
UNIT 12 POETRY AND SOCIETY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (PRE-RESTORATION)

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to have

- A comprehensive idea of the complicated British Milieu political, religious, scientific, aesthetic and philosophic – in the period under discussion, and
- A close acquaintance with the distinct traits of the different modes of poetry in vogue at the time.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In England the seventeenth century is a period of great upheavals in almost all spheres of life – social, political, religious, philosophical and scientific. These developments have their impact on the poetry of the time which is noted for

innovations in content and techniques. The main current of the poetry is metaphysical (The details about it you will have later in the block). Close to this current there are flowing other currents as well. These are the Spenserians, the Ben Jonsonians and the Early Augustans. The Spenserians remain uninfluenced by the dominant mode of Donne and work as a link between Spenser and Milton. The Ben Jonsonians try to emulate the classical model of Ben Jonson. They also present sustained arguments and scholarly images in the vein of Donne. The Early Augustans show a definite sign of change in their perception and their technique.

Each important development in the life and poetry of the time has been elaborately explained in the course of the discussion.

12.2 THIRTY YEARS' WAR (1618-48)

You will read about the Civil War in England in unit 22. Like the British Civil War, this war, too, was politico-religious in nature. But while the Civil War was a British affair, this war spread over the whole of the continent and the key fighters in this war were France, Germany and Spain. British involvement in it was limited. The continent at the time was sharply divided into two hostile religious groups. France and Poland were Catholics, while Britain, Holland and Scandinavia were Protestants.

In Germany both faiths were in conflict. But this conflict was sought to be kept in abeyance by the Treaty of Augsburg. Under the treaty, the religion of the reigning Prince was to be the religion of the place. Emperor Ferdinand of Germany was a Catholic and Catholic princes were more powerful than the Protestant ones. Ferdinand was a cousin of the king of Spain, and in league with Spain, he thought of gaining control over the whole of the Central Europe. Meanwhile, Henry IV of France aligned himself with the Protestant elements in Germany. But he was murdered by a Catholic fanatic.

King James of England wanted to be an arbiter. He also wanted marital ties between his family and the families of some Catholic States. But ironically enough, it is his son-in-law Elector Frederick, who proved to be the cause of this Thirty Years' War. The inhabitants of Bohemia invited Elector Frederick to be their ruler, but the German Emperor did not agree to this arrangement. Frederick was defeated by the forces of the German emperor at the battle of White Mountain near Prague in 1620. Palatine, the kingdom of Frederick, too, was captured by Spanish Catholic forces. For want of support from the Parliament, and due to the fragile economic position of England, King James could not do anything significant in favour of his son-in-law.

In short, a lot of blood was spilt in this long drawn and widely spread war. Ultimately this war came to an end in the peace of Westphalia.

In fact, neither the Protestants nor Catholics won this war. The faith of the people in religion was greatly shaken by this religious war. The effect was accentuated by the British Civil War. People thought of thinking freely even in matters concerning the fundamentals. This tendency got further fillips through the Renaissance and the developments in the field of science, particularly astronomy.

EXERCISE-I

1. Name three main fighters in the Thirty Years' War.

2. What was the period of the Thirty Years' War?

3. Which two religious groups were involved in this war?

4. Tell the main difference between the Thirty Years' War and the Civil War.

5. Name two countries that were dominated by the Protestants.

6. Name two countries that were dominated by the Catholics.

7. Was England one of the main fighters in The Thirty Years' War?

8. Give the location of the place called White Mountain. When was the battle of White Mountain fought? Who won this battle?

123 CULTURAL BACKGROUND

12.3.1 The Visual Arts

With a view to appreciating in full the cultural milieu of our period (the seventeenth century), we have to make ourselves aware of the aesthetic preoccupations of the time. The accession of Charles I in 1625 was propitious for many-fold increase in aesthetic activities, especially in the sphere of visual arts. Despite financial difficulties, Charles spent a lot of money on collection of art-objects. The Earl of **Arundel** embarked on an art-collecting spree and he had full support of the king. The **king** and his courtiers were fond of their portraits drawn by painters. Van Dyck's portraits of the king and his courtiers are memorable. The king sent his men all over **the** Continent in search of beautiful paintings. The missions of papal **representatives**

came to Charles with gifts including a "Titian" and a bust of Charles by Bernini. (From *Donne to Marvell*) The interest of Charles in visual arts had its impact on the application of this art to architecture and carpentry and other related fields. This fact is reported among others by G.M. Trevelyan: "Framed pictures and marble sculptures were becoming common, after the example set by the art-loving Charles I and his great subject, the Earl of Arundel. Rubens, Van Dyck and the homelier Dutch painters did much work for English patrons. The plaster work of the ceilings was elaborately decorative... The trestle table was giving place to solid tables with ornamental legs. Many magnificently carved bed and cupboards...still survive in their grandeur..." (*English Social History*)

This craze for visual arts imperceptibly passed into the poetry of the time, especially the Spenserians. The pastorals of these poets are full of scenic paintings.

12.3.2 Mannerism

The word "mannerism" means the angularity of speech or behaviour, particularly a habitual trait peculiar to a person. It also implies an excessive use of a distinctive manner in literature. In the context of the seventeenth century literature, it means a particular trait of the period that has been made use of over much. The Metaphysical poets are fond of using witty and ingenious analogies. Such analogies in Metaphysical poetry is often expressed through conceits. (The word 'conceit' has been elaborately explained in Unit 13). The moment a conceit becomes a forced explication of an image to the furthest point to which ingenuity can carry it, it becomes a bad conceit. This is caused because of the sheer love of the poets for mannerism. In one of his elegies, John Donne, by a series of ingenious analogies, advocates the preposterous proposition that an old and ugly woman will make a better wife than a young and handsome one. This indulgence in sheer wit smacks of mannerism.

Poems of the forties and the fifties of the seventeenth century abound in conceits running to fantastic extravagance. Even a major poet like Marvell indulges in this mannerism. R.G. Cox rightly affirms:

...the wit of Marvell himself sometimes misfires, as with his Salmon-fishers who 'like Antipodes in Shoes', have shod their Heads in their Canoes.
(*Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol-3)

John Cleveland in his poetry make wit a game and the imaginative pressure is not there to back it up. Consequently, he is liable to Johnson's charge that the attempts of the Metaphysicals are analytic (one that splits) and that they are deficient in the poetic power to make a synthesis of the heterogeneity of materials. In the third stanza of the poem, *To the state of Love* Cleveland dilates at length on his clasping of his beloved. Cleveland's use of wit is a hangover of the Metaphysical heritage and does not have anything to do with the newness of perception.

12.3.3 The baroque

The term 'baroque' has been derived from the Spanish and Portuguese name for a pearl that is rough and irregular in shape. It has become a pet word for art historians in their description of a style of architecture, sculpture and painting in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It later spreads to Germany and other countries in Europe. Initially it was a term of disapprobation, but with the passage of time the derogatory meaning is lost. This term is also applied to literature. It has assumed the signification of any elaborately formal and magniloquent style in verse or prose, for example, some verse passages in "Paradise Lost" and Thomas De quincery's description of his dreams in *Confessions of English Opium Eater*. It took the intplication of a stock-in-trade word designed for the post-Renaissance literature on the Continent. Besides, it is a catch-word frequently applied to elaborate verses and

extravagant conceits of poets like Marino and Gongara in Italy, St. Amant in France and Crashaw in England. The poems of Donne, especially some of his divine poems in which he contemplates the apocalyptic vision, are labelled as baroque. This term also suggests the religious emotionalism of poets like Crashaw. In the continental context, the term, 'baroque', refers to the crisis of sensibility in the late Renaissance.

The Renaissance in initial years generates remarkable self-confidence and buoyancy of spirit. The pagan world that comes into being with the Renaissance clashes with medieval ethic, and there ensues a war between body and soul. So long as the balance of the two is there, the picture is ordered and 'coherent'. But as time goes by the schism in the psyche gets pronounced. This results into pessimism, chaos and violence. The scenario is perceptible in the Jacobean drama and the Metaphysical poetry, more conspicuous in the former than in the later. The baroque thus helps the poets to present and surmount the chaotic state prevailing in the Continent. Some poets who want to come to grips with the conflict between the body and the spirit harness their senses in the service of God. This phenomenon is noticeable in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, the Emblem Books of Jesuit poets like Southwell and the poetry of Crashaw.

The baroque sensibility works in two different ways. In the poetry of Crashaw it works in terms of rich sensuous images in adoration of the Divine. Drops of blood became rubies and tears became pearls in his poetry. In his poems, the experience of suffering undergoes a glittering metamorphosis, and the end product is the emergence of a world of tenderness and joy. In most of the continental poets, the picture is macabre and the dance of death is horrifying. The taste for the macabre is perceptible in the French drama as well. The life in the contemporary literature looks tortured, restless and tense. The scenario is full of skeletons, bones and shrouds. Poems of Theophile, St. Amant, Gongara and Marini replace the living world by a series of correspondences (resemblances). The recurrent motifs are tears, wounds, flaming hearts, the turtle dove, the phoenix, the grave and the nest. But some of the baroque poets conjure up a rich sensuous world. By doing so they want to transcend the ugly and horrifying world where things are out of joint. H.J.C Grierson rightly remarks of Crashaw's resplendent world that steals a march over the world of suffering :

Crashaw's long odes give the impression at the first reading of soaring rockets scattering balls of coloured fire, the 'happy fireworks' to which he compares St. Teresa's Writing.

(Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century)

Grierson, too, describes Crashaw's style in a baroque language. The baroque poetry has an affinity with the continental mode. It abounds in conceits that have the continental lineage. Grierson discovers that in Crashaw's *The Weeper* and *The Hymn to St. Teresa* conceits

...are more after the confectionery manner of the Italians than the scholastic or homely manner of the followers of Donne.

Let us see an example of Crashaw's baroque conceit in the following lines:

O cheekes! Beds of chaste loves,
By your own showers seasonably dash't,
Eyes! nests of milkie Doves
In your own wells decently washt.
O wit of love that thus could place,
Fountaine and Garden in one face!

(The Weeper)

The fountain and the garden are in the face of the repentant sinner, Magdalene. Tears dropping from her eyes refresh plants in the bed of her cheeks. This co-presence of the fountain and the garden is a matter of great joy. She has the feeling that tears shall be welling up in her eyes all the time. At another place in the same poem the

poet compares the tear-splashing eyes to two portable baths and, again, to contracted oceans. They are imagined to be oceans because the reservoir of water is not likely to be depleted:

Two walking Baths, two weeping motions;
portable and compendious Oceans.

EXERCISE-11

- 1. Name the earl who took lead in art-collection during the reign of Charles I

- 2. Name **two** painters of the time.

- 3. Define the word 'mannerism'.

- 4. What is meant by the 'baroque'?

- 5. Name an English poet who writes baroque poems.

- 6. Name a baroque poem that you have read.

- 7. Which class of the English drama may be nick named the 'baroque drama'?

- 8. Are the baroque writers generally optimistic or pessimistic?

12.4 SCIENCE: AN INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Elizabethan world-picture around 1590s new assumptions about life come into being. These assumptions spring from the emergence of the empirical science that relies solely on experiment. The medieval world order which, was based on faith faces a challenge. The territory of faith shrinks, leaving the rest to reason. Our period witnesses spectacular triumphs in diverse scientific fields. The Elizabethan world-order based on Ptolemaic astronomy as a vast system of the concentric sphere with the earth at the centre receives a shattering blow from three eminent astronomers: Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo and the notable physicist, Newton. The sun replaces the earth as the centre of the universe. The role of the astronomical theories is causing an upheaval in the minds of the people find an apt description in Donne's poem *Anniversary I*

And now Philosophy calls all in doubt
The Element of fire is quite put out,
The Sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it

12.4.1 The Astronomical Revolution

Let us have a brief discussion on the contemporary scientists and their contributions.

i). Copernicus (1473–1543): Copernicus's book titled *Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies* that is concerned with the revolution of planets also brings about a revolution in the world-view of the time. Copernicus believes that the sun is at the centre of the universe and that the earth moves round the sun. He also discovered that the earth has two sorts of motions: diurnal and annual. Thus the Copernicus theory displaces the earth from its geographical pre-eminence. It also makes man skeptical about the cosmic importance attached to him in the Christian theology. It challenges the medieval belief that the universe is an affair between God and man.

Copernicus himself is apprehensive of church inquisition and withholds the publication of his book till near his death time in 1543. The Legend goes that he holds the first copy in his hands on his death-bed. Luther to whom he communicates his theory feels completely upset. He looks upon Copernicus as a fool malingering a vain bid to reverse the established astronomical belief. Calvin, too has his gibe at Copernicus takes him to be rash and impetuous in placing his theory above the holy spirit of God.

ii). Tycho Brahe (1546–1601): Brahe holds an important position in the evolution of the astronomical science. His theories are partially correct. He holds that the sun and the moon go round the earth, but the planets go round the sun. He contradicts Aristotle's idea that everything above moon is unchanging. He makes a star catalogue and takes down the details of the movements of the stars. His study is of great use to Kepler.

iii). Kepler: Kepler takes the heliocentric theory of Copernicus and makes a lot of improvement on it. Kepler finds three laws to describe the motions of the planets. His theories of astronomy are published in 1609 and 1619. He maintains that the paths of the planets are elliptical, not circular. His second law relates to the varying speed at which a planet travels along its ellipse. The third law relates to the movement of a planet towards another planet.

iv). Galileo (1564 – 1642): Galileo adopts the heliocentric system of Copernicus and Kepler. He invents a telescope and makes a number of discoveries. He discovers the phases of Venus and the satellites of Jupiter. So far there were believed

to be only seven heavenly bodies: the five planets, the sun and the moon. So the number of seven was regarded sacred. This myth is now exploded with the addition of the four moons of Jupiter the number comes to eleven. His discoveries generates a lot of heat in the society and considerable hatred against him. Bertrand Russell points out that

“...the traditionalists denounced the telescope, refused to look through it, and maintained that it revealed only disaster...”
(*An Outline of Western Philosophy*)

Russell adds that even the professors of philosophy were members of the ignorant ‘mob’.

v). **Isaac Newton (1642–1727):** Newton believes that the heavenly bodies attract one another with a force. This force is directly proportional to the product of their masses. It is in inverse ratio to the square of distance between them. His ideas about the motions of planets and their satellites, the orbits of comets and the tides are deduced from his laws of motions. He makes an improvement upon Kepler's three laws and discovers the law of gravitation.

Most of these discoveries thus come in conflict with the established religious belief.

12.4.2 The Mechanical Philosophy

Our period is marked by a spectacular advancement in the scientific thought. The work of individuals like Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Bacon, Harvey, Gilbert, Descartes and Boyle and the Royal Society creates a climate of opinion that is inimical to the belief in the supernatural and the occult. Now the universe comes more and more to be

...regarded as the great machine working by rigidly determined laws of material causation.
(Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*).

Descartes gives a picture of the universe that moves according to fixed mathematical laws. Galileo plays an important role in establishing the primacy of the physical universe. According to Aristotle, heavier objects fell faster than the light ones. But Galileo established that both heavy, and light objects fall in a like manner. He also contradicts Aristotle's principle that an arrow is kept in flight only so long as the air pushes it. He holds that a moving object remains in motion until some force stops it. Galileo's stress on experiment is evident from his letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany written in 1615:

"Methinks that in the discussion of natural problems we ought not to begin at the authority of places of scripture, but sensible experiments and necessary demonstrations".

Cited in J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*).

Galileo does not believe in the blind following of the established philosophical principles; he rather believes in the deduction of philosophical laws from the book of nature. To put it in his own words,

philosophy is written in that great book which ever lies before our eyes – I mean the universe... This book is written in the mathematical language and the symbols are triangles, circles... without whose help it is impossible to comprehend a single word of it...
(cited in the book just referred to)

Another important agent of this scientific movement is Francis Bacon. In his book, *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) he talks of the scientific method which involves the making of experiments, the drawing of general conclusion from them and the testing of these generalization in further experiments. He is a champion of the inductive method in science. This inductive method receives a boost with the establishment of the Royal Society in 1660.

Newton who becomes the President of the Royal Society after Hooker's death in 1703 conceives the universe as a machine. He contradicts Aristotle's belief that nature can be explained from self-evident principles. He does not rely on those self-evident principles and establishes notions which match the facts of experience.

Hobbes and Locke are also eminent scientific thinkers of the time. They were not practising scientists, but their ideas were scientific. Locke was also a member of the Royal Society. Hobbes's contribution to the theory of mechanism and causality is significant. He turned Galileo's physics into a Metaphysics. He regarded mind as simply another body in motion. He enunciates the basic postulates of the mechanical philosophy in the following words :

For seeing life is but a motion of limbs...all automata have an artificial life?
For what is a heart but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body.

(Cited in *The Western Intellectual Tradition*)

The late seventeenth century poetry is an artistic reflection of the mechanical philosophy. We find a primacy of reason in the poems of Cowley, Denham and Waller. You will have the details in the section on the early Augustans.

EXERCISE-III

1. Describe the following adjectives : Heliocentric homocentric and concentric.

2. Name three astronomers of the time.

3. Write a few words on Copernicus.

4. Who wrote the following :

- a) *Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*
- b) *The Advancement of Learning*

5. Which poets of the seventeenth century are influenced by the mechanical philosophy?

6. Name a poet who reflects the contemporary conflict between religion and science.

7. Name two scientific thinkers who were associated with the Royal Society.

8. In which year did Copernicus die?

9. Name some important scientific philosophers of the time.

10. Which eminent scientist became the President of the Royal Society in 1703?

12.5 THE SPENSERIAN

The period under discussion is dominated by the Metaphysicals. But some poets of the time still write in Spenser's vein. This poetry makes a deification of love. In it we find an exaltation of virtue. The poetic tone is generally solemn and serious. The questioning spirit of the Metaphysicals is generally absent from this poetry. Like the poetry of Spenser, the Spenserian poetry is generally allegorical, pastoral and pictorial. There are four important poets in the group: Phineas Fletcher, Giles Fletcher, George Wither and William Browne. They have the significance of being a living link between Spenser and Milton and work as a conduit for passing the Spenserian legacy to Milton, who, too, takes to the allegorical mode.

12.5.1 Phineas Fletcher (1582-1650)

Phineas Fletcher, a clergy by profession, is noted for his allegorical poem, *The Purple Island*. An allegory is a narrative in the guise of something that is suggestively similar. It also has a moral bearing. *The Purple Island* is also pastoral in character and has an affinity with Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. In a pastoral we have an

enchancing world of peace and harmony. It may have a tail of chivalry and love. In a pastoral allegory the shepherds act as agents. But in this poem we have a fisherman who talks about love and religion. Here we find a pictorial description of the beauty of mountains, meadows, brooks and dales. It also looks like an anatomy of human body. This provides a battleground to virtues and vices. The poem has an echo of Book II, Canto 911 of *The Faerie Queen* by Spenser. Sir Guyon comes to the castle of Alma and falls into the trap of sensual enticement and struggles with them. The poem has a didactic design. The poet is also influenced by the notable Protestant poet of the time, dubartas. In this poem we have a reinarkable religious fervour reminiscent of Bunyan's allegories. The poem has influence on Milton's *Morniag of Christ's Nativity* in point of sensuousness and mythological embellishment. Fletcher's diatribe against the Jesuits in his poem, *The Locusts*, too, has its bearing on Milton's mind. The Jesuits are abominable because in league with infernal powers they hatch a conspiracy against the godly people .:

The Porter to th' infernal gate is sin,
A shapeless shape, a foule deformed thing,
Nor nothing, nor a substance...

12.5.2 Giles Fletcher (1585-1623)

He, too, was a clergyman. Apart from the influence of Spenser, the Influence of the Stalian poet of Counter Reformation is also perceptible on him. His poems are allegorical. They are marked by paradox His fondness for paradoxes and sensuousness is attributed to the influence of the *Stalian* writers. In his love for paradoxes he is also akin to Catholic poets like Southwell and Crashaw. His well-known poem, *Christ's Victorie and Triumph* (1610) relates to the Fall, the Incarnation, the Redemption and the Ascension. The poem is in the Spenserian vein. The end of the poem is remarkable. The poem ends with a vision of the marriage of the divine, groom and his mystical Bride, the Church. The description of paradise is rapturous. The poem is suffused with the benign and forgiving spirit of the Gospel. The Sensuousness and paradoxical wits infuse the elements of the baroque into the poem. But the carping consciousness of Puritan poets like Milton and Bunyan is absent from this poem.

12.5.3 Wither (1588-1667)

Unlike the Fletcher brothers, Wither is a Puritan. But he is in the habit of changing sides in politics. He is now a Royalist and now a Parliamentarian. The Royalists imprison him.

The Puritanical strain in him makes him unrelenting in his antipathy to vices. His poetry sometimes has a satiric edge. In his captivity he writes a number of poems. This comes at in the form of an anthology titled *Juvenalia* (1622). His other notable poems are *The Shepherd's Hunting* (1615), *Fidelia* (1615) and *Faire Virtue* (1624). His poems are pastoral and religious. He has a deep love for the country-side. He believes in the healing power of nature and is believed to have anticipated Wordsworth. His *Christmas* is a poem of naïve and pure delights. But his poems experience a Puritan interference from the poet. He inserts moral maxims in them and thus prevents them from being natural,

12.5.4 William Browne (1591-1643)

Unlike George Wither, Browne had got a sweet temper. He is suffused with a Chaucerian spirit and lets himself go in his description of jollity and mirth in the lap of nature. His poem, *The Shepherd's Pipe* gives us simple and pure delights of nature in the Chaucerian vein without the interposition of any moral speculation. This poem also has the sweetness that we discover in Spenser's Bower of Bliss (in *The Faerie Queen*). The allegorical strain of Spenser is noticeable in his poem *Britannia's*

Pastorals. This poem also calls to mind Sidney's *Arcadia*. The account of song birds singing their melodious songs, the scenic beauty of dawn breaking over a village and the lively and vibrant picture of huntsman dovetails with the patriotic subject. The poet relates the chivalrous acts of Knights who fight for the glory of the country.

EXERCISE-IV

1. Describe in a few words the main traits of the Spenserian poetry in the seventeenth century.

2. Name the poets who are called the Spenserians

3. In which sense are these poets important?

4. Name the poets who wrote the following:
a. The Purple Island, b. The Locusts,
b. *Christ's Victoria and Triumphs*
c. *Juvenalia*, e. The *Shepherd's Hunting*,
f. *Fidelia*, g, *Faire Virtue*, h. Christmas,
i. The *Shepherds' Pipe*.

5. Write a note on Phineas Fletcher.

12.6 THE CAVALIER POETS

The expression, 'The Tribe of Ben' needs elucidation. It has two key words: 'Ben' and 'Tribe'. 'Ben' cryptically, stands for Ben Jonson, 'Tribe' means a cohesive group under a chief. Here the leader is Ben Jonson in the realm of literary art for a number of younger poets of the time. Usually the word 'Tribe' is used contemptuously. But here it does not have any pejorative meaning. They, no doubt, seek inspiration from Ben Jonson and like to call themselves his 'sons' (Pelican *Guide to English Literature*, vol. 3). Still they are distinctively individual in their perception. All these poets were associated with the Court of Charles I. They were also known as Cavalier Poets, The cavaliers were Royalists and were pitted against the Round heads who were supporters of Cromwell. The faith of the cavaliers was Anglican and they aligned with the squires. The Roundheads were Puritans and were

confined to the industrial and commercial centres. It is worth noting that the Tribe of Ben was a part of the cavalier group. All cavalier poets did not belong to the tribe. This discussion confines itself to Ben's tribe only.

Let us first have an idea of the basic qualities of Ben Jonson's poetry. Ben Jonson's poetry is a blend of classical discipline and sturdy native inspiration. Ben Jonson is prized for poise, maturity and civilized grace in his non-dramatic poetry. In his poetry the stress is on the centre of emotion: but control does not mean the suppression of genuine feelings. He wants a critical control of emotional experience.

The cavalier poets thus seek to fashion their poetry after Ben Jonson. They, sometimes, also present a sustained argument in the vein of Donne, and again like Donne, they present the feelings in terms of images called not from classical mythology as was wont with the early Elizabethans but from different branches of knowledge, such as theology, philosophy and natural science. Thus the two veins of Ben Jonson and John Donne mingle in this poetry in various proportions. It is because of this that Geoffrey Walton calls this poetry an "aristocratic synthesis" of Ben Jonson and Donne (*The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.3*). In this poetry we have the upper-class culture of pre-Commonwealth England. It is an eminently English poetry, but it, especially in the poems of Suckling and Lovelace, also embraces the Continental literary traits exemplified by poets like Marino. In the poetry of the Tribe the elements of elegance and sophistication are tinged with naivety. When emotional discipline flags, it becomes boisterous and it verges on obscenity. As a result of the slackening of the classical grip, some of these poems become uneven, awkward and slipshod.

The quintessence of the poetry of the Tribe thus summed up finds its manifestation in various proportions in four principal talents : Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, John Suckling and Richard Lovelace.

12.6.1 Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

Robert Herrick : Herrick's poetry falls into three groups : anatomy poems, religious poems and epigrams. The last group is insignificant and so our study of Herrick's poetry will center round his erotic and divine poetry only. In his love poem, *To Anthea*, he adores his mistress in the Petrarchan vein :

Bid me to live, and I will live,
They Protestant to be...
Or bid me die, and I will dare
E'en Death, to die for thee.

The poet has the singleness of mood of veneration for his lady-love. Though he proclaims himself to be the 'Son of Ben', he does not appear to possess the Jonsonian attribute of control over emotion. The typical classical pose and maturity Jonson exhibits in the subtle ordering of emotions is sadly lacking in this sentimental outpouring of the poet for wooing Anthea. It is a tender and playful paraphrasing of the simple and unalloyed amorousness of the poet. In his poem on Julia he waxes lyrical over the silk costume of his beloved, and in an ecstatic ardour breaks forth into

...how quickly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

It is the naivety and unpretentiousness of a lover who shows abject servility to his mistress. In this respect he is close to the Elizabethan songsters. In the poem, *The Poetry of Dress*, he gives us a picture of the bewitching beauty of his beloved. The beauty here does not lie in the impeccable arrangement of the garment the lady is attired. The poet notices with a remarkable effusion of abounding joy:

A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat,

This discovery of beauty in wild civility is not in tune with Ben Jonson's concern for form and emotional discipline.

Herrick's poem, *To Dianeme* ushers the reader in a different world suffused with the classical wit that tempers Ben Jonson. Here the poet initiates us into a world that is different from the world of adoration. In this sense he is close to Donne. He wants to confront the beloved on an equal footing :

Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes
which starlike sparkle in their skies.

He drives the point home to his beloved that all her world of beauty is gone and that she has no armour against this ineluctable law of change, decay and death. In this poem the poet strikes an anti-Petrarchan note. Herrick is remembered for his oft-quoted poem, *Corina's going a- Maying*. In this poem, love assumes a greater dimension. It is in this sense that love is depicted in the backdrop of the greater rhythms of nature involving the sun in its splendid radiance at a dawn. We have pictures of dew-spangled herbs, trees and many-hewed flowers. Nature is in jollity and it is unwise to stay indoors. The poet says that to remain unresponsive to the beautiful rhythm of nature is an act of impiety:

'tis sin,
Nay, profanation to keep in,
When as a thousand Virgins on this day
Spring, sooner than the Lark, to fetch in May.

In this poem Herrick moves away from his master, Ben Jonson and goes in for romanticism that puts a premium on the indissoluble bond of man and nature. It is a celebration of paganism. Here the poet shakes off the shackle of rules and prescriptions.

Though Herrick in many a lyric is preoccupied with the theme of *Carpe diem* (i.e. making hay while the sun shines), he is also aware of the transience and brevity of all earthly things. This awareness becomes an obsession with the poet, and it is articulated in poems like *To Daffodils* and *The Funeral Ribs of Rose*. In *To Daffodils* he says,

Fair daffodils, we weep to see
you haste away so soon:

This awareness of the transience of life is a prelude to his religious poetry, such as *A Thanksgiving to God for his House* and *Litanie to the Holy Spirit*. Herrick's religious poetry is a simple invocation to God's grace. He looks upon God as his saviour. He gets succour from God in the moments of distress. In his religious poetry we do not have conflict between sin and redemption. His simple and naïve love for God is depicted in the following lines of the poem, *Litanie to the Holy Spirit*:

When (God knows) I'm lost about
Either with despair, or doubt
Yet before the glasse be out,
Sweet Spirit comfort me.

12.6.2 Thomas Carew (1594-1639)

Carew may not have the freshness and spontaneity of Herrick, but he outstrips him in point of workmanship. He has two poetic masters – Ben Jonson and Donne. The debt to Donne lies in the sustained argumentative evolution of his lyrics and the flexibility of his lines and the influence of Ben Jonson is perceptible in matters of

grace, urbanity and poise. His love lyrics do not have the languorousness of Herrick's erotic poetry, but they present a dry intellectual analysis of the experience of love. Sir Herbert Grierson rightly affirms :

...the poetic ornament of that court of Thomas Carew.
This young careless liver was a careful artist with a
deeper vein of thought and feeling in his temperament
than a first reading suggests.

Hazlitt dubs him as an "elegant court triflex" (cited in Crompton – Rickett's *History of English Literature*). But F.R. Leavis has all praise for him :

Carew, it seems to me, has claims to more distinction
than that he is commonly accorded. (THE REVALUATION)

In his love poetry Carew, sometimes, comes under the sway of Petrarch as Donne does in his poem, *The Canonization*. In the poem, *Song*, in a vein of adoration, he finds the ever smiling rose (an impossibility) in the beauty of his beloved. In the last stanza he compares the fragrant bosom of his beloved to a spicy nest in which the phoenix comes, at last, to die. In the poem, *To my inconstant Mistris*, he writes in the way Donne does in his poem, *The Flea*,. He wants to win the love of the lady who has broken faith with him. But unlike Donne, Carew is not outrageous and lyrical in his anti-Petrarchan poems. He is suffused with the court culture and cannot have the raffishness of Donne. The urbanity of time may also be attributed to the influence of Ben Jonson. Carew uses religious vocabulary, such as "poor excommunicate", "stray faith" and "glory crowned". The poet has banished the lady from his charmed circle of joy, because she deserted him. Meanwhile he has found another beloved and finds a great pleasure in the company of the new beloved. He says that now the former beloved would envy his happy lot and will like to return to him. But now he will not accept her. Some lines of the poem are double-edged. For example, we may see the following :

And to my soule, a soule more pure
Than thine...

If the lover is under an impression that he has a right to label her 'excommunicate' and 'apostate', he too deserves the same labels. The ironical expression implicit in the expression, "a soule more pure than thine" is an unwitting acknowledgement of the fact that he, too, is inconstant. This play of critical intelligence is Carew's indebtedness to Jonson-Donne heritage.

Carew's poem, *Maria Wentworth*, is a fine elegy. It, perhaps foreshadows the elegy of Thomas Grey on Richard West and Samuel Johnson's elegy on Dr Levet. It is in many ways superior to Grey's elegy which at many places tends to sentimentality. Carew's elegy is suffused with the double strains of Jonson and Donne. The image of Virgin as a bride justifying a chaste polygamy is a Metaphysical wit. The following lines reflect the civilizing grace of Ben Jonson :

Good to the Poor, to kindred dear,
To servants kind, to friendship clear,
To nothing but herself severe.

12.6.3 Sir John Suckling (1609-42)

Like Thomas Carew, Suckling is a court poet. But he is far less urbane and polished than Carew. However, he is witty and generous. He disarms people by his witty sallies. He is mercurial and volatile. He has the protean quality of changing his stance in lovemaking.

In the poem, *Song*, poet is wooing his lady-love who is pale, wan and mute. The poet feels exasperated when his entreaties fall flat on her. He feels vexed and annoyed and fails to keep his cool. In sheer rage, he breaks into imprecations:

If of her self she will Love,
Nothing can make her;
The Devill take her.

In the poem, *Sonnet*, the poet is love-sick. His mind is so revetted on love that he does not care a háng for any other consideration:

Make me but mad enough, give me good store
Of love...

He is in a state of frenzy and says that beauty is a misnomer and a cheat. These expressions are indicative of the poet's cynical attitude to love. He does not know of any sacred bond subsisting between the lover and the beloved, and in the vein of a typical Retoration rake or gallant arrogates himself the powers to invent to himself his own concept of beauty and love. In the last stanza the poet becomes a downright sensualist and uses raw imagery:

'Tis not the meat, but it is the appetite
makes eating a delight,

Thus he loses control over his emotion and does not follow the Jonsonian principle of restraint.

The poem, *My dearest Rival* is a sustained piece from beginning to end. The poet shows his argumentative development of his emotional experience. He has got a rival in love-making. He lists on an ingenious plan to curb the eccentricity of the beloved and to foil the game of his rival. He has an understanding with the beloved that they make a joint endeavour to praise the beloved. They vie with each other in extolling the beauty of the beloved. They continue with this venture till death knocks at their door. He says to his rival that if he dies before him he will make a will bequeathing the lady-love to him, and if he outlives the pact he will relinquish his claim to the rival. He says,

For no one stock can ever serve
To love so much as shee'l deserve.

This poem has a singular place in Suckling's canon of love poetry. This poem is marked by classical restraint. Here the poet forbears using coarse and brutal expressions. The interlocutor in Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesie* says that Suckling uses the language of a gentleman. Probably the interlocutor has this poem in mind.

12.6.4 Richard Lovelace (1618-58)

Lovelace is a poet of finer sensibility than Suckling. His indulgence into vulgarity is only casual. He makes an unbridled use of emotion in his poem, *The Scrutinie*. He suffers no qualms of conscience in snapping his relation with his lady-love at his sweet will. He took a vow to his beloved that he would be constant in love-making. But just as the day ended he revoked his commitment. This forsaking of the pledge is wanton and comes within the purview of perjury. But the poet wants to go scot-free and is not in the least ashamed of riding rough shop over the feelings of the beloved :

Have I not lov'd thee much and long,
A tedious twelve houres space?...
Could I still dote upon thy Face?

But in his poems like *To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas*, *To Lucasta, **Going** to the Warres*, and *To Althea, from Prison*, Loveless is quite a different poet. In his poem, *To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas*, he speaks of a complete union with his beloved, even at the moments of separation, reminding us of the two legs of the compasses in Donne's poem *A Valediction forbidding mourning*. *To Lucasta, Going to the warres* is also an affirmation of true love to the beloved. The image of "the nunnery" is suggestive of the elevated character of love. *To Althea, from Prison* breathes the rarefied atmosphere of the Italian poet, "Marino". The poet conjures up the picture of Althea. She comes to him in prison, riding the wings of poesy. His union with her in the realm of imagination is ecstatic. The poet shows himself transcending the confinement of the temporal world and discover bliss in the anns of love.

EXERCISE-V

1. What is meant by the term, "The Tribe of Ben?"

2. Name the poet who belong to the Tribe of Ben.

3. Which of the two group is bigger the Tribe of Ben or the cavalier poets

4. What were the main traits of Ben Jonson's poetry?. Confine your answer to twenty words.

5. Which sense the poets of the Tribe are similar to John Donne?

6. Name two poems by Herrick.

7. Name a poem in which Herrick appears like a romantic poet?

8. Name four religious poems by Herrick.

9. Name a poem by Carew in which we have the adoration of the beloved in the petrarchan vein.

10. Name four poems by Suckling.

11. Name four poems by Lovelace.

12. Write a few words on the poem, *My dearest Rival*.

13. Which of the four important members of the Tribe seems to be most uncourtly and vulgar?

12.7 THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

Seventeenth century in English literature witnesses the emergence of a host of religious poets. They are Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Marvell, Vaughan and Traherne in their chronological sequence.

You will have long discussions on Donne, Herbert and Marvell later in the block.

12.7.1 Henry Vaughan (1621/22-95)

Vaughan was born at Newton St. Bridget, Brecknockshire in 1621/22. He was the elder of the twins. His father came of an illustrious Welsh family. The pre-eminence of the family lay in the chivalry of one of its members, Sir Thomas Vaughan. Sir Thomas Vaughan fought gallantly in the battle of Agincourt. He fell a victim to Richard III. He was commemorated by Shakespeare. Very little is known about his mother. Henry Vaughan had the privilege of passing the early years of his life in a singularly beautiful and picturesque country. This opportunity of being nurtured in a lovely place was denied to major Metaphysical poets, such as Donne, Herbert and

Crashaw. Herbert saw the country-life only when he became matured. The urban Donne and the scholastic Crashaw missed the healing touch of nature.

Pre-Restoration

Henry Vaughan had been to Oxford along with his brother, Thomas. Thomas got his B.A. from Oxford, but Henry did not get his B.A. degree. He studied law and medicine, too. He was a Royalist and participated in the Civil War. He had the experience of being wounded in battle and also of imprisonment. He felt a great disappointment when he found that the Royalists lost the battle to the Parliamentarians. He also felt that his prospect of becoming a lawyer was belied. His frustration mounted all the more when two of his close friends died in military operations. His suffering was exacerbated with the untimely death of his brother and he also became vulnerable to illness, references to which are there in many a poem. All these facts of his private life—soldiering, protracted illness, the death of his brother and the failure of the Royalist cause—were the shaping spirit of his imagination. He got a very disappointing picture of life, violent and unjust. This resulted into an indignant contemplation of life, the manifestation of which is noticeable in the recurrent account of the fall of man from the state of grace in his poetry. It is this experience of disenchantment with the ways of man that is at the root of his moral preoccupation. His saddening experiences changed the course of his life. The Henry Vaughan of early days who mixed with the gay Cavaliers and bacchanalian wits found himself moving in a new direction. His gait became different, he became sober and charted a new path for himself. This change in him was further reinforced by a lot of literary activities he did from 1647 to 1650. This period is the watershed in his life. During this period he makes a lot of translations of classics. These translations hasten the spiritual change in him. He makes a translation of two very substantial essays by Plutarch, one of which relates to the diseases of the mind and the body. He develops a stoic point of view with a good deal of warmth and shrewdness. He translates Guevara's *The Praise and Happiness of the Country-life*. In keeping with the incipient mood, he translates *Flores Solitudes* by Nierembergins. This relates to the theme of solitude and retirement. Through the translation of Anselm's *Man and Glory* he offers a sterner fare. This book deals with the theme of temptation of the world. He also translates the book titled *The World Condemned*. This, too, deals with the religious theme of guilt and salvation. He also makes a translation of Nolius's *Hermetical Physick*. This book is metaphysical in character and tells us about the relation of God, nature and man. His long contact with the theological works has a chastening effect in him. He feels himself roused into a new life of bounding spiritual energy. With his new frame of mind, he beseeches his readers not to read his works written prior to 1647. There are at least ten passages in his poetry that suggest a consciousness that he has been looking for truth in a wrong place, i.e. in the paths of magic:

And my false Magic, which I did believe
Any mystic Lyes to Saturn I do give.

We may divide Henry Vaughan's poetic career into three phases. The first phase is that of gay and elegant love lyrics which were published in 1646. The second phase is the core of Vaughan's poetry stretching from 1647 to 1650. This group of poems is labelled *Silex Scintillans*. This anthology is enlarged in 1655 with the poet's preface to it. The third phase is known as "Thalia Redeviva". This was published in 1678. This group is considered to be of little value. This volume also includes some erotic poems which were written in the first phase. The poems of the first group owe their origin to the poetic fashion of the time. Vaughan seems to have drunk with the wits and swaggered down the streets with some of his bohemian friends. These poems are in the vein of Donne's early love lyrics devoted to the wooing of the mistress in an outrageous and cynical manner. The poem, *To Amoret gone from him* is a fine specimen of the lover trying to woo his beloved by cogent reasoning. The poet seems to attempt an imitation of Donne's amatory verses. The poems of this phase are marked by playful tenderness without the sensuous immediacy and rawness of Donne's poetry. But later Vaughan is convinced of the meaninglessness of these

poems. So he discards the fashion of amorous verses and goes in for real poetry that comes out in the form of *Silex Scintillans*. It is in this phase of poetry that the poet finds his voice and discovers a poetic medium for making articulate the vision incubating in his psyche. The kind of experience that the poems depict is control to his Muse. The poems generally present Vaughan's meditation on nature or on right or eternity or death or the presence of God in His Creation. In the preface to the enlarged edition of *Silex Scintillans*, Vaughan acknowledges his debt to Herbert in no uncertain terms and attributes the change in his poetic course to Herbert :

The first, that with any effectual success attempted a diversion of this foul and overflowing stream (i.e. of 'witty' amatory verse), was the blessed man, Mr. George Herbert, whose holy life and verse gained many pious Converts (of whom I am the least) and gave the first check to a most flourishing wit of his time. (cited in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol.3)

This candid statement of Vaughan prejudices the minds of many a critic of Vaughan who, on the basis of some poetic expressions of Vaughan having resemblance with Herbert's, try to establish that Vaughan's poetry is derivative. They maintain that Vaughan chooses the themes and titles of Herbert's poetry portrayed in a tame manner, makes a rehash of what Herbert does in his poetry. A critic like Hutchinson goes to the extent of remarking that he finds no other example of a poet who has so extensively borrowed from his model. (Cited in Boris Ford's (ed.), *From Donne to Marvell*) "Borrowing" is not the right word here, because Vaughan is not a plagiarist who steals lines from a passages from others and calls them his own. There is a kinship between Vaughan and Herbert in point of moral concern for taking a lesson from nature for the refashioning of man in the moral mould. This is the meeting point between the two poets. Soon after they part company and chart their ways of coming to grips with their vision in their own distinctive ways. Herbert's propensity is towards classical exactness and he does not have the flair for the intuitive apprehension of mystery that resides at the core of the universe as Vaughan does. Vaughan's concern is much more for the restoration of the commerce of heaven and earth that man has snapped willfully. In this restoration of the salutary intercourse of heaven and earth, his love of the picturesque native country comes to his rescue.

Vaughan's view of nature is difficult to understand without an acquaintance with his view of man. In the poem, *Man* he talks about the unstable character of man:

He hath no root, nor to one place is ty'd,
But ever restless and Irregular
About this Earth doth run and ride,

It is painful to contemplate the spectacle of the rebelliousness of man, his stubbornness to hearken to God's commandments and his proclivity to chase strange gods of fleshly appetite. This wanton defiance of man sunk in the mire of vile passions the poet puts against the process of nature which has a regularity and constancy about it. The first stanza of the poem, *Man* is about the steadfastness of the ordinary things of nature, such as birds which are like "watchful clocks" dividing time in a noiseless and imperceptible manner, the bees that "get home and hive" at night and the flowers that "rise with the sun". The poet longs for the steadfastness of the objects of nature that will have a beneficial influence on man by arresting his straying from the path of moral rectitude. He says,

I would (said I) my God would give
The staidness of these things to man! for these
To his divine appointments ever cleave,

The spectacle is both sublime and pathetic. It is sublime in the sense that the Creator has set man above all the rest of the creation, and it is pathetic in the sense that man becomes oblivious of his glorious destiny that he knocks at all doors, strays and roams.

In the poem, Cock-crowing, the poet in the vein of the German mystic, Boehme, talks about the unbreakable continuum subsisting between heaven and earth. Vaughan does not share the belief of a Christian Platonist who believes in the theory of ascension from the little world of man to the world of divinity. His is a conception of grace in descending order, meaning thereby that God's benedictions shower down from the top and the poem, Cock-crowing is a fine embodiment of the spark of divinity transfiguring in the ordinary cock. In this poem the poet presents the quintessence of his vision which in its capacious fold contains a remarkable intermingling of the terrestrial and the supernatural. At the outset the poet talks about the divine magnetism that works in the cock all night and makes him dream of *Paradise* and light. The cock remains undaunted in the night and its entire attention is riveted on the coming of the dawn in all its splendour and glory. It has an undying knack for anticipating the coming of the day in all its radiance, and this sense of having a premonition of the coming dawn has come to him from the Lord who is the Father of lights:

'Father of Lights.' What Sunnie seeds,
What glance of the day hast thou confin'd
Into this bird?

In the life of the cock the rapport with the Lord of Creation is intact, but the tragedy with the world of man is that a veil keeps off the grandeur of God from him, and consequently, for want of divine emanation, his life remains folded in darkness :

Only this veyle which thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veyle, I say, is all the cloke
And cloud which shadows thee from me.

Here Vaughan is very much like the penitent Donne or Herbert ashamed of his willed remoteness from the Maker. He is also akin to them in invoking divine ministration for his redemption :

O take it off!' Make no delay,
But brush me with light, that I
May shine unto a perfect day,

Henry Vaughan's vision is also perceptible in his distinctive contemplation of death. Generally death is considered to be a terrible reality of which we are afraid. But for Vaughan death has got a splendour of its own, and in this treatment of death he is like Donne in some measure in the sense that Donne, too, views death as a benign force which enfranchises the captive soul and enables it to experience felicity. In her book *Metaphysical Poets*, Helen C. White rightly observes that Henry Vaughan exhibits the characteristic seventeenth century "Mortuary splendour" and, in a typical *Metaphysical* vein, views death as the gate to the radiance of eternity. In the poem, *Ascension Hymn*, Vaughan hails death as a lovely, beautiful and righteous thing:

Dear, beautiful death! the jewel of the just.

In a bid to elaborate the beneficial idea of death the poet gives the image of a sepulchre or tomb and that of a star. The star is the soul and the tomb is the body, If the star is put into the narrow confines of a tomb, its light is circumscribed, but if it comes out of the cribbed and confined cell of the tomb; its light increases. In a similar manner, the soul comes out of the body after death and finds itself in its full

glory. But this glorification of death need not be taken as a morbid preoccupation of a psychopath,, it should rather be viewed as a desire for a richer life of the spirit. The view of death as the release of the spirit from the bondage of material existence has hardly anywhere been expressed so glowingly.

Vaughan's is a nature-mysticism. It has some kinship with the Blakian universe as regards mystical contemplation. This mysticism finds a beautiful account in the poem, *The Retreat*. In this poem, Vaughan's intuitive perception of eternity in "some gilded cloud, or flowers" unfolds his mystical vision. In many of his poems he talks about the radical failure of the ratiocinative faculty in man to comprehend the dynamics of the universe shrouded in mystery. He has an intense desire for cleansing the dusky and blurred glass of life so that he may have a glimpse of the bright face of God. In the poem, *The Retreat*, he imagines the days of purity when the soul was free of all blemish and he wanted to recapture the primal innocence that animated his soul either in the pre-natal state or in the state of childhood:

Happy those early dayes! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,

Vaughan's mystical vision is sometimes supposed to be vague and shadowy. It is thought that his picture is hazy and there is nothing to clutch at. But Vaughan's mysticism is not a flight into the realm of the inane. In the poem, *The Retreat*, the lines,

But felt through all this fleshly dresse
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

Give a lie to the misconception about his mysticism as being sloppy and fluid. The awareness of eternity here and now is a rebuff to those who take Vaughan's mysticism with a grain of salt. Compared with an identical experience of 'angel infancy' in Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* Vaughan's contemplation has got definitiveness about it. Wordsworth may be charged with vagueness and a mental bombast, but Vaughan's *The Retreat* has got an experience realised in terms of concrete immediacy in the images of "the bright stroots of everlastingness" and the unsteady gait of a man inebriated who in his bed to move forward goes two steps backward.

It is generally believed that Vaughan's poems have a brilliant beginning and a brilliant ending, whereas in between the two there is a lack of a sustained development of the idea from the beginning to the end. Vaughan is supposed to be a poet of flashes, one who sees visions but miserably fails when the question of incarnating that vision in terms of a concrete situation comes. The opening line, like the following:

I saw eternity the other night (From *The World*)

impresses the reader, but the poem does not become a sustained piece. It turns out to be a struggling one leaving the impression of a curious tameness and flatness on the reader. The vision that flashes like a wonderful jet in the beginning experiences a swift extinction. But this is not true of all poems of Vaughan. He distinguishes himself on the plane of sensibility. He is not as good on the reflective level as he is on the level of sensibility. However, in a few notable poems, such as "Man", "Peace", "Regeneration", "Cock-crowing", "The Retreat" and "The Night", he exhibits his capacity for sustaining his inspiration from start to finish. It is not any lack of faith in ecstasy, nor is it any failure of taste for the heights. It is a matter of Metaphysical heritage for keeping both heaven and home in sight. Vaughan is also accused of being loose in the texture of his structure. His poetry has beautiful phrases or purple patches. But he lacks the compression of Herbert. Compared with

the taut and firm lines of Herbert, Vaughan's lines are diffuse and limp. For example, we may see the following lines from Vaughan's "Night":

Through that pure vision – shrine,
That sacred vail drawn o'r thy glorious noon.
That men might look and live a Glo-worms Shine,

But, at times, Vaughan, too, succeeds in presenting lines that are precise and compact. For example, we may see the under-mentioned lines from Regeneration,

The unthrift Sunne shot vitall gold
Checqu'd with Showie fleeces,
The aire was all in spice
And every bush
A garland wore.

Like Crashew's, Vaughan's vocabulary is limited and somewhat monotonous. There is a tendency in both Crashaw and Vaughan to use words like 'herb' and 'star' in a special, almost liturgical meaning. But the emotional aura is much more extensive.

12.7.2 Richard Crashaw (1612/13-49)

Richard Crashaw was born in England in 1612/13. He was the son of William Crashaw, a famous Anglican preacher and writer of conspicuous Puritan sympathies. William Crashaw was also noted for his passionate participation in the acrimonious debate of the time relating to the repugnance to the papal authority. The initial development of the mind of Richard took place in the scholastic atmosphere of the family. The foundation of his education was laid in the father's library in White chapel. The staunch and sincere crusading spirit of the father affected the sensibility of the son. The family ambience was afflicted with a series of setbacks, and this had a lasting impact on the mind of Richard. When he was three or four years old, his mother died. But the step-mother was there to supplant his mother with tenderness and affection. His father also died a premature death, leaving Richard under the guardianship of two distinguished lawyers who were the friends of his father's Temple days. Signor Praz attributes something of his susceptibility to maternal tenderness to recurrent losses in the family. Crashaw's letter containing the nostalgic expression "my dearest mother" and his praises of Teresa of Avila and the Virgin is indicative of his craving for maternal love. The tragic incidents in the family made him highly sensitive. The first turning point in his life after his father's death was his acceptance for admission to the Charter house in 1629. His stay at Charterhouse had a lot to do with the formation of his religious sensibility. Sunday exercises were a part of the curriculum, and as a part of this course, seniors were required to make verses in Latin and Greek on the Gospel and the Epistle of the day. Richard Crashaw proved his merit by being elected to the Greek scholarship at the college on October 6, 1631. He did matriculation in the next year as a pensioner at Pembroke College, Cambridge. With a considerable reputation as a youthful poet he came to the university. He made many contributions to the collections of elegies in his first year. In the address prefixed to his "Epigrammata Sacra, he makes a declaration of his objectives in making poetry. He speaks of his unflinching resolve to devote himself to sacred poetry. He was greatly influenced by Little Gidding. Little Gidding was a circle of like-minded spirits suffused with religious feelings. It was founded by Nicholas Ferrar. This circle sought to put a primu in on monasticism and religious life in the Protestant England. Nicholas Ferrar was a friend of Richard's father. Little Gidding also ministered to the spiritual nourishment of George Herbert. Ferrar was an Anglican, but he was not prejudiced against Catholics. Like Ferrar, Crashaw was an Anglican scrupulously refraining from taking upon Pope as Anti-Christ.

The poetry of Crashaw falls into three groups. The first group is called "Epigrammata Sacra". This was published in 1634.

This anthology contains poems that are wholly Latin and wholly sacred. The second anthology "steps to the Temple" was published in 1646 and was enlarged in 1648. This book is a mixture of Latin and English poems. Unlike the preceding anthology, this anthology includes both secular and religious poems. The third collection is known as "The Delights of Muses". This is also a mixture of sacred and profane themes. The fourth anthology was titled "The Carmen Deo Nostro." It was published in 1652. The poems in this group are exclusively sacred and English. It is an outcome of the poet's realisation that his Muse will be more at home in the vernacular than in Latin.

A perusal of his sacred poetry gives us an idea that Crashaw's idea of God is different from Donne's and Herbert's. Donne has got the conception of a wrathful God intent on punishing those who go against His commandments. Donne suffers from deep anguish resulting from his nagging sense of sin and is, generally, afraid that the wrathful God will not absolve him of his sins. The sense of sin is also the prime alienation of man from God in Herbert's poetry. But Crashaw is altogether a different breed. He is a radiant spirit who feels perfectly assured of his salvation in God. It is probably in only one poem by Crashaw, i.e. *Our Lord in his Circumcision to His Father* that God is wrathful. Crashaw's God is generally the God of love who cannot bear to see the misery of this Creation. In his poem, *Christas Nimia*, God, the emblem of love, shows largesse on people irrespective of their deeds in this world:

Why shouldst thou bow thy awfull brest to see
Why mine own madneses have Done with mee
(From *The steps to Temple*).

In the poem, *A letter to the Countess Denbigh*, Crashaw's all-benign and all-forgiving God is ready to embrace the hesitant man:

Disband dull Fears, give Faith the day:
To save your life, Kill your Delay.
(From *The Carmen Deo Nostro*)

In his conception of a loving God, Crashaw owes much to Marino, the Spanish poet, who in his poem, *Sospetto D'Herode* (1637), gives an identical conception of God:

That the unmeasur'd God so low should sinke,
As prisoner in few poore Rags to Lye.

The idea is that God is bountiful even in granting pardons. Crashaw seems to have been highly impressed by God's forgiveness and His readiness to provide succour to the needy.

In his poem *Hymn to St. Teresa* the poet presents a highly exalted account of the life of St. Teresa of Avila. Some critics feel that it is a resume of the great sacrifice of St. Teresa and that it has nothing to do with the personal predicament of Crashaw. But a careful reading of the poem makes it manifest that through this account of Teresa's sacrifices for the fulfilment of the lofty ideal of love and sacrifice, Crashaw is enacting the drama taking place in his own soul. St. Teresa is the alter ego of Crashaw. We have an idea of the poet's radiant spirit talking about the uplifting inspiration emanating from St. Teresa. The poet expresses his sense of wonder and delight in a fellow creature and makes an effort to analyse the sources of power that he has felt in the words of the saint. He has a feeling that Divine love has kindled Teresa's heart and that Teresa's fire has kindled his heart. In the hymn Crashaw says,

Each heavenly word whose lid flame
 Our hard Heart shall strike fire, the same
 Shall flourish on thy browes, and be
 Both fire to us and flame to thee.

Teresa is a persona in the poem enacting the spiritual turmoil in the heart of the poet. Making St. Teresa the protagonist of the poem is a device used for maintaining an aesthetic distance from the poet. It is a method for making his personal struggle impersonal in an indirect and oblique manner. Unlike Donne and Herbert, Crashaw, in his devotional poetry, talks least about his personal agony. His poetry is fundamentally contemplative and effective. This aspect of his poetry gives rise to a charge against him that his poetry has little intellectual content. But this charge is not rooted in fact. Crashaw is a profound scholar and is trained in theological disciplines. His poems are full of religious contemplation and full of intellectual contents.

Some critics see in excess of sentimentality in Crashaw's poetry. But actually it is not so. Crashaw uses some poetic devices that prevent his poems from being sentimental. The preponderance of antithetical expression impart a sort of stringency to his poems and neutralize the effects of emotion. For example, we may see the following:

Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet
 (From *The Weeper*)
 and

Of a sweet and subtle Pain: of intolerable joys:
 (from *Hymn to Teresa*)

Crashaw's adept handling of paradoxes is a typical metaphysical trait. The line,

Fountain and garden in one face (From *The Weeper*)

has the intellectual draught breathing dry air into the clammy universe of *The Weeper*. Lines like this save Crashaw's poetry from lapsing into a riot of emotions,

One charge against Crashaw's is that his poetry abounds in abstractions. This charge seems tenable. The words Crashaw uses lack the nerve and sinew of the English Language. The forthrightness and masculinity of Saxon words are absent from his poetry. Some sort of remoteness is there in hearing in the studied and impersonal diction.

Crashaw has the great gift of the sheer power of music. The little and cadence constitute the secret of his poetry. His images are not well realized. But it does not mean that he fumbles and gropes in the realm of uncertainty. What is lacking in the immediacy and concreteness of imagery is made up by the uplifting and ecstatic rhythm of the life.

12.7.3 Thomas Traherne (1637-18 – 74)

Despite extensive researches into the life of Thomas Traherne, very little is known of it definitively. The place and date of his birth are unknown. However, scanty evidence gleaned from various sources tell us that Traherne was the son of a shoemaker of Hereford. His family was connected with the ancient family of the same name that for three centuries owned Middlecourt, at Lugwardine, a mile from Hereford. It is also supposed that Traherne had some Welsh blood in him.

Information goes that the Traherne family was well off and prosperous and that Thomas Traherne had the fortune of having a happy boyhood. On March 1, 1652 he entered Brasenose College, Oxford, the haunt of the Puritans of the time. He did his B.A. from there in 1667. His stay at Oxford provided him with a great opportunity for saturating himself with the classics. The subject that endeared to him was Platonic philosophy. His early interest also centred round Socrates and the Stoics. On doing his B.A. he came in contact with Annabella, the Dowager Countess of Kent who offered him the living at Credenhill (supposedly a parish). In his *Centuries of*

Meditations, he tells us about his setting down in the country with a contented heart. He was satisfied with the austere and spartan life in the country. He spoke of his firm determination to be content with ten pounds a year, some leather clothes, bread and water. In this strict regimen, he was in quest of felicity. He had a Thoreau-like vision. In 1661, he did his M.A. and in 1669 he did Bachelor of Divinity. The range and kind of scholarship he displayed implied a prolonged sojourn in a well-stocked library at a parsonage. In the library he read Thomas A. Kempis, Bernard of Clairvaux, the Church Fathers, especially St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Augustine, St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas and Luther. The University Note Books tell us about Traherne's readings in Seneca, Plato, Plutarch, Aristotle, Pico della Mirandola and the Hermetic philosophy. The Bible also formed an integral part of his life and he made use of it in his daily meditation. His books, *Roman Forgeries* (1673), *Christian Ethicks* (1675) and *A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation* (1699) are suggestive of his wide and extensive reading not only of religious literature but also of political and social upheaval of the time. In recognition of his talent, Sir Orlando Bridgman made him chaplain. But unfortunately, Sir Bridgman himself suffered an eclipse and moved to London, accompanied by Traherne. This was a blessing in disguise for Traherne who got an opportunity of mixing with the London elite. He made a mingling of the felicity of the rural retreat with the stark reality he encountered in the mercantile world. In *Christian Ethicks*, he is not a dreamer enjoying isolation and solitude, but a philosopher and critic, intensely aware of and responsive to the intellectual currents of his day. On Bridgman's retirement in 1672 he accompanied him to Teddington, Middlesex where he died in 1674. He had a row of five houses which he donated to the poor. This act of munificence is suggestive of certain unworldliness which pervades everything he wrote.

Traherne is one of the most intensely personal poets of the time. In this respect, he surpasses even Donne. In Donne, we are aware of a tension between his self-consciousness and his desire to transcend himself. But in Traherne, the impression is that of a poet who is obsessed with the compulsive course of self-articulation in the lyrical form. Traherne is a man of revelation, and the heart of that revelation is his own experience. He is both, a prophet as well as a poet. Like Henry Vaughan and Wordsworth, he tells us about the experience of innocence either of childhood or of the life before birth. This experience is Edenic. His insatiable desire for recapturing the felicity which has something celestial about it endows his poetry with a mystical dimension. In his poetry, the reader feels confronted with the overwhelming consciousness of the presence of God in His Creation. Traherne outdoes Vaughan and Wordsworth in making the reader feel this immanence of God in His Creation with a sense of urgency that is difficult to match. In Vaughan's *The Retreat*, the desire to tread the ancient track to catch a glimpse of the shady city of palm trees gets impaired by the sway of intoxication with sensual pleasures. The see-saw rhythm bodes well for the pilgrim embarking on the journey to the place of his birth in Paradise. In Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*, shades of the prison house descend on the growing boy and the landscape becomes murky, despite the realisation that the world of vile passions is not his original home. But in Traherne there is no uncertainty, no second thought, no succumbing to temptation and no procrastination in the attainment of felicity. The confident pilgrim in his poem, *On News*, has fastened his eyes on the priceless treasure in a foreign country :

My very Joys themselves, my forren Treasure,
Or els did bear them on their Wings;
With so much Joy they came, with so much Pleasure.

The poet says that the treasures of the temporal world hold no attention for him :

...(since nought did please
I knew.) my Bliss did stand.

To him God is the 'Cream', the 'Gem', the 'Diadem' and the 'Ring' enclosing all that belong to the material world (From *On News*). He says that the *Heavenly Eye* (From *Centuries of Meditation*) is much wider than the sky and that it oversees everything. There is a joyous acquiescence into God who is the Alpha and Omega of everything. In the poem, *Hosanna*, Traherne speaks of the sovereignty of God :

No more shall Walls, no more shall Walls confine
That glorious soul which in my Flesh doth shine.

Henry Vaughan compares the body to a tomb and the soul to a star and says that the star remains eclipsed in the tomb. But Traherne's faith in God makes him declare that the walls do not have the power to keep the soul from sending out light. This shows that the poet's faith in God is unflinching.

To Traherne, all aspects of human experience, apart from the adoration of God, are secondary, derivative and ancillary. When the commerce of the human soul with the Divine ceases, people become blind and fall prey to vile passions. In this state of delusion they take the sham for the real. Like Bunyan, he movingly pictures people groping about in darkness, and says that salvation resides in God.

Traherne's mystical experience gives him a distinctive character. He feels that the joy and illumination he experiences is not self-regarding. He believes that the joy of this ineffable order increases by common sharing and does not, like goods of this world, diminish by use. Felicity is to be reached out to all, because its real value lies in the communal sharing :

The light which on ten thousand faces shine
The Beams which crown ten thousand vines
With Glory and delight, appear
As if they were
Reflected only from there all for me
That a Greater Beauty there might see.
(From *Centuries of Meditation*)

The poem, *Shadows in the water* shows the criss-cross pattern of Traherne's self-consciousness in a typical Donne manner. It is only Donne of all other Metaphysicals who **come** closer to Traherne in respect of the adroit playing of one attitude against another. In this poem, the poet is on the brink of a pool of water and broods over the possibilities of abstruse and bizz **are** possibilities of life. The paradoxical play of **intithetical** ideas is beautifully reflected as in the following :

Beneath the Water People drown'd,
Yet with another Hev'n crown'd,

In the concluding stanza of the poem Traherne's heightened consciousness of nature, the treasure house of the unknown joy is embodied in his becoming one with the purpling stream. This rapport with the sweet murmur of the rill is possible when the thin '**Skin**' is broken. Earlier in the poem the poet speaks of the intervening barrier of a **film** that keeps off the poet from the other world. **The** film reminds us of Vaughan's veil that keeps off a man's soul from the Divine.

Traherne is not an accomplished craftsman. He does not have the native endowment of a **poet** consciously manipulating his materials into a **design**. His poetic genius feels at home in the couplet form, and when he comes to the composition of spacious stanzas, he fails. Traherne comes towards the end of the Metaphysical movement when the sensibility of England is moving towards plainness. So he is also close to **Cowley** and his disciples whose writings are marked by clearness, coolness and simplicity. He is good at writing couplets. In respect of musical quality, Traherne is

close to the Caroline poets. The poems that he writes in praise of God are exceedingly moving.

EXERCISE-VI

1.

Bring out some points of difference between the religious poetry of Donne and that of Herbert.
2.

Which of the two **Marvell** is closer to ----- Donne or Herbert?
3.

When did Henry Vaughan die?
4.

Name works that Vaughan translated in English.
5.

Name two poems by Vaughan
6.

Who wrote the following

a. *Silex Scintillans*
b. **Thalia** *Redeviva*.
7.

Give the main idea of the poem, *Cockcrowning*.
8.

When was Crashaw **born**?
9.

In which language was the first anthology of Crashaw written?

10. In which sense Crashaw's idea of God is different from those of Donne and Herbert?

11. Who wrote the following:
- Centuries of Meditations
 - Shadows in the Water.

12.8 THE EARLY AUGUSTANS

T.S. Eliot states a basic fact of life when he says that sensibility alters from generation to generation. This change in sensibility necessitates a corresponding change in poetic medium. Probably mid-seventeenth century poets like Waller, Davenant, Denham and Cowley perceive a change in the sensibility of the people and makes an artistic reflection of this changed awareness in their poetry. Their poetry points to a change in favour of order and decorum both literary and social. In their poetry we have a predominance of reason and this preoccupation with reason, becomes the hallmark of the poetry of the eighteenth century. It is in this sense that these poets are called the precursors of the Augustan poetry. In the preceding and the contemporary Metaphysical poetry (some Metaphysical poets were contemporaries with them) the focus is on the inner vibration of man, but in this poetry the centre of interest shifts towards the social aspect of man. The Metaphysical wit involving cerebral quibbling gives way to epigrammatic neatness. Instead of the passionate thought of the Metaphysical we have a polite rationality and a good sense. The eloquent rhetoric of the Metaphysical is replaced by a tone of polite discussion. Things are amenable to rational argument and wit is regulated by a sense of good form. Unlike the Metaphysicals, these poets do not revel in ransacking the world for images expressive of their unusual perceptions. They focus their attention on the general conceptions of life. They take their cue from the experimental philosophy of Bacon. Abraham Cowley, a leading poet in this group, is a founder member of the Royal Society that lays emphasis on getting knowledge through observation. Hobbes's rationalism is there as a great assault on the vagaries of imagination. This incipient growth of rationalism comes as a great foil to the playing up of the imaginative faculty that sometimes runs into an excess in the Metaphysical poetry.

12.8.1 Edmund Waller (1605/6-87)

Waller writes lyrics in the vein of the cavaliers like Suckling and Lovelace. But his emotion is not unrestrained. He puts his emotional experience to scrutiny.

In his poem, *The selfe-banished* the poet languishes in love for a lady for sometime. But his wooings evoke no response. His attempt to distance himself from her proves futile. The memories revive and hurt him. We have an impression that the poet has been wronged by the lady-love, but the penultimate stanza springs a surprise. The last line,

The vow I made to love you too

brings the cat out of the poet's bag. It is now clear that the poet has affairs also with another woman.

In the poem, *Song*, the poet takes a dig at a beauty who is proud of spurning the offer of love. Unlike the Metaphysicals, he takes the familiar image of rose, and says that a lovely lady who is unresponsive to lovers is a rose flower blooming in the wilderness of a desert and dying unwept and unsung. He offers a counsel to the beauties of the world:

Bid her come forth,
Suffer her selfe to bee desir'd,
And not blush so to be admir'd

In the Metaphysical the stress is on the presentation of individual experiences, but in the hands of poets like Waller the personal experience merges into the experiences of the common people.

Waller also wrote divine poems. His poem, *Of the Last Verses*, is about the wisdom that comes with old age. It gives us the story of a man whose passions are spent and whose visions are unclouded. The man has been compared to a dark cottage, battered and decayed. The chinks in the door of the cottage admit the ray of the sun. The ray is the light of wisdom that drives out the darkness of ignorance that was thickened by vile passions. The conclusion of the poem reminds us of the concluding line of Sophocles's *Antigone* that have been uttered by the chorus :

We learn when we grow old.

There, we have pride, instead of passions, that clouds the vision of the protagonist.

This poem has been written in complete. The pair of iambic pentameters rhyming together is foil to the waywardness of emotions. The couplet thus keeps exuberance under check. Thus Waller earns the credit for reforming the numbers. He can also make the couplet supple by using enjambement (or run on) as he does in the following:

No Mortal Parts are requisite to raise
Her.'..

This reminds us of John Donne who is in the habit of using enjambents (explained in units 13 and 14). This also shows that the co-currents of literature have overlapping boundaries and they are bound to be affected by each other (or one another), though in some measure only.

12.8.2 Sir William Davenant (1606-68)

Davenant wrote both secular and religious poems.

For the Lady, *Olivia Porter* is a fine specimen of his love poetry. Endimion Porter has an intense desire to send a new year's gift to his wife, Olivia Porter. He wants to give her the tribute of a white "Ermine" and orders his men to hunt the ermine. He also sends his men to climb up a rock and bring a star contracted in a diamond. But he says that the eyes of Olivia outshine the stars. He thinks of presenting her pearls brought from the sea, but he realises that the tears of his wife are like pearls. He also realises that his images are hyperbolic and so he comes down to the world of reality :

How I command? How slowly they obey?
The churlish Tartar will not hunt today:
Nor will that lazy sallow Indian strive
To climb the rock, nor that dull Negro dive.

The antithetical statements in the first line of the quotation are played off against each other and, in a mock-heroic vein bring the poet back to the waking world. The heroic couplets give a compact form to the riot of emotions the poet indulges himself in.

The poem, *The Christian's reply to the Philosopher* relates to the clash of body and soul, and also to reason and faith. He says that our body is the seat of passions and passions are like mists that darken the vision. The poet tries hard to move towards the light of divinity, but the progress is tardy. At last he looks towards death as

A short dark passage to Eternal Light.

Allied with this theme of death as the harbinger of a new life is the theme of dry reason made mellowed by faith.

12.8.3 Sir John Denham (1615-69)

Denham is often associated with Waller. Both are regarded as the pioneers of the classical poetry from Dryden to Johnson. Pope sums of the chief attributes of the two in the following words:

Denham's strength and Waller's sweetness

Like Waller, Denham goes in for correctness and decorum. His primary concern is for common sense and good form. The measured and deliberate movement of his verse proclaims the advent of a new era. His poem, *Cooper's Hill* is a specimen of the careful art involved in the making of the couplets, the appropriate medium for his controlled feelings. From the vantage point of the summit of the hill he looks at the landscape. But the painting of the landscape is different from the exuberant fantasy of either a Sidney or a Spenser. There is a skilful mingling of the descriptive and the reflective strains. The description of Runnymede brings to mind the historical associations of the place. During the process of rumination, the matter of kingship also comes. Johnson is full of praise for Denham's *Cooper's Hill* and looks upon him as the initiator of the new genre of local poetry. The meticulous care that Denham employs in the fashioning of his couplets is evident from the following extract from *Cooper's Hill*.

O could I flow like thee and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme!
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle yet not dull
Strong without rage, without overflowing full.

The simple and direct diction is governed by the requirement of sense. The assortment of words having antithetical meanings are telescoped together in expressions like "though deep yet clear," "though gentle yet not dull" and "strong without rage". The couplet becomes a poetic instrument for describing things with a great precision and conciseness.

12.8.4 Abraham Cowley (1618-67)

Cowley stands at the cross roads of transition, and as such, his poetry shows the traits of both – the Metaphysical poetry and the Augustan poetry. He has fondness for the Metaphysical conceit of Donne. He also has a growing taste for physical science and rationalism. He is a great friend of Hobbes and a great admirer of Bacon. He is one of the founder members of the Royal Society. The Society aims at the acquisition of scientific knowledge. It also aims at the invention of a style that is simple, natural, precise and concentrated, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can. The language is a common man's language. It is not the language of wits.

Though Cowley shows the influence of Donne in him, he does not hesitate in heralding a new order. This order lays emphasis on Reason, Nature and Truth.

In the poem, *Ode: of Wit* he presents wit in a manner that is quite different from that of the Metaphysical. The attributes of wit, according to him are Reason, agreeable harmony and lack of Discord or confusion. It is a serene and steady contemplation of life. In the poem, *The Change* the poet gives a realistic picture of love. The poem is marked by a genuineness of feelings. Reason and common sense make their presence felt in the poem. The poet is aware of the pitfalls underlying the charming surface of love. The apparently beautiful beloved is a prisoner of Pride, Malice and Inconstancy. The case of the lover is completely different. He looks ravaged by despair, grief and fear, but he harbours profound love in his heart. This critical examination of the theme of love anticipates the character of Belinda in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

The classical bent of Cowley is seen in poems like *On the Death of Mr Crashaw* and *On the Death of Mr. William Hervey*. The stateliness of diction in which he pays a tribute to Crashaw is classical in tone :

Thou from low earth in nobler Flame didst rise
And like Elijah, mount Alive the skies.'
Elisha – like (but with a wish much less,
More fit thy Greatness, and my Littleness)

The couplet form saves the elegiac strain from becoming too morose and gloomy. The magniloquence of diction typical of a neo-classical poem has an uplifting effect.

EXERCISES-VII

1. Write a brief note on the characteristics of the Early Augustan poetry.

2. Who wrote the following poems :

- a. *The self-banished*
b. *Of the Last Verses*

3. Write a few lines on the poem, *The self-banished*.

4. In which poem does Waller suggest that wisdom comes with old age.

5. Name two poems by Davenant.

Who wrote Cooper's *Hill*?

In which poem does the following line occur :
"O could I flow like thee and make thy stream"

In Cowley's poem, *The Change* we have the prototype of the arch-character in Pope's poem, *The Rape of the Lock*. What is the name of this character in Pope's satire?

2.9 LET US SUM UP

Now that you have had a close look at the multi-faceted life and poetry of the seventeenth century, you may be able to form your idea of the period. In sum, it is one of the most troubled times in the history of England. The Civil War between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians took the toll of many a life. The Thirty Years' War between the two wings of Christianity engulfed almost the whole of the continent. The contemporary man is torn between influences and counter-influences from the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Ptolemaic theory, the Royal Society, the Bible and so on. There is a conflict in the mind of man between faith and science and body and soul, and there is turmoil without. The picture of the horror is best mirrored in the continental baroque and the Jacobean drama. The Metaphysical poets strike a balance between the ugly and the beautiful, as it is exemplified by Donne's key image in *The Relique*: "a bracelet of bright hair about the bone". Even in his religious poetry Donne brings together the two apparently antagonistic worlds: the earthly and the spiritual. In his religious sonnet, *Batter my heart* he imagines himself to be a bride wedded to God but being placed under the spell of her worldly seducer. This is the state of the contemporary man.

But the turmoil is not abiding. People have started looking forward to order, Reason, Reason and Nature. This phenomenon is well reflected in the poetry of a new generation that combines the best qualities of both the worlds. To put it in Emile Zola's words,

... (He) took the highest place in the estimation of his day. He closes the list of the 'metaphysicians' and anticipates the English classicists. He resembles Donne in his search for conceits and subtleties, ...but with a taste for physical science, he is above all an intellectual.

(*A Short History of English Literature*)

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5. Name two poems by Davenant.

6. Give the main idea of the poem, *For the Lady*, Olivia Porter

7. Who wrote *Cooper's Hill*?

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(*A Short History of English Literature*)

Note: The answers that are well reflected in the body of the discussion do not find any mention here

Exercise I

1. France, Germany and Spain
2. 1618 – 1648
3. The Roman Catholics and the Protestants.
4. The latter was British affair, while the former was a continental (an European) war. Britain did not participate in it.
5. Britain and Holland
6. France and Poland
7. No, it did not even participate in it.
8. It is near Prague in Germany.
9. The German emperor won the battle.

Exercise II

1. The Earl of Arundel
5. Crashaw
6. The Jacobean drama
7. Optimistic

Exercise III

1. According to the heliocentric conception the sun is the centre of the universe. The planets move round it. This theory was propounded by Copernicus.
- b. The homocentric theory believes that man is at the centre of the universe. As per the Christian theology the universe is an affair between God and man.
1. The word 'concentric' means having a common centre with another circle or other circles. As per the Ptolemaic astronomy, there is a vast system of concentric sphere with the earth at the centre.
2. Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo
4. a. Copernicus (b) Francis Bacon
5. Cowley, Denham and Waller.
6. John Donne
7. Newton and Locke
8. 1543
10. Newton

Exercise IV

They are important in the sense that they serve as a living link between Spenser and Milton.

Exercise V

3. The Cavalier Poets
14. Suckling

Exercise VI

1. In Donne's religious poetry, there is an exciting argumentative evolution warring impulses culminating in a harmony but in Herbert the conflict is not

exciting. In Donne's divine poetry we never have the feel that the poet tilts the balance in favour of one at the expense of another. But in Herbert earthly pleasures are played down and heavenly bliss is played up. Herbert tends towards an austere and ascetic mood, where as Donne plays upon the entire gamut of experience even in his divine poetry

2. Donne. Like Donne (Marvell) shows a vibrant structure that encompasses within its fold the deeply moving picture of sensual ecstasy warring with the spiritual ecstasy.
10. Donne thinks God to be wrathful who is intent on punishing those who go against His commandments. He is afraid that God will not absolve him of his sins. The sense of sin alienates man from the God in Herbert's poetry, too. But Crashaw is nearly always assured of his salvation in God.

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15. J.B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit*.
16. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*.
17. F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation*
18. Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*.
19. L.C. Knights, *Explorations*.

UNIT 13 JOHN DONNE : PORTRAIT OF THE MAN, HIS THEMATIC AND TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS AND A STUDY OF FOUR LOVE POEMS.

Structure

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to critically appreciate John Donne's love poems, and to present John Donne as a catalyst, making significant alterations in the course of the preceding Elizabethan poetry.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to John Donne, the pioneer of the metaphysical movement in English literature in the first half of the 17th century. His poetry is expressive of intense personal emotions in a conversational idiom with detachment. But critics of the school of Samuel Johnson look askance at Donne's poetry whereas his poetry has received approbation from such modernists as T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis. Unit 12 has already given you a picture of the milieu : social, intellectual and religious that forms the groundswell of the kind of poetry that Donne writes. In this unit you will read about Donne the man and also about the salient features of his poetry. This unit also undertakes a close textual reading of four major poems of John Donne, the first two of which deal with the poet's favourite theme of anti-courtly or anti-Petrarchan love and the remaining two tell us about his metaphysic of love, the implication of which inheres in a close interdependence of body and spirit.

13.2 JOHN DONNE.: THE MAN AND THE POET

John Donne (1572-1631) was the son of a prosperous London ironmonger and his mother was the daughter of John Heywood, the epigrammist. His parents were Catholics. When he was only three or four years old, his father died. The task of



schooling him falls on the shoulders of the mother who trains him on the basic tenets of Catholicism. At the age of twelve he with his brother, Henry, goes up to Oxford. He matriculates from Hart Hall in October, 1584. His biographer, Izaak Walton says that at the age of fourteen, he moves from Oxford to Cambridge and that he remains there until his seventeenth year. But Sir Richard Baker, a contemporary of John Donne at Hart Hall gives the clinching evidence of John Donne's having been at Oxford only.

In 1591 he becomes a law student at Thavie's Inn and from there he goes to Lincoln's Inn in 1592. In the interregnum, from 1582 to 1591, he travels on the Continent, especially Italy and Spain. There is a difference of opinion amongst Donne critics as to the period of his travel during this phase. But documentary evidence shows that the travel occurs between 1588 and 1591. From 1592 to 1596 he has been more or less in continuous residence at Lincoln's Inn. He studies law and divinity and mingles with the wits of his time at the mermaid, writing verses, going to plays, making amorous advances to his mistress and falling out with them, too, in the same strain. This portrait of the man need not create the impression that he is a bohemian. His is a paradoxical personality. This 'visitor of ladies' and 'frequenter of plays' is also a painstaking reader. He has a "hydroptique immoderate desire" (Donne's phrase from a letter cited in *The Monarch of Wit*) of learning. From four to ten in the morning he is seen lost in the realm of books. Though he is a voracious reader, he fails to have a University degree. The fact of his being a Catholic was looked upon as a disability and for fear of maltreatment Catholic parents avoided sending their wards to the University. However, John Donne engages himself in a profound study of doctrinal differences between Anglican Church and the Roman Church. He witnesses the tragic death of his brother, Henry, in August 1593. Henry had invited the wrath of the ruling class for harbouring a seminary priest and had to undergo imprisonment. He dies in captivity. In 1596 under Essex he goes on Cadiz expedition. This is followed by Island's expedition in 1597.

On his return from Island's expedition in 1597 he becomes Secretary to Thomas Egerton. In 1601 he is elected one of the members of Parliament for Brackley, a constituency controlled by Egerton. These achievements give him a sense of fulfilment and, in a mood of elation, he brands Catholicism as 'corrupt' and forsakes it. But the sense of satisfaction that he gets from rising by 'winding stair' (*Monarch of Wit*) wears thin very soon. It is owing to his clandestine marriage with Anne More (the first name is also written as 'Ann') in 1601 that he loses the secretaryship in 1602. Anne's father, George More, even manoeuvres for his as well as his associates' imprisonment. All this means disaster for him and he writes to his wife :

John Donne, Anne Donne, VN-done (cited in Monarch of *Wit*)

These acts of injustice also leave a scar on his psyche that is difficult to heal. However, his love for his wife remains constant. Probably it provides him with an escape from worldly tension. This fact finds a poetic rendition in his poem, "The Canonization" which will be discussed in Unit 14.

Donne's dismissal from Egerton's employment marks the end of what J. B. Leishman calls the First Act of Donne's life. After his dismissal he goes to the house of Anne's cousin, Sir Francis Woolley, at Pitford in Surrey. He studies Canon and Civil Law there. In moving to Pitford his aim is to be near London with his eye on the prospect of preferment in store for him. He then moves, first, to Camberwell and, then, to Mitcham. At Mitcham he generally leaves his wife at home and moves into the charmed circle of his friends in or about London. The situation is similar to the one expressed in his poem. "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" through the image of a pair of compasses. The desire for secular preferment is overpowering in him and goads him on peregrinations. In course of this intense search for a job he gets considerable assistance from one of King James's most favoured chaplains, Thomas Morton. With Thomas Morton, Donne embarks upon the task of converting the English Roman Catholics to Protestantism in 1607. Both Thomas Morton and King James think Donne to be a great theologian especially made for the service of the Church and tries to persuade Donne to take orders. But Donne is still inclined to have an employment in State and declines the offer. In 1611 he finds a patron in Sir Robert Drury and goes on a visit to the Continent with him. In 1614 he becomes a Member of Parliament for the second time. But this proves to be a short lived affair, because the Parliament is dissolved at a premature age of two months only. The dissolution of the Parliament marks the end of what Leishman would call the Second Act of his dramatic life. In this period he is virtually "an actor without a part (*Monarch of Wit*). Like Hamlet, he broods over the meaninglessness of life. Though he is not rebellious like Hamlet, he feels caged in this life, like a 'Prince in prison' (*The Extasie*). Probably this state of imprisonment in life also finds expression in "The Second Anniversarie" in which he talks about the imprisonment of the soul in body. J. B. Leishman seems right to a great extent when he says that

...during the thirteen years that followed his dismissal from Egerton's service in 1602 until his ordination in 1615 he was without a part.

Donne takes orders in 1615 and in 1621 he becomes the Dean of St Paul's. He dies in 1631. The period from 1615 to 1631 that shows him mainly as a preacher may be said to be the third phase or the Third Act of his life. Leishman is probably right to remark that

the part which was allotted to him, proved to be peculiarly suited to his temperament.

From the above chronicle of Donne's life we may also have the image of John Donne the poet. He is a man who vacillates between two masters within him. The one pulls him to the life of sensual pleasures and the other leads him to disenchantment and detachment. His sufferings and religious training make him brood over the idea of the relative importance of body and soul, leading to their interminable dialogue in his major poems. His early poems like "The Flea" and "Go and Catch the Falling Star" are impudent and outrageous and seem to reflect the poet's early life. His life as a preacher has been given a dramatic expression in poems like *Litanie* and his Divine poems. Thus the life of the poet has a definite bearing on his poems.

Exercise- 1

1. . What prevents John Donne from taking a University degree? Is it an incompetence on his part or a matter of some constraint implicit in his birth?

2. Who was responsible for John Donne's schooling in boyhood? Was he left free to develop himself as he wanted to do so or was he made to have some particular religious training?

3. What evidence is there to set at rest the controversy that John Donne got his education at Oxford and not at Cambridge? Is the issue alive or dead?

4. How far do you agree to a reading of John Donne as a man about town, a man in search of the delights of life ?

5. How do you reconcile John Donne the bohemian, a visitor of ladies and a frequenter of plays with John Donne brooding over the ephemeral character of the world?

Note : See the answers given at the end of the unit.

13.3 JOHN DONNE IN RELATION TO THE PETRARCHANS

John Donne's poetry falls broadly into three groups: Satires, Elegies and Verse letters, Songs and Sonnets and Divine Poems. These three groups have an underlying impulse, the impulse to break away from the shackles of the conventions of poetry reigning in English literature just before his advent on the literary scene. The dominant convention has been set by Spenser. But Spenser patterned his poems after Petrarch, the Italian poet: The Spensarian universe in his Amoretti sonnet – sequence is devoted to the adoration of his lady-love. Spenser invests his lady-love with heavenly attributes. However, he is not alone in writing poetry of this type. Some other poets are also there piping in the same strain. Sidney in his "*Astrophel and Stella*", Thomas Lodge in his "*Scylla's Metamorphosis*" and Michael Drayton in his "*Endimion and Phoebe*" make a goddess of their love, exempt from the ravages of time.

To John Donne this mood of abject acquiescence to lady love is something quite repulsive, because he feels that it runs counter to the psychology of man, man composed of diverse emotions and feelings. If adoration is an impulse in man, scorn is also there, contending with it and negating it, or setting it at naught. John Donne, who is aware of the intricacies of human heart in which contradictory impulses pull

in different directions, cannot reconcile himself without any demur to a lop-sided rendering of the theme of love. John Donne, with his penchant for extensive reading in law, theology and contemporary science, cannot be a mute spectator to what Spenser and his tribe was doing by extolling the lady-love and also transforming her into a deity. John Donne begins with a sedulous and unrelenting campaign against the ruling convention of the love poetry of the time wedded to idealization. He has a sharp analytical mind, and dissects the many-hued aspects of life and contemplates experiences with scepticism and detachment. In short, the distinctive flavour of **Donnes'** poetry lies in his reaction against lavishing praise on the object of love indiscriminately, and with cool objectivity, subjects even personal experiences to vigorous scrutiny, and thus John Donne breaks new grounds in poetry by launching a persistent and unflinching-attack on the ascendancy of poets just alluded to and fond of idealizing things. The scepticism and self-consciousness of the poet made him view the sugared sonnets of poets, such as Sidney and Spenser as well as the composers of madrigals weaving a tapestry of delectable romance, with a grain of salt. Though the attack on the high-falutin love is also there in Shakespeare's sonnets relating to Dark Lady and in Jacobean playwrights with their poetry of blood and revenge, Donne steals the show, because he is the singular poet, who with the zeal of a crusader, debunks the sublime and elevated strain unrelated to the lowly and mean impulses in man.

This impulse to probe and scrutinize is at work in different ways in his secular poetry of the first two groups of "Elegies and Satyrs" and "Songs and Sonnets" and Divine poems. The mood of debunking is not applicable to religious poetry in the manner it is applicable to the first two groups. In Divine poems the mood of questioning is there, but there is no attempt to deny the authority of God. The poet is seeking grace and redemption. Even in his secular poetry he takes the stuff of the Petrarchan mode of idealization for granted, but his mood of enquiry enables him to re-work the Petrarchan motif in a manner that the result is quite startling and the fond idea of the "Impossible She", claiming a blind allegiance from lovers of all hues, is subjected to scrutiny, and consequently the sham from the real in love-making is sifted and winnowed.

Exercise – II

1. Write a note on the reigning love conventions in the early 17th century lyrics. How does John Donne differ from the Petrarchans ?

2. Bring out the main difference between the love poems of the Petrarchan poets and those of John Donne.

3. Write a note on the "Impossible She"

4. What is Petrarchan model of love ? Name the English poets whose poetry is patterned after Petrarch.

5. How does Spenser become the presiding deity of poets writing in the Petrarchan vein?

6. Do you recall the famous sonnet sequence of Spenser drawing inspiration from Petrarch ?

7. Try to correlate Spenser's Amoretti sonnet-sequence with Shakespeare's first 25 sonnets that are known as sugared sonnets.

Note : The answers are placed at the end of the unit.

13.3.1 John Donne and poetic medium

Apart from John Donne's thematic innovations just referred to in the preceding subsection, there is a point worth noting in respect of the poet. It is that John Donne forges a poetic medium commensurate **with** his theme. In his poetry emotions have their intellectual counterparts. Joan Bennett makes a very illuminating comment that emotions are a grist to the intellectual mill of the mind. (Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical poets*). The implication is that an emotion is analysed in the context of a wide range of thought, and out of this analysis develops a pattern of thought utterly different from the primacy of one thought. John Donne knows that reality is 'diverse, and unless there is an attempt at comprehending the varied facets of reality, the poetry will lack fidelity to thought and experience. A refusal to grapple with the complex living of man results in a poetry that presents only a partial perception of the truth of life. In order to overcome this failing, John Donne wants his poetry to go the whole hog in recapturing the variety that composes the intricate pattern of life. T. S. Eliot, too, is full of admiration for John Donne for devising a medium that devours experiences of all sorts, right from adoration to brutality, with all intermediate shades of feeling in between, and with this amalgam of diverse experiences, he makes a pattern, rich and satisfying. A romantic poet is besotted with an agreeable experience and makes a flight into the empyrean domain oblivious of the stark reality. But John Donne digests the disparate facts of life and weaves a unity out of steady contemplation. Thus metaphysical poetry is primarily a style which provides the poet with a tool that places emotions in the wider matrix of life and also perceives a correlation between one emotion and the other, Basil Willey in his book, *Seventeenth Century Background*, rightly avers that the metaphysical sensibility means the capacity for living in divided and distinguished worlds and also for perceiving

correspondences between the diverse worlds one lives through. John Donne exhibits this capacity for taking on realities of different sorts with a searching mind and makes a pattern out of them. It is a conception of poetry in which the genesis is, no doubt, in private emotions of the poet, but the private emotion is judged and evaluated in a bigger pattern; and in John Donne's poetics, the poet has to be gifted with two attributes : one is sensibility and the other is judgement. This blend of emotion and thought in the making of poetry is reminiscent of what Coleridge says about the union of feeling and ratiocination : " Judgement ever awake and steady self –possession with enthusiasm or feeling profound or vehement" (From Joan Bennett., *Five Metaphysical Poets*, Chapter III).

Exercise - III

1. We would like to prize John Donne's poetry not for the idea, but for the manner in which the idea is presented. Discuss.

2. Write a note on John Donne's poetic medium.

13.3.2 John Donne and his detractors

The novelty in Donne's style is taken with a pinch of salt by his contemporaries like Burton. Burton, in the Preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, satirises Donne's poetry in a hyperbolic tone and remarks that his poetry is strong-lined, abounding in hyperboles and allegories. (From Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets*. "Introduction").

Soon the expression, 'strong-lines' (From Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets*, "Introduction") assumed the character of a slang against Donne's poetry. This depreciatory evaluation of Burton in point of Donne's poetry gets added strength from Dryden, remarking that "... he affects the metaphysics not in his satires but in his amorous verses where nature only should reign." (John Dryden, *Dedication to Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*). Later Dr. Johnson comes with his damaging observation on the metaphysicals, saying that they "may be termed the metaphysical poets". (Samuel Johnson, "*Life of Cowley*", *Lives of the Poets*). He adds that the metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show learning was their whole endeavour. Johnson again launches a devastating assault on the metaphysicals, when he comments that in their poetry "heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together". Dryden, in conjunction with Johnson, is responsible, in a large measure, for putting antipathy into the mind of the reader towards the metaphysicals. However, a sensitive reading of Donne's poetry, without any pre-possession, nails the charge that his poetry is a mere cerebral exercise and a cross-word puzzle. Donne's poetry is endowed with certain elements that are typical not only of his poetry, but all good or great poetry is supposed to have those attributes. It is a fact that disparate ideas find a place in his poetry, but the unity of experience is not a forced one. The unity comes into being under the intensity of artistic process.

In every good or great poet dissimilar ideas are seen not as a welter of facts, not a motley assortment of unrelated ideas, but a harmonious whole comes into being, when the poet contemplates them and perceives the inter-relationships amongst them.

far-fetched comparisons, as he finds a pair of compass for a pair of lovers and the image of marriage temple for the flea, that swells and pampers with the blood sucked from the lover and the beloved. The images in question may sound far-fetched or ingenious, but they have their justification in the context of the experience that is consistently developed in both poems – "Valediction : forbidding mourning" and "The Flea". To John Donne, or to any metaphysical poet, there is no segregation of experience into water-tight compartments of the sublime and the repulsive. The whole of life is grist to the mill of the imagination of the poet, and John Donne admits of no distinction between the poetical and the unpoetical. The concept or the image that illustrates his emotion comes into poetry.

Exercise - IV

1. On what ground does Dryden attack the Metaphysical Poets?

2. Do you really think that in Donne's poetry the resemblance between two objects are effected forcibly and unnaturally? Write only 'yes' or 'no' in your answer.

3. Is Johnson's statement that metaphysical poetry is simply a yoking of heterogeneous ideas by violence together (a) a reasoned one or (b) a matter of prejudice? Write your answer in only 'a' or 'b'

13.3.3 Donne's versification

Unless there is a careful consideration of some deep seated prejudices centring round Donne's versification, we fail to have a right estimate of the consummate management of his verses. Ben Jonson and Samuel Johnson are, in a large measure, responsible for vitiating the correct understanding of Donne's versification, Ben Jonson observes that for not keeping of accent, Donne deserves hanging (cited in John Bennet's *Five Metaphysical Poets*, Chapter III). Samuel Johnson remarks that Donne's verses are rugged and harsh (*Lives of the poet*, "Life of Cowley"). He further says that in Donne's verses "the modulation was so imperfect that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables". Apart from the misconception as to Donne's versification fostered by the above two critics, the songsters of the Elizabethan England also share the blame for this. The lyrics of these songsters are sung to the accompaniment of music. Donne's verses appear alien to the conventional mode and cause annoyance to the protagonists of the songsters' verbal melody typified by *Campion*. T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, in their different ways, have successfully countered the misconception about Donne's versification. They refute the remark of Samuel Johnson, T. S. Eliot, in his book, *On Poetry and Poets*, draws a distinction between a 'limited sensibility' and a 'defective sensibility'. He says that Johnson's sensibility is limited and not defective. Johnson is nurtured in the ethos of his time and is responsive to the subtle nuanced of the heroic couplet. When the question of being sensitive to the harmonies of Donne's verses comes, he fails. F. R.

Leavis concurs with Eliot when he observes that Johnson is conditioned by the needs of his time and is limited in point of his sensitivity to Donne's versification. (F. R. Leavis, *Anna Karenina* and *Other Essays*). Ben Jonson's remark is also circumscribed by his classical temperament which adheres to rules already laid down. F. R. Leavis rightly remarks that Donne writes in complete dissociation from music of the time and writes in a stanza form that 'proclaims a union of poetry and music' (*Revaluation*, Chapter I). Every sensitive reader whose ears are attuned to Donne's music finds that he successfully bends and breaks up the metrical pattern to accommodate with a remarkable fidelity the fluidity of his moods. In keeping with his meaning he distributes pauses and emphases. It is a tight rope walking in which the poet is treading the tense curve of the verse.

The subtle artistry that goes into the making of Donne's verses will be better appreciated when we take a passage and see how the poet fashions his verse. Let us examine the first five lines of "The Sunne Rising" (You will have an easy access to an analytical discussion of this poem in *Understanding Poetry*, EEG06 Course) and see for ourselves how meaning and rhythm become active partners in the enactment of the experience :

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us ?
Must to thy motions lovers season run?
Saucie pedantique wretch, goe chide
, Late School boyes, and sowre prentices.

The experience rendered in this passage (and the poem) relates to the wounded feelings of a lover who is in no mood to brook any interference with love-making. In his mood of anger he knows of no norms of decorum and propriety and he makes his verse an effective instrument of feelings, raw and elemental.

The first line of the passage is a string of invectives. The trochaic beginning in 'busie' arrests the attention of the reader who cannot help witnessing the poet heaping indignity on the mighty and widely respected sun. It is followed by a spondaic foot in "old fool". This stressing of both the syllables recaptures the mounting scorn of the poet. It is an off hand and contemptuous treatment of the sun. The manner is blatant and brazen.

It is through rhythm that the poet flings his barb at the sun who is uncivil and impudent and pokes his nose into the affairs of the lovers. The brusque and the intemperate in the poet-lover embodied in the movement of the verse shows that the poet is full of disrespect for the sun who is widely respected. The movement of the verse indicates impatience and impertinence. Thus the movement is in keeping with the emotion and experience that the poet wants to communicate. The angry poet fashions pungent shafts and hurls them at his adversary, the sun. The use of the pause after 'fool' and 'sun' in the first line is indicative of the fact that the poet, in a calm mood quite possessed with himself, breaks the sun into smithereens. The scornful mood plays against the rhythm of the line and thereby heightens his anger and disdain.

The poet also varies the length of the line as per the demand of versification, scrupulously reflecting feelings and thoughts, as they arise in his heart. It has got naturalness and directness typical of dramatic blank verse. In a dramatic verse gesture, intonation, pause and emphasis work in unison. These elements taken together compose the movement of this poem and the poem, from the beginning, manipulates tone and gesture, because it is through them that much of the meaning comes to the reader. The first two lines are short whereas the third one is long with the doubling of expressions such as 'Through windowes' and 'through curtaines'. The second line is a run-on entering into the syntactical pattern of the third line. The

auxiliary 'dost' is separated from the main verb, 'call' by the expression, 'through windowes and through curtaines'. It is a device for putting emphasis on the invasion of the bed-chamber in a clandestine manner. The length of the third line in its iambic measure is expressive of the rays of the sun in the form of a peeping Tom. The interrogative structure of the fourth line is in the form of a challenge to the sun. The use of the auxiliary 'must' with its note of compulsion and inevitability in the interrogative structure is designed for making a mockery of the pretentious such who is supposed to rule over the world. The preponderance of sibilants from line number one to line number four coupled with alliteration and assonance are meant for increasing the intensity of the venomous feeling against the sun. He is on a mocking spree and does not refrain even from calling names like 'saucie' and 'pedantique'. These adjectives are used also to heighten the negative effect by degrees.

From the above example it is manifest that the lines in Donne's verse are freely divided and are of varied lengths. It approximates to the speaking voice and have the vigour of colloquial speech. It is not the solemn and dignified march of verse associated with Spenser in Amoretti sequence. Spenser mounts a perch and does not know how to descend from it. His versification is in an elevated key and lines are of equal length. This regularity of mood and line is an anathema to Donne. It is because Donne has a realistic perception of man caught in the web of the intricacy of human heart. This perception is to be presented in a verse medium which catches the fleeting nuances of feelings and thoughts and embodies them in the tone, gesture and movement of the speaking voice.

A scansion of a Donne passage will help you to see his art of versification even more vividly. Let us scan the first stanza of "The Good Morrow" :

I won/der by / my troth/, what than /, and I /
 Did, till / we lov'd / ? Were we / not wean'd / till then ?
 But suck'd / on coun/trery ple/asures, chi/ldishly ? /
 Or snor/ted we / i/the sea/ven slee/pers den ? /
 'Twas so / ; But this / , allplea/sures fa/ncies bee. /
 If e/ver a/ny bea/uty I / did see, /
 which I / desir'd / , and got / was but / a drea/me of thee /.

1st line – Iambic Pentameter

2nd line – Iambic Pentameter with a variation in the first foot which is a trochee.

3rd Line - Iambic Pentameter

4th Line - Iambic Pentameter with a variation in the third foot which is an anapaest.

5th Line - Iambic Pentameter with a variation in the third foot which is a spondee.

6th Line - Iambic Pentameter

7th Line - Iambic Hexameter

Exercise – V

1. Point out the basic difference between John Donne and his predecessors as regards versification.

2. What prompted Ben Jonson and Samuel Johnson to castigate Donne for writing verses that are unmetrical.

3. 'John Donne argues in verse', Comment on this statement.
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-
-
4. Try to show that John Donne is a great metical mister.
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-
-
-
5. 'John Donne's verse has been affected by his being a frequenter of plays'. Justify.
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-
-
-

13.3.4 Conceit in Donne's poetry

You see the term, 'conceit' recurring in Donne criticism as a refrain.

Helen Gardner defines conceit as

...a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or, at least, is more immediately striking.

The impulse to discover likeness in things unlike is typical of us and this discovery is a simile or a metaphor. But this comparison becomes a conceit, when we are made to see the likeness, while being greatly conscious of its incongruity. In Donne's poem, "A Valediction : of weeping" a tear is compared to a globe. The quantity of tears grows into an amazing proportion and it takes the form of a deluge. The incongruity is patent and the reader finds it difficult to see the similarity between the things dissimilar. However, an alert reader is able to perceive the similarity on the emotive plane, and thus the apparent incongruity is condoned. Still the fact of apparent unlikeness is difficult to brush aside. Sometimes an element of fallacy is also introduced in an extended conceit. But the poet tries his best to present the fallacy as truth through some ingenious methods. The dialogue of souls in Donne's "The Extasie" is witnessed by a third person, and through the quantitative technique the poet adopts, he is able to "multiply his evidence in order to hammer home his conviction. (Leo Spitzer, "The Extasie". Gerald Hamond's ed. "The metaphysical Poets : A Selection of Critical Essays). Normally a poet presents his conceit in an argumentative way. S.L. Bethell maintains that "the perfect conceit must necessarily take an argumentative form ("The Nature of Metaphysical Wit"). The poet sometimes also builds up an allegory to convince his readers. The similarity presented through a conceit is not always literal, it is sometimes purely notional. But the most important element in a conceit is its apparent incongruity. Though critics like Dr. Johnson disapprove of this fashion of using "false conceit" (*Lives of the poets.*, "Life of Cowley"), the critics of our generation generally think it a natural way of presenting similarities between things apparently unlike. This idea is echoed in the following lines of Rosemund Tuve :

Much has been made of his (Donne's) harsh, violent, or displeasing images. It seems to me an error to call these images dissonant or audaciously discordant. They are not disharmonious with the subjects he chose... they are sometimes inharmonious with a given reader's preconceived notion of what kind of subject the contemplation of 'Love' or 'Woman' or 'The Soul' ought to lead one to propound.

(*Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, "The Criterion of Decorum")

Donne's subjects are audacious and so is his unabashed importation of the strictness of logic into the poetic genres he preferred.

In "A Valediction : forbidding mourning" a pair of lovers becomes the stiff legs of a geometrical compass. To a reader with a preconceived notion (and most of us have such notions) this comparison leaves an impression that it is a recondite and learned image, ill at ease with the softness and tenderness of love. Such images, though justified, are called conceits because of the incongruity being apparent in it. The element of incongruity is writ large on the surface of the poem, "The Flea". Herein the poet discovers likeness between the flea and the marriage bed as well as the flea and the temple, and obliterates the separate identities of the lover and the girl he is wooing by merging them into one. All these examples illustrate the fact that conceits are the products of the ingenuity of the poet discovering likeness between things hitherto thought to be unlike.

A conceit differs from its mother (Enanuele Tesaurio defines Metaphor in the following way : "And this is the Metaphor, mother of poetry, of conceits, of ingenious notions, symbols and imprese". (cited in) S. L. Bethell's essay "The Nature of Metaphysical Wits.") metaphor, in the sense that

...normally metaphor and simile allow and invite the mind to stray beyond the immediate point of resemblance, and in the extended or epic simile, which is the dismetrically opposite of the conceit, the poet himself expatiate freely, making the point of comparison a point of departure.
(Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets*)

But in an extended conceit the poet forces upon us new points of likeness, through the reinforcement of fresh images. Sometimes the central image in an extended conceit is encircled by a series of supporting images. This helps the poet to convince his readers. This happens in Donne's poem, "The Extasie".

In short, the elements of conceit are incongruity, concentration, tight logic and argumentative and dialectical tenor. It is an instrument designed for defining the meaning of the poem or used for persuading the reader to come round to the point of view developed in the poem.

Exercise – VI

1. What does a conceit mean?

2. Cite the example of a conceit from Donne's poetry and explain it?

3. Do you think then John Donne's conceits are lacking in a sense of propriety? Write either 'yes' or 'no' only.

4. Which of the two is the basic ingredient of a conceit – likeness or incongruity? Write your answer in one word only.

Note : Compare your answers with the one given at the end of the unit.

13.4 "THE FLEA"

John Donne's "The Flea" is one of the most admired poems occurring in the section titled *Songs and Sonnets*. It is evident from its appearance at the beginning of the 1635 edition of Donne's poem. A Dutch poet, Huyghens translated some 19 poems of John Donne with "The Flea" coming at the top, and some Dutch correspondents of Huyghens selected this poem for special commendation. Sir Grierson looks upon "The Flea" as a masterpiece of wit in England and Holland. J.B. Leishman, too, in his book, *Monarch of Wit* lavishes praise on "The Flea".

Donne had performed a kind of miracle, had almost succeeded in triumphing over the laws of nature - had, as it were, made a fire without sticks, built a house without bricks, created something out of nothing, or next to nothing.

Though "The Flea" is somewhat deficient in high seriousness, it offers unrivalled opportunities for the display of the author's wit. The astonishing fact about the poem is that the poet writes three stanzas of twenty seven lines, of close-knit and consecutive argument on an apparently unpromising subject as a flea-bite. The ancestry of writing poetry on a despicable subject such as the flea goes back to antiquity when Virgil writes on a gnat, and Ovid on a flea. IN the 16th century the Florentine poet, Berni (1535) had earned notoriety for his witty poems in praise of the plague, fleas, gluttons being in debt, urinals and the like. Thus the subject of poetry may be trivial, but the skill of the poet may transmute the ugly material into something engrossing, and John Donne's "The Flea" engages the inind of the reader by the brilliance of his wit.

Like the poem, "The Damp", "The Flea" is provocatively anti-courtly, and deflationary of the high pretensions of the religion of love. "The Flea" is meant to intiinate emblematically that it is not the Petrarchan posture of abject servility which is in view, but the quite uncourtly objective of marriage. The hallowed properties of the Petrarchan mode — disdain, honour and constancy — are to be exorcised brutally. It is the naked pursuit of love's war on equal terms, instead of the one-sided devotion to the lady-love, deified and exalted.

The poem begins with a rhetorical assault on a maiden, and the flea becomes a medium for the poet for outsmarting her in the game of love. The poet peremptorily asks the girl to mark the flea which has ravished her. This audacious charge of the violation of the chastity of the girl is stunning for her. But the rhetorical flourish of the poet is such that reels out a consistent argument in defence of the accusation he has hurled at her. The argument is specious, and appears to be well reasoned out, and on account of this sly sophistry, he affects a seeming suspension of disbelief. The poet wants to disarm the girl when he says:

Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee

The flea sucked the blood of the poet first and then that of the girl and consequently the two bloods become one. To the poet this mingling of bloods has nothing wrong about it, though the wrong is quite palpable and manifest in the sense that the mingling of bloods signifies a mating of man and woman. The poet, with a shrug of his shoulders, turns to the girl and wants to wrest her assent to his reading of the situation :

Confess it, this cannot be said
A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead.

The poet says that the supposed union of the poet and the girl in the flea has been effected without any courtship. The poet further says that the wedding was consecrated in a church and the flea is both the church where the marriage was solemnised and the marriage-bed. The battery of sophistry is so unrelenting that the girl is shown to be acquiescing into his rhetoric. The poet further adds that she need not inadvertently kill the flea in a moment of annoyance. If she does so, she would be liable to be committing sinful acts. First, through the killing of the flea, she kills him, secondly she kills herself and thirdly she desecrates the church where the marriage took place. This appears to be bizarre and outlandish to argue so, judged by the conventional norms. But there is the semblance of reality backed up by the intense feeling of the poet. The poet here mocks the conventional morality typified by the parents of the girl as well as the girl herself. The poet calls the girl cruel and unfeeling, because her hand is stained with the innocent blood of the flea which has committed no wrong. The poet completely absolves the flea of any guilt in doing any harm to the girl, saying :

In what could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?

The poet in a tone of raillery makes the girl a butt of ridicule by saying that there is no loss of honour or chastity involved in their affair with the flea. In a subtle and imperceptible manner the poet through his cogent reasoning has outwitted the girl. The subtle casuistry of the poet enables him to tear to shreds the conventional ethic of love that makes the girl coy and bashful and thereby impedes the possibility of a union of the poet and his supposed mistress. In undermining the fort of the traditional norm of prudence and circumspection, sustaining the life-style of the girl the poet is wooing, the rhythm used by the poet plays a significant part. Donne's rhythms arrest the attention of the reader and goad him along a desired line. They force him to pause here and rush there, governing paces and emphasises so as to bring out the full force of the meaning. Such shifts are as integral to Donne's particular mode of poetic statement as sensuous imagery is to Keats's. The opening line, "Marke but this flea, and marke in this" with its repetitive rhythm with a slight change is in the imperative mood, intended to wean the girl from all other distractions for focusing herself on the flea which is emblematic. The expression, 'confess it' is perhaps in the tone of admonition, the tone of rather forcibly wriggling out an approval, if the girl disagrees. Sometimes the poet speaks in a tone of urbanity and sophistication, dispensing with any overbearing tone :

This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloysterd in these living walls of Jet.

The rhythm is successful in evoking an intense dramatic circumstance from the outset by the pitch of the address. The scene is called up, peopled and tensed by the single speaking voice, and the poem goes on as though an action unforeseen at the start were revolving there and then. The reader follows through a spontaneous commentary on it spoken by one of the participants. It is the method of these poems (poems uncourtly) to present one side of a dramatic dialogue in which attack and tone

are relied upon to evoke the other party. It is also designed for controlling the distance between persons, telling us implicitly how they stand towards each other. This is a fiction which does much to give Donne's lyrics their peculiar immediacy as well as their intensity. When the piece is set, he varies and adjusts with a sensitive precision. The means are often unobtrusively slight.

Exercise - VII

1. What makes the poet ask the girl to mark the flea?

2. On what basis does the poet say that he himself and the girl become one in the flea?

3. What according to the poet is their marriage bed and marriage temple? Write your answer in one word only.

4. Do the girl's parents approve of the supposed marriage? Write only 'Yes' or 'No' as the answer.

How does the poet argue that in killing the flea the girl commits triple murder?

6. Is there any loss of honour and chastity involved in the type of love the poet celebrates in "The Flea". Give your answer in one word only.

7. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem, "The Flea".

8. Write a note on the arguments advanced by the poet in favour of the supposed marriage.

9. Explain three important images in the poem, "The Flea".

10. Consider "The Flea" as an anti-Petrarchan poem.

Note : Compare your answers with those placed at the end of the unit.

13.5 "TWICKNAM GARDEN"

John Donne's "Twicknam Garden" begins with his personal predicament. The poet is writhing with agony and his lacerated self finds a succinct summing-up in the first two lines of the poem :

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears,
Hither I come to seeke the spring.

"The poet feels so shrivelled and disconcerted that he decides in his mind to find something soothing for his afflicted nerves, and he comes into a garden, perhaps the garden of his patroness, Duchess of Bedford. The specific garden of his patroness to whom he has paid handsome tributes in many a poem, in no way sheds any significant light on the poet's anguish that has unhinged him. The garden is not the garden of Marvell with multiple layers of meaning. In this poem Donne's garden is simply a place, luxurious and delighting to the tortured self of the poet. The poet hopes to get the bliss of paradise and in the last line of the first stanza he uses the expression, "True Paradise" for the garden. He believes that the garden has magical property because he will receive such balms "as else cure everything". The panacea the poet presumes to discover is of no avail because in the last line of the stanza he says, "I have the serpent brought". The image of the serpent has to be viewed in connection with the image of "spider love" in the sixth line of the poem. These two images: the image of the serpent and that of the spider love, have something diabolical about them. The serpent in relation to paradise is the cause of the primal sin in the garden of Eden, making Adam an exile into the world, condemned to live by the sweat of brow. The serpent is symbolic of the original sin bringing a life of travail for people. Spider love signifies something that is base and vile because the spider feeds on filth and dirt. In Donne's poem, "Love's Exchange" we find a similar low image for love :

Love, any devill else but you
Would for a given Soule give something too.

In short, the deceitful nature of love impels the poet to bring in the two images: serpent and spider. The poet has at the back of his mind the disdain and indignity heaped on him by his lady-love and this unceremonious treatment at the hands of his lady-love is the cause of his disturbed state of mind. The poet lays blame at the door of love (love embodied in the mistress), and he adds another dimension to the treatment of the idea of love which has become the cause of his undoing. The lines

The Spider love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert Manna to gall

have three keywords, 'transubstantiates', 'Manna', and 'gall'. The first two words impart scriptural reverberations to the poem. Transubstantiation is the doctrine in Eucharist church which means that bread is the flesh of Christ and wine is His blood. It is an important ritual in church. The partaking of bread and wine recalls to mind the crucifixion of Christ and Judas, one of Christ's disciples instrumental in putting Christ on the cross. This is nothing but betrayal of love. Manna is food provided by God for Israelites during their long stay in the desert, when love and trust are not there sustaining the bond subsisting between man and man. John Donne's poem begins with his private emotion of grief, but the sensibility of the poet is such that instead of luxuriating himself in sorrow, he contemplates the idea of suffering with a genesis in love in a wider perspective. In Donne, there is an affirmation of cool detachment and self-possession in the face of something that upsets him. He shows a stand against a commitment to one's woes which disturb normal poise and variety of response and congeals at worst into cold self-righteousness. Donne's wit exhibits a cool sanity and a wary openness which goes much beyond the refusal of facile commitment or sardonic amusement at the way the world goes. He probes and sifts experiences and analyses with remarkable candour the various possibilities in a given situation without aligning himself summarily with a soft option of acceptance or rejection. In the first stanza of "Twickenham Garden" the poet who is lovesick and is sunk in the slough of despondency keeps his wits about himself and contemplates the reality of love in multiple facets: the love that is naïve, the love that is pure and immaculate, and the love that has a seamy side. The telescoping of images in the brief compass of the first stanza — the images of spring, balm, paradise, serpent, spider and transubstantiation roll into unity under the intensity of artistic process, giving the impression of the ruin wrought by love that works in an unbridled way and knows no moderation.

The second stanza presents an awful prospect staring the poet in the face. The poet who came to the garden in search of balm finds that his expectations are shattered and the garden becomes a menace with a sinister design, and he, therefore, wants that the garden be folded in darkness:

'Twere wholsomer for mee, that winter did
Benight the glory of this place

The poet wants to be some senseless piece of the garden. He wants to be a mandrake or stone fountain, and this impulse of regression to the world of rocks and plants is prompted by something in the poet that he fails to come to grips with. He finds that the trees glistening with bright foliage mock him and the poet makes a very despairing disclosure:

But that I may not this disgrace
Indure, nor leave this garden...

This is a galling experience in the sense that the poet finds himself in impasse and does not know how to overcome it. He does not feel anger towards the lady-love who is not responsive to his amorous advances. He wants self-effacement by merging himself into nature without giving vent to pent-up anger to his mistress.

Here this state of mind of the poet has kinship with the Astrophel of Sidney's sonnet-sequence, like many other Petrarchans and Petrarch himself. reflecting the grim plight they are in, and thus powerless to amend it. In this universe of lovers, anger is not consonant with the attitude of the poet-lover. The response is nearer to simple human respect than to reverence or hatred. However, it is certainly not genuflection before a semi-deity in the form of a lady-love. The point worth noting in respect of Donne's treatment of the **disdainful** attitude of the mistress to him is that Donne deals in all the battery of sighs and tears supposed to be flimsy stock-in-trade of the Petrarchan mode of idealizing the 'Impossible **She**'. Donne's distinctive merit lies in a finely discriminated fidelity to natural experience, and he refrains himself from the Petrarchan adulation of lady-love.

The third stanza is an intensification of the probing and analytic mind of Donne making an inquisition on the experience of frustration in love. This stanza **abounds** in hyperbole when he says that lovers with crystal vials would come to him for collecting his tears with the injunction from the poet to compare his tears with the tears of their mistresses at home. The poet cannot forbear himself going into high - falutin utterances that tears of all are false that taste not just like his. He indulges himself in making extravagant claims of being pure and steadfast in love and makes a brutal exposure of sham and pretence underneath the veneer of naivete :

Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,
Nor can you more judge woman's thoughts
Than by her shadow, what she by tears, wears,

Though the poet appears to have spared his Lady-love the ignominy he has heaped on the rest of woman folk, he, in fact, with a remarkable sleight of hand brings his mistress in the net of wide-ranging censure of women when he says, "O perverse sexe". The expression, 'perverse sexe' is also a severe **idictment** of the capricious tyranny of his lady-love. The poet is broken-hearted, dying of her hard-heartedness and **scorn**, and this contemptuous mien of his lady-love offers an affront to him. She is a pervert because she has outraged the first primal state of nature in which love for love is an innate condition of life.

In short, the poet wants the naturalness of impulses seeking their fruition without, in **the** least, being impaired and warped by the massive indifference and nonchalance of **the** lady-love. On the surface "Twicknam Garden" appears to share the strain of idealization in the Petrarchan mode in the light of the overceremonious gravity of manner. But there is no denying the fact that there are continual deflating touches of hard realism perceptible in the images of self-traitor, spider love, transubstantiation, Manna and gall, and it makes the poem a huge, high, comic hyperbole. Like Donne's poem "Love's Deitie", flouting the accepted pieties and denying the basis of courtly servitude of the Petrarchan mode, "Twicknam Garden", too, asserts that an unreciprocated love is no love, and, therefore, he breaks into the damning exclamation, "O perverse sexe".

Exercise - VIII

1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, "Twicknam Garden".

2. Consider "Twicknam Garden" as an anti-Petrarchan poem,

3. Try to discover the Petrarchan influence in **Twickenham** Garden. Write your answer in two or three lines only.

4. Why is the poet in search of the spring? Where does he hope to find it?

5. What does the poet mean by the expression, "perverse sexe".

6. Name a few conventional image used in the poem, "**Twickenham** Garden".

Note : Compare your answer with the ones given at the end of the unit;

13.6 "THE GOOD-MORROW"

John Donne's "The Good-Morrow" is a poem that stands at the threshold of a new love universe. To Donne the experience that goes into the making of the poem, "The Good-Morrow" is like awakening from a nightmare. The nightmarish experience from which the poet comes out is begotten by fear and jealousy that rule the roost in the mind of lovers. The canker of fear and jealousy eats into the tender emotion of love and makes a veritable hell of life for lovers. This happens when love rests on the fickle foundation of sensual delights, the **thirst** for which remain unslaked for a woman-hunter. But in this phase of writing poetry the need for watchful jealousy passes, and a sense of serenity comes to the poet who finds himself in perfect rapport with his lady-love. "The Good-Morrow" is one of a number of poems composed by John Donne which celebrate that rare love in which the senses are but vehicles and mating is a marriage of **true** minds. That this poem has behind it the groundswell of John Donne's mood of calmness in respect of love is evident **from** the letter he wrote to Anne More :

We had not one another at so cheap a rate as that
We should even be weary of one another.
(Cited in Joan Bennett's *Five Metaphysical poets*)

This welcome to serenity is the counterpart of his **former** distrust, both of his own and of his mistress's constancy, and in the poem, "The Good-Morrow", he presents the love that is serene, and the equipoise reaches the culmination. The mood of happiness and security in **love-making** that the poem exalts is not done in the Petrarchan mode of making an abject surrender. The poem begins in a highly

dramatic manner with a disconcerting question directed not only to his lady love but also to himself. The mode is perhaps that of looking into one's past record, and in a mood of stock-taking the poet asks,

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then?

The poet wants to scrutinize their doings just before they have pledged themselves to each other. Both have a sense of lurking fear that their past record is not blameless. They may have many twists and turns in their amorous relationship, and now is the time for reckoning and making a new beginning.

The meaning of Donne's poems lies far more in the interplay between their logical structure and their rhythm and cadences than in their occasional illustrative imagery. The desire for a new life is a noble start, no doubt, but it bristles with some pitfalls when the memories of the past revive. The poet has a feeling of amazement not only at himself but also at the lady-love when he thinks of their mutual life in retrospect, and this looking into the past with a sense of wonderment has been admirably recaptured in the distribution of the pauses and emphasises reflective of the mental state nagging at him. In the first line the pauses are after 'troth' and 'thou'. The pause is deliberately put there, because he puts emphasis on 'wonder' and 'thou', 'thou' referring to the lady-love. The emphasis is not only put on 'thou' because he not only suspects the lady love, he also has doubt about himself and the syntactical construction of the first line runs into the second when he says, 'and I did'. The intonation is controlled here and the stress is got on 'did'. The second line goes on and its second part runs, 'were we not wean'd till then?'. Here the stress is on the word 'wean'd', which implies a big question mark pertaining to whether both of them have not turned away from their indulgence in pleasures elsewhere. The consummate control of utterance, gesture, intonation and larger rhythm in the first two lines bring the point home to the reader that the adroit management of rhythm is designed for bringing out the meaning in all its emphasis at the right place. John Donne breaks the even tenor of verse: he bends and cracks up the line, and he takes liberty with the stanza form, and all these are designed for conveying the meaning through inflexion, pause and emphasis. The poet wanted to elicit from his beloved whether they still suffered from vacillation or irresolution and went their wonted way of sucking country pleasures childishly. The poet voices the doubts and uncertainties about their **commitment** to a new life, but their commitment to the new venture suffers from a momentary wavering, and they very soon feel galvanized into the new life they have elected for themselves :

If ever any **beauty** I did see,
Which I **desir'd**, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

The poet allays all misgivings and fears marring their relationship, and he then comes out with a **firm** resolve that he has no lady-love save and except herself. This is an unambiguous statement pledging complete fidelity and trust, but this life of trust, is born out of a conflict in his mind.

In the second stanza the poet says that they have awakened to a new life and in this life fear gets banished and there is complete sovereignty of love: love which is the union of mind and soul, reminiscent of Donne's poem, "The Extasie" :

For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little **roome**, an every where.

Here the experience approximates to the Platonic archetype of which all earthly beauties are but dim reflection. The poet brings in some more images from geography and cosmology as illustrative analogies. He does not want to imitate those who roam about the globe in search of virgin territories and says,

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds have **showne**
Let us possesse our world, each hath one, and is one.

As John Donne in the poem, "The Extasie", observes that lovers discover their selves in the eyes of each other, the poet in "The Good-Morrow" says,

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest.

The idea expressed here is that the face is an index to the mind. But in "Twickenham Garden" eyes do not reveal the trouble that is brewing inside, and there is much substance in Shakespeare's line,

There is no art to read mind's
Construction in the face. (*Macbeth*).

But in this poem, there is a complete union of the poet and his beloved. This union of the two is again reinforced through the image of the globe with two perfect hemispheres, one the lover and the other the beloved. This fact of the union of the two finds an analogy in the image drawn from the world of chemistry. It is the analogy of simple and compound things. Simple or uncompound things such as God or soul are incorruptible and compounded elements without **contriety** are also not subject to dissolution. But other compound things are perishable. The image is no doubt a learned one, and some readers may take exception to its not **being** in consonance with the tenderness of emotion **forming** the theme of the poem. Coleridge rightly observes, "Too good... it contains a deep practical truth..." (Quoted in Grierson's *Metaphysical Poets*). The mathematical image of two becoming one is there expressive of the merging of **their** separate **identities** into a new one and this recalls to mind the making of the new in "The Extasie" which time cannot invade :

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die

Donne in the poem, "The Good-Morrow" plays on modulations of mood and person as delicately as a lutenist. This is a dramatic **counterpoint** complicating the sensitive movement of man's thought. This complication is done with the interplay of two separate wills. The tonal variations such as adverse possibilities, momentary resolutions, and sudden certainties give the underpinning of the intricacies a **popping-up** in course of love-making. The rhetoric is sensitive enough to suggest a concerned **affirmation**. The affirmations have qualifying asides at their heels. The variety of moods are **carried** alive in the diction, The separate identities merge into oneness, then pulling apart again, and finally, end on the warmth of the homecoming of a prodigal to the life of the abiding verities of constancy in love.

Exercise - IX

1. Justify the title of the poem, "The Good-Morrow"

2. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem, "The Good-Morrow"

3. Explain two important images used in the poem, "The Good-Morrow"

4. "The Good-Morrow" may be seen as a door to the poet's theme of constancy in love". Explain.

13.7 "THE EXTASIE"

The poem, "The Extasie" deals with John Donne's metaphysic of love. It presents the communion of two souls of a loving couple on a grassy turf beside a river, untouched by carnal passions. The physical aspect of love-making finds no mention here. The lovers are engrossed in the thought of an abiding union and are animated by the impulse to coalesce and fuse into one :

So to **engraft** our hands, as yet
Was all our meanes to make us one

The poem presents the lovers in a trans-like state when both of them appear to be verging on being oblivious of their fleshly life.

John Donne's typical method is to present an idea in terms of concrete images. The images become the emotional equivalent of his thought. Let us see how he presents the unforgettable idea of a beatific experience through the image of 'extasie' reinforced by a wealth of images culled from different spheres of life.

There is a pun on the title word, 'extasie'. In the modern sense it refers to the trans-like state the lovers have entered into. But the original Greek meaning takes us to the heart of the poem. The Greek word, 'ekstasis' means 'going forth'. The souls go out of their respective bodies. They have a dialogue ruminating over their communion, and surprisingly enough, there is a bystander who is within a convenient distance from there. This third person is no impediment in their love-making on the spiritual plane. He appears to be a device invented by the poet, adding substance to their highfalutin experience, either by testifying to the veracity of the experience or by also coming under the spell of their ecstatic vision. Here the poet's mood is serene, probably in keeping with the sublimity of the experience. The poet presents a romantic background, bringing in the violet, a conventional image of love, reclining on the pregnant bank, but the pictorial description of the visual beauty simply enhances the intensity of their love without any romantic gloss, and it is much in keeping with the mood of the poet. The expression, 'balm' also rightly finds company in the sweet-smelling violet evoking the right ambience. This image of the violet which has a visual beauty recurs later in the poem with a **changed** connotation without any romantic association. Here we have the botanical expression, 'grafting', as a variation in a different way on the image, 'to **engraft** our hands', used at the outset of the poem. The two images: the images of engrafting hands and transplanting of a violet-work in conjunction with each other. The **former** implies the removal of their separateness and their emerging into a single identity and **the**

latter speaks of the strengthening and enriching of the weaker breed of the violet in a richer soil. It is symbolic of the creation of a new soil that is bereft of all weaknesses:

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the colour, and the size,
(All which before was poore, and scant,)
Redoubles still, and multiplies.

The poet does a remarkable feat of imagination by finding the image of a jeweller threading pearls on a string. The lovers are lost in gazing at each other in such a way that there is, perhaps, the optical illusion of their eyes being on a double string. It appears to be hyperbole that the eyeballs are on the string, and the only justification for this image is that it is suggestive of their becoming one. The lovers find themselves on the same emotional wave-length, and from this rapport they establish it appears that all hostilities cease, and the truce thus effected rests on a lasting foundation. The pictures of each other reflected in their eyes suggest an addition of pictures. The word 'propagation' apparently suggests an increase in spiritual grandeur.

The fourth stanza presents the core of the experience of oneness of the lovers. The soul here takes the lead and the body lies still and inert. The soul is engaged in a mission and accomplishes the task with a remarkable serenity and aplomb. The image comes to us in an expanded form. It is the image of two equal Annies, arrayed against each other and awaiting the announcement of victory in the battlefield by Fate. The expression, 'equal Armies' shows the attitude of the poet towards lovers in the sense that in the Petrarchan vein there is one-sided love-making, that is, the lover adores the beloved as if the latter were a deity and the former a vassal, but here both are on par with each other without having an edge over the other. The body becomes quiescent and the soul is resplended with spiritual ecstasy.

In stanza V we have another elaborate simile that describes the physical condition of the lovers. They are compared to statues in a tomb from where the soul has gone out.

The image of 'transplant' is picked up in stanza XI in a different manner. The concept here is of 'interanimation', and this is on physiological as well as metaphysical plane. It is the rejuvenation of the phoenix-like soul ravaged by loneliness. With this reshaping of the soul in a new mould the lovers have the feeling that they are beyond the inexorable law of change, decay and death. Time has no effect on them, because they have reached the state of timelessness. They have passed beyond the confines of the temporal world and enjoy a state of bliss, and the poet rightly says, "...whom no change can invade".

But later in the poem there is a transition from the world of timelessness to the mortal coil of life. The poet talks about the descent of the soul into the body. Many critics take it to be a denouement that after celebrating the ecstatic union on the spiritual plane the poet talks about their coming back to the body. It is no anti-climax because in the Donne universe there is no segregation of soul and body in hermetically sealed boxes. In the poem, "Aire and Angel" the poet deals with an identical theme. Angels leave their imprint on the air and the air passes on the celestial span into the body, and this interanimation is a subtle process which invigorates and enriches the life. Without the incarnation of the beatific vision in the body it remains shadowy, chimerical and ethereal, Stanza XVI is pregnant with deep physiological implication:

As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like soules as it can
Because such fingers need to knit
The subtile knot, which makes us man.

The blood begets spirit, the spirit goes into the brain, the brain gives direction to the muscle and this gives rise to an interrelated being. This interrelationship brings the image of 'subtile knot'. This complex character of man envisages a blend of soul and body : "The union of soul and body, through the working of the spirits 'makes us man'." (Helen Gardner).

Exercise – X

1. What does the military image stand for in the poem, "The Extasie"?

2. Do you agree with Donne that love is not sex?

3. Why does the poet owe thanks to the body?

4. Who is the great 'Prince in prison'?

5. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem, "The Extasie".

13.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit has initiated you into the poetic art of John Donne who broke with the ruling love conventions of his time and forged a poetic medium expressive of his sensibility. This has also acquainted you with the biased critical pronouncements against him and has made an attempt at placing him in the right perspective. The close reading of the four love poems makes it manifest that though they fall within the class of love poems, they are not exactly alike in respect of theme, nor are the poet's mood identical in them.

13.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise- I

1. John Donne's Catholic faith stands in the way of his taking a University degree. It has nothing to do with incompetence on his part. The 'disability' is implicit in his birth.

2. It was John Donne's mother who was responsible for his schooling. She trained him in Catholic faith. He was **not** free to choose the course of his life.

Note : The rest of the answers are incorporated into the body of unit 13.2.

Exercise - II

1. The dominant love conventions of the time lies in the idealization of love. The lover worships the beloved as if she were a deity. It is an uncritical acceptance of the attitude that the beloved is possessed of divine attributes. John Donne reacts against this convention of lovers showing an abject servility to their lady-love. He looks upon his beloved as a mortal.
2. Petrarchan love consists in the exaltation of the object of love. Love here has a religious unction and requires an exclusive devotion to the lady love.

Sidney, Thomas Lodge, and Michael Drayton are notable English poets drawing on the Petrarch's adoration of his mistress, Laura.

Note : The rest of the answers can be seen in the body of unit 13.3.1.

Exercise - III

Both the answers are incorporated in the body of unit 13.3.2.

Exercise - IV

1. See the body of unit 13.3.3
2. No
3. b

Exercise - V

Note : The answers are incorporated in the body of unit 13.3.4

Exercise - VI

3. . No
4. Likeness

Note : Answers to questions 1 and 2 are incorporated in Unit 13.3.5

Exercise - VII

1. The flea-bite.
2. The mingling of the blood in the flea.
3. The flea.
4. No
5. See the body of unit 13.4
6. No
7. See the body of unit 13.4
8. See the body of unit 13.4
9. See the body of unit 13.4

Exercise - VIII

3. The poet avoids blaming his mistress directly. He makes **an** oblique reference to it through the expression '**perverse** sexe'. The Petrarchan poets never blame their mistresses in their lyrics.

4. The poet is love-sick and wants to find spring that would give solace to him. He hopes to find it in the garden of Lucy, Countess of **Bedford**.
5. The expression 'perverse sexe' suggests women in general who are not responsive to love.

John Donne-I

Note : The rest of the answers may be seen in the body of unit 13.5.

Exercise - IX

The "Good Morrow" suggests a rebeginning in love. The poet wants to forget the past and wants his beloved to do the same. They both want to make a new beginning. Hence the 'good morrow'. Thematically, this marks the beginning of a series of poems that would deal with the theme of constancy in love. In these poems the poet talks of the mating of mind, interdependence of body and soul and also of union of souls.

Note : The rest of the answers are incorporated in the body of the unit 13.6

Exercise - X

The military image in the poem is illustrative of the nature of love subsisting between lovers. When two **armies** are at war, the outcome is not known before hand. In a like manner, it is difficult to predict the result of a prolonged love making between the lovers. The lovers are like two armies poised for a **victory** against each other. It is fate that plays a great role in deciding who the winner becomes. The prolonged warfare may necessitate the cessation of hostilities and for achieving this end **ambassadors** of the warring nations hold **parlies** and come to some **settlement**. Likewise the lovers and beloved are like equal armies, negotiating for a settlement.

Note : The rest of the answers are incorporated into the body of unit 13.7.

UNIT 14 JONE DONNE

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF POEMS OF LOVE AND FAITH

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 'The Canonization'
- 14.3 'A Valediction : forbidding mourning'
- 14.4 'A Nocturnal upon S. Lucies day'
- 14.5 'Batter my heart, three person'd God'
- 14.6 'Hymn to God the Father'
- 14.7 Let us sum up
- 14.8 Answers to exercises
- 14.9 A select Bibliography

14.0 OBJECTIVES

The present unit aims at acquainting you with some dimensions of John Donne's poetry I did not touch upon in Unit 13, with this end in view, this unit takes up a close reading of five other major poems of John Donne, secular as well as religious, and puts focus on some new traits of his poetry.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The present unit deals with three major love poems and two religious poems of John Donne. The love poems under discussion in this unit have some special traits which distinguish them from the love poems we have considered in Unit 13. In the preceding Unit the stress was on how John Donne reacted against the love conventions of the time, especially in the two poems of the unit, *The Flea* and *Twickenham* Garden and in the remaining two poems of that unit, *The Good-?norrow* and *The Extasie* the focus was on the creation of a world of love resulting from an attempt at striking a balance between body and soul. But this metaphysic of love passes through a subtle change and the much sought after balance of visible beauty and mind or soul is upset. A close reading of the three major love poems in the present unit reveals an intellectual predominance. In *A Valediction : forbidding mourning* there is an explicit statement that there is a refinement of the mind which impels a lover to care less for eyes and lips than for the mind. The refinement goes to such an extent that the lovers become oblivious of their sex, and this verges on a sort of abstraction of love. In *The Canonization*, the title itself vouches for the shift that has imperceptibly come over the poet, from the fullness of love pictured in *The Extasie* with its metaphor of 'subtile knot' to the exaltation of the mind. Though there is a denial in a Donne poem that the lover seeks the joy of the mind, there is no denying that change that has occurred in favour of the mind. In the poem, *A Nocturnal upon S. Lucies day*, there is a love ethic which flourishes on the roots of absence, darkness and death, and this is nothing but a communion of souls quite unrelated to the body whose rehabilitation the poet is at great pains to do in *The Extasie*. In short, the unmistakable trend in love poetry spirit with the attenuation of the delights of the body.

The religious poetry of John Donne is intensely personal. It is sensitive record of the clash of two opposing perceptions of life : one is the medieval ethic with a stress on the ephemeral character of life and the other is the splendour of the visible world epitomised by the Renaissance. Being a denizen of two different worlds, Donne sensitively pictures these two worlds in their basic antagonism. The varying values of life impinged on his mind and out of their collision he wrought beautiful religious poetry. In the two religious poems under study in this unit we find the poet battling with temptations and allurements of this world in his search of faith in God. In the first the poet fails to resolve the conflict raging in his soul between body and spirit, but in the second he succeeds in having God's grace,

14.2 THE CANONIZATION

The composition of Donne's poem, *The Canonization* is after his marriage with Anne More. It is because he in this poem at the very outset speaks of his ruined fortune and he ascribes the blight upon his fortune to his marriage. Though he feels quite undone, he does not know any abatement in the intensity of his love for Anne. He is so lost in his amours that he does not care a hang for the carping tongue of others and the opening line appears to be bursting with loving impulses laced with impatience and defiance : "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love". The ruling passion of his life is love and he has no regard for the riches of the world. He does not envy those who amass fortune by currying favour with the royalty. In a veiled tone of disdain he speaks of their craving for earthly gains and forbids them to interfere with his love-making:

'With wealth your state, your minde with Arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace, .
Or the Kings reall, or his stamped face

Donne says that his world has contracted to his companionship with his wife, and he looks upon her as his anchorage. This experience of oneness in love is a recurrent motif in his love poems. In *The Anniversarie* he makes an emphatic declaration of this primacy of love that admits of nothing else in life : "Here upon earth, we are Kings.. ." It is also akin to the idea of self-sufficiency in love that finds an expression in "The Sunne Rising : She' is all States, and all Princes, I". This theme of the supremacy of mutual love is not in the vein of Petrarch who, in terms of extravagant hyperboles, writes complimentary verses of adoration, In the third stanza the poet talks about the nature of love in terms of a host of images. First he presents the traditional image of the fly and the taper with a slight variation. Here the lover and the beloved are flies and tapers :

Call her one, mee another flye,
We' are tapers too, and at our own cost die

Love is no mere transient passion. It is not the passion which slackens in the least and has the readiness to go to the extreme even to embrace death for its consummation.

In support of a further explication of his love experience, the poet reinforces three more images : "The Eagle", "The Dove" and "The Phoenix". In the medieval fable the old eagle flies upto the sun and is scorched and then plunges into a well to renew its youthful energy. This image explains the central idea of love that hopes to renew itself through dying. The image of a dove has a religious overtone and sheds ample light on the loftiness of love the poet and his wife have for each other. In *The New Testament* there is an account of the Holy Ghost descending upon Christ at the time of his baptismal ceremony, like a dove. T.S. Eliot uses this image of the dove upon Christ in *Four Quartets* as a symbol of the purifying fire of God's love and looks upon it as "The only hope, or else despair", Donne correlates this meaning of dove

with his love and the love they exhibit has a purgatorial value. The phoenix image also explains the basic idea of love that discovers a sense of fulfillment in undergoing pain. The phoenix renews her youth only when she is burnt, burnt alive. It is also regarded as "one neutral thing (sex)". The poet uses the images of 'eagle' and "phoenix" because both are images of renewal or resurrection. In his poem, Phoenix, D.H. Lawrence says, "...she is renewing her youth like the eagle". The idea of death is ambient : partly negative and partly positive, and the poet plays on the duality of implications :

Wee dye and rise the same and prove
Mysterious by this love.

The expression, ' we dye and rise the same' is paradoxical in the sense that the poet feels crucified to the world, but he gains by cleansing himself of the dross. The poet feels the consecration of love and becomes a saint or martyr of love :

And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us canonized for love.

A.J. Smith rightly avers,

... at one level there is a
consummation of 'religio amoris'
on which the poem is built.

(Celebration of Donne)

The poet does not have any regret that the lovers do not have any glamorous trappings of a hero recorded in a legend or a chronicle. He says that their canonization for love is without any fanfare, without any pretensions. It comes to them through their steadfastness and constancy in love in the face of all adversities. The experience has nothing transcendental about it. It is rooted in the stark reality of life. It becomes an archetypal pattern of love worthy of emulation, if others choose so :

And thus invoke us; Yo11 whom reverend love
Made one anothers hermitage

This apotheosis of love intercedes with the god of love himself on behalf of the lovers still struggling for the heroic resolution to make their love complete.

It is difficult to isolate this mystique of love from the interaction of the speech rhythm with the continuous logical structure of the poem. It is a practice with the poet to bring in a bystander or an overhearer in a poem to give it a dramatic cast. The poet issues a stream of shifting injunctions, such as 'take you a course', 'get you a place' and 'observe his honour, or his grace'. These injunctions impart a vibrant dramatic life to the poem. A.J. Smith rightly points out that the poem has a dramatic syntax. This dramatic syntax inheres in the modulations of grammatical moods, now of command, now of defiance, now of pathos and now of elation. The other person is perhaps a wiseacre. Each address to the person fixes its own degree of tension by developing an interaction of opposing views resulting into a richer harmony at the end. Overruling the scepticism of the other person, the poet develops a magnificent vision that incorporates the whole world consisting of countries, towns and courts into its capacious domain. The poet, in terms of the image of the 'glasses' of the eyes, says that the whole world shrinks and becomes reflected in the eyes of the beloved.

EXERCISE - I

1. Write a brief note on the paradox inherent in the title of the poem, the *Canonization*.

2. Has the poet used **the images** of 'the fly' and 'the taper' in the conventional way or he has made a variation on the conventional use of them?

3. In what sense the images of 'the fly' and 'the taper' differ from the images of 'the Dove', 'the Eagle' and 'the Phoenix'?

4. Write a note on the bystander in the poem, "The Canonization".

5. Explain the phrase, "The Phoenix riddle",

6. In which sense the phoenix image has 'more wit' than the images of 'The Eagle' and 'The Dove'?

7. What does the phrase 'neutral1 thing' suggest?

8. Explain the lines,

"We dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love."

9. Explain the phrase, "Canonized for Love".

10. The second stanza abounds in hyperboles. Pick out two hyperboles from the stanza and mention them.

11. What is the difference between the King's real face and his stamped face?
-
-
-
-
12. Write a few words on the background of the poem, *The Canonization*
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-
-
-
13. Try to explain that Donne's wife is an anchorage for him.
-
-
-
-
14. Does the poet think of deserting his wife when he realizes that his marriage has undone him?
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-
-
-
15. In which sense the word 'wit' has been used in the poem?
-
-
-
-
16. What is meant by the phrase, "pattern of...love".
-
-
-
-
17. Write a note on the anti-Petrarchan element in the poem.
-
-
-
-
18. Enlist the religious words that come in support of the title conceit of canonization.
-
-
-
-
19. Jot down below a few points for a critical appreciation of the poem.
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-
-
-

14.3 A VALEDICTION : FORBIDDING MOURNING

Talking about the composition of the poem, *A Valediction: forbidding mourning*, Izaak Walton, says (*Life of Donne*) that Donne writes the poem before he sets out for Paris with Sir Robert Drury in 1611. Like *The Canonization*, this poem has been addressed to his wife. But the galling experience of the ruin of his fortune attributed to his marriage with Anne More that finds an overt reflection in that poem does not have any mention in this poem. In this poem the poet allays his lady-love's fears and misgivings arising from his going away to a distant land and says that this separation is no separation at all and that their relationship is as abiding and constant as ever. Theirs is a love of souls so complete as to make one soul that is better than either and is exempt from change. This idea of the unity of souls is the basic proposition in the poem.

In the first stanza this proposition is supported by the analogy of the soul of a virtuous man leaving the body at the time of death without any fuss. As the soul of a pious man goes away from the body without any whimper, so will the lover take leave of the beloved without leaving any room for apprehension on either side. Generally lovers in the ardour of their passion, bewail separation from each other by shedding tears and heaving sighs. But those who are **firm** and unchanging in their relationship do not indulge in petty trivialities of weeping and sighing. Donne's is an expression of a rare breed and has a sacred halo about it:

'Twere prophanation of our joyes
To tell the laity our love.

The laity are persons uninitiated into the mysteries of the ecclesiastical order, and any talk by them about the soared order is regarded as a sacrilege. Likewise, discussing love in public is supposed to be a blasphemy.

In stanza 111 we have the analogy of the moving of the **earth** and the trepidation of the spheres. The quaking of the earth brings fear and ruin, but **the** movement of **the** crystalline sphere, higher than and at a remove from our world, causes no anxiety for us. **This** illustration brings the point home to **the** beloved that there is no worrying about his going away to a far-off place. Like the movement of the celestial body far off from our habitation, the **movement** of the lover engenders no trouble in the beloved. The trouble lies with those who are engrossed in sensual **delights** and who believe that soul is sense. Such people are called 'dull sublunary lovers'. In *The Extasie* the poet speaks of the inseparable and indistinguishable union of body and soul. But in the present poem the **theme** of intellectual union predominates:

Inter-assured of the mind,
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to **misse**

Unlike in *The Extasie*, the stress here is on the refinement of feeling:
But we by 'a love, so much **refin'd**
That our selves know not what it is

However, the poet observes a fidelity to the reality of the situation by apportioning values on things in keeping with their relative importance. Consequently, he does not make any summary **rejection** of the body which is at the lowest rung in the hierarchy (comprising body, spirit and soul).

To reassure his beloved of constancy of their love the poet introduces two fresh analogies. The first is that of a gold-bar. The goldsmith beats **the** gold-bar with a hammer and the gold-bar expands into a thin leaf. This points to the **expansion** of the relationship between the lovers during their momentary separation. The other analogy is an erudite one **and** has been drawn from the Ptolemaic system. The lovers are supposed to be the two legs of a compass, the beloved being the fixed foot and the lover the other foot. When we describe a circle, one foot is fixed and the other

moves. In course of drawing a circle the fixed foot leans towards the other, and this bending of one towards the other suggests their closeness to each other. When the circle is inscribed full, the outstretched foot is brought back to the other, and the compass is closed up. While the circle is being described, the fixed foot is pinned with firmness in the centre. This elaboration of the image is an explication of the relationship the poet has with his beloved. The image is suggestive of reciprocity, inter-dependence and inter-involvement of the poet and his lady-love. The expressions, 'lean', 'tome', and 'hearken' are also indicative of the mutuality of relationship subsisting between the two.

The image of the two legs of a compass is often regarded as incongruous. But the fact is that it has not been introduced into literature by John Donne nor has it been used inappropriately by him. F.P Wilson points out that three years before John Donne wrote this poem, Joseph Hall used this image in his poem entitled Epistles. This image was also employed by the poet-dramatist, Guarini in his madrigal of the 1580s. Guarini, too, looks upon his beloved as the fixed foot firm in the centre and the lover as the other foot suffering the rotation of fortune. Later a minor poet, Thomas Carew, uses this image in his poem, Excuse of Absence. These examples illustrate the point that this image has found a place in the cultivated mind of the people of the time. John Donne assimilates this image into the wardrobe of his imagination and makes use of it in a very befitting manner.

In Donne poetry there is an interplay of logical structure with the speech rhythm, and the present poem is a fine specimen of this interweaving of the two.

If on this count we compare this poem with The *Anniversarie*, we find that, in some measure, substance in The *Anniversarie* is independent of speech rhythm and easily detachable from it. But in this poem it is difficult to separate poetry from argument, because it is one continuous and close argument fused and coalesced with the poem. The simplicity and quietness of the stanza has something classical about it. A.J. Smith rightly affirms that the steady pulsing movement overriding any jaunty rhythm "...makes the poem a series of muted and self-contained utterances, almost laconic in their extreme dipped simplicity; a character which is dramatically right and indeed part of the sense of the poem. (Celebration of John Donne).

EXERCISE - 11

1. Pick out four images from the poem and explain the theme of the poem A *Valediction: forbidding mourning* on the basis of those images.

2. Write a detailed note on the expanded conceit of a pair of compasses.

3. Who are 'dull sublunary lovers'?

4. How does a virtuous man go from the world?

5. What does the image of the beating of gold to airy thinness suggest?

6. Do you remember another poem by Donne in which the images of 'teare floods' and 'sigh tempests' appear in an identical way? Mention the expressions concerned and name the poem.

7. Explain the anti-Petrarchan idea inherent in the lines,
 'Twere prophanation of our joyes
 To tell the **layetie** our love:

8. What do the images of the 'moving of the earth' and 'the trepidation of the spheres' suggest?

9. The keyword in the line 'Thy firmness makes my circle just', refers to a quality in the mistress and also to the theme of the poem. Which word is it?

10. "The statement "Inter-assured of the **mind**,/**Care** lesse, eyes, lips and hand to misse." gives us an idea of the love-ethic of Donne." Comment.

11. Give your idea of the occasion of the poem.

12. Tell whether the following statements are true or false.

a. The **image** of a pair of compasses **was** introduced into literature by John Donne,

- b. The image of the beating of the goldbar to airy thinness suggests the beating of the beloved for taming her.
- c. The trepidation of the spheres causes upheavals on the earth.
13. What do the expressions, 'leans', 'hearkins' and 'growes erect' suggest?
14. The image of a flood of tears has become a part of John Donne's poetic diction. Name his poems that contain this image.
15. The expression, "by 'a love, so much refined", recalls to our mind another poem by John Donne. There he uses it with a slight variation. Name the poem and mention the expression.

14.4 A NOCTURNALL UPON S.LUCIES DAY

Like the poem, The Dissolution, *A Nocturnall upon S.Lucies day* has been occasioned by the death of a mistress whose identity remains an object of conjecture for the critics of Donne. H.J.C. Grierson is of the view that Lucy, countess of Bedford, is the woman the poet has in mind. Grierson also associates the countess with Lucy, the patron saint of December 13. H. W. Garrod points out candidly that he is not clear on the point of the identity of the woman. However, he opines that both poems, *The Dissolution* and "*A Nocturnall upon S.Lucies day*" centre round the same woman. J.B. Leishman views the poem in the light of its tone and attitude and remarks that the woman in the poem is no other than the wife of the poet. He further says that it is not the actual or imagined death of a mistress; it is rather the loss of the mistress who loved the poet and whom the poet loved in turn. In the circumstances, it would be wise to concentrate on the end product of the poem more than on the identity of the woman concerned. Moreover, for a self-haunted poet that Donne is, it is pertinent to look into the subterranean forces in the psyche that shape his poetry. The present poem along with *The Dissolution* belongs to a phase in the poet's life when he feels overpowered with dejection, emptiness, and isolatedness. Melancholy has been a persistent strain in Donne from the days of youth. This obsession with melancholy may recall to your mind S.T. Coleridge's *Ode to Dejection* in which he talks about the dissipation of the shaping spirit of imagination. Donne, too, falls a prey to this acedia (the blight of desolation or the spiritual sloth). In one of his sermons Donne says,

Man is nothing, no more than a worme or a fly...
for all his actions, and himself, too, are nothing.
(Cited in Helen C. White's *The Metaphysical Poet*)

This preoccupation with the insignificance of man gets confirmation from his letter to Henry Goodyer :

The pleasantness of the season displeases me.
Everything refreshes and I wither, and my load grouses.
(Cited in Leishman's *The Monarch of Wit*)

John Donne is vulnerable to bouts of depression and has a ghastly charade during his last hours, when "...he lay contemplating the **protrait** of himself in his winding sheet like a grim and mortified Narcissus". (Cited in *The Monarch of Wit*). The present poem is to be studied in this backdrop of despair, a settled effect in the imagination of the poet.

The opening passage with its grave and sombre movement initiates us into the frightening realities of life. The scene is of midnight. The idea of midnight itself on December 13 in all pervasive darkness is uncanny and sinister. Lucy, the patron saint of this day, is the awful presiding deity allowing the sun to shine scarcely, for seven hours. The poet piles up sickening image of life. The sun is 'spent'. The earth is afflicted with fatal dropsy and is huddling at bed's foot, and ultimately it dies and is buried. The 'sap' of life is gone dry. On the top of it, the poet becomes the emblem of death by being an epitaph. All the images are related to disease, sickness and death and produce a horrifying effect. The fearsomeness is accentuated by the iterative verbal and schematic pattern through the line, "**Tis the yeares** midnight, and it is the dayes". This pattern is sustained over the remaining lines of the first stanza in terms of macabre pictures. The thud sound in words such as 'spent', 'sunke', 'drunk' and 'shrunk' is evocative of something that has an abrupt end with a bang. It is suggestive of life coming to a halt. The sound pattern enacts the meaning of the experience that relates to deadness all around. The rhythm is slow and akin to the mournful tolling of the bell during the burial. The dismal chant suggested through the slow and solemn pace of the line is revelatory of the plight of the poet. It appears that **life** has been tainted at its source and the sap of life does not course through nature. The poet feels that he has been robbed of everything that is good and positive in life. He feels driven upon himself and begins contemplating the sad reality. He plays on things negative, such as, nothingness, privation, darkness, emptiness, death and chaos. He lays blame at the door of love who turns malevolent and ruins him :

He ruin'd **mee**, and I am re-begot
Of absence, **darkness**, death; things which are not.

In stanza **III** he strikes a contrast between himself and others in life. He has nothing positive to think of, whereas others draw sustenance from good things in life. His despairing realization expresses itself in the following lines :

I by loves limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing..

Here he contrasts his sense of unrelieved desolation with the days of happiness he lived with his wife. **The** life of conjugal felicity is Petrarchan in tone when he says : "Oft a flood /**Have** we two wept, and **so/Drowned** the whole world, us two..." and by recalling this he throws into a sharp relief the nothingness of the present moment.

• In stanza **IV** the poet hurls a very scathing accusation at himself when he says that he is neither a man nor a beast, nor a piece of stone. First he thinks himself to be an 'ordinary nothing' and then the 'first nothing'. He is an adept in dialectics and tells

an ordinary nothing from the first nothing. The former means the absence of something, while the latter means chaos reigning in the universe before the Creation. The poet further plays on words, such as, 'quintessence' and 'elixir', and uses them in the ironic sense. These two words have a positive connotation, but here quintessence is of nothingness and elixir is of chaos. However, negative the preoccupations of the poet may be under the stress of the loss of his mistress, the two expressions, 'first nothing' and 'elixir' have redeeming features and the positive import of these two words give a new dimension to the theme of the poem. H.W. Garrod feels that the poem is bitter and J.E.V. Crofts concurs with him on this point and remarks :

Thus the brain-sick fancies are piled up, twaddle upon
twaddle until the whole thing explodes with
a passionate outcry and a familiar image.
(Essays and Study)

But John Donne's adroit handling of abstractions like 'first nothing' and 'elixir' develops a mystique of love which, despite its root in absence, darkness and death, has the amplitude of spirit that stares the reality in the face. Grierson in his book, *Mataphysical* Lyrics and Poems, observes that John Donne reaches "the majestic heights and mystical depths of love" in the following :

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring :
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchemie.

The poet also develops a metaphysic of love out of facts : bare, naked and stark. This metaphysic has some affinity with what the poet discovers in course of living his life with his lady-love, as it is depicted in *The Canonization*. In both poems the stuff of love is pain and anguish, but the patterns of love is rich and invigorating. The theme of constancy in love that we find in *The Canonization* and *A Valediction* : forbidding mourning comes in a different way in the present poem. The love of flesh that finds a secondary place in those two poems is completely absent here, because the poet here expresses his love for his dead mistress. The last stanza is no unqualified rumination on the nothingness of life. The poet has no grudge against those who enjoy the joy of spring. He knows that his 'Sunne' will not 'renew'. The sun is seen as the harbinger of vernal gaiety. But the poet has a rich fare in store at the long night's festival of his mistress where he will have communion with her. The elegiac strain appears to be giving way to the mood of a carnival and the resulting experience sublimates into a mystical union. He pulls himself together and embarks on a journey for immersing himself in the long nocturnal festival of his lady-love :

Since shee enjoys her long night's festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Virgill, and her Eve, since this
Both yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

The poem is a tour de force. Here we have an ethic of love wrung out of privation and nothingness.

EXERCISE – III

1. Write a brief note on the occasion of the poem.

2. Show that the theme of constancy in love gets an unusual treatment in the poem, *A Nocturnall*.

3. The melancholic aspect of the poet's nature finds a poetic rendition in the poem *A Nocturnall*.

4. What does the work 'midnight', suggest in this poem?

5. Why does the poet compare himself to 'an every dead thing'?

6. Explain the following

- (a) "The world's whole sap in sunke".
- (b) " 'Tis the **yeares** midnight, and it is the dayes".
- (c) "...me, who am their Epitaph".
- (d) "...I am **rebegot**
of absence, darkness, death;
things which are not".
- (e) "...let me call
This houre her **Virgill** and her Eve..."

7. Who is Lucy?

8. What **picture** of life do you find on St. Lucy's day?

9. How does **the** poet distinguish himself from the **general run** of lovers?

10. How does a living poet become an epitaph?
11. Mention the **expression**/lines that help the poet to draw a sickening picture of life.
12. Enlist the words that give the effect of thuds.
13. "Donne, too, followed the Petrarchan pattern of love, while he was a young lover". Does the poem, A Nocturnal¹ give you any evidence in support of this statement?
14. Donne uses verbal contradictions by juxtaposing words of opposite meaning. Cite at least two examples from this poem to support the above statement.
15. The last four lines of the poem stand as a contrast to the rest of the poem. Prove it.
16. The poet's sense of despondency is contrasted with the joys of others, giving us an impression that life is an **amalgam** of disparate experiences. Do you agree?

14.5 BATTER MY HEART, THREE PERSON'D GOD

Donne's sonnet, "Batter my heart, three person'd God" is a passionate and dramatic prayer for freeing himself **from** the shackles of **temptations** and distractions of life. The poet wants to have the singleness of purpose to bind himself in an abiding

relationship with God. The theme of guilt and redemption has been Donne's persistent concern not only in his religious poetry but also in his sermons. Like Donne's sonnet, ***Death*** be *not proud* (See Understanding Poetry, EEG 06 Course), this sonnet is Petrarchan in structure, comprising an octave and a sestet. The octave states the experience and the sestet which is reflective in character makes an evaluation of the experience. The octave is a sensitive picture of the poet's predicament with a propensity to sin and the sestet is an overture to extricate himself from the tentacles of sin. The rhyme scheme in the octave is a b b a a b b a, falling in pattern with a common Petrarchan octave. But the rhyme scheme in the sestet of the present sonnet is slightly different from the conventional pattern, i.e. c d c d c d. Here the rhyme scheme is c d c d d d. Thematically, this sonnet is close to a La Corona sonnet. In a La Corona sonnet, too, the poet talks about the release of man's sinful soul through faith in God. But unlike in the sonnet, *Rather my heart*, the emphasis in a La Corona sonnet is on the doctrinal side of Christianity. Donne's poetry is religious, when we take religion in a general perspective. In its widest connotation the word, 'religion' means man's striving for making his will conform to the transcendent will. John Donne is, perhaps, the first intensely English religious poet. It is because he expresses the mind not simply of a Christian as such, but the conflicts and longings of a troubled soul. The present poem bears the imprint of a passionate outpouring of penitence and longing of the poet. The conflict that rages in his mind between body and soul has a magnificent articulation in this poem.

The sonnet begins with the line, "Batter my heart, three person'd God, for, you". The word, 'batter' has an onomatopoeic ring, suggestive of continuous knocking or hammer strokes. The verb, 'batter', has its subject in 'three person'd God', comprising Father, Son and Holy Ghost. God is being implored to do something for him because his life has gone amiss and requires repairs. This may remind you of John Donne's another religious poem, "Litanie" in which he makes a similar prayer :

And create mee, now growne ruinous:
My heart is by dejection, clay,
And by self-murder, red.

His heart is sought to be battered, because it is bereft of tenderness. In one of his sonnets, Donne says, "And thou like Adamant draw my iron heart". The word 'mend' points to the fact that something has gone wrong about his life and requires urgent repair by the Maker. The expressions, 'knock', 'breath', 'shine' are active verbs indicative of a host of activities in which an artisan-like God is expected to engage Himself in the process of putting things in order. The poet also feels that a little bit of repair will not do and that there is a radical failure in the workings of his mind which needs a complete overhaul. He implores God to 'overthrow' him, suggesting thereby that his erring self needs a transmutation. He brings in the image of a blacksmith at work in his smithy. The words 'break', 'blow' and 'bum' are indicative of the work carried out in the workshop of the blacksmith. The blacksmith breathes into the bellow and makes fire for smelting iron ore. The poet is a lump of flesh susceptible to its frailties. He wallows in the mire of vile passions. He wants to be refashioned in a new and lofty image and only God can accomplish this.

To **grasp** the full meaning of a Donne poem, you are required not simply to understand the connotation of words but also to listen to the utterance, gesture, movement and larger rhythm. Donne uses speaking voice and speech rhythm to enact his meaning. A loud reading of the following lines will illustrate this point well:

That I may **rise**, and stand, o' **erthrow** mee,
'and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, bum and make
me new.

The run-on or enjambement in the first line of the passage from 'and bend' to 'your force' in the succeeding line is a fine example of the control of intonation. The distribution of pause is aimed at expressing its meaning in all its immediacy. Unless a reader attends to his modulation of tone, he fails to relish the meaning as it arises in the mind. The rhythm imposes on the reader the right incipient muscular movement. The pause on 'force' shows the vivid posture of someone summoning required strength and skill for performing a task in hand. When the artisan works at his smithy, he has to lift the hammer and wield it with skill, and this picture is evoked through speech rhythm. The alliteration of 'b' in 'break, blow and bum' with its quick succession of monosyllables is indicative of a series of strokes dealt continually by the blacksmith, when he forges something new. Donne deliberately refrains from using learned images here and expresses the abstruse experience of spiritual metamorphosis in terms of the homely image of a blacksmith.

The poet who implores God for his spiritual regeneration does not hesitate telling Him the intractable stuff he is. He says that he has to be wary and circumspect in dealing with the devious workings of his mind. He has nothing to conceal from Him and reveals himself in all candour. He gives the image of a town under siege and this image of a usurped town suggests that he is under the sway of a different master. The assailant is within him. It is his appetite. He tells God in a forthright manner that he does not obey His commandments. But he becomes aware of the folly of betraying the trust and wants to make amends. He now desires to make God his master and 'labours to admit' Him. But his will is circumscribed : "...but Oh, to no end". The line that contains the exclamation just cited is antithetical in nature. The first part of the line is expressive of the awakening of an impulse to fit close to God and mustering of the courage for doing so. The second part is about the new-born isolation that sags his spirit. The exclamation is a pathetic admission of his failure to come out of the slough. The slack and weak rhythm of latter part of the sentence is indicative of the sagging spirit of the poet.

John Donne is in the habit of unleashing image after image and making a serial use of them to hammer his point home. After the images of a blacksmith and a usurped town, we have the image of a viceroy, a deputy of the ruler. The representative here is none else but reason in man. His reason has become a slave to passion. It has joined the band of marauders laying siege to the fort of his being. Reason has become a collaborator, a renegade, a quisling, and has jettisoned God. It has failed to resist vile passions and has succumbed to its enchantment. Further, the poet likens himself to a woman who has changed her lover and thereby broken the contract for the gratification of sexual desires. It is the image of betrothal bereft of trust and fidelity. The poet feels ashamed of having abrogated the contractual obligation and longs to cross over to His side. When all efforts fail, he beseeches God to ravish him. Probably, the ravishing is the only way to relieve him of his suffering. So we have a paradox in the word 'ravish' that suggests a use of force by God to fulfil the desire of the poet who imagines himself to be a woman. The line that carries this word, 'ravish' is paradoxical in nature, "Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me". 'Ravishing' has a profane connotation, the violation of the chastity of a woman. This meaning is ill assorted with the protection of the honour of a woman that the word 'chaste' implies. The paradox is best understood when we unravel its meaning in the larger context of the poem. 'Chastity' means purity, the integrity of being, and God, by delivering a person from the vile path of sensuality is alone capable of restoring the primal innocence of the sinner.

Though the poet longs for the singleness and simplicity of soul, he finds that the goal is beyond his reach. This sonnet remains inconclusive in its search for securing a still centre in God. The poet does not have the peace and security within him as he has towards the end of *Hymn to God the Father*, the poem that you will read just after. However, what gives this sonnet its beauty is the war the soul wages with infinite subtleties of temptation of the labyrinth of his low passions. J.B. Leishman's remark on this point seems pertinent :

The religion which gives such passion and plangency to these stanzas is religion in its most primary and fundamental sense : what Donne asks for is purgation, purification, illumination and in Rilke's beautiful phrase, a directing of the heart.

(The monarch of wit)

EXERCISE - IV

1.

Why does the poet call himself an 'usurpt town'?
2.

Why does the poet ask God to 'batter' his heart?
3.

What is meant by the expression, 'three-personed God'?
4.

Why does the poet ask God to 'ravish' him? Does he want to secure relief from God?
5.

Write a brief note on the structure of the sonnet, *Batter my heart*.
6.

How does the poet create the image of a blacksmith? Why does he liken God to a blacksmith?
7.

Comment on the image of the 'viceroys'
8.

Enlist the images in the poem which have been borrowed from the institution of marriage and tell the function that they perform.

9. Why does the poet use **amorous** images in this religious poem? Enlist those images.

10. Write a brief note on the alliterative expression, "Breake, blöwe, and bum."

11. Show that the poem is a passionate prayer to God.

14.6 HYMN TO GOD THE FATHER

John Donne's *Hymn to God the Father* marks a watershed in his religious poetry. It is a departure from the general run of his religious poetry in the sense that the poet achieves the much needed sense of security and joy in his prayers to God. In the religious poetry that precedes it the poet finds himself wading through the maze of **encouragements** of fleshly life accompanied by a striving for divine grace. Here he is in a different moral and spiritual clime, breathing something bracing and solutary, in a sharp contrast to what he got in the murky landscape of vile passions. The peace that he discovers in this perilous journey through the dark night of the soul is epitomised in this hymn that was composed during his illness in 1623 and sung to the **accompaniment** of music. He felt **overwhelmed** with the **enchanting** strain of the **hymn** and sang it several times in church. Its singing wrought a miracle in soothing his afflicted **nerves** and he fell relaxed in the ravishing beauty of this hymn. His biographer Izaak Walton, speaks of its magical **property** (*Life of John Donne*). In the religious sonnets Donne wrote before his ordination, he feels greatly disturbed, because he has a feeling that he has acquiesced into youth's fire of pride and lust and has failed to come closer to God. In the present poem, he wrestles with sin in the fond hope of redemption and comes out triumphant as George Herbert does in the poem, Love.

The hymn is composed of three close-knit stanzas. In each stanza the poet beseeches God to forgive his sins. But in the first two stanzas he is not sure that all his sins would be forgiven. It is only towards the end of the poem that he gains full faith in God's **magnanimity**. The wavering is due to his awareness that he has fallen into a sinful way of life. He also knows that the traitor is lodged within him and it may prompt him to swerve aside from the path of God's grace. As he points out in Holy *Sonnet*,

But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That one houre myself I can sustain.

In one of his sermons, Donne dwells on his susceptibility to the frailties of flesh :

...there is a sin before then; a speechless
sin, a whispering sin, which nobody hears
but our own conscience.

And I have sinned before thy face, in my
hypocrisies in Prayer, in my ostentation
and the mingling a respect of myselfe
in preaching thy word. (From a sermon).

His sins abound. He finds himself in a deluge and makes a miserable sight of himself quite unworthy of having Lord's grace. The plight is well explained in his Holy Sonnet.

Depaire behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror.

The root of Donne's vexation of spirit lies in his incapacity to let go of himself, to surrender to God. His sins are multitudinous and he does not have any face to ask God for writing off all his sins at one go. Moreover, he is unsure of refraining from future sins. It looks preposterous to continue with sinning day in and day out and to approach God for pardon after every act of sinning. The rhetorical elaboration of antithesis in the lines,

Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne,
which is my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sinnes through which I runne,
And doe them still : though still I doe deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done.

act as a mirror reflecting warring impulses tugging at the soul of the poet. The clauses are evenly balanced in "And do them still : though still I doe deplore?" and through this antithetical balance the poet reflects the two sides of his personality, the one that immerses itself in the mire of blood and the other that wants to resist the impulse to sin. This interlocking of antithesis is an improvement on the syntactical construction of the Holy Sonnets in the sense that here is a mature and steady deliberation close on heels of indulgence in sin. The antithesis in 'when thou hast done, thou hast not done' reveals the state of the sinner vis-a-vis God. God pardons one sin and then the poet sinner says, 'Thou has done', but when he goes for begging forgiveness for another sin, he feels disconsolate that God has not pardoned him. So he says, 'thou hast not done'. Thus the poet's conflicts and mixed feeling of happiness and disappointment is best mirrored in the antithesis. This antithetical construction is typical of religious poems in making vivid the see-saw rhythm, the to and fro motion marking the overture to divine grace by resolving to exorcise guilt, but he fails to muster sufficient strength for accomplishing the noble goal of having God's grace. Thus in the first stanza of the hymn the poet makes vivid and life-like his divided consciousness, as does Henry Vaughan in his poem, *Retreat* :

But (oh!) my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.

He is poised for making it whole by cleansing his stuffed bosom. In the line, "And doe them still, though still I doe deplore?" the rhyme is quiet and introspective dispensing with the customary display of heat and flamboyance he exhibits. The poet presents the duality of impulses in him in a new way : the impulse to relish lustful thoughts and the impulse to wean himself from passions and to have faith in God.

In the second stanza the same prayer for forgiveness continues with a modification. Here he talks about his abetting others to commit a sin. He also talks about his sin that he committed a year or two ago. He shunned it and was tempted to commit numerous other sins. The tragedy is that he abjures doing evil act in one moment but the next moment he brings in its train enticements alluring him and he gives in.

The thing that saves him from prevarication and equivocation is that he does not conceal his evil doings and unburdens himself to God without any reserve in the fond

hope of getting his grace. He has nothing up his sleeve and wears his heart on his sleeve. God is merciful and He absolves the poet **from** his guilt. The ringing of the refrain, "When thou **hast** done, thou **hast** not done" in the first two stanzas is also indicative of the sloth of the sinner that prevents him **from** fighting evil **passions** with tenacity and remain **swerving** in his devotion to God. It is a reflection on the erring self of the poet that often lapses into evil doings. The line, 'I have more' is about his sinful nature. This expression also brings to our mind the sinful nature' of man. The frailties of the poet may be taken for the frailty of mankind and his journey from darkness to light may be seen as a pilgrim's progress.

The third stanza is a resolution of the conflict that raged in the poet's mind. The conflict was between the consciousness of sin and a profound yearning for forgiveness. At last, all doubts and uncertainties are **stilled** and the poet has a feeling that God is satisfied with his penitence and that the divine grace that forgave many a sin of his will continue doing so in future. He hopes that God's grace will shine unfailingly on him and will illumine his soul. In sonnets before his ordination he harped on the terror of death. The imminence and inevitability of death fills him with anguish and he, therefore, says,

1 have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne
My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;

This fear of impending death withers away when he becomes sure of the never-failing source of abounding love in God. He has an intuitive awareness of getting deliverance from the awful prospect of perishing on the 'shore', and with a sense of incomparable serenity he breaks into a rapture :

And, having done that, Thou hast done,
I have no more.

Thus the unremitting self-consciousness in the poet made him sceptical of God's love in his early religious poetry; but doubts nagging at him give way to the overwhelming love of God. The poet who used to shake with fear at the idea of the awful God in many a religious poem feels assured of His love and has no doubt about His imminent deliverance. In this hymn the carping consciousness of the poet that took delight in reasoning with God is seen subordinated to faith. From this subordination of reasoning to faith results an essential insight that puts a premium on complete devotion to God. The peace and serenity that suffuse him in the hymn take him into a mystical world. In this mystical region the barrier between the egoistical self guilty of dust and sin on the one hand and God on the other is knocked down, and the poet's heart is filled with joy. This hymn is unique in the sense that it reminds us of that Dark Night of the Soul that played a considerable part in the mystical experience of St. John of the Cross. The terrible anguish which is the hallmark of mystical poetry is fused with its concomitants in the overwhelming love of God.

EXERCISE - V

1.

What does the antithetical line, "Thou hast done, than hast not done" mean?
2.

What does the line, "I have spread my last thread mean?

3. Does the poet have any regrets for having committed sins?

4. What sort of fear haunts the mind of the poet?

5. In what sense this hymn is different from other religious poems of Donne.

6. 'Subordination of reasoning to faith' – would it be a correct comment on the poem, *Hymn to God*?

7. "The poem *Hymn to God* is dramatic in nature". Comment.

8. What does the poet mean when he says that God's sun shall shine at his death as it shines now?

9. Enlist the conventional images in the poem.

14.7 LET US SUM UP

Through this unit you have got a perception of two varying worlds of John Donne. First is the world of love with primacy of soul and the second is the world of the questing poet with a profound yearning for Lord's grace for his redemption. The trend in favour of the primacy of soul emergent in the three love poems of this unit receives a fillip in the two religious poems, and the poet is seen sustaining his faltering steps towards the glimpse of the Lord.

14.8 ANSWERS

NOTE: Answers to most of the questions in the exercises have already been given during the discussions on the poems concerned. In this section you will have model answers only to those questions which did not receive sufficient attention during the discussions.

EXERCISE - I

2. The fly and the taper are conventional images for lovers. The taper stands for **feminine** beauty and the fly symbolises sacrifice in love by the lover. John Donne makes a variation on the traditional use of these twin images and says that both he and his mistress are the taper **and** the fly in turn, suggesting thereby that both have made sacrifices in love. This also suggests that in this poem the poet does not attach any importance to the physical aspect of love and, hence, symbols associated with a particular sex has been avoided by the poet. It may also not be out of place to mention that John Donne generally avoids using conventional images in the traditional way.
3. The images of the fly and the taper differ **from** the three succeeding images in the sense that 'the Eagle' and 'the Phoenix' are symbols of renewal and 'the Dove' is a symbol of purification, while the fly and the taper are symbols **simply** of sacrifice in love.
5. The poet himself explains 'the Phoenix **ridle**' in stanza **III** of the poem. The other images used to suggest the obliteration of sexual identities of the lovers have traditional associations with either of the two sexes, thus coming in the way of the communication of the idea of sexlessness in love. This idea is unambiguously conveyed through the image of 'the Phoenix' because it is a '**neutrall** thing'. It is believed to belong to the **neutral** sex, thus representing both male and female sexes. This image also helps the poet to 'dye and rise the same' and thus becomes mysterious by love. The idea about the neutrality of the sex of the phoenix and also the story of its emerging from the ashes seem queer and puzzling. So the poet calls it the 'Phoenix riddle'.
6. The word, 'wit', if we take it in the context it is used here, implies the art of discovering points of resemblance between things apparently dissimilar and giving a pleasant surprise to the reader because of its quality of newness. John Donne is in the habit of using wits one after another to make his point clear. Having used the wits reflected through the images of the fly, the taper, the dove, the eagle and the phoenix, he ransacks his mind in search of 'more wit' exemplified by a better image or conceit. He discovers the similarity between the phoenix on the one hand and himself and his mistress on the other. The lovers are unmindful of their physical existence and enjoys the union of mind. The more they are refined by love the more they are unmindful of their sexual identities. This idea of neutrality in respect of sex is better expressed through the phoenix symbol than it has been expressed through the other symbols referred to by him. The idea of renewal after destruction, too, is expressed better through the Phoenix Symbol than it is done through the symbol of the eagle.
7. **Neutrall** sex. The Phoenix is supposed to be sexless.
10. a. Drowning of ships by sighs.
b. Overflowing of the ground by teares.
c. Removal of a spring by colds.

11. The real face of the king is the king's face, while his stamped face is the picture of his face as it is stamped on the coins.
14. No
15. See answer number 6.
18. Legend, **urne**, ashes, **hymnes**, reverend, hermitage, and peace.

EXERCISE - II

3. The phrase 'dull sublunary lovers' refers to those lovers who are interested **only** in physical love and indulge in sensual delight. For them 'soules sense'. They cannot peep into the souls of their beloveds and cannot bear physical separation **from** them. Such separation for them are like quacking of the earth and these separations are likely to make them cause tear-floods and sigh-tempests. They follow the **Petrarchan** pattern of love.
4. A virtuous man go away **from** the world silently.
A similar idea is expressed by Alexander Pope when he says in his poem, Ode on Solitude, that he wants to '**steal**' from the world.
6. In the poem, The Canonization, the poet expresses the images of **teare** floods' and sigh tempests' in an identical way. In that poem he asks,

What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who saies my teares have **overflow'd** his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?

9. Firmness
10. These lines are concerned with the love ethic of the poet who in this poem lays stress on the importance of the mating of the mind and the union of souls rather than on the show of beauty embodied in human form and the demonstration of passion. This poem is different from "The Extasie" in the sense that in "The Extasie" the poet speaks of the union of body and soul and dwells upon the respective importance of both body and soul. But here his philosophy undergoes change and he cares less for organs like 'eyes' and 'lips' than he does for the mind.
12. a. False
b. False
c. False.
13. The fixed root of the pair of compasses leans towards the moving foot, hearkens to it during the period of the movement and grows erect when the distant foot completes its task and is re-united to the fixed foot. Likewise the **beloved** who remains at home is **mentally** responsive to the travelling lover and her ears are attuned to his silent sound. She feels leaning towards him and grows erect with firmness and is reunited in an **abiding** relationship when the lover returns home.
14. a. A Valediction :forbidding mourning
b. The Canonization
c. A *Nocturnall* upon *S. Lucies* day
d. A *Valediction* : of weeping

15. *The Extasie*:
"so by love refin'd"

EXERCISE - III

2. There is a difference in the treatment of the theme of constancy in love between this poem on the one hand and the poems like *A Valediction : forbidding mourning* and *The Canonization* on the other. In other poems dealing with this theme the poet shows love for his living mistress. But here he feels himself poor because his mistress is dead. But his love for her knows no abatement. He is mentally 'leaning' like the fixed foot of the pair of compasses towards his dead mistress. He is occupied with the sense of separation, somewhat like a sublunary lover. He knows that physical union with her would be impossible. He is reminded of the 'teare floods' and 'sigh tempests' that they made in the Petrarchan vein while they were young lovers. The loss of the mistress envelops him into thick darkness. The world around him becomes sapless, meaningless and hollow. It is an emblem of nothingness. But he is able to give a mystic twist to his thought and by sheer power of imagination, is able to celebrate his mystic union with his beloved. All this shows a never-ending affair with his mistress. Even death is not able to keep them apart.
4. The midnight here suggests the darkest period of one of the coldest and the shortest days of the year. It is the midnight of the day that has seen the sun for scarcely seven hours. The time of this midnight has been deliberately chosen to reflect the melancholic state in the poet's mind. It is probably the period of the worst suffering of the man (Donne) who has viewed his life as a prolonged dying and who has a habit of relapsing into a state of melancholy from time to time.
5. The poem is on the death of his mistress. He is in a state of deep melancholy and regards this time as the blackest hour. The time that he chooses is the midnight of December 13. He is brooding over the idea of death and sees himself as a part and parcel of his dead mistress. There is a spectre of deadness around him. So he imagines himself to be like every dead thing.
6. a. Because of the feeling of the loss of his beloved the poet feels the absence of life all around. The whole world appears dry and sapless to him. The feeling of sadness is compounded by darkness of the midnight, the coldness of the day and the shortening of the day. The 'sun' of the Lord that shines upon him in the *Hymn to God the Father* is completely absent here. He sees no life on earth and so he thinks that the world has become sapless. This also suggests that the poet is in a state of spiritual sloth and the world looks like a wasteland for him.
- b. The repetition of the word 'midnight' in a prolonged sentence suggests that midnight is one of the darkest, coldest and saddest midnights, the darkest and coldest time not only of the day but of the year. This speaks of the deep distress of the poet.
- c. The poet compares himself to an Epitaph. He feels himself a sapless and senseless and lifeless thing. He is also a record of the good deeds of his beloved. So he compares himself to an Epitaph and thinks himself to be an emblem of sorrow.
- d. After a lot of negative reflections the poet is filled with a sense of hope. He is able to distinguish between an ordinary nothing and first nothing. The first nothing was followed by Creation. So the poet feels inspired to be rebegot and to create something out of nothing. Thus the poem takes a turn towards hope, though in the mystical sense.
- e. The poet now wants to celebrate the St. Lucy Day. He is now able to have a mystic communion with his dead beloved. He wants to dance with her. As he wants to obliterate the sexual distinction between himself and his wife, so on the day of their mystic union they will be able to change their sex in turn. So he says that he will be 'her Virgill' and 'her Eve'.

7. Lucy is the patron saint of December 13
8. The poet describes himself as one whose "Sunne will not renew", whose pleasures of life is not to be restored and who is not going to have his good old days back. He contrasts his fate with that of other lovers for whom the sun will bring new lust. They are soon to experience the summer of their life, suggestive of their joys.
11.
 - a) 'The Sunne is spent'
 - b) 'no constant rays'
 - c) 'The world's whole sap is sunke'
 - d) 'The general balme the hydroptique earth hath drunk'
 - e) 'life is shrunk'
 - f) 'dead and enter'd'
 - g) 'mee, who am their Epitaph'
 - h) 'I am every dead thing'
 - i) nothingness
 - j) emptiness
 - k) He **ruin'd** mee
 - l) 'absence, darkness, death; things which are not'
 - m) 'I... am the grave'
 - n) 'nothing'
 - o) 'nor will my Sunne renew'
12. 'Spent', 'sunke', 'drunk' and '**shrunk**'.
13. The poet in the third stanza says in a hyperbolic vein that he and his beloved often caused tear-floods that 'drowned the whole world'. He adds that they were like 'two Chaosses' and cared for worldly things. During the times of separation they would not behave the way he prescribes in *A Valediction: forbidding mourning*. All this, particularly the habit of causing delude with tears is a Petrarchan way of demonstrating love. It appears that Donne, too, followed the Petrarchan pattern, while he was a young lover.
14.
 - a. 'A quintessence even from nothingness',
 - b. 'of the first nothing, the Elixir grown',
15. The last four lines takes the poet from despair to hope. Though it is a hope only of a mystic union with **his** beloved, still it is something like a re-union. The atmosphere is quite contrary to the one presented in the rest of the poem, particularly in the first four stanzas. The **sense** of pathos is lurking there. But the demonstration of melancholy is absent from these lines.

EXERCISE - IV

1. The poet reveals his mental state through this image. A conqueror invades a land and makes its inhabitants **captive**. The inhabitants have to obey the command of the **new** ruler. Here the **poet** is an usurped town and his passion or appetite is his ruler. It exacts obedience from him and he, like the inhabitants of a vanquished **nation**, has to obey the **dictates** of the invader.
2. The poet asks God to 'batter' his heart because his heart has become **home** to sins and the poet fails to relieve his heart of the temptation to sensual pleasures. Probably it will be a stroke or a knock from God. This he thinks to be the only way of jolting him from **the** slumber. This reminds us of the knocking at the gate in Shakespeare's "Macbeth" that has the effect of awakening Macbeth into **consciousness** after the commission of the murder of Duncan. The word 'batter' **here** means the **hammer** stroke of God in the form of a blacksmith for the purpose of repairs.

3. Father, Son and the Holy Ghost.
4. The word 'ravish' means the rape of a woman. But here it implies the use of force against a devotee or woman for purging him of the dross. The poet imagines himself to be a woman under the evil influence of a lecherous person. Howsoever he tries, he is not able to **free** himself from the influence. So he seeks God's help to help him to be divorced from the base passion. For this a use of force by God would be welcomed by him.
6. The poet likens God to a blacksmith because he is a maker like the blacksmith, and like the blacksmith He is supposed to have hammer and anvil and bellow and create man in the way a blacksmith makes an instrument. The image of God as a blacksmith is built up by the use of words like 'knocke', 'breathe', 'shine', 'mend', '**o'erthrow**', 'bend', 'force', 'breake', 'blowe' 'bum' and make...new'. All these images have been borrowed from smithy.
7. The 'viceroi' is the deputy of a ruler. Reason is supposed to be the representative or ambassador of God housed in the mind of man. But this viceroy is a captive to passions and is unable to provide vision to the man whose eyes are blinded to reality.
8. 'heart', 'love', 'betrothed', 'divorce', 'untie', 'break the **knot**', 'enthral', 'imprison', 'chaste' and 'ravish'. These words create the images of a bridegroom for God and a bride for the poet. They also show that the bride has been under the temporary influence of an enchanter in the form of passion and asks God to use force for exorcising the enchanter, freeing him from the spell and pulling him into His fold.
9. The amorous images have already been mentioned in answer to the preceding question.
10. John Donne **makes** no difference between religious and secular poems in respect of vocabulary and images. All experiences are parts of life and we find a logical amalgam of disparate experiences in all his poems. In this sense, it is said, Donne remains the same in his religious and secular poems

One may call all of Donne's poems either love poems or religious or metaphysical poems. Of course, there is an evolution in his ideas and maturing of his vision, but love remains his basic proposition and has its appearance in most of the poems, either in this way or that. In his early **poems** he is interested in courting his mistress and enjoying the physical proximity with her. Even in those poems we have casual appearance of religious words. Then we have his metaphysics of love, and finally, he directs his loving heart towards the Lord. A glimpse at the following lines from his **Holy Sonnet** will **illustrate** this point well :

Since she whom I lord, hath paid her last debt
To Nature, **and** to hers, and my good is dead,
And her **soule** early **into** heaven ravished,
Wholly in heavenly things my mind is **sett**
Here the **admyring her my mind** did **whett**
To seeke thee God..."

11. The poem is, in fact, a passionate prayer of the poet to God. He himself becomes a beloved and sees God as his husband. He even asks Him to enthrall him and ravish him so that he may be free **from** the evil influence of his worldly lover. The poet is impassioned to be united to God who is his husband and seeks His help in achieving his end.

1. The line in **question** means that one sin has been forgiven and the others remain to be forgiven.
2. The spinning of the last thread suggests death. The poet refers to the time of his death.
3. Yes. But it is difficult for him to **retreat from** the sinful way of life.
4. He is afraid that God will not pardon him because he does not give up the habit of sinning.
5. This hymn is different **from** other religious poems by Donne in the sense that it is probably the only religious poem in which he feels assured, though after a considerable conflict, that he will be pardoned by God of all his guilts.
6. The poem is dramatic in the sense that it enacts a conflict in his mind. The poet is unsure that he will be able to give up his sinful habit and that God will pardon all his sins. But towards the end of the poem he acquires the faith that God's sun will shine upon him in the same way 'as it shines now'. The poet is also seen reasoning with God.
7. The poet acquires the faith that God will remain as merciful to him at the time of his death as now. The scene is a symbol of joy, wisdom and God's grace.
9.
 - a. spinning of the last thread
 - b. perishing on the shore
 - c. shining of the sun.

Comment: Use of conventional images in the traditional way is not a normal practice with Donne. His images are generally erudite and are brought from diverse **branches** of knowledge, especially cosmology, chemistry, theology and botany.

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UNIT 15 GEORGE HERBERT : A STUDY OF POEMS

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 George Herbert - the man and the poet and his background
- 15.3 Herbert's Distinguishing Traits
- 15.4 The Christian Inspiration
- 15.5 Rapport with the religious poet
- 15.6 The poetic self- Divine and Human Love
- 15.7 Form and meaning in Herbert and Donne
- 15.8 A Summing Up
- 15.9 Further Reading

15.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine some poems of George Herbert, whose poetry stands in the words of a great modern poet as "a record of the spiritual struggles of a man of intellectual and emotional integrity, who gave much toil to perfecting his verses"

Having read the unit on Donne, you have some concept of metaphysical poetry. Reading Herbert together will enlarge and deepen your concept of metaphysical poetry.

You will compare different styles of writing poetry used by the two poets.

You will explore where Herbert stands among other religious poets of his time

15.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will briefly introduce the man and the poet George Herbert and place him among other poets of his time. Do you remember what you read in the unit "Poetry & society in the 17th Century" ? What are the four groups of poets mentioned ? If you do not remember it may be a good idea to revise that unit before starting on this one.

This will be followed by a discussion of some of his better known poems, their text and the intent of the poet, the techniques used by him and the impact of these on the reader.

The critical appreciation of these particular poems will also take into consideration the genre of devotional poems and how Herbert's poetry carries his own individual genius as distinct from other metaphysical poets of his time.

We will discover together the themes and the development of meaning and their close relationship. By the end of this unit we may begin to see how the effect of grace and simplicity of Herbert's poems is achieved by a very careful and deliberate use of language.

Through such analysis we may appreciate how poets learn from each other and yet have their individual styles.

We need also to look at how critics' attitudes and their interpretation of George Herbert's Poetry has changed.

15.2 GEORGE HERBERT - THE MAN, THE POET AND HIS BACKGROUND

Background

The metaphysical poets were writing in a time of turbulence, change and conflict. All over Europe there were frequent wars and civil wars. These wars were not entirely political and there was a continuous religious controversy feeding these wars. In 1570 Elizabeth I was excommunicated by the Pope and later in England there was the Gunpowder plot which was aimed at James I. As today, in the 17th Century men were ready to kill and die for their religion. English History of the time is stained with the blood of many martyrs.



Poets and writers were uneasy about the underlying motives and morality of human behavior. Both Donne and Herbert comment on man's impulses which destroy him. As today we are concerned about AIDS and sexual immorality so was Donne concerned about the new disease, Syphilis which had appeared in Europe in the 15th Century. Read Donne's "An Anatomy of the World" in which he writes of man trying to undo all creation and making war on himself with the new disease.

There were new discoveries in Science, Astronomy and Geography which disturbed the established World View. Innovators and thinkers had trouble as did Galileo with the Roman Catholic Church. Earth was no longer at the center of a spherical universe which was symbolic of harmony and perfection, but as Donne puts it "the new philosophy calls in doubt". Despite new discoveries Platonic ideas continue to dominate the world, An idea that is found in all metaphysical poets is that of the physical world being a copy of the spiritual ideal universe and this was further mixed with the Christian idea of an imperfect man on earth and a perfect God in heaven. Read Vaughan's poem which begins "I saw Eternity the other night" where he describes the two realities the perfect and the imperfect and describes how foolish men take shadows to be real and turn their backs to true reality. This refers to Plato's description of men in caves. Herbert's poetry although Christian in inspiration has the same Platonic idea of men in caves who mistake shadows cast by fire while the sun and heaven are outside. Herbert's also puns on Sun and 'Sunne' of God. Platonic ideas moved the poets to think in analogies and analogies are crucial to metaphysical styles.

The Metaphysical Poets

Art and Music of this time developed with the growth in Literature and Literature especially poetry was influenced by the development of art. A tradition of setting lyrics to music is too well known to need much elaboration; composers like **Campion** wrote both words and music of their poems. This had its impact on the facility with which the metaphysical poets versify. It is most evident in the artful structure and the musical verification of George Herbert. **As** we know from **Issac Walton's** 'Life of George Herbert' "his chiefest recreation was in music, in which heavenly art he was a most excellent master, and did himself compose many divine hymns and anthems which he set and sung to his lute or viol"

The metaphysical poets were also greatly influenced by their predecessors especially the two giants Shakespeare and Milton. We can see that Shakespeare's writing changed the very nature of poetry making it more dramatic and alive to the psychological complexities of man. In Herbert there is reflection of Milton's concern with the nature of the original Sin, Man's Fall and Redemption.

15.2.1 George Herbert (1593 - 1633)

His contemporaries regarded him as a pious and saintly man. His life was not without drama judging by his poems which depict the agony of a poet who struggled to be humble. Do you find Drama in Donne's poetry? Was Donne humble?

George Herbert was born in an aristocratic family. He was educated at Cambridge and was the Universities Public Orator. He could have gone on to hold a political office but he chose to be a parson and a poet. Unlike Donne he was not self-centred and yet there was some conflict as he admits in a poem

" My birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the town"

His poems reflect his spiritual conflicts : "Such Spiritual conflicts as none can think, but only those that have endured them".

Q1. Which of Herbert's poems according to you illustrates this inner conflict most clearly?

The metaphysical style in the religious poetry of Herbert owes much to Donne with whom he had early contact: Herbert's mother being one of Donne's friends and patroness. Yet in spirit his poetry is totally different from the egocentric poetry of Donne; it is marked by grace, artlessness and simplicity. You remember how Donne displays self in his highly personal diction, phrasing and tone. Herbert shows a plainer diction, simpler phrasing and more subdued tone although he is not without pride in his workmanship.

The question you may ask is what can account for Herbert's influence in his own time on poets like Crashaw and Vaughan and Why does Herbert continue to influence later poets like G.M. **Hopkins** and Emily Dickinson ? What according to you justifies **Colridge's** judgement of "the great general merit of his poems which are for these most part exquisite in their kind" or T.S. Eliot's praise that Herbert "may justly be called a major poet"

Keeping these in mind read once again the poems in **Appendix I** and put down your immediate response.

Q2. Do you agree with Colridge and Eliot?

Q3. What is the the first thing that strikes you?

George Herbert

Yes, his poems are lucid and easier to understand than Donne's. Critics have also talked **of the** terrifying lucidity of his poems. His simple diction and the habit of understatement clearly indicate a deep influence of the Bible and the psalms. Herbert's fondness for the Book of Proverbs and Parables gives his poetry those many concrete pictures and keeps the metaphysical abstractions at bay.

Herbert's poetry possesses a complexity dormant within the apparent simplicity, Similarly his varied range of tones is a direct result of his training as an orator. For example when he writes " My God thou art **all** love" There is no one and final interpretation of such a line.

Q4. What do you think the poet means? Is it a discovery, **longing, surprise** or realisation?

There are many such lines in his poems for example in 'Redemption' the last line is "Who straight you suit is granted said and died "

Q5. What do Herbert's last lines do? Collect some examples to support your 'argument'?

15.3 HERBERT'S DISTINGUISHING TRAITS

Herbert, as you must have noticed when reading the poems included in this unit, stands apart from other poets of his time. His poems are lucid. **This** overall impression of simplicity hides a great deal of technical skill. Like Milton, Herbert can manipulate his verse to reflect the thematic pattern. Like **Andrew Marvell** - a metaphysical poet of his time Herber's lines suggest much more than the lucid textured poem seems to state. You exemplified such lines in 3.3 above. Herber's diction that appears to be simple and limited expands outwards in accordance with **the** given context of the poem. Take for example the title of his well known poem "**The** Pulley'. In this poem God bestows on man all gifts holding back only one, of peace so what it may become the pulley to draw man back to the divine breast. You must have read this poem either at school or at college, But if you haven't it is found in all anthologies and is included in the appendix for easy reference.

What **do** we think of **when** we hear the phrase metaphysical poetry? After reading Units **1&2 in this** Block. You will think of metaphysical poetry as passionate in tones, scholastic in philosophy, rich in wit and arguments and in attitude aggressive and unconventional. Herbert's poetry is very far from this. His language is courtly and urbane, he uses varied and musical verse forms, there is a neatness and poise about his verse suggesting greater influence of Ben Jonson than Donne. **At** this point you may wish to revise the Introductory unit to this block.

Yes, **Herbert** is a devotional poet and usually when we think of a devotional poet we think of someone who goes into ecstasy and often loses sight of his poetic craft. Such devotional poetry makes us feel uncomfortable and is far from tidy. Herbert does not belong to this type of devotional poets. **He** may speak with a gentle voice but his is one of the strongest poetic personality **and** he is a masterful craftsman. There is no need to be apologetic about him.

Q6. After reading his poems what picture of the poet you arrive at?

Herbert describes man as a secretary of God's praise but like a good secretary he is cool and in control, he does not lose himself in ecstasy, he is exact, methodical, honest and modest. He is in noway dull for he does argue with God. His poems are about **man's** rebellion against God. But they end in reconciliation. The poems are marked by complaints followed by resolution. This dramatic contrast is reflected in the outward shape of his poems, long sweeping lines followed by short pointed ones.

Read through the poems looking for such contrast in the use of lines.

Read the poem entitled Affliction (1)

Answer the following questions

Q7. Who is the poem addressed to ?

Q8. What did the poet forget to think of ?

Q9. How does the poet **contrast** his youth with old age ?

Q10. To what does the poet compare himself in the sixth stanza?

Q11. What tells you that the poet was **born** in an aristocratic family?

Q12. How do you know that the poet was a scholar?

Q13. Why does the poet wish to be a tree?

Q14. Does the poet really intend to give up his service of God?

Q15. Is the poet really dissatisfied with God or with himself for lacking **perseverence**.

Read the poem a second time using the glossary or a dictionary. Study the structure of the poem. It is built up in contrast.

Q16. Write a note about how the poet contrasts his early joy without thought and his discovery of pain ?

Q17. Why do you think the poet complains about God pushing him into new ways of life?

Q18. Although the poet argues with God does he want change'?

Note the vocabulary used in this poem. It is drawn **from** the game of bowling. Compare the vocabulary used in the **poem** 'Redemption' It is from the discourse of law - tenant, lease, suit etc. Both poems use the same principle of contrast. In 'Redemption' the contrast comes only in the last **two** lines. After studying the two poems you will understand Herbert's mastery of suiting the form to the thought of the poem.

What Herbert thought of Poetic invention he can find in his poem entitled 'Jordan (II)' which was originally titled 'Invention'.
'Jordan' (II)

When first my lines of heav'nly joys made mention
Such was their lustre, they did **excell**.
That I sought out quaint words'and trim invention.
My thoughts began to burnish, sprout and swell,
Curling with metaphors a plain intention.

Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.
Thousands of nations in my brain did runne
Offering their service, if I were not sped:
I often blotted what I had begunne;
This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
Much lesse those joys which trample on his head.
As flames do works and winde when they ascend
So did I weave myself into the sense.
But while I bustled, I might hear a friend
Whisper, How wide is all this long pretence.
There is in love a sweemesse readie penn'd
Copie out only that, and save expense.

Later we find an echo in Traherne's promise 'No curling metaphors that gild the service nor pictures here, nor painted **Eloquence**; No Florid streams of superficial Gems, But real Crowns and Thrones and Diadems!
(Author to the Critical Peruser! 11-14)

In the poems "Jordon I" and "Jordon II" Herbert makes his choice among Contemporary poetic styles. In Jordon II Herbert shows that he is aware of the many pitfalls especially of egoism and of the duplicity. The restless revisings of the poet-craftsman are fired by religious devotion and yet their lurks the danger of subtle egoism. The question that George Herbert raises is fundamental, does the egoism involved in writing poetry hinder the dedication? It is a question that Herbert has to resolve for himself. As Donald Davie in his introduction to the new Oxford Book of Christian Verse says "When a poet chooses a style, or chooses between styles he is making a choice in which is whole self involved, including, if he is a Christian poet, that part of himself which is most earnestly and devoutly Christian. The question is, for him what sort of language is most appropriate when I would speak of, or to my God. And it is not only the puritans among the poets who appear to have decided that the only language proper for such purposes is a language **striped** of all **ornament**."

15.4 THE CHRISTIAN INSPIRATION

'It is important to remember that Herbert's poems were like his very private meditations which he showed to a few friends and were published by his friends only after his death, as they may help others in facing similar spiritual **problems**. Herbert was steeped in Christian ideology. His collection of poems was called "The Temple" and various poems bear titles like "The Porch" "The Window", etc. Herbert is predominantly a Christian poet and for him each Christian ritual is highly significant. We can read the poem, "The Collar" to illustrate how for Herbert the ritual of the Eucharist* was a visible symbol of the invisible grace. For Herbert Grace involves first a full awareness of the chaotic state of the fallen man and a **firm** belief in the unconditional and **free** omnipresence of grace. According to Herbert god's grace anticipates man's **behaviour** and all man's complaints. Herbert with a devastating irony in the poem "The Collar" puts all complaints in the vocabulary of Christ passion i.e. the Crucifixion. There is a reference to a crown, to a thorn, to blood. Before you can understand the poem it may be necessary to read another poem of Herbert's "The Sacrifice" in which Christ says

"on my head a crown of thorns I wear and especially :
"my blood (is) the only way and **cordiall** left to repair mans decay".
So when the poet in the "The collar" slips the collar and gives vent to his choler or anger he uses the same terminology- the sighs dry up the wine and tears drown the corn which could be the bread and the wine representing the sacrifice of Christ!

"The Collar" like all other poems in the collection. "The Temple" avers to as Eliot puts it :

"The absolute paternal care "

That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere Herbert's poetry celebrates the grace of grace but is dominated by the love of love.

As modern readers do you find this exclusive Christian and sacred burden of the "The Temple" is a **stumbling** block ? Keats said that "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us! How can we respond to Herbert's poetry when he clearly states his aim.

"A verse may find him, who a sermon flies, and turn delight into sacrifice"

Luckily Herbert is less of an orator or a preacher and more of a dramatist and you as other readers have will discover in Herbert's poetry many voices and experiences so that you can identify with the "I" of the poems and find yourself in the centre of the action. So far you have read some of the wide, range of voices, from the Christ in, "The Sacrifice" to courtier in "The Pearl"; the detached narrator, in the "The Pulley", the participant in the "The Collar".

Q.19 Make a list of the Speaking Voices. Who is the speaker in each of Herbert's poems you have read so far ?

15.5 RAPPORT WITH THE RELIGIOUS POET

You may **wonder** whether as Christian religious poetry does Herbert's poetry present a problem to the modern reader. Indian readers do not find it difficult to accept belief in a personal god and the poet's personal relationship with Him, there is a great deal of this in Indian literary tradition. So the readers do not have to be Christians to appreciate Herbert's poetry. There is no doubt that the poet believed seriously in the Bible and the basic doctrines of the Church ? Here once again you want to revise Unit 1 in this Block **III** to understand how religion was a part of **daily** life, social intercourse and politics. What is expected of the reader is the readiness to grasp what moved the poet to record his many spiritual struggles. If you can imaginatively sympathise with the faith of the poet his poems become a source of permanent joy. In his collection "The Temple" the poet depicts the progress of the soul from the first spiritual awakening and delight through many struggles and conflicts to find acceptance and hope of a peaceful union with God.

4.20 Why do you think Herbert called his book of poems "The Temple" ?

Q.21 If the body is the temple who is god who dwells within according to Herbert?

Q.22 How does this remind you of the Scholastic doctrine of the microcosm and the macrocosm ?

Q.23 Do you think Herbert is aware of both the distance between the human and the divine and of the golden thread that binds the two? In Herbert's poetry the architecture of the church plays an important role.

Q.24 Does this mean that the congregational aspect of religion is as important to him as the spiritual ?

Q.25 Do you find that other metaphysical poets like Donne are interested in the Church and its architecture?

Q.26 What does Herbert regard as windows which open on God's love?

Q.27 List Herbert's poems which by their title symbolise soul's progress towards the divine.

Q.28 Read "Easter Wings" "Aaron" and "The Windows" . Write a note on the unity of thought and the form (or shape) in these poems.

15.6 POETIC SELF—DIVINE AND HUMAN LOVE

You will recall that the focus in 17th Century love poetry was on the poetic self. In Herbert's poetry the focus is on the love of the God or Grace. In Donne's poetry there is a dialogue between the poet's self and god, the dialogue depicts conflicts logically. Herbert's poems are of a pastor and not of a preacher, there is no argument, no hortatory discourse i.e., no "you must not tell lies" kind of morality. Herbert's

emphasis is on the general implication of the traditional truths of Christianity. For him the Church is important and so are **congregational** rituals.

George Herbert

What do you think inspires Herbert?

It is the poet's feeling for **the vital** importance of love and charity. He is concerned with how god's grace operates on earth. He is more earth directed. What then do you think is the main theme of Herbert's poetry? It is how man's life, everyday life on earth can be transformed by god's mercy. Now this poems, the images are concrete and substantial. The poem "Love (3) is an excellent example of earthy vocabulary used by Herbert. Be speaks of most sacred things in the simplest language and makes homeliest of comparisons as in "Both heaven and Earth.

Paid me my wages in a world-of-mirth

Prayer is

"Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The Milky way, the bird of paradise"

Divine grace in the sacramental elements

"**Knoweth** the ready way,
and hath the privey key
Op'ning the man's most subtle rooms;
Whilst those, to spirits refined, at door attend.
Dispatches from their friend.
Night is 'God's ebony box' in which
Thou dast inclose us till the day
Put our amendment in our way,
And give new wheels to our disordered clocks.

At his best feeling and natural image are imaginatively and completely merged in one another.

And in age I bud again
After so many deaths I live and write
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my only light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

Q.29 Do you appreciate Herbert's sincere and sensitive poetry? Read the selected poems or others in anthologies and make a list of concrete images like the ones illustrated above. Metaphysical poetry invites the reader to participate in the intimate passionate intercourse between human lovers and in intimate passionate moments of conversations between the human and divine as in Herbert's poetry e.g. in the poem "Love". The readers are like eavesdroppers. This is the stamps of Herbert's poetry which forces us to approach it with reverence. Do you agree? But our awe is soon dispelled by his simple diction and the distance between the readers and the poet is bridged.

Q.30 Now read the poems once again and make a list of phrases that are homely, simple and direct in their appeal and help you in almost forgetting that Herbert is a solemn poet.

The opening lines of Herbert's poems show how he adopted the direct approach which he learnt from Donne and yet his sensibility is very different. Compare any two poems of Donne and Herbert. Note in what way their beginnings are different.

15.7 FORM AND MEANING IN HERBERT AND DONNE

As by now you must have observed each period of literature is distinguished by the way in which it conveys meaning. In the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century this relationship between form and meaning was close; what the writer is communicating determines the form. Form is shaped by each writer in different ways. Milton looking for dignified language for his epic chose blank verse. Another poet like Nathaniel Richards wrote a poem on Christ's Crucifixion in the shape of a cross. As Helen Gardner remarks in her introduction to "The Metaphysical Poets".

"The metaphysical poets favoured either very simple verse forms, octosyllabic couplets or quatrains or else stanzas created for the particular poem in which length of line and rhyme scheme artfully enforced the sense".

Both Donne and Herbert show an outstanding degree of boldness in choice of forms and yet in such an individual way that by a look at the shape of the poem, almost at a glance you can decide, whether a poem is by Donne or Herbert. In Donne the page is more packed than in Herbert since Donne uses longer lines. Herbert uses longer lines only in his few sonnets but you will have noticed that he prefers the short line.

The variety of form in Herbert's poems is striking : he seldom uses the same pattern twice. When you read his poems do you not get the feeling that here is a poet who delights in his skill at versifying- his technical virtuosity.

The most well known case where Herbert's intention is transparently clear is the poem "Easter Wings". Once again look at this poem which is deliberately written in a shape and devising of the shape has not been left to the printer. The poet makes use of the idea of wings throughout the poem. Man's loss by fall (from Eden) is portrayed by lessening length of lines.

4.31 Which are the shortest lines? Yes 'most poore' and "Most thinne"?

Q.32 Why do lines grow longer after these?

Yes, because the poet wants to represent rising and flight.

Read the poem to observe how thought and shape are closely united.

Read the poem "Denial" to see how the disorder of thought is reflected in discord in metre and lack of rhyme.

Turn to the poem "The Collar" and count the syllables in the first four lines.

Did you count ten, four eight, and ten ?

Did you observe and wonder that there seemed to be no overall pattern, no rhymes?

Why do you think Herbert chose this way of expressing his apparent rebellion?

Now let us read the last four lines at what point does all rebellion end ?

Right at the word child? What is the poet's meek answer in the last line?

- 4.33 Read the poem titled "Aaron" Note the words at the ends of lines in the two verses.

4.34 How many times are the four words 'head' 'dead' 'rest' 'drest' repeated ?

Q.35 Is there a change of meaning in the five repetitions ?

Write down your reaction to how Herbert shows the transformation of the human into Christ and reinforces the meaning with the skillful use of form. Is Herbert both devout and playful ? Does his technique at any time intrude on your attention? Are the poems an organic whole ?

Q.36 Comment on how Herbert's poems are part of his spiritual autobiography his experience of prayer and how they spring out of his realisation of the gulf between the human unworthiness and divine grace. Quote lines from his poems to support your argument.

4.37 Which according to you is the most moving poem of Herbert. Why do you find it so moving?

15.8 A SUMMING UP

You have already studied Donne's poetry so by comparing **Donne** and Herbert's religious poetry you can begin to understand the individuality of the two poets and something of the place of religion in the social and the psychological life of men in the Seventeenth Century.

Donne's religious poetry is also a record of his belief. God not only exists for Donne but the immediacy and intensity of this presence in Donne's poetry is overwhelming. Is he the same loving god of Herbert ? No he is more the God of Old Testament stem and strong like the God of Hebrews. Do you find in Donne the gentle love and serenity which you discover in Herbert ? Donne the poet, is more aware of God's **sterne** wrath and pleads, sets out reasons and occasionally picking up courage flusters.

So I say to thee.

To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned. This **beanteous forme** assures a pitious mind.

(Holy Sonnets XIII).

Donne does not doubt God's existence but he has fears about God's nature, he does not put himself in God's hands with trust as Herbert does. As Donne says he has a sinne of Feare that when I have **spunne** / My last thread I shall perish on the 'shore' (A hymn to God the father) Donne lacks Herbert's faith in God's grace, Reread 'Love (3)'.

The mediation and the serenity arising from meditations does not characterise Donne's poetry as it does Herberts. Would you agree with this statement and could you illustrate it?

On the other hand if you compare Donne's love poetry with his religious poetry you find they are more alike. They are marked by a sense of insecurity or instability. The tears and hesitations spring from Donne's life and beliefs. He was born a Catholic and converted to Anglicanism with anguish for secular reasons. However **Donne** seems to be more of a Protestant in his preference for 'private holiness at home' whereas both Catholicism and Anglicanism stress more the congregational and say true worship is when the whole **congregation** together with one heart and one mouth hymns. Protestantism plays down collective rituals and stresses the sermon, the individual prayer and study of the Bible. One of the great products of this **type** of Protestant religious was spiritual autobiography and Donne's religious poetry steins from this kind religious thought. There is no impressian of a congregation in **his** poems, rather we have the awareness of a solitary figure in dialogue with a God of power and awe, The poet argues with and questions his God looking for certainty or promise of salvation but scarcely finding what he was looking for. Donne's imagination responds vividly to **Crucification** and feels within **himself** the pain and the humiliation but his imaginatian lags behind when he depicts Resurrection. In the words of Bunyan, whose "Pilgrim's Progress" is an excellent:spiritual autobiography. Donne makes Christians **spiritual** journey but he never finds the Heavenly City.

Do you find that looking at Donne's life and poetry is a way of understanding how religion played a major role in the psychological environment of the men of his times? His poems reflect the search far true meaning of religions and God in the Seventeenth **Century**, Men like Donne show not only sincerity and urgency but also **were** engaged in examination of themselves **and** of the nature **of** the divine self. This is characteristic of the **period** and its serious commitment **to** religian, Donne, while he may illustrate some trends in Seventeenth Century religious poetry, does not represent it because he is far too individualistic as a poet. Because he is so distinguished far too **often** he is equated with Seventeenth Century religious **poetry** which is fair to neither **Donne** nor the other poets.

Herbert, who learnt a great deal from Donne, was a very different kind of person as you saw in earlier sections. What Herbert learnt from **Donne** were technical skills **e.g.** his opening lines that **reach** out to the heart of the matter.

Q.38 List the opening lines of the poems you've read so **far**, begin with 'The Collar'.

Look at some more such **effective opening** lines.

Why do I languish thus, drooping and dull
As if I mere all earth (Dulnesse)

Ah my dear angry Lord
Since thou **dost** love, yet strike (Bitter-Sweet)

Broken in pieces all asunder
Lord, hurt me not,
A thing forgot (Affliction (IV))

Perhaps Herbert's use of the first person owes something to Donne and his imagery taken from the everyday world which we examined in an earlier section may also owe something to Donne and yet you saw that Herbert speaks with a distinctive style all his own. His collection is entitled 'The Temple' sacred poems and Private Ejaculations showing a blend of the congregational religious experience coupled with spiritual autobiography. The poems are both part of the age and expressions of individual meditations. Herbert more than Donne represents his age, the poet does not take the centre stage, his humility is that of a sage.

It is interesting that while both Donne and Herbert are fascinated by the Crucifixion their responses are totally different. Herbert thinks of Christ with total concentration to the exclusion of his poetic self whereas Donne is lost in fearful fascination. Both Donne and Herbert are painfully aware of the distance between man and God but Herbert is confident of God's mercy.

Yet by confession will I come
Into the conquest. Though I can do nought.
Against thee, in thee I will overcome.
The man who once against thee faught.

(The Reprisall)

This unshakable faith and hope is what distinguishes Herbert's poetry. He is original in that he conveys the feelings of Christ a man's blindness to his mercy and sacrifice. The emphasis is on the Divine self and not on the human self as in Donne's poetry.

Is there anything like a sermon in Herbert's poetry? Through his experience is private and individual the reader is very subtly urged to partake of God's grace but dramatic emphasis is on individual conflict and self image. Herbert's modesty holds him back as in the poem 'Love'. This makes the poems all together human and absolutely sincere. The traditional worship in the Church and the ritual are there in support of the quaking individual self. The poetry holds out hope to everyman and in this way the poet is like a pastor caring and loving to all who come seeking light and solace.

4.39 Does Herbert at any time appear to you as a sentimental poet who makes up for mediocre performance by heavy religious cover ?

Q.40 As you read in Unit I the Seventeenth Century was a period of religious controversy. Do you find such controversy reflected in the poetry of Herbert? Does he keep himself above such controversies?

What picture of George Herbert do you have in your mind after reading his poems. Does he not sound like a person who cares for others and like a loving pastor who makes sure that none from his congregation strays.

He also appears to have been selective. He does not deal with obscure philosophy or doctrine but takes his themes from what is spiritually significant namely indisputable love of god.

In literary criticism sophistication has been associated with Donne and Herbert's apparent simplicity has mislead most critics to think that his was purely personal poetry of priestly piety. When you read criticism do keep this in mind and decide for yourself whether Herbert does not show *finess* in his versification and in his themes which show a blend of the personal and the topical coloured with penetrating meditations.

Donne has so dominated metaphysical poetry that critics have also tended to overemphasize Herbert's debt to Donne it is often forgotten that there was a variety of religious verse written in this period.

Herbert criticism has grown in the last twenty years, earlier critics like Grierson looked on him as a devotional poet and a minor one. Today this view no longer holds and some modern critics think Herbert is a major poet with subtle workmanship and deep self awareness. Shifts in Eliot's judgement are indicative of this change: in his 1951 Review of Georgian Poetry in *Athenaeum* and in "Selected Essays" he found him a minor poet with a special but limited awareness however later in "George Herbert" in 1962 Eliot values Herbert for his restless exploration of variety and a kind of gaiety of spirit, a joy in composition.

J.H. Summers's "George Herbert : His Religion and Art" came out in 1954 and was the first all round study and survey. In the first three chapters he describes how the response to Herbert the poet has changed over the years. The most remarkable are the next three chapters which discuss Herbert's use of form and his use of hieroglyphs which he defines as a figure, device or sign having some hidden meaning. Too often Herbert's hierographic poems like the "The Altar" or "Easter Wings" have been regarded as mere curiosities. In the final chapters Summer also draws attention to poetic voices in "The Temple" and how Herbert infused new life into traditional modes and traditional forms. Herbert's word play and textual revisions were studied critically by M.E. Rickey. For detailed reading of individual poems one has to turn to Helen Vendler. She says one of the particular virtues of Herbert's poetry is its provisional quality. Her work is a study of what she calls the reinvented poems. Fish in his studies of Herbert asks the question where is the poem on the page or in the reader's experience of it. He suggests that the relationship of Herbert the poet to his readers is like a Christian teacher catechising his pupils in such a way that they find the answers to the questions he asks themselves. Incidentally in this Unit we have tried to use the same technique. The studies of Martz relate Herbert to mediatorial liturgy. Tuve urges readers to put Herbert in the context of traditions on which he draws- the traditions of church rituals and typology. More recently Bloch (1985) has concentrated on Herbert's distinctive way of drawing inspiration from the Bible.

We can sum up Herbert's work by a quotation by Wallace Stevens as Donald Mackenzie does.

He is the transference of the place
In which he is and his poems we find peace.

15.9 FURTHER READING

EDITIONS ...

The following editions are not only cheap and easily available but good. Patrides has an interesting introduction and brief notes.

Patrides, C.A.(ed.), *The English Poems of George Herbert*, J.M. Dent, 1974. Reprinted with corrections 1977, 1978, 1981 and 1984. Follows the 1633 edition and includes valuable notes and useful bibliography.

Wall, John N.Jr.(ed.), *George Herbert: The Country Parson, The Temple*, Paulist Press, 1981. Reprinted with corrections 1985. Modernised texts with useful introduction, especially on spiritual background.

BIOGRAPHY

Novarr, David, *The making of Walton's lives*, Cornell University Press 1958.

Charles, Amy M., *A Life of George Herbert*, Cornell University Press, 1977.

Bottrall Margaret, *George Herbert*, 1954. Combines Biography and critical study,

Critical Studies

This brief list is a starting point. There is much material however there is nothing like detailed study of the poems.

Bennett, Joan, *Five Metaphysical Poets*, Cambridge University Press 1963, A good introductory study.

Eliot, T.S., *George Herbert*, Longmans, 1962.

Gardener, Helen, *Religion and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1971.

W.R.Keast (ed.), *Seventeenth Century English poetry* Oxford University Press 1962 - a collection of essays by well known critics.

Knights, L.C., 'George Herbert' in *Explorations*, Chatto & Windus, 1946. An established critical study,

Mahood, M.M., 'Something Understood' : The Nature of Herbert's Wit' in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (eds.), *Metaphysical Poetry*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies II, Edward Arnold 1970.

Patrides, C.A.(ed.), *George Herbert: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983,

Taylor, Mark, *The soul in Paraphrase : George Herbert's Poetics*, Mouton, 1974.

Vendler, Helen, *The poetry of George Herbert*, Harvard University Press, 1975.

White, Helen C., *The Metaphysical Poets: A study in Religious Experience*, Macmillan, 1936.

Other Reading

Dr Johnson - *Life of Cowley* for his comments on Metaphysical poetry. William Empson *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Chatto & Windus) 1950, reissued as Penguin (1973)

Book of Common Prayer to get the feel of religious use of language.

Patrides, C.A.(ed.), The English Poems of George Herbert, J.M. Dent, 1974. Reprinted with corrections 1977, 1978, 1981 and 1984. Follows the 1633 edition and includes valuable notes and useful bibliography.

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Patrides, **C.A.(ed.)**, George *Herbert: The* Critical Heritage, **Routledge & Kegan Paul**, 1983,

Taylor, Mark, The soul in Paraphrase : George Herbert's Poetics, Mouton, 1974,

Vendler, Helen, The poetry of George Herbert, **Harvard** University Press, 1975.

White, Helen **C.**, The Metaphysical Poets: A study in Religious Experience, Maamillan, 1936,

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Book of Common Prayer to get the feel of religious use of language.

UNIT 16 ANDREW MARVELL: A STUDY OF HIS POEMS

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Historical Background
- 16.3 Metaphysical Poetry
- 16.4 'To His Coy Mistress'
- 16.5 'The Garden'
 - 16.5.1 Discussion
- 16.6 'Horatian Ode'
 - 16.6.1 Discussion
- 16.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.8 Suggested Reading

16.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to provide you with a **close understanding** of the lifetime and works of Andrew Marvell. You will also be **able** to write on the theme, style, structure, tone, imagery and other related **issues** of his poetry,

16.1 INTRODUCTION

The structure of this unit may not be **the** best possible **methodology** for the student to follow while reading. **He/she** is advised to read the text of **the** poems first as given in the Appendix at the end of the unit. It is always advisable to first approach the text without any preconceived notions on background **information** and **see** how **much** of the poem you can understand and appreciate on your own. After having given the text a thorough reading you should then read the historical, **bibliographical** information provided and the discussion of the text. **This reading** may **now** enhance your understanding of the poem and provide new insights **into** the poem. In other words, start at **the** end and work your **way** backwards.

16.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The works of **Andrew Marvell** exercise biographer and critic alike for it is evident that conflicting demands of self and the world which in **one** guise or another **inform** many of his celebrated **poems** need to be **seen** not only in relation **to** his **own** enigmatic **personality**, but also **in** the **context** of what one historian has dubbed the '**Century** of Revolutions',

The facts of Marvell's life can be quickly rehearsed. He was born on 31st **March**, 1621 in Yorkshire where his father was a rector but later **moved** to Hull in 1624. He graduated **from** Trinity College, Cambridge in 1633. After **some** years spent in business and in travelling, he entered public life in 1659 when he was elected M.P. for Hull, a position he was to retain till 1661. During his long career in **the** House of Commons he sat on various committees and also supported Charles II's attempts to



extend toleration towards religious dissenters in the work for which he was the most renowned in his own lifetime, *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*.

Marvell grew up in an age which Abraham Cowley was later to describe as 'a warlike, various and a tragical age'. It was an age which saw radical changes in the institutions of the Church and the State and the questioning of many fundamental beliefs about the nature of man and society and the universe he inhabits.

Neither the church of England nor the Monarchy survived the revolutionary decade of the 1640s. Already the conviction was gaining ground that the process of reformation had not gone far enough, which was strengthened by the ecclesiastical policy of Charles I and ruthlessly implemented by William Laud, first as Bishop of London and then as Archbishop of Canterbury. The Long Parliament of 1640 imprisoned Laud and he was eventually tried and beheaded in 1645. The grievances against the King now burst upon him and given the obstinacy of his character and the zeal of his opponents, an armed conflict was inevitable. The civil war which began in 1642 culminated in victory for Parliament in 1645 under Fairfax and Cromwell. The King was tried and executed on 30th January 1649. Monarchy and the House of Lords were abolished in March and a new Commonwealth was established of which Cromwell became the Protector in 1653. After his death in September 1658 followed by a period of confusion caused by the abdication of the new Protector, his son Richard Cromwell, order was restored in the person of Charles II who landed at Dover in May 1660.

The protracted battles for power between the supporters of uniformity and freedom of conscience in the Church and between absolutism and constitutional parliamentary governance in the State were naturally accompanied by an ideological war of words and ideas. Thomas Hobbes's systematic analysis of the nature of man and state – *The Great Leviathan* – swept aside older notions of natural or divine rights. Advances in physical sciences and the growing spirit of scepticism promoted fundamental changes in man's conception of the universe and his place in it through the works of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Newton. But while seventeenth century inventions of telescope and microscope were extending the range of human perception and knowledge, they were also underlining the deceptiveness of appearances and elusiveness of truth. Both the life and writings of Andrew Marvell can be interpreted as the responses of an intelligent and sceptical mind to the need to find new bearings amid the confusions and challenges to inherited assumptions of a period of revolutionary change.

16.3 METAPHYSICAL POETRY

It is customary to refer to one group of poets in the first half of the seventeenth century as Metaphysical. The connotations of this term, which is perhaps more meaningful than some other literary labels, have been neatly summarised by professor Grierson – "It lays stress, he says, on the right things the more intellectual, less verbal character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement."

John **Dryden** said in his *Discourse of Satire* (1693) that Donne in his poetry "*affects the metaphysics*" (meaning that Donne applies the terminology and abstruse arguments of medieval scholastic philosophers. In *Life of Cowley* (1779), Dr. Johnson extended the term Metaphysical from Donne to a group of poets. The name is now applied to a group of poets who were directly or indirectly influenced by Donne, employed similar poetic procedures and imagery, both in secular (Marvell, Cowley) and religious poetry (Herbert, Vaughan, Cowley).

Exercises

How is the socio-political background of the age **important** for Marvell's poetry?
Give the characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry.

16.4 TO HIS COY MISTRESS:

The poem is in the form of an invitation to an unnamed lady for more active participation in the game of courtship. The conditional terms of the first line 'Had we but World enough, and time, casts a mockingly regretful tone over the hyperboles of the first paragraph

1 Had we but World enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long Love's Day.
Though by the *Indian Ganges'* side
Should'st Rubies find : I by the Tide
Of **Humber** would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood :
And you should if you please refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each Breast :
But thirty thousand for the rest.
An **Age** at least to every part,
And the last Age should show your Heart :
For, Lady, you deserve this state;
Nor would I love you at lower rate.

The opening strikes the keynote straight away – *if only* they were not subject to the inexorable laws of space and time, they could play out the fantasy of a love which slowly expands over the face of the earth like an **empire** and which lasts right through human history, from Noah's Flood to the Second Coming of Christ, heralded by the Conversion of the Jews, Such fantasies are among the devices human art has invented to cope imaginatively with the facts of time and mortality. If time did not make the project patently ridiculous, the lover would gladly play the conventional game of protracted courtesy – tune his sorrowful complaint beside the native Humber, while the lady gathered jewels from the **more** exotic banks of the Ganges. The linking of the two rivers, with the difference in sophistication implied between the travelled lady, and the provincial lover, begins the teasing which culminates in the suggestion that the 'last age' before the end of the world prophesised in the Revelation of St. John would 'show' the secret of her heart. The lover's jesting however is not incompatible with a serious undertone of resentment and regret at times defeat of human idealism.

For, Lady, you deserve **this** state;

Nor would I love you at lower rate.

This elegant **compliment** prepares us for the next stage of the **syllogism**, introduced by the 'but' that has **been** looming ever since the **conditional** verb of the opening line–

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near :
And yonder all before us **lye**
Deserts of Vast Eternity
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy **marble** vault, shall sound
My echoing sang : then **worms** shall **try**
That long preserved virginity :
And your quaint Honour **turn** to dust;
And into ashes all my lust,
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace

Instead of a fantasy courtship stretching through millennia, the chilling prospect of a bleak and sterile eternity opens up and the future tense takes over from the conditional. Bodily perfection will vanish from the earth and even the poet's record of his devotion will eventually be lost. This however is the reverse of another poetic tradition which finds consolation for the losses inflicted on human **beauty** in the thought that it would survive in an "echoing song" –

And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand
(Shakespeare **Sonnet** 60)

Marvell however denies this dream. Neither singer nor song will outlast the 'marble vault' whatever the poets may assert on the contrary –

Not marble, not the **gilded** monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme
(Shakespeare **Sonnet** 55)

One way or another, the ravening hunger, of Nature will overcome the **lady**, try whatever she may to **keep** herself intact during her life, With a final sardonic couplet the lover leads into the third stage of his syllogistic assignment –

Now, therefore while the **youthful** hew
Sits on thy skin like **morning** dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant Fires
Now let us part while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,

Rather at once our time devour,
 Than languish in his slow-chapt pow'r.
 Let us roll all our strength, and all
 Our sweetness up into one Ball :
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
 Through the iron gates of life
 Thus though we cannot make our Sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Andrew Marvell

To appreciate this poem it has to be read against other examples of the 'carpe diem' lyric (this will be discussed later). There is a physical immediacy and a desperate recklessness which eschews any sentimental evasions.

The urgently repeated "Now" and the imperative verb forms sweep the Lady towards the physical consummation that is the lover's goal. The dramatic scene of her sexual arousal (34-36) excites the lover to images of brutal forthrightness. Instead of the conventional images of loving or adoring gaze, here there is the devouring of two "amorous birds of prey" and the tearing of pleasures "with rough strife". Lines 41-46 have been open to many interpretations and some think that behind them lie the kind of hyperboles that Donne restored to in order to embody his highest vision of reciprocal love (e.g. *The Good Morrow*, *The Cannonization*). The rolling of sweetness and strength into a single ball is the celebration of the perfect union of lovers. The final couplet may contain an allusion to the feat of the Biblical hero Joshua who made the sun stand still while he took revenge on Israel's enemies. It can also be an ironic comment on Donne's *The Anniversary* where he claims that though the sun which makes time, as they pass, itself grows older, his love "no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday/Running it never runs from us away"; or at his favourite command in *The Rising Sun* that the sun should start its journey over him and his mistress. If Donne's poetry is meant to be brought to mind here, it is a final instance of the speaker's way of undercutting of the ingenuity with which the human imagination avoids the stark facts of lust and time.

Whatever the specific allusions behind these images what is unquestionable is the unsentimental realism with which Marvell's lover concludes his appeal. The consummation he invites her to share with him takes on the air of a contest, in which he and his coy mistress pit themselves against a harsh world. He urges her not to submit to him but to join him to overcome, even if only temporarily, the united forces of time and space.

Exercises

1. Why is there a touch of regret in the first stanza?

2. Why can't the lovers indulge in a prolonged courtship?

3. What are the ways of outwitting time?

As a *carpe diem* lyric (literally "sieve the day" or "enjoy life before it is too late"), *To His Coy Mistress* needs to be read against other examples of the same kind. Perhaps the best known example is a song by Robert Herrick published in his *Hesperides* (1648):

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,
Old time is still a flying :
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the sun
The higher he's a getting :
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to getting.

Closer in tone to Marvell's poem are lines from the final stanza of *Corina's Going a Maying*, also from the *Hesperides* :

Come, let us go, while we are in our prime;
And take the harmless folly of the time
We shall grow old apace, and die
Before we know our liberty
Our life is short; our days are run
As fast away as does the sun.
And as vapour, or a drop of rain
Once lost, can never be found again.

Ben Jonson's song *To Celia* and the lines of the Roman poet Catullus on which it is based, seem to lie even nearer the heart of Marvell's inspiration –

Come my Celia, let us prove,
While we may, the sports of love;
Time will not be ours, for ever :
He, at length, our good will sever.
Spend not then his gifts in vain
Suns, that set, may rise again :
But if once we lose this light,
Tis, with us, perpetual night.

To His Coy Mistress however has a tone of urgency and recklessness in contrast to the sentimental evasions of gathering "Rose-buds" and enjoying "harmless folly".

Seventeenth century love poets differ from their predecessors in that human love is no longer an issue between sense and spirit and hence does not confront a lover with the inherent depravity of the senses or the unreality of the sensible world. There is neither an obligation to renounce nor to transcend human capacities but to recover and realize them fully. A yearning for lost innocence pervades seventeenth century lyric poetry with undertones of guilt or wistfulness. Comparing personable young girls with short-lived flowers is one way of playing off innocence against blasting lust; another is to pose an innocent affection which has now matured into desire :

Ah! Chloris! That I now could sit
As unconcerned as when
Your infant beauty could beget
No pleasure, nor no pain.
(Sedley, 'To Chloris')

Versions of interaction between a young girl and an older admirer run from the delicate to the perverse, from bold warnings to nostalgia and poignancy.

The equivocal standing of passion in the affairs of Adam and Eve doesn't compel us to mark off love from sexual desire. Seventeenth century poets didn't distinguish between high love or low love, but put forward an individual sexual impulse which pulls two ways – to innocence and life but also to corruptness and death. Lovers offer no choice of course and no conflict; indeed to choose would be naïve for we cannot alter our condition. Short of abandoning society altogether our only reasonable response must be a working accommodation with ourselves and others, so as to gain what we can without relinquishing too much.

The reality designated in metaphorical terms is the fact of the Fall. As a datable historical event it is nowhere expressly formulated in Marvell's poetry; but as an ever-present human experience it is never absent from his consciousness. Death brought into the world by the luckless apple casts its maleficent shadow over a number of poems – *Young Love*, *The Match*, *The Unfortunate Lover*, *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Faun* and of course *To His Coy Mistress* where an initially light hearted variation on a common enough theme (*carpe diem*) advances rapidly along unforeseen tracts to an alarming apprehension of the ravenous nature of time and death.

There is a recurrence in Marvell of the linked themes of liberty and necessity of innocence crushed by external violence by the pressures of time or passion inevitably giving rise to tyranny and war once the garden state of childhood is over. There are varied ways in which time can be outwitted – "Thus, though we cannot make our sun/stand still, yet we will make him run"; or by contemplative withdrawal ('The Garden').

A continuous presence in Marvell's poetry is the predicament of restriction – the condition of being thwarted, confined or enmeshed. The persistent lover in *To His Coy Mistress* is a living proof of being thwarted. Given world and time enough his courtship would continue for thirty thousand years. But he is trapped in a paradox – if he gains his end and wins the lady, he will only increase time's speed, the faster you run away from time the faster you use up time.

This poem about the lady's reticence, is a mockery of this reticence, a recommendation to inhabit a world of reality rather than one of convention and an acknowledgement that reality might be barbarous were it not for the civilising force of convention. This is the characteristic Marvell tone, subverting what it alleges and at the same time questioning its own subversion.

Marvell starts with a convention and then proceeds to dismantle it before making his approach to another convention. The *carpe diem* injunction notwithstanding, the poem confronts us with the destructive forces that loom behind all ceremonies whether of sophistication or innocence. Space is a desert now, instead of a fertile land of compliments. Yet we have to ask what is implied by a situation in which honour and lust are alike exposed to mortality and in which lust is declared as the probable driving force behind an earlier zeal for compliment. The Biblical echoes of dust and ashes provide no sanction for the satisfying of desire. It is the triumph of time, a triumph which cannot be thwarted. All that can be done is to retrieve a moment from it and intensify the meaning of the moment. A convention has been set up to be dismantled and the one that has replaced it is not any more sacrosanct. To devour time maybe to turn on one's tormentor, but it is also to become the enemy. To actively "devour" rather than to passively "languish" is not to escape the end but only hasten its arrival. *To His Coy Mistress* is probably Marvell's most destructive poem. Its strength is that having turned against itself in the expected manner of ironic poems, it then turns against its own internal objections, leaving us with the desert that is the poem's centre.

The poem laments the remorseless grinding of Time's jaws and sensitively explains every change of mood and turn of thought. The movement of the poem has great urgency, there is a forward impulse in the three part syllogistic argument, The traditional plea to give up coyness is given a syllogistic form – "Had we but Time

enough"; "But at my back I always hear ..."; "Now therefore..." The three divisions are precisely weighed. The speaker's willingness to practice almost eternal gallantry is emphasised by the twenty lines that it requires; but the necessities of time and morality neatly balance that movement in only twelve lines. The final fourteen lines of the resolution both prove firmly conclusive for the immediate moment also suggest costs and values beyond that moment.

The tone of *To His Coy Mistress* marvellously catches a complex human attitude. Marvell's dialectical attitude implies a metaphysic – "Had we ...", "But ...", "Now therefore ...". What really counts here is the urbanity with which issues are pushed to their universal consequences. The wit, so precise in its hold on the complexities of our being, is no less precisely pitched to catch the human attitude to them. With exquisite delicacy of ironic understatement Marvell rises the bleak prospect of death, corruption, and an empty eternity (lines 25-32). These haunted and haunting conceits would be simply macabre if they were less elegantly or less self-mockingly delivered.

Marvell delicately plays on the myth of an original innocence lost within the terms of pastoral or celebratory love. His concern with innocence is at once tender and subtle; he can be warm in sympathy while allowing that innocence is an equivocal quality in this world. Much of the power of the poem comes from the concreteness with which universal issues are realized or imaginatively experienced and from the grace with which the limitations of our state are entertained and mastered.

The poem's structure itself is an evidence of the grounding in dialectics acquired by Marvell (and other seventeenth century poets). In the first section the leading image is of "vegetable love", an attack on Romantic love which grows slowly, and thus requires endless time and world. The lady could then search for jewels by the Ganges and the lover complains by the tide of the Humber.

In the second section the key image is of Time's winged chariot and the corresponding intensity of terror produced by it. Based on Luther's predictions it was believed in Marvell's time that the world would shortly come to an end (in 1560). So Marvell's preoccupation with time is not surprising.

"Morning dew" and "fire" occur in the next section. The invitation to the sexual act is expressed in three independent images – the lovers as amorous birds of prey devouring time (38-40), the pomander, a union of male energy and female tenderness (41-42) reminiscent of Donne's image in *The Canonization* where the lovers are symbolised by the eagle (strength) and dove (sweetness); the third image is of the gates of life before which the sexual strife is waged. Metallic images reinforce the predicament of restriction. The lovers must tear pressure through life's "Iron gates". There is obviously a pun in the concluding couplet – through the 'son' the lovers can outwit the 'sun'. Images of "devour", "tear", "roll" find justification in a poem dealing with time, death and waste and Marvell is adept at giving unexpected treatment to a stock situation.

Exercises

1. What other 'carpe diem' poems do you know beside *To His Coy Mistress*?

2. How is the seventeenth century concept of love different from the sixteenth century concept of love?

3. What are the main ideas under discussion in the poem?

What is typical of this poem is the translation of personal experience, without loss into a conscious play with literary traditions. The altered status of love in the seventeenth century invites not moral decision but placing. Thus love poetry lost much of its dynamic character and became a realization of the way things are with us. It is haunted art, because it balances the one prospect against the other and holds both in play by way of heightening our apprehension of how far love is bound by time. There was in Marvell's age a heightened apprehension of where our world and we stand in time. Reading nature aright one may in the present age get a glimpse of the original state. The seventeenth century efforts to see things as they really are was a search for the condition of our lost Eden, an attempt to explore how we can accept the way things stand with us and yet go on living in Society at the same time.

Glossary

Noah's Flood : refers to *Genesis 7*
 The Second Coming of Christ : refers to *The Revelation to John*

16.5 THE GARDEN

The next poem under discussion is one of his most famous, namely *The Garden*. It should not be read as an autobiography. What was the state of Marvell's mind as he wandered in Fairfax's Yorkshire garden? This kind of pseudo biographical criticism is both wasteful and deceptive. It diverts attention from the real issues in the text.

"We cannot err in following nature" said Montaigne. This is a useful guide to the thought of the late Renaissance which here concerns us. Nature is to be distinguished from custom – natural inclinations are good and sensual gratifications are not so dangerous as other more orthodox philosophies hold them to be. Sense and instinct find their own balance without the interference of reason. It is good to satisfy natural appetite. As is obvious here the platonic concept of love is being rejected.' This genre of poetry described the sensuality of a natural Eden and a specialized kind concentrated on sexual gratifications as innocent and the subject of unreasonable interference from Honour. There was great flexibility within this genre. Poets who stated the extreme sensualist case were quite capable of refuting it (e.g. Saint – Amant). One might call this refutation "anti-genre". *The Garden* is a poem of the anti-genre of the naturalist paradise. Marvell could pass with ease from the libertine garden to the garden of platonic *solitaire*. The poem uses the language and "norms" of a genre in a formal refutation of the genre.

The Garden is a poem rich in symbolism. The gardens to which Marvell most directly allures in his poem are the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise, and that garden to which the Stoic² and Epicurean³, as well as the Platonist retire for solace or mediation. A word is needed about the garden of the solitary thinker, which Marvell uses in his argument against the libertine garden of innocent sexuality. The libertines use the innocence of self to exact sensuality and to propose the abolition of the Honour, meaning mainly female chastity. This is the situation of *jouissance* poetry which was fashionable in France (Saint – Amant) and England (Carew, Lovelace, Randolph). The garden, the place of unfallen innocence is identified with a naturalist glorification of sensuality. The garden which is formally opposed to this one by

Marvell is the garden where sense is controlled by reason and intellect can contemplate not beauty but heavenly beauty. It was Montaigne in his stoic role who gave currency to the pleasures of solitary seclusion. The relevant ideas and attitudes were developed into a poetic genre. This is the poetry of the meditative garden. There is of course a play of the senses in which the woman has no part. The true end of the garden is 'quietness withdrawing from the world, meditation'. True ecstasy is in being rapt by intellect, not by sex. To the naturalist *jouissance*, Marvell opposes the meditative solitude. The Garden is, however, not a contribution to philosophy nor the direct account of a contemplative act.

Exercises

1. What is the difference between the *Jouissance* and Solitude genres of poetry? To which genre does Marvell belong?

The poem begins by establishing that of all the possible gardens, it is dealing with that of retirement, with the garden of the contemplative man who shuns action. Man vainly runs after Palm (is for victors), Oak (for rulers) and Bayes (is for poets) but retired life is quantitatively superior. If you appraise action in terms of plants you get single plants, whereas retirement offers you the solace of not one but all plants. The first stanza then is a witty dispraise of active life, though it has nothing to distinguish it sharply from other kinds of garden poetry such as Libertine or Epicurean.

The innocence of the second stanza again does not distinguish it from other garden poets, for innocence is a sort of feature of the Libertine as well as Epicurean garden. Your sacred plants, he says addressing Quite and Innocence, are unlike the palm and oak and bay in that if you find them anywhere on earth it will be among plants of a garden. The others you can find in "busy companies" of man. The inference is that Innocence may be found only in the green shade. Society is all but rude (unpolished by comparison with solitude, which at first appears to lack the virtues society possesses, but which actually possesses them in a greater measure).

This prepares the ground for a clearer rejection of libertine innocence. Female beauty is reduced to its emblematic colours (red and white) and unfavourably compared with the green of the garden, as a dispenser of sensual delight. A foolish failure to understand the superiority of green, causes lovers to insult trees by carving on them the names of women. Since it is the green garden and not women that the poet chooses to regard as amorous, it would be farcically logical for him to carve on the trees their own names. This garden is natural and amorous in quite a different way from the libertine garden.

Love enters this garden, but only when the pursuit of the white and red is done, and we are without appetite, (love is here both pursued and the pursuer). Weary with the race and exertion, 'it' makes a retreat to the garden. The place of retreat has therefore love but not women; they are metamorphosed into trees. Even the gods have been misunderstood, they pursue women not as women but as potential trees. And hence the usefulness of the myths of Apollo and Daphne⁴ and Pan and Syrinx. The sensuous appeal of this garden then is not sexual, as it is in the libertines.

The garden has nonetheless, all the enchantment of Earthly Paradise, and all its innocence; this is the topic of the fifth stanza. The trees and the plants press their fruit upon him. The fruits of green, and not red and white are offered in abundance, everything is by nature lush and fertile. The difference between this Paradise and one containing a woman is that here a Fall is of light consequence and without any tragic significance. In this garden both man and nature are unfallen. It is therefore not a trap

The sixth stanza begins with a typical puritan ambivalence – "from pleasures less". It can mean any one of the following – i) reduced by pleasure, ii) the mind retires because it experiences less pleasure than the senses, iii) that it retires from lesser pleasure to the greater. The second meaning establishes a relation between mind and sense which is obviously relevant to the theme. The third meaning is the one most closely associated with this interpretation – the mind withdraws from sensual gratification in order to enjoy a happiness of the imagination. This doubt gives grandeur to the next line – a reference to the then commonly held belief that all species found on land have their counterparts in the sea. The idea here is that the forms exist in the mind of man as they do in the mind of God. By the virtue of the imagination the mind can create worlds, and seas too which have nothing to do with the world which is reported by the senses. It is a common place of the Renaissance poetic process that God is poet. It is conceivable that Marvell in his suggestion of the mind's ability to create refers to modern psychology with its roots in the Renaissance, but with new emphasis. The other worlds are thoughts in the mind of man as the world is a thought in the mind of God. William Empson is of the opinion that **streight** means 'packed together' as well as 'at once'. The mind contains everything undiminished by the deficiencies of sense. The mind's newly created worlds are in the strict sense phantasms, and without substance: and since they have the same mental status as the created world, it is fair to say that "all that's made" is being annihilated, reduced to a thought. The transition here is from the **correspondences of thought with fact** to those of **thought with thought, to find** which is to be **creative**. This leads to the idea that not only does the mind transcend the world it mirrors, but a sea, by similar transition, transcends both land and sea. "**Green thought**" presents a great bogey. Surely the thought is green because the solitude is green. Hence the contextual significance of green is in accord with what is after all a common enough notion – green for innocence. Frank Kermode stakes that green has no very extensive symbolic intention – green is still opposed to red and white; this is possible only when women are absent and the senses are innocently engaged. The stanza thus alludes to the favourable conditions which enable the mind to apply itself to contemplation. The process is wittily described and the platonic touches should not be taken too seriously.

The seventh stanza has also been the subject of much ingenious speculation. As the poet allows his mind to contemplate, his soul begins a platonic ascent. Here the influences of English mystic philosophy and of Platonism is stronger. The fountain is here a symbol of purity and the bird is an emblem of the soul. It "**waves its plumes the various light**" – **we** are reminded that the ascent towards the pure source of light cannot be achieved, but that it is a product of **solitude**, not **ofjouissance** and that it is an alternative to libertine behaviour in gardens. It is the ecstasy not of beauty but of heavenly beauty.

The eighth stanza makes this theme explicit. This is a special solitude, which can only exist in the absence of women, the agents of temptation. This has been implied throughout but is clearly stated here in the first clear reference to Eden. The notion that Adam would have been happier without a mate is of course not new. This is another way of saying the same thing – that women offer the wrong kind of beauty and love, the red and white, instead of the green. Eve deprived Adam of solitude and gave him an inferior joy. Her absence would be equivalent to the gift of a paradise.

In the last stanza, the temperate quiet of the garden is once more asserted, by way of conclusion. The time, for us as well as for the bee is sweet and rewarding. Hours of innocence are conveyed by a dial of herbs and flowers. The sun is '**milder**' because here heat is substituted by fragrance. The time computed is likewise spent in fragrant rather than hot pursuits. This is **solitude**, not **jouissance**, the garden is of the **solitaire**

whose soul rises towards divine beauty, not that of the voluptuary who voluntarily surrenders to the delights of the senses.

16.5.1 Discussion

Marvell¹ unlike most of his modern readers thought it possible to recover the lost harmony with Nature, which before the Fall, man had possessed in the garden. The themes of alienature, harmony, Nature and Art are present in the poem. His intentions were those of a moralist to put matters in proper perspective – so that salvation can be attained, so that the lost innocence, the paradisaical integrity of Nature might be reconstructed with the aid of literary Art in the garden of the mind.

The chief point of the poem is to contrast and reconcile conscious and unconscious states, the intuitive and intellectual modes of apprehension. Yet this distinction is never made explicitly, Marvell's thoughts implied by his metaphors. The poem combines the idea of the conscious mind including everything because understanding it and the unconscious animal nature including everything being in harmony with it. The point is not that these two are essentially different, but that they must cease to be different so far as either is to be known.

Exercises

1. What does the garden signify?

2. Why is the colour of green important? What is green contrasted to?

3. Point out two ambivalent lines from the poem.

4. Why is the mind powerful?

5. What are the chief points of the poem?

Glossary

1 For Plato's theory of love, read *Symposium*

2 and 3 – Schools of Philosophy

4 To save herself from the pursuit of Apollo Daphne turned herself into a laurel tree.

Marvell is usually known as a writer of philosophical and love poetry, Lesser known aspect of him (outlined in 16.2) was his active involvement in the contemporary political scene of England. He had written numerous satires and poems of political content which are not so well known. As our third poem of this unit we have chosen one such lesser known poem *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* (1650).

The easiest error into which critics fall is to define critical studies by historical facts. They try to understand the 'ode' by historical evidence – by letters and documents – what Marvell really thought of Cromwell at different times and then neatly fit the ode into a particular stage of Marvell's developing opinion of Cromwell. This is not only a coarse method but positively perilous; for to ascertain what Marvell the man thought of Cromwell and even to ascertain what Marvell the poet consciously intended to say in his poem, will not prove that the poem actually says this, or all this, or merely this.

So let us review the situation briefly. Hard upon the composition of the 'ode' in 1650, Marvell had in 1649 written poems in which the Royalist bias was perfectly explicit – *To his Noble Friend Mr Richard Lovelace, Upon the Death of Lord Hastings, Elegy upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers*. As Margoliouth (Marvell's biographer) put it : "If (the elegy on Villiers) is Marvell's, it is his one unequivocal royalist utterance; it throws into strong relief the transition character of "An Horatian Ode" where royalist principles and admiration for Cromwell the great man exist side by side." But this transition of views again cannot be graphed as steadily rising curve when we take into account Marvell's next poem *Torx May's Death* in which he seemed to attack Parliamentary forces.

What then does the *Horatian Ode* say? Legouis sees in it a complete impartiality, which is the product of Marvell's non-participation in the wars. But the *Ode* though it may be a monument of impartiality is not a monument of indifference. On the contrary there is a passionate interest in the issues at hand, an interest which is manifested elsewhere in the poem,

From the historical evidence alone we can be sure that the attitude towards Cromwell in this poem will be a complex one. This complexity is reflected in the ambiguity of the compliments paid to him. This becomes clear in the very second word of the poem. 'Forward' may mean 'high-spirited', 'ambitious', but it can also mean 'presumptuous', 'pushing'. The forward youth must forsake shadows and muses and become a man of action. ,

The speaker does not identify Cromwell as the forward youth or directly say that Cromwell's career has been motivated by a striving for fame. But the implications are clear enough. There is the important word 'so' to relate Cromwell to these stanzas – "So restless *Cromwell* could not cease" Restless may mean 'scorning indolence' but can also mean 'to take rest'. Cromwell's high courage will not allow him to rest 'in the inglorious Arts of Peace'. This thirst for glory merely hinted at by these negatives is further developed in the ninth stanza –

"Could by industrious valour climbe
To ruine the great work of Time"

'Climbe' denotes aggressiveness and his courage is too high to brook a rival (lines 17-20). But the speaker is careful to use the word "could not cease" – for Cromwell it is not a question of will, but of a deeper compulsion. Restless Cromwell could not cease even if he wanted to.

Indeed the lines that follow extend the suggestion that Cromwell is like an elemental force (13-16). The last two lines refer to Cromwell's struggle after the battle of Marston Moor with the leaders of the Parliamentary Party. Here we have to be fully alive to the force of the metaphor. The lightning is conceived as tearing through the side of his own body – the cloud. Metaphorically then, Cromwell has not spared his own body; there is therefore no reason to be surprised that he has not spared the body of Charles. If nature will not tolerate a power vacuum, nor will it allow two bodies ("spirits") to occupy the same space. Two spirits must jostle one another, and one must give way: Cromwell's is therefore not a vulgar ambition. If his valour is an "industrious valour" it contains plain valour too, of a kind perfectly capable of being recognised by any Cavalier (45-46). If the driving force is a desire for glory, it is glory of that kind which allows a man to become dedicated and even selfless in his pursuit of it. Moreover the desire for such glory can become so much a compulsion that the man does not appear to act by his own will (11-12). Cromwell is then a marked man, a man of destiny, but he is not merely governed by his star. Active though it be, he cannot remain passive, he is not merely urged by it, but himself urges it on.

So what does this say about Charles? Does it mean that Charles has angered heaven and thus merited his destruction. In the lines there is nothing to suggest that Charles had angered the heavens, or that Justice which complains against his fate is anything less than justice (37-38).

While Cromwell has been established as an elemental force, the poet does not forget that he is a man too – that 'the force of angry Heavens flame' is embodied in a human being (27-28). The lines that follow praise that manliness, strength, valour and cunning (wisdom) which resulted in Charles I's flight from Hampton Court in November 1647 to take refuge in Carisbrooke which was regarded as the King's fatal error. Modern historians however do not find any evidence that Cromwell cunningly induced the King to flee by playing on his fears.

But the ends served by these powers are not commendable. Marvell insists that Cromwell was deaf to the complaint of justice and that the power achieved by Cromwell is a 'forced power' (66). But the speaker is a realist who knows that a kingdom cannot be held by 'merely pleading - 'ancient rights' (39-40).

The more closely we look at the *Ode* the more clearly we realise that the speaker chooses to emphasize Cromwell's virtues as a man and likewise those of Charles as man. The poem does not debate which of the two was right, for that issue is not even in question. The portraits of the two men beautifully supplement each other. Cromwell – to use Aristotle's terms – the man of character, the man of action, who both acts and knows, acted upon by his star but not passive.

Charles on the other hand the man of passion, the man who is acted upon, who knows how to suffer. The contrast is pointed out in half a dozen different ways. In the celebrated stanzas on the execution, there is ironic realism as well as admission – he is the "Royal Actor" who knows his assigned part and performs it with dignity. He truly adorned the "Tragick Scaffold" (53-64). What is being applauded in lines 56-66? Cromwell's resolution in bringing the king to a deserved death? Or the king's dignity on the scaffold as he has suffered death? Marvell was too good a poet to resolve the ambiguity.

The second half of the poem begins with the reference to
..... that memorable Hour
which first assured the forced Power.

Cromwell is henceforth seen as the agent of the new state that has been erected upon the dead body of the king. The thunderbolt simile of the first part of the poem, gives way to the falcon simile in the second part of the poem. The latter figure revives and

qualifies the former. It repeats the suggestion of ruthless energy and power. Cromwell now falls from the sky not as a thunderbolt, but as the hunting hawk. The trained falcon is not a wanton destroyer, nor an irresponsible one. It knows its master; it is perfectly disciplined (93-94). The speaker's admiration for Cromwell culminates in lines 81-82 – the emphasis is on the fact that he need not obey, yet does, that his homage is not forced but voluntary.

What about the Republic which Cromwell so ruthlessly serves? What is the speaker's attitude towards it? The speaker recognises the fact that its foundation rests upon the bleeding head of Charles, and hence the allusion to the Roman analogy. Yet the speaker does not confirm that the bleeding head is a happy augury. (71-72). The speaker is not willing to prophesise peace but is willing to predict that England under Cromwell will be powerful in war and will strike fear into the surrounding states (97-100). Specifically he predicts a crushing victory over the Scots.

What of the compliments to Cromwell on his ruthlessly effective campaign against the Irish? Does Marvell the Englishman for once succumb to biased patriotism (lines 73-80). This must be read with some grim irony and the earlier stanzas sanction that reading. Cromwell's activity, bravery, resolution, his efficiency come in for praise not his gentleness or his mercy and the Irish themselves are best able to affirm this for they have been blasted by the force of angry Heaven's flame. The third quality which the speaker couples with goodness and justice is fitness "for highest Trust" and the goodness and justice of Cromwell culminate in this fitness. The recommendation to trust here refers not to the Irish but to the English state. The passage fits into the poem – a poem which is no panegyric on Cromwell but an unflinching analysis of his character.

The Irish have been tamed and now the Irish will no longer be able to shelter under his particoloured mind. It is the hour of decision and the particoloured mind affords no protection against the man who "does both act and know". In Cromwell's mind there is no conflict. His is not only an "industrious valour" but also a "sad valour". "Sad" may mean steady but can also mean what Virgil had made it mean – sad fear, the fear that made the Trojans sad. Cromwell's valour is sad in that the Scots will have occasion to rue it.

So far the speaker has been content to view Cromwell from a distance, against the background of recent history and refer to him in the third person – but in the last two stanzas he addresses Cromwell directly. He salutes him as "the wars and Fortunes Son", in that he is the master of battle. It can also mean that he is a creature of wars and the product of fortune. The earlier references to Cromwell as a natural phenomena certainly lend support to this reading – power has come to him through wars in troubled times and he has no sanction for his power in "ancient Rights". These readings are not mutually exclusive, rather they support each other. Cromwell is urged to march "indefatigably on". If he could not cease "in the inglorious Arts of Peace", one cannot conceive of his ceasing now in the hour of danger (115-118). It is not merely against the spirits of the night that Cromwell will have to fight. He will have to use his steel against bodies less diaphanous than spirits. If there is any doubt about his last point, the concluding lines (119-120) put it forward explicitly and powerfully.

Exercises

1. What images are used in the poems to describe Cromwell?

2. What is the speaker's attitude towards Cromwell?

3. What does the speaker say about Charles?

16.6.1 Discussion

The stanza form used by Marvell in the *Horatian* Ode was used only once by Marvell (in his poem) and does not seem to occur in English poetry prior to Marvell. Margoliouth and Legouis think that the stanza was Marvell's invention. But Cleanth Brooks insists that Marvell borrowed the form from Sir Richard Fanshawe, Marvell's Royalist associate and also a translation of Horace's odes.

Hunting metaphors pervade the poem and it has an overall Roman cast. Marvell makes specifically no Christian references in the poem. Charles is Caesar, Cromwell is Hannibal. On the scaffold Charles refuses to call not on God but on 'the Gods'. The poem progresses in two movements and the celebrated stanzas on Charles' execution divide the poem into two distinct parts – first, Cromwell's rise to power; and second Cromwell's wielding of that supreme power.

86.7 LET US SUM UP

Even after all this discussion the question can still arise – what is the final attitude towards Cromwell? Is it ultimately one of approval or disapproval? These questions bring to mind Shakespearean tragedies (this is not to imply that Marvell had Shakespearean tragedies in mind while writing this poem). What for example is our attitude towards Macbeth? We assume his guilt, but there are qualities which emerge from his guilt which excite admiration. They do not compensate for his guilt, but they force us to exalt him in the same breath as we condemn him. Similarly the insight into Cromwell is as heavily freighted with admiration as it is with condemnation. But the admiration and the condemnation do not cancel each other. They define each other; and because there is responsible definition, they reinforce each other. The summation can be neatly done in the words of Mr. Margoliouth – "The Ode is the utterance of a constitutional monarchist whose sympathies have been with the king, but who yet believes more in men than in parties or principles, and whose hopes are fixed now on Cromwell, seeing in him both the civic ideal of a ruler without personal ambition, and the man of destiny moved by and yet himself driving a power which is above justice".

16.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

The Metaphysical Poets – ed. By Helen Gardner (read the introduction)
Marvell – Modern Judgements – ed. By Michael Wilding (important articles by T.S. Eliot, William Empson, Frank Kermode, Cleanth Brooks etc.)

Appendix I John Donne's Poems

The Flea

Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;
Confesse it, this cannot be said
A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoyes before it woove,
And **pamper'd** swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than wee would doe.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, nay more than **maryed** are:
This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloysterd in these living walls of Jet.
Though use make thee apt to kill mee,
Let not to this, **selfe murder** added bee,
And sacrilege, **three sinnes** in killing three.

Cruell and sodaine, **hast thou** since
Purpled thy naile, in blood of **innocence**?
In what could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it **suckt** from thee?
Yet thou **triumph'st**, and saist that thou
Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now;
'Tis **true**, then **learne** how false, feares bee;
Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee.

Twickenham Garden

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares,
Hither I come to seeke the spring,
And at mine eyes, and at mine eares,
Receive such balmes, as else cure every thing,
But O, selfe **traytor**, I do bring
The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert Manna to gall,
And that this place **may** thoroughly be thought
True Paradise, I have the serpent brought.

'Twere wholsomer for mee, that winter did
Benight the glory of this place,
And that a grave frost did forbid
These trees to laugh, and mocke mee to my face;
But that I may not this disgrace
Indure, nor leave this garden, Love let mee
Some senslesse peece of this place bee;
Make me a mandrake, so I may grow here,
Or a stone fountaine weeping out my yeare.