II's illegitimate son - the **Duke of Monmouth** landed in Dorset and led a rebellion in Southwest England. Though he won that round and was proclaimed King in Taunton, his army was crushed at the battle of Sedgemoor. James (the brother of King Charles II) was dethroned in 1688 during the Glorious Revolution. The peaceful overthrowing of James II in 1688 – is what is known as the 'Glorious Revolution' and marks the beginning and the foundation of a Protestant settlement in British politics. Thereafter, the Parliament declared that the throne was vacant and **Mary** and her husband **William of Orange** were declared joint monarchs, till Mary's death in 1694. William of Orange continued to rule till his death in 1702 after which James's younger daughter **Anne** succeeded to the throne. Meanwhile the *Act of Settlement* was passed in 1701 by the parliament to basically settle the succession to the English and Irish crowns saving the throne for Protestants only. The next Protestant in line to the throne was the Electress **Sophia of Hanover**, the granddaughter of James VI of Scotland, I of England and Ireland. It was proclaimed that after Queen Anne, the crown would pass on to only her non-Roman Catholic heirs. The Act provided that, if the line of succession established in the *Bill of Rights* were extinguished, then the crown would go to the German cousin, Sophia, Electress of Hanover, and to her Protestant heirs. This act came into being primarily because of the failure of King William III & II and Queen Mary II, and of Mary's sister Anne, to produce any surviving children. Sophia died in 1714, before the death of Queen Anne in 1714. On Queen Anne's death, Sophia's son **King George I** ascended the throne and started the Hanoverian dynasty in Britain.

As we may have noticed, the 17th century was a period of huge political and social upheaval, beginning with an age that was known for having the Crown under the of the state, to a century that witnessed years of war, terror and bloodshed, the execution of Charles I and the introduction of a republic. But all of this was once again overturned with the restoration of Charles II, and a relatively short-lived return to autocratic rule which was finally done away with once, Mary and William were placed as the ruling monarchs by the Parliament. With these events

taking place in England, absolute monarchy was ended and England, Ireland and Scotland were to unite under the title of Great Britain and the country was safeguarded against the horrors of civil war that was witnessed in this century.

Check Your Progress 5

1. What was the Glorious Revolution about?

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1.4 LITERARY ACHIEVEMENTS & THE SOCIO CULTURAL LIFE OF 17TH CENTURY ENGLAND

In section 1.3.4 we talked about the Scientific revolution in 17th century England, this interest in science and the questioning of tradition that followed was exemplified in the writings of scientists and philosophers such as that of **Rene Descartes** and his *Discourse on Method* (1637) and **Pascal**'s *Pensées* (1657–58) in France; **Sir Francis Bacon** and **Thomas Hobbes** and their works *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Leviathan* (1651) in England. This line of questioning was fundamentally a challenge to both thought and language and was to have immense repercussions in the way people understood themselves and the world around them. The most important writer of 17th century British literature was undoubtedly **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616). Some of his most important plays were *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), the *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark/ Hamlet* (1599-1601), *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), *As You Like It* (1623), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623), amongst others. **Ben Jonson** (1572-1637), was a contemporary dramatist as well as a poet, and well known for his satirical comic plays that depicted human flaws, such as, *Volpone, or the Fox* (1606), *The Alchemist* (1610), and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). Let us look at the Metaphysical poets next.

1.4.1 The Metaphysical Poets

Having discussed the socio-political upheavals of the first half of 17th century England in sections 1.3 and 1.4 we realise that those socio-political upheavals were also reflected in the various literary forms that developed in this century. One of the most important developments in art and literature was the Baroque in Europe while in English Literature it was Metaphysical poetry that was the outstanding feature of English verse in the first half of the century. Metaphysical poetry covered a wide range of poets who differed in their individual styles but, shared a common affinity with Baroque literature. **Samuel Johnson** (1709 - 84), the critic coined the term metaphysical poets, to describe a group of 17th century English poets who made inventive use of conceits in their poems. These poets were very skilled at making creative use of language and they dealt with themes such as 'What is religion?' and 'What is love?' They used a lot of metaphors in their poetry. The printing press had been invented earlier on and this invention allowed for the mass production of literature and the Bible particularly the *King*

James Bible (1616), which was undoubtedly the biggest beneficiary. The *King James Bible* was the Bible written in English and its influence maybe found in all types of literature. The important Metaphysical Poets were **John Donne** (1572-1631), **George Herbert** (1593 – 1633), **Richard Crashaw** (1612-49), **Andrew Marvell** (1621-78), **Henry Vaughan** (1621-95), and **Abraham Cowley** (1618-67). John Donne is well remembered for his poems such as *The Good Morrow, A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning, The Progress of the Soul* and *The Anatomy of the World, The Flea* and *The Canonization.* George Herbert's works include *Caller, The Quip and The Pulley, Easter Winds, The Altar, Trinity Sunday*, and *The Windows*. Richard Crashaw wrote *A Hymn to the Name, Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa, A Song, An Epitaph upon Husband and Wife, An Epitaph upon Husband and Wife Who died and were buried together, But Men Loved Darkness Rather than Light, Christ Crucified, and Divine Epigrams: On the Baptized Ethiopian*, amongst others. *To His Coy Mistress, the Ode upon Oliver Cromwell's return from Ireland, The First Anniversary of the Government,* and *Under His Highness, the Lord Protector*, and *The Garden* were written by Andrew Marvell. Henry Vaughan wrote *The Retreat*, and *Childhood*, While Abraham Cowley wrote *The Request, The Thraldom, The Given Love, The Spring, Written in Juice of Lemon, Inconstancy*, amongst others. A look at the Cavalier poets next.

1.4.2 The Cavalier Poets

The cavalier poets were essentially supporters of and mostly courtiers of King Charles I especially during the years of the English Civil War (1642–1648). Charles I was a great connoisseur of the fine arts, and he was the patron of those who created the type of art he appreciated. These poets allayed themselves with the King and became the Cavalier Poets. The word cavalier actually means a mounted soldier or knight. However, when this term was used for the supporters of Charles I, it came to connote brave and chivalrous young men who enjoyed a good celebration. The term was therefore, derogatory in nature. The most well known of the Cavalier poets were **Thomas Carew** (1595-1640), **Robert Herrick** (1591- 1674), **Richard Lovelace** (1617-57), and **Sir John Suckling** (1609-41) and their poetry tries to express the joy and simple gratification of celebratory things, they wanted to promote Charles I, they spoke against the Roundheads who supported the rebellion of the Parliament against the crown. Cavalier Poetry strove to create poems that were pleasurable as well as virtuous, rich in older reference and pleasing. Thomas Carew wrote poems such as *An Elegie upon the death of the Deane of Pauls, Dr. John Donne, To Saxham,* and *A Rapture* while Robert Herrick wrote *Upon His Depature Here, Cherry-ripe, Delight in Disorder* and *Upon Julia's Clothes,* while Richard Lovelace wrote poems like, *To Generall Goring, The Rose, The Ant, The Grasse-hopper, The Snayl, The Falcon, The Toad* and *Spyder,* and Sir John Suckling wrote *Ballade upon a Wedding, I prithee, send me back my heart, Out upon it, I have loved three whole days together,* and *Why so pale and wan, fond lover*? In the latter half of the 17th century, three Johns were very famous- **John Milton** (1608 -74), John **Bunyan** (1628 – 88), and **John Dryden** (1631- 1700).

1.4.3 The Three Johns of the 17th Century

John Milton (1608 – 74), was a highly skilled man - a noted essayist, a poet and a dramatist who wrote popular but at the same time controversial pieces.

For instance, he wrote *Areopagitica* in 1644, which was basically a tract condemning censorship in a sense. But his chief claim to fame is his epic *Paradise Lost* (1667) a version of which, with 12 Books was published in 1674. *Paradise Lost* is basically an epic written in the Homeric epic tradition telling the story of Satan's rebellion against God his fall from grace/ Heaven along with his rebel angels, and also about the fall of Man. He also has other famous poems and another epic but we will be studying Milton in great length in the next Unit.

John Bunyan (1628 –88) was a writer and a Puritan preacher very well remembered as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He wrote nearly sixty titles, many of which were expanded sermons. In 1660, Bunyan was arrested and jailed for twelve years, it was during this time that he wrote a spiritual autobiography called *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and also started working on *The Pilgrim's Progress.* His *Pilgrim's Progress* was one of the most published books in English.

John Dryden (1631- 1700) was as famous as Milton if not more, and many refer to Restoration England/ the Age of the Restoration as 'the Age of Dryden.' Dryden was the first poet to officially hold the position of England's 'poet laureate.' He excelled in the use of the heroic couplet as the dominant form of English verse.

Literary forms during the 17th century developed and changed very rapidly for instance the changes that took place in prose writing was one such example.

Check Your Progress 6

1. Who were the Metaphysical poets?

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2. Describe the work of the Cavalier poets.

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3. Who were the three Johns of the 17th Century and what was their contribution to Literature?

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to trace the political, literary and social history of 17th Century England one of the most tumultuous hundred years in the history of Great Britain and the history of the world. We saw the Crown coming under the Parliament, the beheading of a Monarch, the creation of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell, the civil war and finally the restoration of monarchy in 1660. This age also saw some tremendous writers such as John Milton, John Dryden, John Donne and Richard Lovelace, three literary movements – Puritan literature, Metaphysical poetry and Cavalier poetry. The next unit will examine the life and works of John Milton in detail as will the next two units after that, that will examine some of his famous works.

1.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Read sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Read section 1.3 and subsection 1.3.1 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Read section 1.3.2 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Read sections 1.3.3 and 1.3.4 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 5

1. Read section 1.3.5 carefully and then answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 6

1. Read subsection 1.4.1 carefully and then answer the question in your own words.
2. Read subsection 1.4.2 carefully and then answer the question in your own words.
3. Read subsection 1.4.3 carefully and then answer the question in your own words.

1.7 GLOSSARY

Conceit: figure of speech, usually a simile or metaphor, which forms an extremely ingenious or fanciful parallel between apparently dissimilar or incongruous objects or situations.

Electress: an Electress who was the consort of the Prince - elector of the Holy Roman Empire, one of the Empire's greatest princes.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 JOHN MILTON: LIFE & WORKS

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Understand the life of John Milton;
- Understand his writings and how they may be categorised into different phases of his writing career;
- Understand Milton's style and how different critics and authors reacted to his works; and
- Critically analyse his works.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion played a very important role during the early years of 17th Century England as we have seen in the previous unit and also dominated the national as well as the personal life of John Milton and his contemporaries. Religion was all important and everything for people – almost a matter of life and death. Nearly half of the books published between 1600 and 1640 were based on religious issues. The readers belonged to both the upper strata and the lower strata of society. John Milton was a poet with a classical background. He is the only poet who was not forced to prove himself a Puritan as he was already a Puritan. As a poet he dominates the age and he was a poet of both the *Renaissance* and the *Reformation*. Let's begin to understand his background first.

2.2 JOHN MILTON: HIS CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

John Milton was born on 9th December 1608 on Bread Street in central London at the height of the Protestant Reformation in England. His father was extremely pious and passionately devoted to music, a rather successful law writer by profession. His affluence afforded Milton an excellent education, first with private tutoring, then a private school, and finally Cambridge. Milton was a studious boy who excelled in languages and classical studies. His father had abandoned Roman Catholicism and Milton was raised a Protestant, and later became a Puritan. Many years later Milton wrote in "*The Reason of Church Government*"

> *My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature…and had me daily instructed in the grammar school, and by other masters at home.*

Though his father expected him to take orders in the church, he encouraged and nurtured Milton's poetic talents, his sheer delight in learning, and his wide-ranging scholarship. His schoolmasters taught him languages, literature, and verse writing (in Latin and Greek), and two of them were to become his friends. He also began a friendship with a schoolmate that was to be the most intense emotional attachment of his youth. He was reared in a *bourgeois* Puritan milieu that fostered in him qualities of self-discipline, diligent preparation for one's intended vocation, and responsibility before God for the development and use of one's talents, as well as a commitment to reformist, militant Protestantism. He grew up amidst the sights, sounds and stimuli of a great city like London and could provide, and was very conscious (from early childhood) about the growing religious and political conflicts in English society. These factors combined with inherent talents such as: poetic genius, a prodigious intelligence, a serious and introspective temperament, a slender body, delicate features, and weak eyes, made Milton what he was to become.

In early youth Milton developed character traits and attitudes that lasted a lifetime: lofty aspirations and a driving compulsion to emulate and surpass the best and noblest; very exacting standards of personal morality and accomplishment; high expectations from human institutions (schools, marriage, government, the church); a disposition to challenge and a resistance to institutional authorities who fell short of such standards; a strong need for and high idealism about friendship and love. He gave evidence as a schoolboy of his intellectual and poetic gifts but may have begun to worry even then, as he certainly did later, about his comparatively slow maturation.

In 1625 Milton took admission in Christ's College of Cambridge University, from where he received a Bachelor's Degree in 1629 and a Master's Degree in 1632. Generally, earning these degrees would have lead to some post in the Church of England, but Milton did not join any religious institution. For the next six years, instead, he resided with his parents, continuing his educational programme. He studied and explored world literature and learnt other languages. In 1638 he went on a tour and meet intellectuals in Italy. Milton's contemporary biographer, **John Aubrey**, reported: *'He had Auburn hair… His complexion exceeding fair - he was so fair thaey called him the Lady of Christ' College. Oval face, his eye a dark gray.'*

England at that moment was undergoing a great religious and historical turmoil which was the Puritan movement. This split the country into two warring camps - the Church of England and the King on one side and the Parliament on the other. Milton sided with the Parliament against the assertion of the monarchical rights of the King. The Puritan leaders recognised Milton's talent and engaged him in writing numerous pamphlets for their cause. He married in 1642, but his wife **Mary Powell** thereafter, returned to her Royalist family home. But when Milton was established as a poet she returned to him. In 1649 Milton was appointed as Secretary Foreign Tongues to the Council of State, an important position which involved composing the government's court papers in Latin.

Milton's personal life was full of ups and downs between 1642 and 1652 during which he started losing his eyesight. This was the time when his first wife died. He married **Katherine Woodstock** in 1656, but she also died two years later. Milton was in deep shock and was imprisoned after the death of Cromwell. Milton was ultimately rescued by the intervention of major cultural figures, including **Andrew Marvell**. By then, Charles II (1630 – 85) was king of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He was king of Scotland from 1649 until his deposition in 1651 and King of England, Scotland and Ireland from the 1660 Restoration of the monarchy until his death in 1685. After the Restoration, Milton prudently devoted himself to his poetry. In the summer of 1674 Milton published a second edition of *Paradise Lost* improvised from its original ten books to the twelve in which form we read it today. On November 12 of that year he died in London.

His famous poems are-
On His Blindness
On Shakespeare
How Soon Hath Time, and
Samson Agonistes,

to name just a few. In the next section, we shall look at Milton's writings and develop a sense of his works.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Prepare a brief introduction of John Milton.

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2.3 BRIEF IDEA OF HIS WORKS

We can divide Milton's poem into two phases. His early poems were written during his student years. He wrote *On Shakespeare* which is in short **heroic couplets**. His early **Odes** have also become very popular. Milton in *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (1629), establishes a form that is peculiarly his own. This was the Miltonic Ode. *On Time, At a Solemn Music* (1633–34), *L'Allegro, and Il Penseroso* (1632), were short poems but well discussed by his critics. In both poems, the invocation is followed by a passage, listing the companions of

the presiding goddess. **Mirth** dances across the stage - as in a merry masque - with personified playfellows:

Quips and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles (lines 27-28)

Comus (A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634), is another poem wherein, it is clear that like every poet of his time Milton too was attracted by the concept of a **masque**. *Comus* is by far the longest English masque, whereas, *Arcades (1634),* is among the shortest. In *Lycidas* (1637), like the classical writers before him, Milton begins by stating the reason for writing the poem. There is an introduction or prologue in the beginning and poem is divided into sections. We find a unique blend of pagan and Christian elements in it. It follows no stanza pattern but is written in verse paragraphs. The metre is basically ***iambic pentameter***, but there are variations in the poem.

In 1644 Milton wrote *Areopagitica* (1644), which was a speech for the freedom of unlicensed printing. Milton wrote many pamphlets and Sonnets for example – *Sonnet 9 - Lady that in the Prime of Earliest Youth", "To Mr H Lawes on his Airs", "On His Blindness,"* in which he wrote about his own perceptions on his blindness. He does not complain about the fact that his vision is failing and that he is going blind. Rather he seems to accept his fate. *"When I consider how my light is spent"* is one of the best known of Milton's sonnets. The last three lines (concluding with *"They also serve who only stand and wait*") are particularly well known, though rarely in context.

Milton's most famous work undoubtedly is *"Paradise Lost"*. The question is when did he begin writing it? He had planned a drama on man's fall from heaven but later he went on to change the genre into an epic. Milton began the actual writing of *"Paradise Lost"* as an epic once he lost his vision completely and became blind.

There are four prologues in *"Paradise Lost"* – in Books 1, III, VII, and IX. Milton states the subject of *"Paradise Lost"* as 'man's first disobedience. *"Paradise Regained"* was published in 1671.

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal tast
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth

In the next section, we shall look briefly at how Milton perceived himself and his works.

2.3.1 Milton's Comments on His Own Writings

How the world sees us and our works/ writings/ actions is one thing, and how we perceive ourselves is another. In this brief section we quote how Milton thought about himself and his works.

In the private academies of Italy…I began…to assent…to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die.

The Reason of Church-Government Urged against Prelaty (1642)

…he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well here after in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.

An apology against a pamphlet call'd A modest confutation of the Animadversions upon the remonstrant against Smectymnuus (1642)

… And indeed from my youth upward I had been fired with a zeal which kept urging me, if not to do great deeds myself, at least to celebrate them.

First Defence (1651)

2.3.2 Milton in the Eyes of Famous Authors and Poets

Milton was a public figure and a prolific pamphleteer and a poet, hence, there is plenty of material on and about him than we may find on other writers of his time. Milton created an enormous impact on the writers of his age and also on writers after him. There are numerous writers beginning from his contemporaries onwards till now who have commented and written on him in detail. Here we shall go through some of the comments on Milton and get a glimpse of Milton from the comments and writings of his contemporaries.

What Milton so boldly undertook, he performed with a superior strength of judgment and with an Imagination productive of Beauties not dreamed of before him. The Meanness (if there is any) of some Parts of the Subject is lost in the Immensity of the Poetical Invention. There is something above the reach of human Forces to have attempted the Creation without Bombast, to have described the Gluttony and Curiosity of a Woman without flatness, to have brought Probability and Reason amidst the Hurry of imaginary Things belonging to another World, and as far remote from the limits of our Notions as they are from our Earth; in short to force the Reader to say, 'If God, if the Angels, if Satan would speak, I believe they would speak as they do in Milton. The imitators of Milton, like most other imitators, are not copies but caricatures of their original; they are a hundred times more obsolete and cramp than he, and equally so in all places…

Voltaire, An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France…
From Homer to Milton (1727)

Milton's language is English, but 'tis Milton's English; 'tis Latin, 'tis Greek English; not only the words, the phraseology, the transpositions, but the ancient idiom is seen in all he writes, so that a learned foreigner will think Milton the easiest to be understood of all the English writers. This peculiar English is most conspicuously seen in Paradise Lost, for

this is the work which he long before intended should enrich and adorn his native tongue…

Alexander Pope, Postscript to the Odyssey (1723)

Great events can be hastened or retarded only by persons of elevated dignity. Before the greatness displayed in Milton's poem, all other greatness shrinks away.

Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost (1734)

The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.

Samuel Johnson, Milton, The Lives of the English Poets (1779)

Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

London, (1802), William Wordsworth

Nothing can be more unlike to my fancy than Homer and Milton. Homer is perfect prattle, tho' exquisite prattle, compared to the deep oracular voice of Milton. In Milton you love to stop, and saturate your mind with every great image or sentiment; in Homer you want to go on, to have more of his agreeable narrative.

The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb (1809- 17)

Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some person which he had conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy- not from any mistaken notion of bringing him to repent of perseverance in enmity, nut with the open and alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments…

P B Shelley, A Defence of Poetry

Check Your Progress 2

1. Explain the literary and socio-cultural background of Paradise Lost.

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2.4 CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF MILTON'S WRITINGS

The heroic poem was important in the seventeenth century. On the one hand was the Bible treated with great reverence, on the other was writings focused on patriotic nationalism as a legacy of the *renaissance*. The subject matter of the epic was normally some great act in the drama of national history, and through it, therefore, could be expressed the new found pride of nationhood, and the passion for doing great things for the nation – these were the characteristics of the *renaissance*. In a famous passage on the*Reason of Church Government,* Milton writes on his style and idea

> *… that by labour and intense study…joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. Dryden has written loftily that no poet or critic of the Renaissance could approach Milton in grandeur of purpose and intensity of self-devotion.*

In modern times, Milton's style was critiqued by **T S Eliot**. T S Eliot has both praised and criticised Milton in his book ***Milton: Style and Tradition*** (1936-1947) he says:

> *Milton's style was not modified by his subject; what is shown in greater extent in Paradise Lost may be found in Comus. One source of his peculiarity was his familiarity with the Tuscan poets, the disposition of his words is, I think, frequently Italian; perhaps sometimes combined with other tongues. Of his, at last, may be said what* ***Jonson*** *said of* ***Spenser****, that he wrote no language but had formed what Butler called a Babylonish dialect, in itself harsh and barbarous,..*

He writes to this extent that – his style is not a classic style, in that it is not the elevation of common style, by the final touch of genius, to greatness.

Eliot praised Milton in "*A Note on the Verse of John Milton*" (Martz 12-18): "[W]hat he could do well he did better than anyone else has ever done." Then Eliot added, "Milton's poetry could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever." The general thrust of Eliot's criticism is that Milton's purposely adopted a grand style that is both difficult to accomplish and complicated (in places) to understand that it causes a deterioration in the poetic style of those who are influenced by it and cannot meet its demands. "In fact," said Eliot, "it was an influence against which we still have to struggle." Eliot's prime example is from Book V as Satan addresses his followers concerning the Son:

> *Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,*
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> *If these magnific Titles yet remain*
>
> *Not merely titular, since by Decree*

Another now hath to himself ingross't
All Power, and us eclipst under the name
Of King anointed, for whom all this haste
Of midnight march, and hurried meeting here,
This only to consult how we may best
With what may be devis'd of honors new
Receive him coming to receive from us
Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,
Too much to one, but double how endur'd,
To one and to his image now proclaim'd?

(V, 772-784)

That Satan's point here is obscured by language cannot be denied. Most readers are probably unaware that a question is being asked until they see the question mark at the end of the passage. The meaning here can be worked out, but it is difficult to call such writing good. However, a great many readers of poetry do not appreciate T S Eliot's criticism. They think TS Eliot has criticised and placed Milton in the category of bad poets which is undoubtedly wrong.

Often, they overlooked the fact that Eliot did not suggest that Milton was a bad poet; rather he made others aware of the fact that the grand style that Milton used, in any other poet's hands could lead to bad poetry. It might therefore be pertinent, to read this remark of T S Eliot on Milton in the same book. He says –

> *I repeat that the remoteness of Milton's verse from ordinary speech, his invention of his own poetic language, seems to me one of the marks of his greatness. Other marks are his sense of structure, both in the general design of Paradise Lost and Samson, and in his syntax; and finally, and not least, his inerrancy, conscious or unconscious, in writing so as to make the best display of his talents, and the best concealment of his weaknesses.*

C S Lewis, in his work *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, and **Christopher Ricks** in *Milton's Grand Style* both mounted vigorous defenses of Milton's style. Lewis in particular argued that Milton needed this particular style for a "secondary epic," his use of the term secondary epic here means an epic to be read rather than the "primary epic," which was presented orally in a formal setting and meant to be heard. Lewis' basic point was that the grand style provided the formality of setting that the secondary epic, by the nature of its composition, lost.

Both Lewis and Ricks offered numerous counter examples to show that Milton's style was sublime. Certainly, aside from Shakespeare, no other writer in English could manipulate the language as Milton did. His justly famous description of ***Mulciber*** falling soars:

From Morn
To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
A Summer's day; and with the setting Sun
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star.

(I, 742-745)

Or consider the pathos, poignancy, and hopefulness that is, evident in the last few lines of the epic:

> *Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;*
> *The world was all before them, where to choose*
> *Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.*
> *They hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow,*
> *Through Eden took their solitary way.*
>
> (XII, 645-650)

However, the questions about Milton's style cannot be answered by playing a game of bad line versus good line. The answer to the question posed by Eliot and opposed by Lewis and Ricks is of such a subjective nature that can never be truly settled. Arguments about Milton's style will persist just as they do about the styles of **Henry James**, **Jane Austen**, and even **James Joyce**.

What *can* be accomplished is a clear description regarding what Milton's grand style consists of and how he made use of it in his poems. With this information, the reader can at least begin with an objective foundation on which to base his/her subjective opinion. Let us now look at how allusions and vocabulary as used by Milton.

2.4.1 Allusions and Vocabulary

The first aspect of the grand style that most readers notice is the number of allusions and references, many of which seem obscure, along with the arcane and archaic vocabulary. In just the first few lines of the poem references to "Oreb" (7), "That Shepherd" (8), "chosen seed" (8), "Siloa's Brook" (10), and "Aonian Mount" (15) occur. The purpose of the references is to extend the reader's understanding through comparison. Most readers will know some of the references, but few will know all. The question thus, arises as to whether Milton achieves his effect or the opposite. Further, words such as "Adamantine" (48), "durst" (49), "Compeer" (127), "Sovran" (246) and many others, both more and less familiar, add an imposing tone to the work. Having talked about his use of allusions and vocabulary, let's now try and look at the construction of sentences that Milton adopted as his personal style.

2.4.2 Sentence Construction

In addition to the references and vocabulary, Milton also loves to use *Latinate* constructions. English is a syntactical language using word order in sentences to produce sense. Latin, in contrast, is an inflected language in which the endings of words indicate the word's functions within a sentence, thereby, making word order less important. Latin verbs, for example, often come at the end of the sentence or a direct object may precede the subject. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton seems purposely to strive for atypical English syntactical patterns. He almost never writes in simple sentences. To a certain extent, this type of inverted, at times complex, syntax is necessary for the poetics, to maintain the correct meter, but at other times the odd syntax itself seems to be Milton's style.

In this passage from Book VIII, the exact meaning of the words is hard to pin down because of the Latinate syntax:

soft oppression seis'd
My droused sense, untroubl'd though I thought
I then was passing to my former state
Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve.

(VIII, 291-296)

Lewis, and others who admire the grand style, argue that in passages such as this, the precise meaning matters less than the impressionistic effect, that the images of drowsing, insensibility, and dissolution occur in order to show the breakdown of a conscious mind, in this case Adam's, as God produces a dream vision for him. Certainly this passage, as difficult to understand literally as it is, is not bad writing. The reader understands what Adam is experiencing. Milton's style gives grand treatment to the entire theme of *Paradise Lost.* Next we need to look at his use of extended similes.

2.4.3 Extended Similes

Another aspect of Milton's style is the extended simile. The use of epic similes goes back to **Homer** in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but Milton uses more similes and with more detail. There are many prominent writers who talked in detail on the Miltonic simile. Milton's similes run a gamut from those that seem forced (the comparison of Satan's arrival in Eden to the smell of fish [IV, 166]) to those that are perfect (Eden compared to the field where Proserpine gathered flowers [(IV, 268]). But, in all cases, a critical exploration of the simile reveals depths of unexpected meaning about the objects or persons being compared. Once again, Milton achieves a purpose with his highly involved language and similes. Let us look at his use of images and how the repetition works to either enhance or encrypt the meaning he is trying to convey next.

2.4.4 Repeated Images

Besides extended similes, Milton also traces a number of images throughout the poem. One of the most apparent is the image of the maze or labyrinth. Over and over in the poem, there are mentions of mazes — like the tangled curls of Eve's hair — which finally culminate with the serpent confronting Eve on a "*Circular base of rising folds, that tow'r'd / Fold above fold a surging maze*" (IX, 498-499). Other images also run throughout the poem as a kind of tour de force of imagination and organisation. Each image opens up new possibilities for understanding Milton's ideas.

No doubt Milton intended to write in "a grand style." That style took the form of numerous references and allusions, complex vocabulary, complicated grammatical constructions, and extended similes and images. In consciously doing these things, Milton devised a means of giving the written epic a Bardic grandeur to the original recited/ primary epic. He therefore, created an artificial style that very few writers could hope to emulate though many tried. As with the unique styles of **William Faulkner** and **James Joyce**, Milton's style is inimitable, and those who try to copy it sometimes give the original a bad name.

Milton's style is certainly his own. Elements of it can be criticised, but in terms of his accomplishment in *Paradise Lost*, it is difficult to see how such a work could be better written in some other style. Milton defined the style of the English

epic and, in a real sense, with that style, ended the genre. After Milton and *Paradise Lost*, the English epic as a genre ends.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Discuss the writings of John Milton through the different phases of his life.

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2. What do you understand by Epic? Discuss Paradise Lost as an Epic.

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at John Milton and his life, his works, how he thought of himself and how his contemporaries, and critics and writers later, thought of him. We have discussed his writings particularly his *Paradise Lost,* and his style. The way he used English, his use of allusions, repetition of images, similes, and the use of the Latin sentence structure. This unit has given you a better understanding of Milton and his works and his style.

2.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Read section 2.2, and 2.3 carefully and then answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Read section 2.4 carefully and then answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Read the whole unit carefully and then answer in your own words.
2. Read section 2.3, and 2.4 carefully and then answer in your own words.

2.7 GLOSSARY

Epic: an epic is a poem of grand scale that celebrates the deeds of some the heroic characters and personages. It is a narrative poem that is organic in structure. **Blank verse** definition, unrhymed **verse**, especially the unrhymed iambic pentameter most frequently used in English dramatic, epic, and reflective **verse.**

Ode: a poem expressing the writer's thoughts and feelings about a particular person or subject, usually written to that person or subject.

Sonnet: The word **sonnet** is derived from the Italian word "sonetto," which means a "little song" or small lyric. In poetry, a **sonnet** has 14 lines, and is written in iambic pentameter.

Puritanism: a member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship.

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UNIT 3 JOHN MILTON: LYCIDAS & SONNET XIX ON HIS BLINDNESS

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall look at John Milton's works, primarily *Lycidas*, we will also look at what an elegy as a genre is, and how to read and understand *Lycidas* as a pastoral elegy. We shall also look at understanding Milton's amalgamation of pagan images with Christian images and examine the Sonnet as a genre and the Miltonic Sonnet as well.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

To begin with let me tell you a little about the history behind the creation of this pastoral elegy *Lycidas*. **Edward King**, a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, was a very good friend of Milton's. Edward King drowned on 10th August 1637.

In 1638 a volume of memorial verses by King's companions and friends at Cambridge called *JustaEdouardo King Naufrago* was published. The first part of the volume is called '*Obsequies for Edward King, lost at sea, written by his sorrowful friends in love and remembrance*'. The title is originally in Greek and Latin but the English translation reads as mentioned above. This volume of poems dedicated to Edward King contains twenty-three pieces of Greek and Latin verse. The Second part, titled '*Obsequies to the memory of Mr. Edward King*', contains thirteen poems in English, of which Milton's is the last poem and the longest.

The preface to the volume which is in Latin explains that King's ship had struck a rock not far from the British coast and that caused the death of King. While other passengers endeavoured to save their lives, King knelt in prayer on the deck and went down with the ship. The Cambridge Manuscript contains many revisions made during the process of composition. Let us begin by looking at what an elegy and a pastoral elegy are as genres.

3.2 THE ELEGY, PASTORAL POETRY AND THE PASTORAL ELEGY

An elegy is a poem that is usually meant to honour / lament or mourn a dead person/ personality and may be written in the elegiac couplet mode. In this section, we shall look at what an elegy is, what pastoral poetry includes and what a pastoral elegy is before we begin talking about *Lycidas* as a pastoral elegy.

3.2.1 The Elegy

The word Elegy is derived from the Greek *elegus*, which is a song of bereavement sung to the accompaniment of a flute. 'Needless to say the elegiac tradition was introduced into English Literature sometime during the previous (16th) century. Most elegies follow a set pattern and have distinctive features. For instance, just as we saw in BEGC 101 and BEGC 102, like the classical epic, the elegy also begins with an invocation to a Muse. From the invocation, it then references other myths, in the process showcasing the poet's imaginative as well as creative use of language as s/he questions destiny, justice, and fate. The poet also draws a parallel between various events that occurred in the life of the deceased person as well as in his/her own life thereby permitting the poet to make metaphorical references. At the end of the elegy the poet tries to provide comfort and solace to the family and friends left behind. Needless to say, an elegy is a poem that deals with and expresses sorrow, grief, sadness, and laments a personal loss. The elegy is quite similar to an epitaph, or an ode or a eulogy but there are subtle differences between each genre. For instance, the epitaph written over a tombstone on a grave is very brief; the ode has only one function and that is to exalt or praise the dead, and a eulogy is usually written in very formal prose. A traditional elegy follows three stages of loss: in the beginning there is the lament, where obviously, grief and sorrow at the death of the person are expressed, this lament is followed by a stage wherein, the dead person is idealised, praised and admired, and concludes with providing consolation and solace to grieving hearts. **W H Auden**'s elegy for **W B Yeats** called "*In Memory of W B Yeats*," is a very good example of this form of elegy writing. The other well known elegies are "*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*", by **Thomas Gray**, "*Fugue of Death*" by **Paul Celan**, **Walt Whitman**'s "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*", and his elegy for President **Abraham Lincoln** "*O Captain! My Captain*"! Let us now look at a pastoral elegy and see if there is any difference or similarity between the two.

3.2.2 Pastoral Poetry

The term pastoral elegy consists of two words – pastoral and elegy. We have already discussed what an elegy is. The word pastoral is derived from the Latin word "pastor", meaning "shepherd" referring to a literary work that deals with country life or the rustic or the bucolic life associated with raising sheep and with shepherds. Pastoral poetry as a genre or sub genre of elegiac poetry is conventionalised; meaning it is highly crafted and thereby stylised, unreal and therefore artificial; it deals with an idealised version of bucolic life as opposed to a more realistic view of country life with all its associated hardships and poverty. The origins of pastoral poetry are obviously from the classics – Greek and Latin (remember BEGC 102) and date as far back as the 3rd Century BCE, with the writings of the Greek poet **Theocritus'** (308- 240 BCE), first and second *Idylls* wherein he talks about rustic life in Sicily and remember, that he is writing for an audience that is very sophisticated and living in the city of Alexandria while talking about country life and rustics. Followed by **Moschus**' '*Lament for Bion*', **Bion**'s '*Lament for Adonis*', and later in the 1st century BCE, **Virgil** (70 – 19 BCE), was to continue with the tradition of writing poems in Latin in which he depicted himself and his friends as shepherds living a simple, rustic life in his *Eclogues* especially the *Fifth* and the *Tenth Eclogues* which basically meant a dialogue between two shepherds, in his work '*Bucolics*', (again think back to BEGC 102, Block IV).

Among the *Renaissance* pastorals, he was indebted to **Petrarch**'s (1304 -74), fifth and seventh '*Eclogue*' which introduced ecclesiastical satire into pastoral poetry, **Castiglione**'s (1478 – 1529), Latin elegy, '*Alcon*' and **Sannazaro**'s (1458 – 1530), first *piscatory* eclogue where, as in *Lycidas*, the subject meets his death by drowning and where the lament is spoken by a character named *Lycidas*. In English, the chief influence is **Spenser**'s (1552 – 99), '*Shepheardes Calender*', notably in Spenser's lament for **Dido** in the *November Eclogue* of the '*Shepheardes Calender*' which is indebted to **Marot**'s (1450 – 1526), lament on the death of **Loys**, the French Queen. The meditation on fame parallels that in *Lycidas* and the passage on the true poet and the nature of his reward has its parallel in the *October Eclogue*. Milton is also indebted to Spenser in his use of ecclesiastical allegory for satire. For example, the *May, July and September Eclogues* satirises unholy priests and corruption in the Church. There is a close resemblance between the attack on the clergy in *Lycidas* and the *May Eclogue*. In *Lycidas*, the most reverend **St Peter** as the last among the procession of mourners and his prophecy of doom on false bishops and pastors elevates the poetic mode. The pastoral tenor is restored with the invocation of **Alpheus**, the Sicilian muse of pastoral poetry. By inclusion of the Christian theme, Milton extends the structure and scope of the genre of pastoral elegy initiated by Petrarch and Spenser. **Shakespeare** (1564 - 1616), too made use of the pastoral conventions in his works particularly in works such as *As You Like It* (1599), *Cymbeline* (1611), and *The Winter's Tale* (1623). Some of the themes that pastoral poetry dealt with are love, seduction, death and loss, grieving, the difference between the city/ court and the country, (usually as an ideal country/ rustic world, versus the corrupt city). Pastoral poetry includes the eclogue, such as, those written by Virgil (a dialogue between two shepherds/ a shepherd and a shepherdess). Or it could include an elegy that lamented a dead friend. Or a singing contest; or the pastoral monologue could be included that praised/ exalted or lamented or complained about being love sick. Moving on, let's look at what a pastoral elegy is in a little more detailed manner.

3.2.3 Pastoral Elegy

Branching off from pastoral poetry is the pastoral eclogue and branching off from the pastoral eclogue is the pastoral elegy, which is an expression of the poet's sorrow at the loss of a friend or an important person/ celebrity/ personality. Since pastoral poetry itself is so conventionalised, similarly, the pastoral elegy that is derived from pastoral poetry is also as conventionalised and includes certain features of the elegy such as the invocation to the Muse, an expression of the poet's (in this case "shepherd's"), grief; praises/ exaltation of the dead friend/ personality/ celebrity (once again "shepherd" in this case); insulting/ abusing of death; the effects of the death upon the natural environment; and ultimately, the poet's ("shepherd's") acceptance of the certainty/ finality of death and his hopes for life everlasting. Pastoral elegies are also known to include other elements such as a funeral procession with the mourners following the coffin to its resting place; some satirical comments on a topical issue hence, an aside from the general tone of the poem; the use of a refrain; the use of flowers as symbols; and rhetorical questioning.

Renaissance poets of the 15th and 16th centuries used and expanded the pastoral mode to include both romance and drama. Pastoral drama and romance did not have a precedent in Classical Literature but came to be influenced by Italian Renaissance writers such as **Torquato Tasso** (1544 – 95) with his pastoral dramatic poem *Aminta* (1573) and **Camillo Guarino Guarini** (1624 – 83), of the pastoral tragicomedy *Il Pastor Fido* (1590) fame. In English Literature we have Pastoral romances by **Sir Philip Sidney** (1554-86), *Arcadia* (1590) and **Thomas Lodge** (1558 – 1625), *Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie* which was the inspiration behind Shakespeare's *As You Like It*; **John Fletcher**'s (1579 – 1625), *The Faithful Shepherdess* and **Ben Jonson**'s (1572-1637), *The Sad Shepherd* (unfinished at the time of Jonson's death in 1637). As we just saw, Shakespeare's contemporaries used classical pastoral poetry too for instance, **Christopher Marlowe**'s (1564 -93), "*The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*" (1599), Sir Walter Raleigh's (1552 – 1618), "*The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd*" (1600),and **Thomas Campion**'s (1567- 1620),"*I Care Not For These Ladies*" (1601), then **Edmund Spenser**'s (1552 – 99), *Eclogue 4 The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) and **Mary Herbert**'s (1561-1621), "*A Dialogue Between Two Shepherds*" (1599) and finally **John Milton**'s *Lycidas* (1637) a pastoral elegy lamenting the loss of a friend.

The convention of the pastoral elegy was to continue till the 19th century with the works of poets such as **Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792 – 1822, a Romantic poet) in *Adonais* (1821), which is a pastoral elegy on the death of another Romantic poet **John Keats** (1795 – 1821), and the Victorian poet **Matthew Arnold** (1822 – 88), in *Thyrsis* (1865) a poem written to commemorate his friend **Arthur Hugh Clough** (1819 – 61), who died at the young age of 42 years. Interesting fact, the character, *Thyrsis*, is a shepherd in Virgil's *Seventh Eclogue*, who loses a singing contest against *Corydon*. Elegies however, have continued to be written even in the last century (20th century), however, what needs to be remembered is that the modern poet is not very conventional in his/her use of the elegiac form. The example that comes to mind is **W H Auden**'s (1907 – 73), elegy on **W B Yeats** (1865 – 1939). If you read the poem you will realise that Auden turns the conventional elegiac form completely on its head and treats it ironically as does

another modern poet **Dylan Thomas** (1914 – 53). Having traced the history of the pastoral elegy and stated that *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy, let us jump right in and explore Milton's *Lycidas*.

3.2.4 *Lycidas* as a Pastoral Elegy

In genre, theme and structure, *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy, embodying a set of classical conventions which was prevalent during the *Renaissance*. The classical pastoral elegy typically invokes the Muse, expresses the poet shepherd's grief at his friend's usually premature death, eulogises him and indicts death. All of nature mourns the dead shepherd's loss. The lament generally includes the question, '*Where were ye Nymphs*?' In the procession of appropriate mourners, each utters his grief. The elegy concludes with the pastoral consolation, or change of tone from sadness to joy in the thought of the dead shepherd's immortality. The *Renaissance* added the convention of the poet and his friend as companion shepherds grazing their flocks. Since Christianity also uses pastoral imagery, prominently in the metaphor of the 'Good Shepherd' for Christ and in the laity as the flock of sheep, the shepherds of pastoral poems came to represent not merely poets but priests too. The Christian pastoral also introduced ecclesiastical satire allegorically to attack the corruption of the church.

In keeping with classical precedents, the prologue of *Lycidas* states the situation, sets a melancholic mood and invokes the **Muses**, the nine daughters of **Zeus** and **Mnemosyne**, who inhabit places near the Pierian spring. In lines 85-7, he invokes **Arethusa** and **Mincius** that represent the two sources of pastoral elegy-**Theocritus** and **Virgil**. Critics have noted that *Lycidas* is most closely modeled on Virgil's *Tenth Eclogue* which is an imitation of Theocritus' first *Idyl*. The manner in which Milton addresses the nymphs in *Lycidas* echoes the questions which are used in the formal lament by both Theocritus and Virgil. However, there is a significant difference between Edward King and his two Classical predecessors viz. **Daphnis** and **Cornelius Gallusm** - King's death is an accident and not due to fatal error. Milton does not merely imitate but transmutes the original to develop his central themes. The shears that cut the thread of life belonged to the Fates: **Clotho** spun, **Lachesis** carded, **Atropos** cut the thread when the time came. Milton transfers the shears of the Fates to the **Furies** who were also three in number but their function was different. Furies are avenging deities who bring vengeance and wreak havoc in the lives of those they visit.

The Furies were the three goddesses of vengeance: **Tisiphone** (avenger of murder), **Megaera** (the jealous) and **Alecto** (constant anger). They were also called the Daughters of the Night, but were actually the daughters of **Uranus** and **Gaea**. Another name for them is the **Erinyes**. Without mercy, the Furies would punish all crime including the breaking of rules considering all aspects of society. They would strike the offenders with madness and they never stopped following criminals. The worst of all crimes were patricide or matricide, and first and foremost, the Furies would punish this kind of crime. Though the *Furie*s spent most of their time searching for their prey, Milton blinds them to suggest purposeless, mindless malignity to highlight the cosmic injustice of Edward King's death. In the next section, we shall look at the poem *Lycidas.*

Check Your Progress 1

1. What is an elegy?

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2. What is pastoral poetry?

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3. What is a pastoral elegy?

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4. Examine Lycidas as an example of a pastoral elegiac poem/ a pastoral elegy.

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3.3 *LYCIDAS*: SUMMARY AND NOTES

The theme of *Lycidas* is inseparably connected with its wondrous architecture. In the *Trinity Manuscript*, Milton had arranged the poem in eleven clearly marked sections. These verse paragraphs may be grouped into three distinct movements. The first movement laments the death of Lycidas, the poet shepherd, and by transference, the poet's own possible frustration of disciplined poetic ambition by premature death. It is resolved by Phoebus's assurance of heavenly requital. The second movement laments Lycidas as the priest shepherd, the sufferings of a sincere shepherd and the fold in a corrupt church. It is resolved by St Peter's reference to the' two-handed engine' of divine retribution (among multiple interpretations, the chief is that it signifies the great two-handed sword wielded by Michael against God's enemies).The third movement concludes with the apotheosis of Lycidas which provides the final reassurance and unites the themes of the preceding movements in the ultimate reward of the true poet priest.

3.3.1 The Prologue (Lines 1-24)

The prologue (ll.1-24) states the situation and sets the mood of the poem. The young poet shepherd Lycidas has died prematurely and his fellow shepherds must gather to honour the dead. The opening line emphasises the speaker's reluctance

to write premature poetry. The laurel, the myrtle and the ivy are evergreen which are symbolic of poetic fame. While the laurel symbolises triumph, the myrtle with its darker leaf is associated with mourning. The motif of lamentation and triumph are significant in the poem. The reference to 'season due' and 'mellowing year' suggests the changing season, with their traditional association of harvest and seed time, death and regeneration which is a major theme in the poem's movement from death and lamentation to the triumph of the apotheosis. Following classical precedents, in the prologue, Milton invokes the Muses, the nine daughters of **Zeus** and **Mnemosyne** who inhabit places near the Pierian Spring, to inspire him to write lofty verse for his dear friend. A fellow poet may also be inspired to commemorate his death in verse.

LYCIDAS

In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunatly drown'd in his Passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion foretels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,
I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme. 10
He must not flote upon his watry bear
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of som melodious tear.
Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
Begin, and somwhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,
So may som gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn, 20
And as he passes turn, 21
And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.
For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock by fountain, shade, and rill.

3.3.2 Section I (Lines 23-65)

In the first main section, Milton fancifully allegorises his companionship with King at Cambridge in conventional pastoral language. They spent many sunny

hours together from dawn till sunset and their melodious songs won appreciation particularly from Old Damoetas who was perhaps **Joseph Meade**, a great Bible scholar and popular Professor at Cambridge. The formal lament begins in l.37 with repetition of the phrase, 'now thou are gone'. He introduces the pastoral convention of nature mourning the shepherd's death. The woods and caves overgrown with wild thyme and straggling vine are silent; they no longer echo the shepherd's song. The willows and hazel copses are still as they no longer fan their leaves with joy at the sound of his music. Lycidas is an emblem of nature's beauties that are *nipt in the bud: the rose, lambs and flowers*. Lycidas' loss is to the shepherd's 'ears'-the emphasis is on the role of the poet in producing harmonious joy. Milton again follows convention in the rhetorical question posed to the nymphs that suggest they were negligent as guardians. King was drowned off the north coast of Wales. Milton mentions Mona (Anglesey) identified as the home of the Druids to conflate the Classical and Christian with the Druidic tradition of ancient Wales where the poet I was also priest, philosopher and prophet. He glorifies the poet and his role in society.

The speaker's apostrophe to the guardian nymphs is followed by the reflection that it is idle to blame them for Lycidas' death, since even the Muse Calliope could not save her son, the supreme poet *Orpheus*, from being torn to pieces by the enraged Bacchantes.

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
We drove a field and both together heard
What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright 30
Toward Heav'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.
Mean while the Rural ditties were not mute,
Temper'd to th'Oaten Flute;
Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,
From the glad sound would not be absent long,
And old Damoetaslov'd to hear our song.

But O the heavy change, now thou art gon,
Now thou art gon, and never must return!
Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o'regrown, 40
And all their echoes mourn.
The Willows, and the Hazle Copses green,
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft layes.
As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrop wear,

When first the White thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherds ear.

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
Clos'do're the head of your lov'dLycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the steep,
Where your old Bards, the famous Druids ly,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream:
Ay me, I fondly dream!
Had ye bin there—for what could that have don?
What could the Muse her self that Orpheus bore,
The Muse her self, for her inchanting son
Whom Universal nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His goary visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore.

Alas! What boots it with uncessantcare
To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,

3.3.3 Section II (Lines 66-84)

Lines 66 - 84 are often referred to as digression from the main subject. The speaker speculates on the value of his disciplined dedication to poetry, denying himself the pleasures and amusement of youth. 'Shepherd's trade' signifies both pastor and poet as King was a poet who had taken Holy Orders, while Milton had also seriously considered that possibility. He interrogates his preferences and ponders whether it would not have been better to dally or write poetry of dalliance instead of labouring at sublime poetry. In classical mythology, the three Fates control life. Clotho holds the distaff, Lachesis spins the thread of one's life and Atropos slits it. Milton transfers the shears of Atropos to one of the three Furies who are the avenging goddesses with sharp, searching eyes to spot their prey and he makes them blind to emphasise the irrational cruelty of premature death. The speaker speculates that blind Fury cruelly prevents by death what Fame spurs us on to achieve. In l.75-6, echoing Virgil's *Eclogue* vi 3-4 where Apollo touched the poet's ears to warn him against impatience, Phoebus rejects his hasty view and asserts that true Fame is rewarded in Heaven, not Earth.

And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,
Were it not better don as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of Noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes:

But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze.
Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
And slits the thin spun life. But not the praise,
Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;
Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumour lies, 80
But lives and spreds aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfetwitnes of all judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.

3.3.4 Section III (Lines 85-131)

The second section begins with the invocation of the Theocritean Arethusa, a fountain at Syracuse, and of Virgil's native river, the Mincius, symbolising respectively the muses of Sicilian and Latin pastorals, partly to suggest that the foregoing philosophical and ethical digression has a higher source of inspiration than the pastoral muses. Again, perhaps to apologise for the breach of decorum he has committed by writing, during the digression, in a strain higher than is appropriate to pastoral poetry and also possibly to pay his tribute to Theocritus and Virgil who represent the two sources of pastoral poetry which is now restored with the classical convention of a procession of mourners. The first to appear is Neptune's herald who announces that it was not the waves or winds but the ship, 'that fatall and perfidious Bark' that destroyed Lycidas. The procession continues and Camus, personification of the slow flowing river Cam, appears. He represents Cambridge University and laments the loss of his dearest child. The last of the mourners is St Peter who was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee before he became a disciple of Christ. He is symbolically referred to as a pilot implying his leadership of the Christian Church as its founder. Some scholars opine that the pilot refers to Christ. St Peter holds the keys of the kingdom given to him by Christ. The golden key admits the righteous to God's kingdom while the iron locks out the unworthy. Traditionally regarded as the first bishop of Rome, St Peter is described as wearing a mitre. He bestows praise on Lycidas as the true shepherd priest who would have devoted his life to the welfare of his flock. His speech is often considered the second digression in the poem which introduces ecclesiastical satire. It denounces the false bishop and clergy and laments the plight of the laity. The invective is directed mainly against the hireling shepherds who sneak into the fold with base motives; and the indictment of the false bishops and pastors as 'blind mouths' is an example of Milton's art of compression. **Ruskin** explains in '*Sesame and Lilies*' i22:' *A Bishop means a person who sees. A pastor means a person who feeds. The most unbishoply character a person may have is therefore to be blind. The most unpastoral is instead of feeding, to want to be fed, to be a Mouth.' The sheep under their charge are left unfed. The hungry wolf lies in wait for them* which are references to the Roman Catholic Church ready to engulf the sheep neglected by Protestant pastors. Biblically, the wolf suggests greed and destruction. St Peter darkly prophesises their doom with reference to the 'two-

handed engine' of divine retribution which has been variously interpreted. It is most probably the great two-handed sword wielded by Michael against God's enemies which is symbolic of divine justice and also of death.

O Fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'dfloud,
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocall reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood:
But now my Oate proceeds,
And listens to the Herald of the Sea
That came in Neptune's plea,
He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Fellon winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And question'd every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked Promontory,
They knew not of his story,
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,
The Ayr was calm, and on the level brine,
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.
It was that fatall and perfidious Bark
Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,
His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.
Ah; Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?
Last came, and last did go,
The Pilot of the Galilean lake,
Two massy Keyes he bore of metals twain,
(The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain)
He shook his Miter'dlocks, and stern bespake,
How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
Of other care they little reck'ning make,
Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
Blind mouthes! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least

That to the faithfullHerdmans art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
Besides what the grim Woolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,
But that two-handed engine at the door, 130
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

3.3.5 Section IV (Lines 132-185)

The last section begins with an invocation, for the same reasons as after the first digression, of the river Alpheus, lover of Sicilian Arethusa, and of the pastoral Muse to let the Sicilian vales use all their flowers to strew Lycidas' hearse. The celebrated catalogue of flowers, an afterthought in the Cambridge Manuscript, follows signifying the lament of nature for the dead shepherd. Ruskin in 'Modern Painters' notes the similarity of the catalogue of flowers with that in '*Winter's Tale*' Act IV sc. iv. W L Thompson points out that Milton's passage is more indebted to Jonsons' *Pan's Anniversary*'. It also echoes the '*Shepheardes Calender*', April Eclogue 136-44. The speaker acknowledges that the lamentation of nature is a figment of the imagination like decking his hearse as Lycidas's body has been swept far away, perhaps to the Hebrides, to the depths of the ocean, to Bellerus that is, the land's end, or to the mount where Michael gazes. From St Michael's Mount, a fortified rock off the Cornish coast, the archangel Michael is imagined as guarding England while looking towards the Spanish coast. It suggests protecting Britain from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The speaker asks Michael to look to Lycidas with pity. The dolphins invoked to carry the body to the shore connote loving care and compassion. Associated with St Michael, Lycidas is invested with a sense of triumph. His passing away, like the setting of the sun, is but a prelude to his resurrection, like the reappearance of the morning sun in all its glory. The last section concludes with his apotheosis, a convention introduced by Virgil in '*Eclogue V*'. Milton's expression of a Christian consolation does not preclude pagan imagery. Through Christ's merciful grace, the poet priest shepherd is ushered into the blessed kingdom of God and worships the Lamb with those saints 'in solemn troop' who sang the 'unexpressive nuptial song' of the fourteenth chapter of Revelations in the *New Testament*. Lycidas is transformed into a beneficent influence, a protector of the travelers through the perilous seas. Thus, Milton unites even the apparently digressive themes in the ultimate reward of the true poet priest.

Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,
And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast
Their Bels, and Flourets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low where the milde whispers use,

Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enameld eyes,
That on the green terf suck the honiedshowres,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowres.
Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies.
The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Gessamine,
The white Pink, and the Pansiefreakt with jeat,
The glowing Violet.
The Musk-rose, and the well attir'd Woodbine.
With Cowslips wan that hang the pensive hed,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
Bid Amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
And strew the LaureatHerse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ah me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurl'd
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 deny'd,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;
Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth.
And, O ye Dolphins, waft the haples youth.

Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more,
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watryfloar,
So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With Nectar pure his oozy Lock's he laves,

And hears the unexpressive nuptiall Song,
In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move, 180
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
Now Lycidas the Shepherds weep no more;
Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

3.3.6 Epilogue (Lines 186-193)

Following classical precedents, Milton adds a brief epilogue (a stanza of ottavarima) in the third person. The narrator states that the unknown shepherd has sung all day in memory of his dear friend. The day and dirge are over and tomorrow brings new pastures and new labours.

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Okes and rills,
While the still morn went out with Sandals gray,
Hetouch'd the tender stops of various Quills,
With eager thought warbling his Dorick lay:
And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills, 190
And now was dropt into the Western bay;
At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:
To morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Attempt a summary of Lycidas.

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3.4 *LYCIDAS*: SUBSTANCE, CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Let us look at *Lycidas* the poem critically having understood what the elegy and the pastoral elegy are and having studied the poem. In *Lycidas*, the highest pagan ethics is conflated with the Christian as true fame can only be awarded by a divine and infallible judge - by Jove and by inference, or by Christ himself. Pan, the god of shepherds in Virgil's poem, has an equivalent in Peter as the protector of his flock. With St Peter's explicitly Christian speech, Milton brilliantly transmutes the original. The word 'engine' suggests rational contrivance and assertion of a purposefulness that righteously avenges evil. It modifies the sense of cosmic injustice aroused earlier by 'the blind Fury'. The weary sense of

repetitiveness in '*Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more'*, and the numerous other suggestions in the opening lines of un-readiness and of the repellent but unavoidable obligations to act, are modulated into the opposite feelings of '*Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more*'. The continuity in 'no more' to emphasise the transmutation from grief to joy is renewed at l.165 and l.182. In the last paragraph, the 'smite' of l.131 is replaced by 'might' in 173 which is qualified by suggestions of bravery and triumphant strength in the word 'dear'. *Lycidas* is associated with the brilliant sun image of ll.168-171 through Christ as the perfect shepherd, king and judge. Milton echoes *Revelation 7:17* which connects Christ with the pastoral and the kingly in association with feelings of tenderness, redemption and self-offering: '*For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters :and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes*'.

God acts in a manner that suggests redemption and pardon to bring new and greater good out of evil. While divine justice permits suffering and loss it is also the fountain of overflowing generosity. The classical convention of pastoral consolation is expressed with splendid and luminous clarity in Christian terms that include the pagan culture of pre-Christian England. The Christian Archangel and the classical dolphin symbols combine and are inextricably conjoined. The setting and rising of the sun - a pagan symbol of re-birth; Christ evoked by the image of water is again emblematic of the concept of Christian resurrection. The pagan shepherd leaves the world for groves, streams and nectar of the Isles of the Blest. The Christian soul ascends to the kingdom of Heaven with brooks of nectar, where he hears the inexpressible bridal song of the marriage of the Lamb with which in '*Paradiso*' **Dante** enters into the communion of saints. Milton's vision of 'large recompense' in the apotheosis includes the idea of justice: 'recompense' comes from 'pendere'. 'Engine' and 'Genius' are also linked etymologically, since both derive from 'ingenium'. The suggestion of intelligent contrivance in 'engine' is absorbed, enlarged and elevated in 'genius''- *Lycidas* becomes a tutelary deity who 'shalt be good/To all that wander in the perilous flood' (ll, 184-185). The agonised protest against cosmic injustice at Lycidas' premature and violent death is resolved with the serene perception of the physical world as a divine order that is just and benevolent despite its manifold perils.

Following classical precedents, Milton adds an epilogue in the third person, while the poem is in the first person. As in Virgil's tenth *Eclogue*, after the invocation in the prologue, there is no mention of the speaker until the end. Both poems close with eight lines stanza of *ottavarima,* similar in spirit, referring to the end of the day and the departure of the shepherd. These lines metrically as well as thematically separate, produces a striking shift in perspective. It has the effect of a choric commentary and highlights the fluid passages of lyric and dialogue. The self distancing of the text also suggests the poet's sense of closure-retention of the pastoral and also a search beyond it. The precedents of Virgil and Spenser suggest that the pastoral genre is preparatory for the sublime genre such as the '*Aeneid*' and the '*Faerie Queen'*. Milton never used it again in English.

Metrically *Lycidas* is a combination of regularity and freedom. The predominant rhythm is iambic pentameter varied occasionally by the introduction of the three foot line. The poem is made up of eleven verse paragraphs of lengths varying from eight to thirty-three lines. The rhyme varies from couplet form to intricate

stanzaic arrangements, even ten unrhymed lines. The elegy opens with fourteen line stanza which appears a variation of the sonnet form, while it concludes with a stanza of *ottavarima*. **F T Prince** pointed out that Milton applies the principles he found in the *canzone* tradition to 'construct a large-scale lyric such as had never been achieved in English.'(146). Prince was the first to argue that what **David Masson** called Milton's 'free rhythmic paragraphs' may be a variation of traditional *canzone* composed of several verse paragraphs which follow an intricate and identical rhyme scheme while the poem concludes with a shorter unit called *commiato*. In a *canzone*, sound is fused with sense as different stanzas and different parts within a stanza are linked by 'key' rhymes on which the sense turns. Milton uses such 'key' or connecting rhymes in his poem which rhyme with preceeding rhymes even as they connect to a new series of phonetic reverberations. The 'smite' of l.131 and 'might' in l.173; the irregular rhymes that bring three important words into association: Lycidas', 'Genius', 'perilous', are examples of this usage.

Milton's adaption of the *canzon*e was influenced by the irregularly rhymed passages of lyric and dialogue in Tasso's '*Aminta*' and Guarini's '*Pastor Fido*'. He was also influenced by Italian pastoral verse, as represented by the eclogues of **Sannazaro** and **Berardino Rota** (1509 – 75), in attempting to evolve a poetic diction equivalent to Virgil, and to combine the tradition of the *canzone* with that of the classical eclogue. Like Spenser, Milton adds a pastoral colouring to the poem through the use of words like 'swain', 'rathe', 'scrannel', 'dafodillies', 'quills', 'oaten', 'guerdon', 'pledge' in the sense of child from the local rustic dialect. Milton's own coinages are 'inwrought' and 'freaked'.

Several critics have argued that '*Lycidas*' is a dramatic lyric and is therefore, best read as dramatic speech. **Lowry Nelson**, for example, has emphasised the dramatic character of 'Lycidas' in '*Baroque Lyric Poetry*'. The poem's closeness to the *madrigal* form (which is usually a composition for two or three voices in simple harmony) is evident in its skillful manipulation of voices. There are multiple voices and the swain himself has at least two voices - one observing and the other reflecting or speculating. The blurring of boundaries between Lycidas, the swain and the poet enables the inclusion of personal beliefs and emotions. While the references to **Amaryllis** and **Neaera** capture the tonal inflections of *L'Allegro*, the strictly regular iambic rhythm articulates *Penseroso*'s '… need to scorn delights and live laborious days'. The voices of Phoebus, Cam, and St Peter are conspicuous. Phoebus' tone of righteous belief is as distinctive as Cam's rhetorical lament. St Peter's bitter invective and thunderous prophecy in the manner of the Old Testament prophets shatters the gentle modulations of Pastoral poetry. The epilogue delivered in the third person by an onlooker provides another voice that expands the range of accents and creates a sudden shift in perspective by making the impersonal final speaker the focal voice.

Lycidas exhibits the influence of Pindaric odes in its sudden shifts in subject, its unusual junctures, its use of usual allegorised myths and its multiple poetic voices. Its structure also resembles the five – part structure of the ode, namely, exordium, proposition, confirmation, digression and epilogue. Like the Pindaric ode, 'Lycidas is exalted in subject, feeling and style. The compressed re-telling of *Orpheus*' story resembles a brief Pindaric myth and like a typical myth in a Pindaric ode, Milton does not recount the *Orpheus* myth in its entirety but dwells only on its horrific conclusion.

Milton was profoundly influenced by classical literature. Pastoral conventions enabled him to idealise and simultaneously to infuse his personal anxieties and ecclesiastical passion to expand, enrich and renew the genre of pastoral elegy in *Lycidas*. His personal emotions and ecclesiastical passion are so vividly expressed that **E M W Tillyard** claims that the real subject of *Lycidas* is Milton himself - his fear of death and of his bitter scorn of the clergy. **David Daiches** points out that 'Milton universalises his subject which is man in his creative capacity, as Christian humanist poet-priest'. *Lycidas* is one of the finest pastorals in English and **J H Hanford** affirms the truth of **Edward Phillips**' tribute: "Never was the loss of a friend so elegantly lamented!" Having looked at *Lycidas* in detail, we shall now look at Milton's famous Sonnet *On His Blindness* next.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Attempt a critical analysis of Lycidas.

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2. 'Lycidas is blend of pagan and Christian images'. Comment.

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3.5 SONNET XIX ON HIS BLINDNESS

Let us begin by understanding what a sonnet is as we are going to examine Milton's *Sonnet XIX On His Blindness* in this section. Before we interpret the poem we will need to understand the form in which it is written – which is the Sonnet.

3.5.1 The Sonnet

A sonnet is a poem consisting of fourteen line with a fixed rhyme scheme and it very often makes use of the iambic pentameter, which as discussed in BEGC 102, is five sets of unstressed syllables followed by stressed syllables for a ten-syllable line. Sonnets were first written in Italy as far back as the 13th century by the poet **Giacomo da Lentini** (1210-60). The word sonnet is believed to have been derived from the oldest romance language Occitan wherein, *sonet* meant "little song." Over time, the sonnet form has evolved. There are two main types

of Sonnet Forms – the Italian/ the Petrarchan and the English or the Shakespearean. Let us begin by looking briefly at the Italian/ Petrarchan sonnet next. Sonnets usually deal with the theme of religion, of love, or political issues. These early Italian poets were primarily influenced by the love poems of the troubadours from Provence, and from there on the influence of the sonnet form spread to Tuscany and other parts of Italy. Petrarch's *Canzoniere* — is a very good example of the Petrarchan sonnet at its height and is a sequence of 317 sonnets, addressed to his beloved Laura.

3.5.2 The Italian/ Petrarchan Sonnet

The Italian sonnet consists of eight lines / *octave* followed by a group of six lines/ the sestet and is based on the original sonnet form invented by **da Lentini**. The Petrarchan sonnet too consists of the octave / the group of eight lines, followed by a sestet /group of six lines. The usual rhyme scheme being: abbaabba for the octave and cddcdd, cddece, or cddccd. The first eight lines/ the octave introduces a problem/conflict/ asks a question/ expresses an emotional tension, and then the sestet tries to solve the problem/, answers the question/ or relieves the tension.

The sonnet form was introduced in England in the 16th century by Sir **Thomas Wyatt**, **Henry Howard**, Earl of Surrey, **Sir Philip Sidney** and Shakespeare but Milton revived the Italian form of the Sonnet. The Elizabethan/ English/ Shakespearean sonnet form is composed of three quatrains, three segments of four lines each, with an independent rhyme scheme, and ends with a rhymed couplet. Among the notable Elizabethan sequences are Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), **Samuel Daniel's** *Delia* (1592), **Michael Drayton**'s *Idea's Mirrour* (1594), and **Edmund Spenser**'s *Amoretti* (1591). The sonnet form was to continue in English Literature, with **William Wordsworth** (1770-1850), **John Keats** (1795- 1821), **Elizabeth Barrett Browning** (1806 -61), **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** (1828 -82)**,** and **Rainer Maria Rilke** (1875 – 1926), who is, amongst the most famous of the 20th century sonnet writers. In the next subsection, we shall look at Milton's Sonnets.

3.5.3 Milton's Sonnets

Milton practiced both styles of sonnet writing – the Italian and the English styles. Milton's sonnet structure was different from Shakespeare's which consisted of three quatrains and a couplet. Milton's Sonnet "*On His Blindness*" is a Petrarchan sonnet, a lyric poem with fourteen lines. This type of sonnet, popularised by the Italian priest **Petrarch** (1304-1374), has a rhyme scheme of abba, abba, cde, and cde (Two lines in the octave and three in the sestet). Another important aspect of the Shakespearean sonnet is that there is a turn, in the third quatrain, whereas in Milton's sonnet style, you will recognise the turn in the middle of the eighth line. The central turn in the sonnet helps the thought process to turn on itself in the concluding lines of the poem.

3.5.4 Summary of *"On His Blindness"* and Analysis

This is one of Milton's most celebrated personal sonnets. Hence, the date of composition assumes significance when we try and understand the mood of the poet and it also modifies our interpretation of the poem. The available evidence points to three possible dates - 1644, 1651-2 and 1655.

John Milton's poem "*On His Blindness*" is an autobiographical sonnet in which he meditates on his loss of sight. This sonnet is an intensely religious poem with an abundance of Biblical quotations and an affirmation of Christian faith and virtue.

Sonnet 19: ***When I consider how my light is spent***

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent

That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed

And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

Summary

Milton is reflecting on his steady loss of vision and he begins the poem with the assumption that he will not be able to serve God or fulfill God's work because of the loss of his sense of sight. As we read further we find out that Milton has a change of thought and he starts believing that God still wants him to continue his work despite his rapidly deteriorating sight. Eventually, by the time we reach the end of the poem we realise that Milton believes very firmly that he is indeed carrying on with serving God like the angels.

He begins the sonnet by stating that half his life, he has spent serving humanity, but with losing his sight, the rest of his life will be dark. He will not be able to see anymore. He also comments on his one talent which was writing, which will now cease as he has become blind. In these lines we see the struggle of the poet in accepting the reality of his blindness.

In the second verse, he stops lamenting the loss of vision and begins wondering whether he can still serve God, or whether God still wants Milton to serve him? The poet's agitation in the earlier lines is countered by "patience" which means calmness that is essential for dispassionate deliberation. He also wonders whether he is being foolish by desiring to serve God with his lack of sight. In truly Christian terms, Milton acknowledges the operations of Divine grace in human affairs. There is a perceptible change in tone - from nervous despair to an admission that God is both the giver and the withholder of gifts to man.

In the third verse, Milton realises that it is not man's work that pleases God but the fact that a person is content and patient with what has been given to him, that

is what pleases God. Milton also says that just as there are many angels working relentlessly to fulfill God's works and then there are others who wait to do his bidding. The service of both types of angels is equally important to god. In other words what Milton is trying to say is that he has served God with his sight intact and can serve Him without sight as well. And both the ways in which he serves the Lord are important. He feels content that he is indeed serving God's will even after losing his vision. Hence, the question that Milton asks seems to be foolish - how would he a blind poet be able to serve God's will? The Christian's acceptance of God's dispensations and his abiding faith that God shall accept all form of service from his dependents gives the poem a triumphant note at the end.

3.5.5 Biblical References

The *Bible* is the sacred book of the Christians. It is the *Gospel of Jesus Christ the Saviour*. In a simple and elegant style it narrates the life and teachings of Christ with the help of a number of parables. The *Bible* often referred to as the *New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ* also includes the *Psalms* and the *Proverbs* that direct men on the right path to attain the kingdom of Heaven. There are four versions of the *Gospel* by *St Matthew*, *St Mark*, *St John* and *St Luke*. Milton in sonnet XIX *"On His Blindness"* has employed Biblical phrases to restate the task of the Christian - to stand and wait, in acceptance and acknowledgment of God's love for his children, in abiding faith in his providence with no concession to despair even in one's darkest moments.

3.5.6 Notes

1. light is spent: This clause presents a double meaning: (a) how I spend my days, (b) how it is that my sight is used up.
2. Ere half my days: the date of composition, half my life
3. talent: The Biblical meaning is faculty/coins but, Milton uses it in the sense of Literary Talent.
4. useless: Unused.
5. therewith: By that means, by that talent; with it
6. account: Record of accomplishment; worth
7. exact: Demand, require
8. fondly: Foolishly, unwisely
9. Patience: Milton personifies patience, capitalising it and having it speak.
10. God . . . gifts: God is sufficient unto Himself. He requires nothing outside of Himself to exist and be happy.
11. yoke: Burden, workload.
12. post: Travel.

3.5.7 Figures of Speech

Alliteration: my days in this dark world and wide (line 2)

Metaphor: though my soul more bent / To serve therewith my Maker (lines 3-4). The author compares his soul to his mind.

Personification/Metaphor: But Patience, to prevent / That murmur, soon replies . . . (lines 8-9).

Paradox: They also serve who only stand and wait.

Check Your Progress 4

1. What is a sonnet?

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2. What is the difference between an Italian Sonnet and an English Sonnet?

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3. Examine the Biblical references in Sonnet 19.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have looked at *Lycidas* and *On His Blindness*, two of Milton's important works. In the process, we have come to understand what elegy as a genre is and how it moves into the subgenre of the pastoral elegy, we have tried to analyse *Lycidas* as a pastoral elegy. We have also tried to define the elegy, pastoral elegy, the sonnet and highlighted the difference between the Petrarchan sonnet and the English sonnet and then looked at Milton's sonnet *On His Blindness.* In the next unit we will look at two more very important works by Milton – *L'Allegro* and *Il Pensoroso*.

3.7 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read section 3.2.1 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

2) Read section 3.2.2 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

3) Read section 3.2.3 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

4) Read section 3.2.4 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Read section 3.3 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Read section 3.4 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

2) Read section 3.4 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Read section 3.5 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

2) Read sections 3.5. 1 and 3.5.2 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

3) Read section 3.5.6 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Allegory: An allegory is a story within a story. It has a "surface story" and another story hidden underneath. For example, the surface story might be about two neighbors throwing rocks at each other's homes, but the hidden story would be about war between countries. Some allegories are very subtle, while others (like the rock-throwing example) can be more obvious.

Amaryllis: Amaryllis, in Roman literature, is a stock female character, a natural, pretty young woman who was usually a shepherdess. Amaryllis is mentioned in classical pastoral poetry and in later works, such as Thomas Campion's "I Care Not for These Ladies" (1601) and John Milton's "Lycidas" (1638).

Baroque: Baroque is a period of artistic style that started around 1600 in Rome, Italy, and spread throughout the majority of Europe. In informal usage, the word baroque describes something that is elaborate and highly detailed. The Baroque style is characterized by exaggerated motion and clear detail used to produce drama, exuberance, and grandeur in sculpture, painting, architecture, literature, dance, and music. Baroque iconography was direct, obvious, and dramatic, intending to appeal above all to the senses and the emotions.

Canzone: A predecessor of the sonnet, the canzone's poem-verse form consists of stanzas written in 10- to 12-syllable lines without a refrain. The canzone is traditionally used in three ways: tragic, comic, and elegiac. The canzone is one of Italy's great contributions to Renaissance-era poetry. Yet, outside of the form's adaptation by Spanish poets into the modern cancion, the 17th

century Italian instrumental form of canzona, and the use of "canzone" to describe almost any form of simple and songlike composition, the form faded with the Renaissance.

Commiato: leave-taking

Ecclesiastical: of or relating to a church especially as an established institution, suitable for use in a church

Exordium: is a beginning or introduction especially to a discourse or composition

Madgril: A song or short lyric poem intended for multiple singers. Originating in 14th-century Italy, it became popular in England in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It has no fixed metrical requirements.

Mnemosyne: is the goddess of memory in Greek mythology. Mnemosyne is the mother of the nine Muses.

Neaera: Neaera was a Naiad-nymph of Mount Sipylos in Lydia (western Anatolia). She was the mother of Dresaios (Dresaeus), a Lydian ally of the Trojans in their war with the Greeks.

Occitan: Occitan, also known as lenga d'òc by its native speakers, is a Romance language spoken in Southern France, Monaco, Italy's Occitan Valleys, as well as Spain's Val d'Aran; collectively, these regions are sometimes referred to as Occitania. It is also spoken in the linguistic enclave of Guardia Piemontese

Ottavarima: Ottavarima is a rhyming stanza form of Italian origin. Originally used for long poems on heroic themes, it later came to be popular in the writing of mock-heroic works. Its earliest known use is in the writings of Giovanni Boccaccio.

Pindaric odes: An ode in the form used by Pindar, consisting of a series of triads in which the strophe and antistrophe have the same stanza form and the epode has a different form. Pindarics was a term for a class of loose and irregular odes greatly in fashion in England during the close of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century.

Satire: A satire is a genre of literature in which vices, follies, abuses and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, government, or society itself into improvement.

Zeus: Zeus is the God of the sky and of thunder in ancient Greek religion, he is also the king of the gods of Mount Olympus.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

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UNIT 4: JOHN MILTON: *L'Allegro, Il Pensoroso*

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will look at two important poems by Milton that are sometimes considered to be twin poems and usually mentioned together – "*L' Allegro"* and "*Il Pensoroso"*. Both the poems "*L'Allegro*", and the "*Il Penseroso,*" were written sometime in 1631 but published in his anthology called *Poems* in 1645. Both poems are written in octosyllabic verse or a line of verse with eight syllables. However, the poem "*Il Pensoroso*" has a ten line prelude that is absent in "*L' Állegro*". In *"L' Allegro"*, the poet invokes the goddess Mirth/ laughter/ amusement. He desires to live with her in pastoral simplicity and later in the busy, urban centres filled with people and vitality. In "*Il Penseroso*" the poet calls upon the goddess Melancholy/ sadness/ sorrow and talks of "solitude, music, and a quite life of meditation". We will study both these poems and see how they compare/ contrast or whether they supplement/ complement each other.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1645 Milton published two poems in an anthology titled *Poems;* the two poems were "*L' Allegro*" and "*Il Penseroso*." These two poems offer two different perspectives on whether it is better to live a carefree or a contemplative life. The narrator in "*L' Allegro*" (or the "joyful man" (in Italian) argues for living a pleasurable life, while the narrator in "*Il Penseroso*" (or the "pensive man") argues for a life dedicated to study. Both "*L' Allegro*" and "*Il Penseroso*" begin with their respective narrators invoking a goddess to be their guide, in doing so the poems reflect the western classical tradition of praising a chosen god or goddess. *"L'Allegro"* and *"Il Penseroso"* appear to be in constant dialogue, or it could be that there are two distinct narrators arguing for different approaches to life, or

even a narrator in a monologue about the kind of life to live or to be lived; then there are critics who suggest that the two poems are twin poems reflecting youth and old age. However, when we analyse the two poems carefully, we realise that at one point Milton mixes pain and sorrow with the joy and fun aspect of life in "*L'Allegro*", and brings in mirth and fun in the sorrowful aspects of "*Il Pensoroso*", thereby, suggesting that while it may be alright to argue about the kind of life one should lead, a well led life is somewhere in the middle of the two extremes of ultimate joys or ultimate sorrows. But all said and done, we must remember that both these poems were extremely popular and influenced many writers. In fact, **William Blake** (1757-1827), illustrated both the poems and **George Frideric Handel**'s (1685 – 1759), pastoral ode composed in 1740, called *L' Allegro, Il Penserosoedil Moderato* (1740) or "*The Cheerful, the Thoughtful, and the Moderate Man*"; is based on the poems of Milton. **Charles Villiers Stanford's** (1852 – 1924), *5th Symphony*is titled *L' Allegro et Il Pensieroso* after the two poems of Milton. So Milton did not only influence writers, he influenced musical composers too.

4.2 *"L'ALLEGRO"*

In this section, we shall summarise and quote the poem and then analyse the poem in the next subsection. A summary in a sense helps us understand a poem better, and gives us clues as to what the poem is actually talking about. *"L'Allegro"* is a poem of 152 - lines largely written in tetrameter couplets. The exception is in the first ten lines that alternate between trimeters and pentameters. In many ways it is a companion piece to the other poem under consideration – "*Il Penseroso.*" "*L'Allegro*" as mentioned in the introduction translates into "the cheerful man," and the poem talks about the ideal day of a man in the country. The poem begins with the rising of the sun and enables the man/ narrator/ speaker to journey through the ideal country day till it's time for the rural population to go to bed. Thereafter, the speaker/narrator/man, goes, to the city, and continues to enjoy the rest of his evening in a more sophisticated, urban and literary company/ context.

4.2.1 Summary

In the first ten lines of the poem, the narrator of "*L' Allegro*" dedicates it to banishing Melancholy, the goddess that guides "*Il Penseroso*," from the poem. The speaker in "*Il Penseroso*" begins his own argument in a similar way, by banishing "vain deluding Joys," the "crew" that guides "*L' Allegro*," from his poem. Though each speaker is arguing against the other, the shared structure gestures to what the two poems have in common: Both "*L' Allegro*" and "*Il Penseroso*" begin with ten-line introductions in which the speaker rejects the other speaker's goddess. Even as the speakers insist that they share nothing, their arguments formally echo and reflect each other. In the first lines of the poems, Milton is already subverting his speakers' arguments against each other by drawing attention to what they share.

L'ALLEGRO

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born
In Stygian cave forlorn

'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!
Find out some uncouth cell,
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-raven sings;
There, under ebon shades and low-browed rocks,
As ragged as thy locks,
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.

Thereafter, the narrator celebrates *Mirth* as his chosen goddess throughout the poem. *Euphrosyne* is the Goddess of Good Cheer, Joy and Mirth and is invoked by Milton in this poem. The narrator imagines how the Goddess came into being or was born. One myth suggests that she was conceived by *Venus* and *Bachus,* Greek gods associated with love and fertility. Another myth suggests that she was born to *Zephyr* and *Aurora*, once again, the Greek gods representing the wind and dawn.

But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,
And by men heart-easing Mirth;
Whom lovely Venus, at a birth,
With two sister Graces more,
To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore:
Or whether (as some sager sing)
The frolic wind that breathes the spring,
Zephyr, with Aurora playing,
As he met her once a-Maying,
There, on beds of violets blue,
And fresh-blown roses washed in dew,
Filled her with thee, a daughter fair,
So buxom, blithe, and debonair.

The narrator/ speaker keeps jumping between these two origin myths and does not dwell for long on one idea alone, as he is impatient. He then moves on to cataloguing the attributes of *Mirth* such as, *Jest, Jollity, Sport, Laughter*, and *Liberty* and he imagines them to be a group of characters that join him in a festive dance.

Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest, and youthful Jollity,
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,
Nods and becks and wreathed smiles
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.

The narrator/ speaker starts day dreaming about what his life would be like if he lived with *Mirth* and *Liberty*, and he begins describing a day in their company; how the lark would announce the end of the night and the beginning of a new dawn/ a new day. The rooster not to be left behind would then lead his hens out to begin the day.

Come, and trip it, as you go,
On the light fantastic toe;
And in thy right hand lead with thee
The mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty;
And, if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved pleasures free:
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And, singing, startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow,
Through the sweet-briar or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine;
While the cock, with lively din,
Scatters the rear of darkness thin,
And to the stack, or the barn-door,
Stoutly struts his dames before:
Oft listening how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill:
Sometime walking, not unseen,
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate
Where the great Sun begins his state,
Robed in flames and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures,
Whilst the landskip round it measures:
Russet lawns, and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray;
Mountains on whose barren breast
The labouring clouds do often rest;
Meadows trim, with daisies pied;
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide;
Towers and battlements it sees
Bosomed high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The cynosure of neighbouring eyes.
Hard by a cottage chimney smokes
From betwixt two aged oaks,
Where Corydon and Thyrsis met
Are at their savoury dinner set
Of herbs and other country messes,

His imagination creates/ paints a picture of a morning hunt in the woods, of peasants beginning their day in the fields, and as he looks around (in the landscape of his imagination), he spots a cottage that belongs to two peasants, *Corydon* and *Thyrsis*, who are enjoying a meal.

Which the neat-handed Phyllis dresses;
And then in haste her bower she leaves,
With Thestylis to bind the sheaves;
Or, if the earlier season lead,
To the tanned haycock in the mead.
Sometimes, with secure delight,
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth and many a maid
Dancing in the chequered shade,
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday,
Till the livelong daylight fail:
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat,
How Faery Mab the junkets eat.
She was pinched and pulled, she said;
And he, by Friar's lantern led,
Tells how the drudging goblin sweat

The speaker/ narrator then imagines spending an evening with *Mirth*, and *Liberty*, and how it would be very different from his normal evenings as he would join in the country dances and stay up late into the night while telling stories about fairies and goblins.

To earn his cream-bowl duly set,
When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn
That ten day-labourers could not end;
Then lies him down, the lubber fiend,
And, stretched out all the chimney's length,
Basks at the fire his hairy strength,
And crop-full out of doors he flings,
Ere the first cock his matin rings.
Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,
By whispering winds soon lulled asleep.
Towered cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men,
Where throngs of knights and barons bold,
In weeds of peace, high triumphs hold
With store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence, and judge the prize
Of wit or arms, while both contend
To win her grace whom all commend.
There let Hymen oft appear
In saffron robe, with taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With mask and antique pageantry;
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream.
Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learned sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild.
And ever, against eating cares,

Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse,

Such as the meeting soul may pierce,
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out

The narrator/ speaker also sees himself falling asleep and then dreaming of castles and knights. He dreams of the court and the pastoral, bucolic setting of the poem so far changes to that of the urban landscape of the city, and it is here that he imagines himself going to the theater and watching plays by **William Shakespeare** and **Ben Johnson**, who, as we know by now were Milton's contemporaries.

The poem ends with the speaker/ narrator's claim that *Mirth*'s poetry can beat the song of *Orpheus*, who is a shepherd famous for attempting to lead his wife out of the underworld by singing the perfect song.

With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony;
That Orpheus' self may heave his head 145
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydice.

In the final lines of the poem, the speaker/ narrator reiterates that that he intends to live his life with *Mirth*.

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

Check Your Progress 1

Extremely brief answers:

1. Who does the speaker choose as his guide in "L' Allegro"?

   .....

2. Who does the speaker reject at the beginning of "L' Allegro"?

   .....

3. Who is *Orpheus*?

   .....

4. What does the speaker argue in "L' Allegro"?

   .....

5. Which playwright does Milton reference in "L' Allegro"?

   .....

6. How does "L' Allegro" end?

   .....

7. Who is Faery Mab?

   .....

8. What is the name of the companion poem to "L' Allegro"?

   .....

9. What does the speaker argue for in "Il Penseroso"?

   .....

10. How does "L' Allegro" begin?

    .....

11. Which character from Greek mythology does the speaker allude to in "L' Allegro"?

    .....

12. Which tradition are the shepherds that appear in "L' Allegro" drawn from?

    .....

13. The speaker aligns Melancholy with ___.

    .....

14. Which bird sings in "L' Allegro"?

    .....

15. How many lines is the prelude to "L' Allegro"?

    .....

4.2.2 Analysis

This poem is like a fantasy about what a day spent with *Mirth* in the idyllic countryside would be like. The countryside is naturally idealised, and there is no mention of anything that is unpleasant or that could cause displeasure, and the way the poem is written, the speaker/ narrator/ poet/ man is more of an observer of all that is taking place and not really a participant in any of the bucolic activities that are unfolding before his eyes and that the people talk about. The landscape described too is a rather impossible one, as, meadows, mountains, rivers, woods of the countryside and the castle, and the urban theatres crowd the montage. The day that begins with describing the workings of people in the countryside gives way to merrymaking in the evening, where the country folk tell each other stories of old legends and country tales as they drink the evening away. Once it's sun down they head off to bed to begin another working day the next morning. Their lives and their pleasures are simple. The narrator/ speaker/ man however, does not follow the routine of the country folk, he is now lost in imagination, dreaming about "towred Cities", with "throngs of Knights and Barons bold." In his imagination, there is a tournament taking place much like in the medieval days with castles and knights, and then a wedding feast. Look at the manner in which his imagination takes a turn, from the simple, bucolic pastoral life and pleasures to medieval times and castles, tournaments and wedding feasts and now onto the city theatres where he watches the comedies of **Ben Jonson** and **William Shakespeare**. Lost in the beautiful world of the imagination, the narrator/ speaker/ man dreams of soft music and poetry that would awaken even *Orpheus*, and concludes that if *Mirth* can make all these pleasures available to him, he would always live with her. The tone of *"L'Allegro"* is full of life and cheerful, along

with some chaos scattered in it. We might recall that the speaker/ narrator/ man asks *Melancholy* to go away right at the beginning of the poem and at the end of the poem he makes a reference to the story of *Orpheus*.

Orpheus was a musician, a poet and a prophet whose parents were the king of *Thrace–Oeagrus* and the muse *Calliope*. He was the best musician and he is said to have played the lyre beautifully. He could charm the animals and make the trees dance with his music. *Orpheus*é wife *Eurydice* is strolling in the woods when a satyr tries to rape her, and in trying to avoid the satyr's attack, she falls into a pit of vipers, is bitten and dies as a result of the poisonous bites. *Orpheus* finds his wife's body, and overwhelmed by grief he starts singing the most mournful songs which causes the nymphs and the gods to start weeping and they advise him to go to the Underworld to bring back his wife. *Orpheus* follows their advice and meets with *Hades* the god of the Underworld and his wife *Persephone*. He pleads with them and sings such sorrowful songs to them, that they agree and tell him not to look back until he and his wife have reached the surface. *Orpheus* and *Eurydice* starts walking towards the surface. When *Orpheus* reaches the opening of the cave with his wife following, he turns around to see if **Eurydice** is still following him. As she has not yet reached the opening of the cave, and *Orpheus* has turned back to look at her, she disappears into the Underworld forever.

Just as *Orpheus* attempts to lead his wife out of the underworld, the speaker/ narrator/ man tries to lead *Mirth* away from *Melancholy*, whom he thinks of as being connected to darkness and the underworld. The speaker/ narrator/ man tries to convince his audience/ listeners that a life with *Mirth* is much better than a life with *Melancholy*— or that a life filled with happiness and joy is better than a life of deep contemplation and reflection which he perceives as sad and depressing/ melancholic.

That Orpheus' self may heave his head 145
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydice.

Though *Orpheus* is referred to at the very end of the poem, (in the above quoted lines), the narrator/ speaker/ man begins to hint at a connection between the story of *Orpheus* and his poem much earlier - when the speaker introduces *Melancholy* at the beginning of his speech, he tries to create a parallel between himself as *Orpheus* by placing *Melancholy* in the underworld ("*in Stygian caveforlorn*") and letting *Mirth* escape back into the world of light. Like *Orpheus* leading *Eurydice* from the underworld to the surface, the speaker/ narrator/ man guides *Mirth* out of the darkness and back into the world of the living.

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born
In Stygian cave forlorn
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy! 145

4.2.3 Symbolism and Allegory in *"L' Allegro"*

When describing the bucolic evening festivities, there is a reference to *Faery Mab*, who becomes symbolic as a fairy queen known for the pranks she plays on people while they sleep.

Then to the spicy nut-brown ale, 100 - 102
With stories told of many a feat,
How Faery Mab the junkets eat.

She appears for the first time in English literary history in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), where the character *Mercutio* describes *Faery Mab* as someone who creates a lot of disorder amongst her victims, as she causes them to fall in love. He also lists the mishaps that *Faery Mab* causes. But most importantly, in his long monologue he sees *Faery Mab* as someone extremely sinister, as someone capable of inspiring soldiers to go to war, as someone capable of causing the chaos of violence. Since then *Faery Mab*, has always been symbolic of chaos.

Sometimes, with secure delight,
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth and many a maid 95
Dancing in the chequer'd shade,
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday,
Till the livelong daylight fail:

The Hunt (Allegory)

When Milton describes the country folk as "dancing in the chequer'd shade," he follows the pastoral poem tradition that we spoke about earlier in Unit 3 when talking about *Lycidas*. In pastoral poems, "shade" indicated a sense of mystery, deep, dark secrets, maybe even a conspiracy, or a sexual escapade, or political intrigues. But the use of the word "shade" here is not just these connotations; it is also a reference to a scene in Shakespeare's "*Titus Andronicus*," where *Tamora*, Queen of the Goths, mother of *Chiron* and *Demetriusa* sleeps with a servant *Aaron* her Moorish lover, in the "chequer'd shadow" and makes fun of the hunting horns they can hear indicating not one but two separate hunts – one in which deer is being hunted and the other where her political rivals are being hunted. This allusion seems to create a somber and sinister environment in *"L'Allegro"*. Even though the speaker/ narrator/ man sounds cheerful when describing the dogs "cheerily rouse" (rousing), the morning with their barking— the same lines can also connote something more sinister. The victims of the hunt may therefore, be looked at as an allegory for the victims of a life full of pleasure.In the next section we shall examine *"Il Pensoroso"*.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Does light have a role to play in "L' Allegro"? If yes, explain how.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Why do you think there is a reference made to Orpheus at the end of "L' Allegro" the speaker?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.3 *"IL PENSOROSO"*

"Il Pensoroso" oft considered to be, the twin poem to *"L'Allegro"*, is a poem that looks at a life away from laughter and fun, and more at a life of contemplation. The narrator/speaker/man in "*Il Pensoroso"* scorns happiness and cheer calling it "vain deluding Joys" and in fact joins hands with *Melancholy.* The speaker/ narrator/ man orders "vain deluding joys" to leave him alone, and he welcomes *Melancholy* whom he believes to be a goddess who is so radiant and bright that humans cannot see her for what she is. Instead, they see her as dressed in black, which is the colour of wisdom.

4.3.1 Summary

Hence, vain deluding Joys,
The brood of Folly without father bred!
How little you bested
Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys!
Dwell in some idle brain,
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
As thick and numberless

As the gay motes that people the sun-beams,
Or likest hovering dreams,
The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train.

Thereafter, the man/ narrator/ speaker traces her lineage and describes her as the daughter of the Roman Goddess of the hearth, home, and family. *Vesta* was thought of as being a Virgin Goddess and was rarely depicted in human form much like *Melancholy* is described here, and was represented by the fire of her temple. *Vesta* is believed to be one of the *Dii Consentes*, one of the twelve of the most honored gods of the Roman pantheon. *Saturn* is the father of *Melancholy*, while *Vesta* is the mother.

But, hail! thou Goddess sage and holy!
Hail, divinest Melancholy!
Whose saintly visage is too bright
To hit the sense of human sight,
And therefore to our weaker view
O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue;
Black, but such as in esteem
Prince Memnon's sister might beseem,
Or that starred Ethiop queen that strove
To set her beauty's praise above
The Sea-Nymphs, and their powers offended.
Yet thou art higher far descended:
Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore
To solitary Saturn bore;
His daughter she; in Saturn's reign
Such mixture was not held a stain.
Oft in glimmering bowers and glades
He met her, and in secret shades
Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
Whilst yet there was no fear of Jove.

The narrator/ speaker/ man then calls upon *Melancholy* to come to meet him and he describes her as "devout, and pure, sober, steadfast, and demure," and dressed in her dark clothes. He also requests that she bring with her some other attendants who will be useful such as, Peace, Quiet, Fasting, Contemplation, Silence, Fast (as in fasting from eating food), Leisure, the Muses and Contemplation who is a cherub. The man/ narrator/ speaker then starts imagining all the dark, secluded places where he and his companions could meet and ponder over the various mysteries that may be held by astrology, alchemy, and philosophy. He then thinks about the nightingale and her song and how it would be a welcome break if the nightingale's song were to interrupt the silence of the woods, as it would help in "smoothing the rugged brow of night".

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestic train,
And sable stole of cypress lawn
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.
Come; but keep thy wonted state,
With even step, and musing gait,
And looks commercing with the skies,
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:
There, held in holy passion still,

Forget thyself to marble, till
With a sad leaden downward cast
Thou fix them on the earth as fast.
And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet, 45
Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,
And hears the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing;
And add to these retired Leisure,
That in trim gardens takes his pleasure; 50
But, first and chiefest, with thee bring
Him that yon soars on golden wing,
Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,
The Cherub Contemplation;
And the mute Silence hist along, 55
'Less Philomel will deign a song,
In her sweetest saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of Night,
While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke
Gently o'er the accustomed oak. 60

The sight of the moon travelling across the sky "Like one that had been led astray / Through the heav'ns wide pathless way", is another sight that would also be welcome. The speaker/ narrator/ man thinks that a room dimly lit with "glowing embers" that shades the room with a dull and gloomy light is a good place to sit and reflect quietly. He envisages a quiet night where the only sounds that break the silence of the night is the chirping of the cricket on the hearth and the distant cry of the town crier as he does his rounds late at night watching over people's safety as they sleep in their warm beds.

Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee, chauntress, oft the woods among
I woo, to hear thy even-song;
And, missing thee, I walk unseen 65
On the dry smooth-shaven green,
To behold the wandering moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way, 70
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.
Oft, on a plat of rising ground,
I hear the far-off curfew sound,

Over some wide-watered shore,
Swinging slow with sullen roar;

Or, if the air will not permit,
Some still removed place will fit,
Where glowing embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom,
Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth,
Or the bellman's drowsy charm
To bless the doors from nightly harm.

The narrator/ speaker/man is awake even as the world around him sleeps and he says that he'd like to climb the high lonely towers late at night and watch the stars, particularly the constellation known as the Great Bear/ *Ursa Major*/ Big Dipper. Or, while in the lonely and quiet high towers he could ponder over the teachings and theories of **Plato**, the Greek Philosopher. Thinking about Plato and the Greeks he begins to think of great Greek Tragedies such as the Trojan War or about other Greek Tragedies that were staged in Athens during ancient times. Much like the narrator/ speaker/ man in *"L'Allegro"* here too the narrator/ speaker/ man, imagines himself studying in a tower, sleeping in the shade of trees, and listening to the music that he hears from a nearby church. Once again, *"Il Pensoroso"* too follows the routine of a whole day and just as *"L'Allegro"* ended with his desire to stay with *Mirth, "Il Pensoroso"* ends with his decision to stay with *Melancholy*.

Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely tower,
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,
With thrice great Hermes, or unsphere
The spirit of Plato, to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook;
And of those demons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or underground,
Whose power hath a true consent
With planet or with element.
Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine,
Or what (though rare) of later age
Ennobled hath the buskined stage.
But, O sad Virgin! that thy power

Might raise Musaeus from his bower;
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as, warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made Hell grant what love did seek;
Or call up him that left half-told
The story of Cambuscan bold,
Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That owned the virtuous ring and glass,
And of the wondrous horse of brass
On which the Tartar king did ride;
And if aught else great bards beside
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
Of turneys, and of trophies hung,
Of forests, and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear.
Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,
Till civil-suited Morn appear,
Not tricked and frounced, as she was wont
With the Attic boy to hunt,
But kerchieft in a comely cloud
While rocking winds are piping loud,
Or ushered with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the rustling leaves,
With minute-drops from off the eaves.

The narrator imagines, being woken up the next morning and escorted by *Melancholy* "when the Sun begins to fling / His flaring beams", to "arched walks of twilight groves". He also sees himself being provided shade from the harsh rays of the sun by *Melancholy* near a brook where he can hear the bubbling and murmuring of the water. He thinks he could fall asleep there by the brook, hidden from the rays of the sun and dream. And when he should awake, he would hear the sweet music of a spirit.

And, when the sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring
To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves,
Of pine, or monumental oak,
Where the rude axe with heaved stroke
Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,

Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.
There, in close covert, by some brook,
Where no profaner eye may look, *140*
Hide me from day's garish eye,
While the bee with honeyed thigh,
That at her flowery work doth sing,
And the waters murmuring,
With such consort as they keep, *145*
Entice the dewy-feathered Sleep.
And let some strange mysterious dream
Wave at his wings, in airy stream
Of lively portraiture displayed,
Softly on my eyelids laid; *150*
And, as I wake, sweet music breathe
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some Spirit to mortals good,
Or the unseen Genius of the wood.
But let my due feet never fail *155*
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high embowed roof,
With antique pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light. *160*

The man/ narrator/ speaker wishes melancholy would let him walk along the hallways of a convent, which is once again, quiet, secluded, cloistered and meant for contemplative thought. He describes the scene as "dim religious light" coming through the rich stained-glass windows.

There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies, *165*
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.
And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell *170*
Of every star that heaven doth shew,
And every herb that sips the dew,
Till old experience do attain

To something like prophetic strain.
These pleasures, Melancholy, give; 175
And I with thee will choose to live. 176

He goes on to continue with the image of the convent, with an organ playing in the chapel and a choir singing, he himself becoming exuberated and "dissolve (ing) into ecstasies", envisioning heaven. He also seems to suggest that in his later years, as he grows old, he would choose to live in a hermit's cell. In the end, the narrator/speaker/man accepts *Melancholy*'s lifestyle of self-discipline, seclusion, and most importantly an aversion to pleasure. He is happy with the idea of living a secluded life as a hermit in exchange for a life filled with deep and sincere contemplation. The poem ends with these lines:

These pleasures, Melancholy, give,
And I with thee will choose to live.

Check Your Progress 3

Extremely brief answers

1. Who does the speaker choose as his guide in "Il Penseroso?"

   .....

2. What does the speaker reject at the beginning?

   .....

3. What does the speaker argue for in "Il Penseroso"?

   .....

4. How does "Il Penseroso" end?

   .....

5. During the Renaissance, people associated Melancholy with ____

   .....

6. Who does the speaker say gave birth to Melancholy?

   .....

7. The speaker compares ___ to a lost traveler.

   .....

8. Which genre does the speaker contemplate in the tower?

   .....

9. Where does the speaker go to sleep during the day?

   .....

10. After taking a nap, the speaker wakes to ___.

    .....

11. Which work does the speaker allude to in "Il Penseroso"?

    .....

12. The speaker calls a group of muses including ____.

    .....

13. The speaker compares Melancholy to a ____.

    .....

14. Where was Melancholy conceived?

    .....

4.3.2 Analysis

"Il Pensoroso" uses the same tetrameter form but this poem is longer than *"L' Allegro"* as it is 176 lines, so 24 lines longer. *"Il Pensoroso"* means 'the thinking man' or 'the contemplative man'. This poem examines and expresses the joy that a solitary man feels in his seclusion and contemplation**.** *"Il Pensoroso"* celebrates *Melancholy* in the pastoral poetry mode, and the setting if you read the poem diligently, is rather Gothic, while emphasising a secluded, scholar's solitary life. The speaker/ narrator/ man as we already know invokes a melancholic mood. And while he wanders in his imagination, through an urban landscape, the descriptions remind us of medieval castles and knights and tournaments. The narrator/ man/ speaker is ready to devote his time, his youth and life in the pursuit of philosophy, tragedy, Classical and Christian hymns that permit him to have beautiful visions. We must remember that *Melancholy* is described as the offspring of Saturn and Vesta, who bear a connection to science and the heavens, and she is also connected to Urania, the "heavenly" muse, also the goddess that inspires the creation of epics, Melancholy is also connected to prophecy, and a deep experiential understanding of nature. In the next section, we shall look at a comparison between the two poems.

Check Your progress 4

1. How does Milton manipulate debate as a form in "L' Allegro" and "Il Penseroso"?

   .....

   .....

   .....

   .....

2. Why is "Il Penseroso" often, thought of as a night poem?

   .....

   .....

   .....

   .....

4.4 *"L'ALLEGRO"* AND *"IL PENSOROSO"*: A COMPARISON

The date of composition of the twin lyrics,' *L'Allegro'* and '*Il Penseroso'* remains uncertain. Ascribed by **D Masson** to the beginning of the Horton period, (ie. Hammersmith, autumn 1632), the companion poems have been dated by **H F Fletcher** and **F W Bateson** as early as 1629. **E M W Tillyard** and **W R Parker** argue for the summer of 1631, a date accepted by **D Bush** and **J French Hanford** and **Taaffe** points out that we can only establish that 1629 is a *terminus ad quem* and 1632 a *terminus a quo.* They are central poems of the early period that establishes Milton's disposition and the nature of his art.

'L'Allegro' and '*Il Penseroso'* have elements of a variety of literary modes - preeminently the academic prolusion, particularly Milton's own *First and Seventh Prolusion*, the argumentative essay or debate, the pastoral and the classical ode or hymn, particularly, Pindar's 'Olympia 14'. On the surface, the poems appear to be graceful description of generalised activities under the influence of *Mirth* and *Melancholy*. Thus, **Rosemond Tuve** suggests that *"L'Allegro"* and *"Il Penseroso"* are two contrasting tendencies in every man, including Milton. *Mirth* and *Melancholy* are the central symbols representing the two sides of Milton and of Everyman. Similarly, **Cleanth Brooks** sees the light symbol with the day-night contrast as the central symbol which brings together all the opposites of the poems making them the two halves of one unified structure. Critics such as **J B Leishman**, Tuve and Brooks analyse the poems as two equal ways, two aspects, of a comprehensive intellect. In their view, the contrasts between the two choices are presented as choices which can appeal to the same mind. Emphasising the equality of the alternatives, they suggest that the poems are contrasts, depicting two moods and attitudes towards life, rather than a progression. Critical studies on the twin poems have elaborated the motivation for the measured equality in Milton's paean to *Mirth* and *Melancholy*. **G Wilson Knight** takes note of Milton's innate sympathy with the weighty, the monumental and the architectural and sees the proportion of the poems as essential to their enduring value as well as their inherent design.

There is a prominent repetition in outline and design in the poems which bring out the thematic contrast. Each poem begins with a banishing of the travesty of which is praised in the other. This exorcism constitutes the first ten lines of the poems, in which iambic pentameter alternate with trimeter, except the first line, which is a trimeter, with initial spondee; (hence, loathed *Melancholy*; hence vain deluding Joys). In *"L'Allegro"*, black melancholy, a medical concept derived from Greek physicians - particularly **Galen**, is loathed and banished in the opening lines. The mythological parentage of Black *Melancholy* is of Milton's invention and the description conveys moral and psychological signification.

The infernal discord of the black melancholiac's existence is exorcised through excess in the opening passage of *"L'Allegro*". The opening of *"Il Penseroso"* is, in design, the exact counterpoint of the hyperbolic opening of *"L'Allegro"*. The pleasures of *Mirth*, exquisite in innocence, are only 'vain deluding joys' to be

transcended by a seeker of higher truth. The imagery framed mainly by allegorical personifications, are only mildly pagan. There is no reference to hell. Ruled by *Orpheus*, the son of Sleep and god of dreams, *Mirth* lives in an unreal world of shadows. His illusions operate upon earth. The faults of mundane joy are negative - they obstruct from higher vision. Thus, the opening in *"Il Penseroso"* is of an earthly rather than an infernal malaise that is banished.

In both the poems, the goddesses who preside over the poem are invoked. In Milton's invocation to *Mirth* and *Melancholy*, they are at first, directly addressed followed by their genealogy and the circumstances of their birth and conception. The society over which *Melancholy* presides is complementary to that of *Mirth*. While *Galenic* or black melancholy is loathed and banished, the neo-Platonists', particularly, **Ficino**'s, 'golden tinged with purple' *Melancholy,* traced to Aristotle and the classical poets, is celebrated as divine. But whereas Milton identifies *Mirth* as *Euphrosyne*, he is not explicit when it comes to *Melancholy*. He calls her the daughter of *Saturn (Chronos)* and *Vesta*. Like most Renaissance mythographers, he identifies *Vesta* as Saturn's own child but classical poets and mythographers alike make *Vesta* a virgin. *Vesta* was identified with the heavens, especially with fiery ether; *Saturn*, the god of science, was also connected with the heavens and with contemplation. *Melancholy*'s identity is therefore quite elusive. However, **Stella P Reward** in "'*L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso': Classical Tradition and Renaissance Mythography*" points out that Milton's description of her as 'sage and holy', 'devout and pure', 'Whose saintly visage is too bright/ To hit the sense of human sight' and whose looks commerce with the skies, fits the description of the heavenly Muse, *Urenia*, who is Milton's patron spirit for '*Paradise Lost*'. He first invokes her, also without naming her, in '*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*'. Most classical poets name *Zeus* (Jupiter) and *Mnemosyne* (Memory) to be the parents of the Muses but older authority assigns them to the line of *Saturn*. Begotten by *Saturn*'s father, *Urenos (Coelus)*, they are close to the heavens and to science and contemplation, over which *Saturn* presides. Etymologically connected to the 'mind', all the Muses are associated with learned thought and heavenly harmony. Mythographers opined that divine music moved the Muses' heavenly spheres to establish order throughout the universe. Among the Muses, *Urenia*, who rules over the eighth heaven and is called the heavenly Muse, is most closely connected with *Urenos* and *Saturn*. She is often depicted in engravings and described in epigrams as the Muse who fixes her eyes on the stars rapt in silence and contemplation.

In Milton's invocation to *Mirth* and *Melancholy*, after the goddesses are addressed and genealogy cited, succinct reference is made to the circumstances of their birth and conception in vivid imagery. *Venus* bore *Mirth* and two more sister *Graces Alternatively*, *Aurora* conceived her on May Day on Arcadian beds of fragrant and colourful dew-drenched flowers. *Melancholy* was born after a courtship in glimmering bowers, glades and the shady grove on Mt. Ida. Next, the goddesses are eulogised with attributive adjectives. *Mirth* is 'fair and free', 'buxom', 'blithe'. *Melancholy* is 'pensive', 'pure', 'sober', and 'steadfast'. Each is invoked to come with her companions. *Mirth* is asked to enter dancing leading *Liberty* in her right hand along with allegorical persons '*Jest*' and '*Jollity*' as in a masque. *Melancholy* is asked to enter with sedate, thoughtful steps, eyes fixed heavenwards along with her associates, '*Spare Fast*', '*Peace*', '*Quiet*',

'*Leisure*', and most of all, '*cherub Contemplation*' who is to her what *Liberty* is to *Mirth*. Just as *Mirth* leads *"L' Allegro"* into fellowship with 'two sister Graces more', similarly, *Melancholy* leads *"Il Penseroso"* to hear 'the Muses in a ring'.

In *"L' Allegro"*, the world that is portrayed inspired by *Mirth* is the inclusive, green world of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Strutting cocks and cheerful hounds, the whistling plowman and singing milk-maid, the country dances, lilting music of bells and fiddlers on sunshine holidays are set in a country landscape composed of sweetbrier and eglantine in spring, beautiful lawns, meadows and brooks as in a pastoral picture. The English rustics, *Corydod*, *Thyrsis, Phillis* and *Thestylis* are engaged in homely activities such as preparing dinner and binding the sheaves. They also represent the classical pastoral world as Milton names them after the rustics in **Virgil**'s and **Theocritus**'s eclogues. The world of the folk tale is also included. In the evening the farmers, regale themselves with tales drawn from superstitions and legends of old, over spicy ale, tales of - *Fairy Mab* and her punitive ways and goblins who labour through the night for a bowl of cream. The chivalric world is encompassed with the description of the sun with attendant clouds, cities with towers and battlements. Knights and barons joust at tournament, while ladies of high degree watch admiringly, eager to award the prize to the victor. *Hymen*, the god of marriage is asked to appear to complete the ever green world of festivity so that 'Jack hath his Jill'. Finally, the comedy of Jonson and Shakespeare are included in "*L' Allegro*'s pastoral world. **Plato** has condemned the 'lax' Lydian mode but **Cassiodorus** has approved it for providing relaxation and delight against excessive cares and worries. *"L' Allegro"* aspires to be immersed in sweet long drawn-out Lydian music which might awaken *Orpheus* and inspire *Pluto* to release *Eurydice*. The poem concludes with L' Allegro's renewal of his pledge of devotion to his inspiring Grace. Whereas L' Allegro hears cheerful sounds all around him' Il Penseroso hears muted sounds of the evening – far - off curfew's sullen roar', the chirping of the cricket on the heath, the drowsy incantation of the bellman as he passes each door, reiterating,' 12 0'clock and all's well.' Melancholy directs Il Penseroso to the study of **Hermes Trismegistus** and Plato whose works combine philosophy, magic and astrology. In '*Poimandres*' Trismegistus writes that the immortal mind that sheds the fleshly nook, proceeds upwards, discarding impurities at each stage. Then it reaches the eighth sphere, where it praises God and mounts up to the Father, becoming part of God. The purified mind is 'the music of God' (pp 13-14). Il Penseroso also pursues the study of the great tragic cycles - Thebes, Argos and Troy – **Aeschylus**'s *Seven against Thebes*, **Sophocles**' treatment of different descendants of *Pelops* - *Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Electra* and the Trojan plays of **Euripides** such as *Andromache* and *The Trojan Wome*'. His study includes noble English tragedies ('buskined stage'). He proposes that Melancholy call up the spirit of the supreme Greek poet *Orpheus* and his pupil, *Musaeus*, seer, priest and founder of priestly poetry in Attica both of whom had Muses for mothers and whose poetry has the power to melt *Pluto*'s heart and release *Eurydice* from hell, In pursuit of the epic, he proposes that Melancholy call up the ghost of **Chaucer** to inspire him, as she had **Spenser**, to complete the Squire's Tale of *Cambuscan, Camball* and *Algarsife* whose wife was *Canace* and owned the ring glass and horse of brass endowed with magical powers.

The ring reveals the secrets of nature, the glass is the revealer of the secrets of men and the brass horse is the symbol of conquered space. Other 'great bards' who inspire him are perhaps **Ariosto** and **Tasso** whose epics had been allegorised by Renaissance critics ('Where more is meant than meets the ear'). Absorbed in scholarship, he stays awake all night like the Bear that never sets. In **Hermes**, the constellation of the Bear is a symbol of perfection which is Il Penseroso's guiding star.

"*Il Penseroso*" ends when "*L' Allegro*" begins - in early morning. However, the morning is not of brilliant sunlight but clouded skies, strong winds and rain. He retreats to the precinct of wood nymphs and spirits, to the sounds of humming bees and murmuring waters, as he falls asleep. The dream that is the melancholic counterpart of L' Allegro's appears. However, it is 'some strange mysterious dream' of prophetic vision.' Mysterious' is used here in the sense of the scriptures, referring to the hidden truths of divine revelation. The music that awakens him is parallel to the 'Lydian airs' (I.136) that conclude "*L' Allegro*" but it is all pervasive and magical. An echo of *Ariel*'s music in *The Tempest*, it appears as an emanation of *Daemon's* powers 'to mortals goods'. It is but a preparation for the Christian rapture that ensues. Two concluding sections of "*Il Penseroso*'' have no parallel in "*L' Allegro*". Having incorporated and transcended sensuality, worldliness, classical art, philosophy and magic emblematised by Orphean music in the twin poems, "*Il Penseroso*" is receptive to the higher sights and sounds of Christianity. The combination of studious cloister, organ music, full-voiced choir, church service and anthem generate ecstasy. *Urenia*, originally the Muse of astronomy, is elevated, as by **Du Bartas** in '*La Muse Chretienne*', to the position of Muse of Christian poetry in Milton's vision as he develops the Christian connotations of divinest Melancholy 'which brings all Heav'n' before Il Penseroso's eyes. He becomes the poet - prophet, seer, vates, the vehicle of the *Holy Spirit* invoked in 'Paradise Lost'. The poem closes with Penseroso's pledge to the god of poetry as prophecy, choosing to live with 'divinest Melancholy' who can give this ultimate pleasure.

Thus, the companion poems are not merely academic exercises in contrast between day and night, between the social and solitary man, between youth and age. It is one of two most significant poems of his early period which indicate Milton's predilection and anticipate his masterpiece. They also establish his early metrical diversity. The same octosyllabic couplets convey marked difference in feeling add tone with abundant metrical variations. The standard octosyllabic couplets is iambic of eight syllables (for eg. 'To hear the lark be bin his flight') but numerous lines omit the first syllable, so that they begin with a spondee (for eg. 'Jest and youthful Jollity').The addition of final extra syllable to the line may give an effect of lilting, trochaic measure rather than staid iambic measure (for eg 'which the neat-handed Phillis dresses'). Milton's work indicates early instance of mastery in craftsmanship in these two poems.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at two of Milton's poems – "*L' Allegro*" and "*Il Pensoroso*", read them, understood them, analysed them and critiqued them. We

have read them as separate poems and also looked at them as twin poems. We have concluded with the understanding that these poems indicate Milton's greatness that was to be exemplified in his *Paradise Lost*.

4.6 HINTS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Liberty
2. Melancholy
3. A shepherd from Greek Mythology who tried to lead his wife out of the underworld
4. The best life is a life full of joy
5. William Shakespeare
6. With the speaker enjoying the theater
7. A fairy queen known for mischief
8. Il Pensoroso
9. A life of contemplation
10. With the speaker rejecting Melancholy
11. Orpheus
12. Pastoral Poetry
13. The darkness of the underworld
14. The lark
15. 10 lines

Check Your Progress 2

1. Yes, light has a major role to play in the poem "L' Allegro". Even though many critics and scholars believe it to be Milton's "day" poem, as the poem has many day time scenes, the poem actually delves more into the night, as you have descriptions of the lark singing in the early morning, of ale drinking and country dancing in the evening, of dinners with country folk, and dreams of castles at night. Milton in this appears to be more interested in the transition period between day and night, than of only day or only night. Many of the scenes in the poem are set either at dawn or at dusk, the particular time in 24 hours when the light changes. Hence, we may say that light has an important role to play in the poem as it enables the poet, to create scenes and therefore the understanding of it in "half light."
2. Orpheus appears at the end of "L' Allegro," yet structure of the poem is built around Orpheus' story. Orpheus tries to lead his wife out of the underworld and the speaker in "L' Allegro" tries to lead Mirth away from the darkness of Melancholy. The parallels between the two stories are emphasised as

Melancholy is said to be the child of Cerberus, who as we may know is the dog that guards the underworld, and a personified Mirth (as a muse), is called upon by the speaker to join him. The speaker refers to Orpheus, who, fails to save his wife, and the speaker too, fails to capture his Muse forever at the last moment.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Melancholy
2. Vain deluding joys
3. The speaker argues that the best life to live is a life of contemplation
4. It ends with the speaker listening to music in a Church
5. An artistic temperament
6. Saturn and Vesta
7. The speaker compares the moon to a lost traveler
8. The speaker contemplates tragedy particularly Greek Tragedy in the tower
9. The speaker sleeps in the shade during the day
10. After taking a nap, the speaker wakes music
11. The speaker alludes to The Canterbury Tales
12. The speaker calls a group of muses including quiet
13. The speaker compares Melancholy to a nun
14. Melancholy was conceived in the shade

Check Your Progress 4

1. The speakers in the two poems pitch their arguments against each other in the introduction itself and the poems are actually very alike and akin to one another. Milton is able to blur the distinctions between the two speakers and their arguments, thereby very successfully subverting the arguments presented earlier by focusing instead on their similarities. The speakers believe and claim that their lives are different and opposed to each other we find that both the speakers are actually part of the same world, so while presenting a debate, Milton is also extremely successfully in tearing down the two sides of the debate.

2. Just as "L' Allegro" was thought to be a day poem many also feel that "Il Penseroso" is a night poem again, because many scenes are night scenes. Most of the poem occurs in the dark, but the poem is also full of day scenes. Similarly, "L' Allegro," which many consider to be Milton's day poem, includes both day and night scenes. Like many of the binaries Milton sets up the division into day and night division doesn't really hold. His poems include both light and dark, as he is more keen on understanding the common grounds.

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