o

South Valley University
Faculty of Education
Department of English
First Year (General)

Poetry (1)

1st year (General Education)

English Department

Compiled by

Dr. Nabil Abdel Fattah

Qena Faculty of Arts – South Valley University

2022-2023

Preface

The main purpose of this course is to enable students to read and enjoy poetry. Students will explore English poems from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and acquire the critical skills required for studying verse. In addition to the technical aspects of poetry, students will study in detail selections from the poetry of the representative poets and movements in these three centuries of English poetry. Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to acquire the fundamental critical skills and terminologies required to produce close textual readings of poetry, evaluate the poetic and technical strategies used in studied poems, and recognize the differences and similarities among the poetic schools and traditions

Best Wishes & Regards

Dr. Nabil Abdel Fattah

Table of Contents

Subject	Page
1- Poetic techniques	2
2- William Shakespeare	19
3- Sir Thomas Wyatt	29
4- Edmund Spencer	41
5-Christopher Marlow	49
6- Sir Walter Raliegh	22
7- Robert Herrick	61
8- John Donne	77
9- Andrew Marvell	88
10- Aphra Behn	127
11- References	160

Poetic techniques

Allegory

An extended metaphor in which the characters, places, and objects in a narrative carry figurative meaning. Often an allegory's meaning is religious, moral, or historical in nature. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* are two major allegorical works in English.

Alliteration

The repetition of initial stressed, consonant sounds in a series of words within a phrase or verse line. Alliteration need not reuse all initial consonants; "pizza" and "place" alliterate. Example: "We saw the sea sound sing, we heard the salt sheet tell," from Dylan Thomas's "Lie Still, Sleep Becalmed."

Allusion

A brief, intentional reference to a historical, mythic, or literary person, place, event, or movement. "The Waste Land," T. S. Eliot's influential long poem is dense with allusions. The title of Seamus Heaney's autobiographical poem "Singing School" alludes to a line from W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" ("Nor is there singing school but studying /Monuments of its own magnificence").

Antithesis

Contrasting or combining two terms, phrases, or clauses with opposite meanings. William Blake pits love's competing impulses—selflessness and self-interest—against each other in his poem "The Clod and the Pebble." Love "builds a Heaven in Hell's despair," or, antithetically, it "builds a Hell in Heaven's despite."

Apostrophe

An address to a dead or absent person, or personification as if he or she were present. In his Holy Sonnet "Death, be not proud," John Donne denies death's power by directly admonishing it. Emily Dickinson addresses her absent object of passion in "Wild nights!—Wild nights!"

Assonance

The repetition of vowel sounds without repeating consonants; sometimes called vowel rhyme. See Amy Lowell's "In a Garden" ("With its *leaping*, and *deep*, cool murmur") or "The Taxi" ("And shout into the *ridges* of the *wind*").

Aubade

A love poem or song welcoming or lamenting the arrival of the dawn. The form originated in medieval France. See John Donne's "The Sun Rising" and Louise Bogan's "Leave-Taking." Browse more aubade poems.

Augustan Age

The first half of the 18th century, during which English poets such as Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift emulated Virgil, Ovid, and Horace—the great Latin poets of the reign of the Emperor Augustus (27 BCE to 14 CE). Like the classical poets who inspired them, the English Augustan writers engaged the political and philosophical ideas of their day through urbane, often satirical verse.

Blank verse

Unrhyming iambic pentameter, also called heroic verse. This 10-syllable line is the predominant rhythm of traditional English dramatic and epic poetry, as it is considered the closest to English speech patterns. Poems such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, and Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," are written predominantly in blank verse.

Carpe diem

In Latin, "Seize the day." The fleeting nature of life and the need to embrace its pleasures constitute a frequent theme of love poems; examples include Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time."

Conceit

From the Latin term for "concept," a poetic conceit is an often unconventional, logically complex, or surprising metaphor whose delights are more intellectual than sensual. *Petrarchan* (after the Italian poet Petrarch) conceits figure heavily in sonnets, and contrast more conventional sensual imagery to describe the experience of love. In Shakespeare's "Sonnet XCVII: How like a Winter hath my Absence been," for example, "What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!" laments the lover, though his separation takes place in the fertile days of summer and fall. Less conventional, more esoteric associations characterize the *metaphysical* conceit. John Donne and other so-called metaphysical poets used conceits to fuse the sensory and the abstract, trading on the element of surprise and unlikeness to hold the reader's attention. In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," for instance, John Donne envisions two entwined lovers as the points of a compass.

Consonance

A resemblance in sound between two words, or an initial rhyme (see also Alliteration). Consonance can also refer to shared consonants, whether in sequence ("bed" and "bad") or reversed ("bud" and "dab").

Couplet

A pair of successive rhyming lines, usually of the same length. A couplet is "closed" when the lines form a bounded grammatical unit like a sentence. The "heroic couplet" is written in iambic pentameter and features prominently in the work of 17th- and 18th-century didactic and satirical poets such as Alexander Pope: "Some have at first for wits, then poets pass'd, /Turn'd critics next, and proved plain fools at last."

Dimeter

A line of verse composed of two feet.

Dramatic monologue

A poem in which an imagined speaker addresses a silent listener, usually not the reader. Examples include Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Ai's "Killing Floor." A lyric may also be addressed to someone, but it is short and songlike and may appear to address either the reader or the poet.

Eclogue

A brief, dramatic pastoral poem, set in an idyllic rural place but discussing urban,

legal, political, or social issues. Bucolics and idylls, like eclogues, are pastoral poems, but in nondramatic form. See Edmund Spenser's "Shepheardes Calendar: April," Andrew Marvell's "Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn," and John Crowe Ransom's "Eclogue."

Elegy

In traditional English poetry, it is often a melancholy poem that laments its subject's death but ends in consolation. Examples include John Milton's"Lycidas"; Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "In Memoriam"; and Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." More recently, Peter Sacks has elegized his father in "Natal Command," and Mary Jo Bang has written "You Were You Are Elegy" and other poems for her son. In the 18th century the "elegiac stanza" emerged, though its use has not been exclusive to elegies. It is a quatrain with the rhyme scheme ABAB written in iambic pentameter.

Epic

A long narrative poem in which a heroic protagonist engages in an action of great mythic or historical significance. Notable English epics include *Beowulf*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (which follows the virtuous exploits of 12 knights in the service of the mythical King Arthur), and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which dramatizes Satan's fall from Heaven and humankind's subsequent alienation from God in the Garden of Eden.

Figure of speech

An expressive, nonliteral use of language. Figures of speech include *tropes* (such

as hyperbole, irony, metaphor, and simile) and *schemes* (anything involving the ordering and organizing of words—anaphora, antithesis, and chiasmus, for example).

Foot

The basic unit of measurement of accentual-syllabic meter. A foot usually contains one stressed syllable and at least one unstressed syllable. The standard types of feet in English poetry are the iamb, trochee, dactyl, anapest, spondee, and pyrrhic (two unstressed syllables).

Genre

A class or category of texts with similarities in form, style, or subject matter. The definition of a genre changes over time, and a text often interacts with multiple genres. A text's relationship to a particular genre—whether it defies or supports a genre's set of expectations—is often of interest when conducting literary analysis. Four major genres of literature include poetry, drama, nonfiction, and fiction. Poetry can be divided into further genres, such as epic, lyric, narrative, satirical, or prose poetry.

Georgic

A poem or book dealing with agriculture or rural topics, which commonly glorifies outdoor labor and simple country life. Often takes the form of a didactic or instructive poem intended to give instructions related to a skill or art. The Roman poet Virgil famously wrote a collection of poems entitled *Georgics*, which has influenced poets since. Read a translated excerpt from Virgil's *Georgics* Book III

or Book IV.

Hymn

A poem praising God or the divine, often sung. In English, the most popular hymns were written between the 17th and 19th centuries. See Isaac Watts's "Our God, Our Help," Charles Wesley's "My God! I Know, I Feel Thee Mine," and "Thou Hidden Love of God" by John Wesley.

Hyperbole

A figure of speech composed of a striking exaggeration. For example, see James Tate's lines "She scorched you with her radiance" or "He was more wronged than Job." Hyperbole usually carries the force of strong emotion.

Iamb

A metrical foot consisting of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. The words "unite" and "provide" are both iambic. It is the most common meter of poetry in English (including all the plays and poems of William Shakespeare), as it is closest to the rhythms of English speech.

Imagery

Elements of a poem that invoke any of the five senses to create a set of mental images. Specifically, using vivid or figurative language to represent ideas, objects, or actions. Poems that use rich imagery include T.S. Eliot's "Preludes," Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," and Mary Oliver's "At Black River."

Irony

As a literary device, irony implies a distance between what is said and what is meant. Based on the context, the reader is able to see the implied meaning in spite of the contradiction. When William Shakespeare relates in detail how his lover suffers in comparison with the beauty of nature in "My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing like the Sun," it is understood that he is elevating her beyond these comparisons; considering her essence as a whole, and what she means to the speaker, she is *more* beautiful than nature. Dramatic or situational irony involves a contrast between reality and a character's intention or ideals. For example, in Sophocles' Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, King Oedipus searches for his father's murderer, not knowing that he himself is that man. In "The Convergence of the Twain," Thomas Hardy contrasts the majesty and beauty of the ocean liner *Titanic* with its tragic fate and new ocean-bottom inhabitants.

Lament

Any poem expressing deep grief, usually at the death of a loved one or some other loss. Related to elegy and the dirge. See "A Lament" by Percy Bysshe Shelley; Thom Gunn's "Lament"; and Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Lament."

Lyric

Originally a composition meant for musical accompaniment. The term refers to a short poem in which the poet, the poet's persona, or another speaker expresses personal feelings. See Robert Herrick's "To Anthea, who May Command Him Anything," John Clare's "I Hid My Love," Louise Bogan's "Song for the Last Act,"or Louise Glück's "Vita Nova."

Metaphor

A comparison that is made directly (for example, John Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" from "Ode on a Grecian Urn") or less directly (for example, Shakespeare's "marriage of two minds"), but in any case without pointing out a similarity by using words such as "like," "as," or "than." See Sylvia Plath's description of her dead father as "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God" in "Daddy," or Emily Dickinson's "'Hope' is the thing with feathers— / That perches in the soul."

Meter

The rhythmical pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in verse. The predominant meter in English poetry is accentual-syllabic. *Falling meter* refers to trochees and dactyls (i.e., a stressed syllable followed by one or two unstressed syllables). Iambs and anapests (i.e., one or two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one) are called *rising meter*.

Metonymy

A figure of speech in which a related term is substituted for the word itself. Often the substitution is based on a material, causal, or conceptual relation between things. For example, the British monarchy is often referred to as the Crown. In the phrase "lend me your ears," "ears" is substituted for "attention." "O, for a draught of vintage!" exclaims the speaker in John Keats's "Ode to Nightingale," with "vintage" understood to mean "wine." Synecdoche is closely related to metonymy.

Mock epic

A poem that plays with the conventions of the epic to comment on a topic

satirically. In “Mac Flecknoe,” John Dryden wittily displays his mastery of the epic genre to cut down a literary rival. Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock” recasts a petty high-society scandal as a mythological battle for the virtue of an innocent.

Octave

An eight-line stanza or poem. The first eight lines of an Italian or Petrarchan sonnet are also called an octave.

Ode

A formal, often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and often celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea. Its stanza forms vary. **The *Greek* or *Pindaric*** (Pindar, ca. 552–442 B.C.E.) ode was a public poem, usually set to music, that celebrated athletic victories. **English odes** written in the Pindaric tradition include Thomas Gray’s “The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode” and William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Reflections of Early Childhood.” **Horatian odes**, after the Latin poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.), were written in quatrains in a more philosophical, contemplative manner; see Andrew Marvell’s “Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland.” The **Sapphic ode** consists of quatrains, three 11-syllable lines, and a final five-syllable line, unrhyming but with a strict meter. See Algernon Charles Swinburne’s “Sapphics.”

Onomatopoeia

A figure of speech in which the sound of a word imitates its sense (for example, “choo-choo,” “hiss,” or “buzz”). In “Piano,” D. H. Lawrence describes the “boom

of the tingling strings" as his mother played the piano, mimicking the volume and resonance of the sound ("boom") as well as the fine, high-pitched vibration of the strings that produced it ("tingling strings").

Oxymoron

A figure of speech that brings together contradictory words for effect, such as "deafening silence." For instance, John Milton describes Hell as "darkness visible" in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.

Persona

A dramatic character, distinguished from the poet, who is the speaker of a poem. The persona who describes the process of composing and playing music in Robert Browning's "Abt Vogler" is a German organist by the same name. Similarly, three historical figures (Erasmus Darwin, James Whitfield, and Josiah Wedgewood) narrate Linda Bierds's three-part poem "The Ghost Trio." The identity of the speaker is not always so clear; John Berryman's sequence of *Dream Songs* is narrated primarily by a persona named Henry, who refers to himself in the third person.

Personification

A figure of speech in which the poet describes an abstraction, a thing, or a nonhuman form as if it were a person. William Blake's "O Rose, thou art sick!" is one example; Donne's "Death, be not proud" is another. Gregory Corso quarrels with a series of personified abstractions in his poem "The Whole Mess . . .

Almost.” Personification is often used in symbolic or allegorical poetry; for instance, the virtue of Justice takes the form of the knight Artegal in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*.

Poetic diction

The vocabulary, phrasing, and grammatical usage deemed appropriate to verse as well as the deviations allowable for effect within it. Aristotle discussed the proper diction for writers in his *Poetics*, and English poets have long struggled with which kind of language to employ and when. Wordsworth argued against the ornate language of his predecessors in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Poetic diction is distinguished from common speech by effects such as circumlocution, elision, personification and Latinate terminology such as “azure skies.”

Prosody

The principles of metrical structure in poetry.

Refrain

A phrase or line repeated at intervals within a poem, especially at the end of a stanza. See the refrain “jump back, honey, jump back” in Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s “A Negro Love Song” or “return and return again” in James Laughlin’s “O Best of All Nights, Return and Return Again.”

Rhyme

The repetition of syllables, typically at the end of a verse line. Rhymed words conventionally share all sounds following the word’s last stressed syllable. Thus “tenacity” and “mendacity” rhyme, but not “jaundice” and “John does,” or

"tomboy" and "calm bay." A *rhyme scheme* is usually the pattern of end rhymes in a stanza, with each rhyme encoded by a letter of the alphabet, from *a* onward (ABBA BCCB, for example). Rhymes are classified by the degree of similarity between sounds within words, and by their placement within the lines or stanzas.

-***Eye rhyme*** rhymes only when spelled, not when pronounced. For example, "through" and "rough."

-

End rhyme, the most common type, is the rhyming of the final syllables of a line. –

Feminine rhyme applies to the rhyming of one or more unstressed syllables, such as "dicing" and "enticing." Ambrose Bierce's "The Day of Wrath" employs feminine rhyme almost exclusively.

-

Half rhyme is the rhyming of the ending consonant sounds in a word (such as "tell" with "toll," or "sopped" with "leapt"). This is also termed "off-rhyme," "slant rhyme," or apophany.

-

Identical rhyme employs the same word, identically in sound and in sense, twice in rhyming positions.

-

Internal rhyme is rhyme within a single line of verse When a word from the middle of a line is rhymed with a word at the end of the line.

-

Masculine rhyme describes those rhymes ending in a stressed syllable, such as

“hells” and “bells.” It is the most common type of rhyme in English poetry.

-***Monorhyme*** is the use of only one rhyme in a stanza. See William Blake’s “Silent, Silent Night.”

-***Pararhyme*** is poet Edmund Blunden’s term for double consonance, where different vowels appear within identical consonant pairs. For example, see Wilfred Owen’s “Strange Meeting”: “Through granites which Titanic wars had*groined*. / Yet also there encumbered sleepers *groaned*.”

Rhythm

An audible pattern in verse established by the intervals between stressed syllables. “Rhythm creates a pattern of yearning and expectation, of recurrence and difference,” observes Edward Hirsch in his essay on rhythm, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”

Scansion

The analysis of the metrical patterns of a poem by organizing its lines into feet of stressed and unstressed syllables and showing the major pauses, if any. Scansion also involves the classification of a poem’s stanza, structure, and rhyme scheme.

Sestet

A six-line stanza, or the final six lines of a 14-line Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. A sestet refers only to the final portion of a sonnet, otherwise the six-line stanza is known as a sexain. The second stanza of Emily Dickinson’s “The Soul has

Bandaged Moments” is a sexain. “Sestina: Like,” by A.E. Stallings possesses several sexains. See also Sestina.

Shakespearean sonnet

The variation of the sonnet form that Shakespeare used—comprised of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*—is called the English or Shakespearean sonnet form, although others had used it before him. This different sonnet structure allows for more space to be devoted to the buildup of a subject or problem than the Italian/Petrarchan form, and is followed by just two lines to conclude or resolve the poem in a rhyming couplet. Learn more about sonnet forms here.

Simile

A comparison (see Metaphor) made with “as,” “like,” or “than.” In “A Red, Red Rose,” Robert Burns declares:

> O my Luve is like a red, red rose
> That’s newly sprung in June;
> O my Luve is like the melody
> That’s sweetly played in tune.

“What happens to a dream deferred?” asks Langston Hughes in “Harlem”:

> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?
> Or fester like a sore—
> And then run?
> Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Stanza

A grouping of lines separated from others in a poem. In modern free verse, the stanza, like a prose paragraph, can be used to mark a shift in mood, time, or thought.

Stress

A syllable uttered in a higher pitch—or with greater emphasis—than others. The English language itself determines how English words are stressed, but sentence structure, semantics, and meter influence the placement and perception of stress.

Symbol

Something in the world of the senses, including an action, that reveals or is a sign for something else, often abstract or otherworldly. A rose, for example, has long been considered a symbol of love and affection.

Every word denotes, refers to, or labels something in the world, but a symbol (to which a word, of course, may point) has a concreteness not shared by language, and can point to something that transcends ordinary experience. Poets such asWilliam Blake and W.B. Yeats often use symbols when they believe in—or seek—a transcendental (religious or spiritual) reality.

A metaphor compares two or more things that are no more and no less real than anything else in the world. For a metaphor to be symbolic, one of its pair of elements must reveal something else transcendental. In "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," for instance, Yeats's image of the rose on the cross symbolizes the

joining of flesh and spirit. As Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren write in their book *Understanding Poetry* (3rd ed., 1960),“The symbol may be regarded as a metaphor from which the first term has been omitted.”

Synecdoche

A figure of speech in which a part of something stands for the whole (for example, “I’ve got wheels” for “I have a car,” or a description of a worker as a “hired hand”). It is related to metonymy.

Tone

The poet’s attitude toward the poem’s speaker, reader, and subject matter, as interpreted by the reader. Often described as a “mood” that pervades the experience of reading the poem, it is created by the poem’s vocabulary, metrical regularity or irregularity, syntax, use of figurative language, and rhyme.

William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's sonnets comprise 154 poems in sonnet form that were published in 1609 but likely written over the course of several years. Evidence for their existence long preceding publication comes from a reference in Francis Mere's 1598 *Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury*, where his allusion to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private frinds" might indicate that the poet preferred not to make these works public. It is unclear whether the 1609 publication, at the hands of a certain Thomas Thorpe, was from an authorized manuscript of Shakespeare's; it is possible that the sonnets were published without the author's consent, perhaps even without his knowledge.

This is but one of the mysteries of Shakespeare's sonnets. Another, which continues to spur debate among literary scholars today, is the identity of the publication's dedicatee, the collection's "onlie begetter," a Mr. W. H. Speculation largely vacillates between two main candidates: Mr. William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke; and Mr. Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton. Both possibilities are tenable, as both were men of means and of literary interest enough to be patrons to Shakespeare. In fact the poet dedicated other works to each: his First Folio to Herbert and his *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* to Wriothesley. Those who favor one man or the other draw on circumstantial evidence concerning his life and character, such as the amicable terms on which Shakespeare is known to have been with Wriothesley, or events in Herbert's life that may be intimated in the exploits of the sonnets' "fair lord."

The fair lord is one of three recurring characters in the sonnets, together with the dark lady and the rival poet. The real-world referents of these persons are yet

another locus of controversy. Some critics suggest that the fair lord and the collection's dedicatee are one and the same, while others disagree. Still others question the autobiographical nature of the sonnets, arguing that there is no hard proof that their content is anything but fictional.

These mysteries and others, including the ordering of the sonnets, the date of their composition, and seeming deviations from the otherwise rigid format (one sonnet has 15 lines, another only 12; sonnets 153 and 154 do not fit well in the sequence), have generated an abundance of scholarly criticism over the years, and the dialogues they provoke remain highly contentious to this day.

The 1609 publication of Shakespeare's sonnets is today referred to as the "Quarto" and remains the authoritative source for modern editions.

Sonnet 18

by

William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,

Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

SONNET 18

One of the best known of Shakespeare's sonnets, Sonnet 18 is memorable for the skillful and varied presentation of subject matter, in which the poet's feelings reach a level of rapture unseen in the previous sonnets. The poet here abandons his quest for the youth to have a child, and instead glories in the youth's beauty.

Initially, the poet poses a question—"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"—and then reflects on it, remarking that the youth's beauty far surpasses summer's delights. The imagery is the very essence of simplicity: "wind" and "buds." In the fourth line, legal terminology—"summer's lease"—is introduced in contrast to the commonplace images in the first three lines. Note also the poet's use of extremes in the phrases "more lovely," "all too short," and "too hot"; these phrases emphasize the young man's beauty.

Although lines 9 through 12 are marked by a more expansive tone and deeper feeling, the poet returns to the simplicity of the opening images. As one expects in Shakespeare's sonnets, the proposition that the poet sets up in the first eight lines—that all nature is subject to imperfection—is now contrasted in these next four lines beginning with "But." Although beauty naturally declines at some point—"And every fair from fair sometime declines"—the youth's beauty will not; his unchanging appearance is atypical of nature's steady progression. Even death is

impotent against the youth’s beauty. Note the ambiguity in the phrase “eternal lines”: Are these “lines” the poet’s verses or the youth’s hoped-for children? Or are they simply wrinkles meant to represent the process of aging? Whatever the answer, the poet is jubilant in this sonnet because nothing threatens the young man’s beautiful appearance.

Then follows the concluding couplet: “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” The poet is describing not what the youth is but what he will be ages hence, as captured in the poet’s eternal verse—or again, in a hoped-for child. Whatever one may feel about the sentiment expressed in the sonnet and especially in these last two lines, one cannot help but notice an abrupt change in the poet’s own estimate of his poetic writing. Following the poet’s disparaging reference to his “pupil pen” and “barren rhyme” in Sonnet 16, it comes as a surprise in Sonnet 18 to find him boasting that his poetry will be eternal.

Here the theme of the ravages of time again predominates; we see it especially in line 7, where the poet speaks of the inevitable mortality of beauty: "And every fair from fair sometime declines." But the fair lord's is of another sort, for it "shall not fade" - the poet is eternalizing the fair lord's beauty in his verse, in these "eternal lines." Note the financial imagery ("summer's lease") and the use of anaphora (the repetition of opening words) in lines 6-7, 10-11, and 13-14. Also note that May (line 3) was an early summer month in Shakespeare's time, because England did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752.

The poet describes summer as a season of extremes and disappointments. He begins in lines 3-4, where "rough winds" are an unwelcome extreme and the shortness of summer is its disappointment. He continues in lines 5-6, where he

lingers on the imperfections of the summer sun. Here again we find an extreme and a disappointment: the sun is sometimes far too hot, while at other times its "gold complexion" is dimmed by passing clouds. These imperfections contrast sharply with the poet's description of the fair lord, who is "more temperate" (not extreme) and whose "eternal summer shall not fade" (i.e., will not become a disappointment) thanks to what the poet proposes in line 12.

In line 12 we find the poet's solution - how he intends to eternalize the fair lord's beauty despite his refusal to have a child. The poet plans to capture the fair lord's beauty in his verse ("eternal lines"), which he believes will withstand the ravages of time. Thereby the fair lord's "eternal summer shall not fade," and the poet will have gotten his wish. Here we see the poet's use of "summer" as a metaphor for youth, or perhaps beauty, or perhaps the beauty of youth.

But has the poet really abandoned the idea of encouraging the fair lord to have a child? Some scholars suggest that the "eternal lines" in line 12 have a double meaning: the fair lord's beauty can live on not only in the written lines of the poet's verse but also in the family lines of the fair lord's progeny. Such an interpretation would echo the sentiment of the preceding sonnet's closing couplet: "But were some child of yours alive that time / You should live twice; in it and in my rhyme." The use of "growest" also implies an increasing or changing: we can envision the fair lord's family lines growing over time, yet this image is not as readily applicable to the lines of the poet's verse - unless it refers only to his intention to continue writing about the fair lord's beauty, his verse thereby "growing." On the other hand, line 14 seems to counter this interpretation, the singular "this" (as opposed to "these") having as its most likely antecedent the poet's verse, and nothing more.

Sonnet 130

by

William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun [dull brown];
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
  And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
  As any she belied [contradicted] with false compare.

SONNET 30

The theme of the poem is that memories of the youth are priceless compensations—not only for many disappointments and unrealized hopes but for the loss of earlier friends: "But if the while I think on thee, dear friend, / All losses are restored and sorrows end." Stylistically, Sonnet 30 identically mirrors the

preceding sonnet's poetic form.

This sonnet is one of the most exquisitely crafted in the entire sequence dealing with the poet's depression over the youth's separation (Sonnets 26–32). It includes an extraordinary complexity of sound patterns, including the effective use of alliteration— repetitive consonant sounds in a series of words—for example, both the "s" and "t" sounds in "sessions of sweet silent thought."

But alliteration is only one method poets use to enhance the melody of their work. Rhyme, of course, is another device for doing this. A third is assonance—similar vowel sounds in accented syllables—for example, the short "e" sound in the phrases "When sessions" and "remembrance". In this case, the short "e" sound helps unify the sonnet, for the assonant sound both begins— "When"—and concludes—"end"—the sonnet.

Contributing to the distinctive rhythm of Sonnet 30's lines is the variation of accents in the normally iambic pentameter lines. For example, line 7 has no obvious alternation of short and long syllables. Equal stress is placed on "weep afresh love's long," with only slightly less stress on "since," which follows this phrase. Likewise, in line 6, "friends hid" and "death's dateless night" are equally stressed. This sonnet typifies why the Shakespeare of the sonnets is held to be without rival in achieving rhythm, melody, and sound within the limited sonnet structure.

The sonnet is generally considered a humorous parody of the typical love sonnet. Petrarch, for example, addressed many of his most famous sonnets to an

idealized woman named Laura, whose beauty he often likened to that of a goddess. In stark contrast Shakespeare makes no attempt at deification of the dark lady; in fact he shuns it outright, as we see in lines 11-12: "I grant I never saw a goddess go; / My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground." Here the poet explicitly states that his mistress is not a goddess.

She is also not as beautiful as things found in nature, another typical source of inspiration for the average sonneteer: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; / Coral is far more red than her lips' red." Yet the narrator loves her nonetheless, and in the closing couplet says that in fact she is just as extraordinary ("rare") as any woman described with such exaggerated or false comparisons. It is indeed this blunt but charming sincerity that has made sonnet 130 one of the most famous in the sequence.

However, while the narrator's honesty in sonnet 130 may seem commendable, we must not forget that Shakespeare himself was a master of the compliment and frequently made use of the very same sorts of exaggerated comparisons satirized here. We even find them elsewhere in the sonnets, and in great abundance, too; note that while his "mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," his fair lord's indeed are, as in sonnet 49: "And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye."

This may lead one to wonder, is it really pure honesty that the poet is showing in sonnet 130, or is there also some ulterior sentiment, perhaps that the dark lady is not deserving of the narrator's fine words? Or perhaps she is deserving

but such words are not necessary, as though the narrator feels comfortable enough with the dark lady that he is able to show such honesty (which his insecurity regarding the fair lord prevents him from doing)? There are many ways to interpret how the poet's psychological state may have influenced stylistic choices in his writing, but these sonnets do not provide definitive proof.

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 – 11 October 1542) was a 16th-century English ambassador and lyrical poet. He is credited with introducing the sonnet into English literature. He was born at Allington Castle, near Maidstone in Kent, though his family was originally from Yorkshire. His mother was Anne Skinner and his father, Henry Wyatt, had been one of Henry VII's Privy Councillors, and remained a trusted adviser when Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509. In his turn, Thomas Wyatt followed his father to court after his education at St John's College, Cambridge. None of Wyatt's poems were published during his lifetime—the first book to feature his verse, Tottel's Miscellany of 1557, was printed a full fifteen years after his death.

Wyatt's poetry and influence

Wyatt's professed object was to experiment with the English tongue, to civilise it, to raise its powers to those of its neighbours. A significant amount of his literary output consists of translations and imitations of sonnets by the Italian poet Petrarch; he also wrote sonnets of his own. He took subject matter from Petrarch's sonnets, but his rhyme schemes make a significant departure. Petrarch's sonnets consist of an "octave", rhyming abba abba, followed, after a turn (volta) in the sense, by a "sestet" with various rhyme schemes. Wyatt employs the Petrarchan octave, but his most common sestet scheme is cddc ee. This marks the beginnings of an exclusively "English" contribution to sonnet structure, that is three quatrains and a closing couplet. 15 years after his death, the printer Richard Tottel included 97 poems attributed to Wyatt among the 271 poems in Tottel's Miscellany, Songs and Sonnets.

In addition to imitations of works by the classical writers Seneca and Horace, he experimented in stanza forms including the rondeau, epigrams, terza rima, ottava rima songs, satires and also with monorime, triplets with refrains, quatrains with different length of line and rhyme schemes, quatrains with codas, and the French forms of douzaine and treizaine. Wyatt introduced contemporaries to his poulter's measure form (Alexandrine couplets of twelve syllable iambic lines alternating with a fourteener, fourteen syllable line), and is acknowledged a master of the iambic tetrameter.

While Wyatt's poetry reflects classical and Italian models, he also admired the work of Chaucer and his vocabulary reflects Chaucer's (for example, his use of Chaucer's word new fangleness, meaning fickle, in They flee from me that sometime did me seek). Many of his poems deal with the trials of romantic love, and the devotion of the suitor to an unavailable or cruel mistress. Others of his poems are scathing, satirical indictments of the hypocrisies and flat-out pandering required of courtiers ambitious to advance at the Tudor court.

Wyatt was one of the earliest poets of the English Renaissance. He was responsible for many innovations in English poetry and, alongside Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, introduced the sonnet from Italy into England. His lyrics show tenderness of feeling and purity of diction. He is one of the originators of the convention in love poetry according to which the mistress is painted as hard-hearted and cruel.

Sir Thomas Wyatt: Themes

Change

The Tudor court was filled with change. Henry VIII's reign was in a time of great political, social, national and international upheaval. Wyatt was central to all

of these areas as a lover, a courtier, an ambassador and a diplomat. Wyatt seems to have concluded that change is inevitable, as illustrated in 'Divers Doth Use', but also that change without direction can be dangerous, if not deadly, as in 'My Galley Charged'. Wyatt suggests that change is natural and inevitable but nonetheless dangerous, and sometimes fatal.

Music and Song

Several of Wyatt's greatest works are songs. As a popular court entertainment, and a fashionable way to demonstrate one's verbal wit and musical prowess, Wyatt made much use of the ballad and the rondeau to show his skill and to deliver his opinion on issues of the day. Music was an integral part of the court of Henry VIII – Henry himself was an accomplished musician and singer, composing and performing his own ballads and songs. The songs that best express Wyatt's sentiments would be the ballads 'They Flee From Me' and 'Blame Not My Lute', which typify Wyatt's varying position in the court. Songs such as 'Madam, Withouten Many Words' and 'Forget Not Yet' have a tone of hostility built within the traditional form of amusement.

Courtly Life

Many of Wyatt's works record the setting and pastimes of the Tudor court within their messages surrounding human behavior. 'Whoso List To Hunt?', despite being a translation of a sonnet by Petrarch, encompasses the Tudor age in its metaphor of deer hunting as a comparison to the pursuit of a lady. Such close parallels have been drawn with the poem and Wyatt's challenging relationship with Anne Boleyn, who was subsequently courted and married by King Henry VIII, that the poem could be said to exemplify the age. Similarly, the metaphor of falconry used in 'Lux! My Fair Falcon' serves to utilize a popular pastime of the age with a

popular issue of changing political and social loyalties.

Rejection

The theme of rejection, by peers, lovers and even his king, is seen throughout Wyatt's work. 'Lux! My Fair Falcon' illustrates the frustration brought about when a challenge to a relationship leads to abandonment. The narrator observes the loyal falcon, wishing that other associates of the court would be so steadfast. In 'Divers Doth Use', the narrator reflects on the ways in which men cope with rejection; choosing himself not to be daunted by the fickle nature of women.

Forsaken Love

A popular theme for courtly poetry, forsaken love is often a surface theme in Wyatt's works, though sometimes it is used to cover a deeper political sentiment. Poems which refer to abandoned lovers would be 'Madam, Withouten Many Words', And Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus?', 'Farewell, Love', 'What no, Perdie!' and 'My Heart I Gave Thee'. What typifies these poems is the traditional regretful sentiment of lost love mingled with elements of cynicism and even anger. Wyatt's love poems have a bitter edge, which makes his work distinct from that of his predecessors, like Petrarch, and his successors, like Shakespeare. Petrarch's sonnets have elegance, Shakespeare's have wit, Wyatt's have dynamism and vitality.

Loyalty and Betrayal

Wyatt appears to have had a strong sense of justice with regard to relationships. His work contains criticism and condemnation of the treachery of those around him. His translations of sonnets such as 'Whoso List To Hunt?', 'They Flee From Me' and 'Forget Not Yet' are used to present his frustration and condemnation of the transitory, sometimes even fatal, implications of the bonds which are made, and broken, within the court. A common theme of the spurned

lover exists through Petrarch's work, and to some extent Wyatt utilizes this theme in poems such as 'My Heart I Gave Thee' and songs such as 'Madam, Withouten Many Words'. Often his acknowledgement of betrayal can work on several levels, with criticism being implied of not just his lady, but also his peers and his king.

"I Find No Peace"

by

Sir Thomas Wyatt

I find no peace, and all my war is done.
I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;
And nought I have, and all the world I season.
That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison
And holdeth me not—yet can I scape no wise—
Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.
Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain.
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.
I love another, and thus I hate myself.
I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;
Likewise displeaseth me both life and death,
And my delight is causer of this strife.

Summary

The narrator expresses his despair with diametrically opposed concepts. He is unable to rest, and yet he has no fight left in him. He is optimistic yet afraid, he is ablaze yet frozen. He is soaring, yet cannot take off; he has nothing, yet he holds the whole world. Though there are no locks strong enough to imprison him, he cannot escape. The narrator feels he has no control over whether he lives or dies. He can see without his eyes, and complains without a tongue. He says he wishes to expire, and yet demands strength. By line 11 he reveals a less paradoxical contrast: that he loves another therefore must not love himself. He revels in the joy of the sadness and discomfort of this love, and although the situation is almost like a living death, the cause of his pain is his greatest pleasure.

Analysis

The confusion, ambiguity and vacillation of feelings and emotions connected with love is the subject of this sonnet, which is a translation of Petrarch's sonnet 104. The poem is built from opposite sentiments and ideas to reflect the full range of feeling that love can provoke. While it seems that this relationship is an impossible affair that leads him to the brink of despair, the poet also seems intoxicated by it. The opening image of war and peace also reminds us of Wyatt's diplomatic and ambassadorial duties, the vast changes in allegiance that he saw within his term of office and the challenges of the international political arena at this time.

The metaphors used highlight the physical extremes such as burning and

freezing to connote the psychological consequences of the dramatic emotions involved. Love in the tudor court was often fraught with social implications, particularly as the king himself was involved in numerous precarious romantic relationships. But, the idea of being incarcerated despite the fact that no bonds could hold him reminds us that the resultant torture is one which the narrator is willingly subjecting himself to. Alas, he derives pleasure from the situation that directly causes his pain.

Line 11 is interesting as these two ideas are not usually mutually exclusive: it is possible to love another and oneself. However, Wyatt is perhaps indicating that the relationship is one dictated by the heart rather than the head; though the love feels right, the narrator cannot quiet his mind to the unsettling knowledge that his love is not a practical or logical choice. If he is prepared to put himself in danger for his love, he must not care enough about himself to prevent his own destruction. In the final rhyming couplet, the narrator makes it clear that he understand that that which gives him the most pleasure is that which causes him the most peril.

"The Lively Sparks"

by

Sir Thomas Wyatt

THE lively sparks that issue from those eyes,
Against the which there vaileth no defence,
Have pierced my heart, and done it none offence,

With quaking pleasure more than once or twice.

Was never man could any thing devise,

Sunbeams to turn with so great vehemence

To daze man's sight, as by their bright presence

Dazed am I ; much like unto the guise

Of one stricken with dint of lightning,

Blind with the stroke, and cying1 here and there :

So call I for help, I not2 when nor where,

The pain of my fall patiently bearing :

For straight after the blaze, as is no wonder,

Of deadly noise hear I the fearful thunder.

1 Or, erring.

2 i.e. know not.

Summary

The sonnet opens with the narrator explaining how he has been dazzled by the eyes of the lady. There is no defense against their bewitching ‘sparks’ which have penetrated his heart, but without damage. He is overcome with the power of her gaze and experiences 'quaking pleasure’. He is overwhelmed to the point of confusion, and feels as if he has been struck by lightning. He appears to stumble and flail in the light, and calls for help as he has lost his bearing. He does begin to feel pain as he falls, but bears the discomfort with fortitude. He realizes that the light which has enchanted him is followed by the deadly rumble of thunder.

Analysis

The sonnet uses a variety of types of light to describe the gaze of the lady. The light is initially ‘sparks’, which could be said to wane as quickly as they appear. Even these brief flashes cause the narrator to seek cover; which he does not find. The sparks pierce his heart, but, at this point, do not damage it. Feeling the need to take cover should indicate that the narrator will not be able to stand a harsher radiance. Her love is then compared to sunbeams, but the ‘vehemence’ or harshness goes beyond the gentle warmth of an English summer’s day. He is overcome by this, as if stunned by a bolt of lightning. The lightning comparison sees him weak and defenseless - blind, disoriented and confused. The narrator bears the strike with fortitude, and awaits the inevitable ‘fearful’ consequences of his love; as thunder follows lightning, so there may be ‘deadly’ penalties for this relationship. These are clever allusions to the condition of love as would be appreciated by the Tudor court; an initial attraction may lead to love, which may in turn lead to vulnerability and public shame or social weakness.

Wyatt flexes the structure of the sonnet here as the division between the sestet and the octave is organized through the use of caesura and enjambment in line 8. This enhances the proximity of one idea to the other. This idea is echoed in the metaphors used as the closer that lightning is to thunder, the more dangerous the consequences are.

“Forget not Yet the Tried Intent”

by

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Forget not yet the tried intent
Of such a truth as I have meant;
My great travail so gladly spent,
Forget not yet.

Forget not yet when first began
The weary life ye know, since whan
The suit, the service, none tell can;
Forget not yet.

Forget not yet the great assays,
The cruel wrong, the scornful ways;
The painful patience in denays,
Forget not yet.

Forget not yet, forget not this,
How long ago hath been and is
The mind that never meant amiss;
Forget not yet.

Forget not then thine own approved,

The which so long hath thee so loved,

Whose steadfast faith yet never moved;

Forget not this.

Summary

The poem is written as five quatrains, with a rhyming tercet followed by a fourth line repeated as a refrain throughout the song.

Lines 1-4

In the first four lines, the poet asks for the audience not to overlook his intention to reach meaning and truth, and to consider the great efforts he has willingly made. The fourth line refrain 'Forget not yet' emphasizes this request.

Lines 5-8

The request here is for the audience not to forget when they first began this tired life of service and courtship, which no one really understands. The refrain in line 8 is a repetition of line 4.

Lines 9-12

Here the audience is asked not to overlook the big criticisms, the mean injustices, the cruel treatment and the pain of waiting through delays in decision-making. Line 12 is a repetition of line 4 again, and this serves to build up the negative issues, which the narrator is attempting to highlight.

Lines 13-16

The appeal here is to not ignore how long ago it was (and is) that the mind never meant any harm. The repeated refrain of line 4 is used for the last time here.

Lines 17-20

The final quatrain requests that the reader consider those who were approved,

who have loved the audience for so long and who have remained faithful. The final line of the quatrain is a variation of the refrain used through the rest of the poem. The line becomes 'Forget not This!'

Analysis

The song is composed of the three line rhyme, or tercet, followed by a fourth line which is repeated, forming a refrain. The intention is to emphasize the connected point of each tercet with a repeated request to 'forget not' forming the final quatrain, or four line verse. The use of the negative, 'forget not', rather than 'remember' accentuates the tone of melancholy and regret.

The first verse stresses the honesty and truth with which the song is composed. By beginning with this assertion, the audience is compelled to see the following sentiments and observations as sincere. There has been considerable effort – 'great travail' – put in to this message; not just in the formal structure of the verse, but in the diplomacy with which a difficult and dangerous sentiment is phrased and expressed.

By the second verse the poet highlights the life within the court, how exhausting it is for audience and narrator, and how clandestine the affairs of court are. It is certain that in the young court of King Henry VIII, who was a monarch at 17 and surrounded himself with the young, the witty and the beautiful.

Edmund Spenser

Edmund Spenser was born in London in the year 1552 or 1553. Little is known about his family or his childhood, except that he received a scholarship to attend the Merchant Taylor School, where he likely studied Latin and Greek. He went on to study literature and religion at Cambridge University's Pembroke Hall, receiving a BA in 1573 and an MA in 1576.

Spenser published his first volume of poetry, *The Shepheardes Calender* (Hugh Singleton), in 1579, dedicating it to the poet Sir Philip Sidney. He was also the author of *The Faerie Queene* (William Ponsonby, 1596), a major English epic, and *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (William Ponsonby, 1595), a sonnet sequence dedicated to his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle.

Alongside his poetry, Spenser pursued a career in politics, serving as a secretary first for the Bishop of Rochester and then for the Earl of Leicester, who introduced him to other poets and artists in Queen Elizabeth's court. In 1580, he was appointed secretary to the Lord Deputy of Ireland; later, in 1596, he wrote an inflammatory pamphlet called *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (James Ware, 1633).

In 1598, during the Nine Years War, Spenser was driven from his home in Ireland. He died in London in 1599 and was buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Amoretti LXXV: One Day I Wrote her Name

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,

But came the waves and washed it away:

Again I wrote it with a second hand,

But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

"Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay,
A mortal thing so to immortalize;
For I myself shall like to this decay,
And eke my name be wiped out likewise."
"Not so," (quod I) "let baser things devise
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:
My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
And in the heavens write your glorious name:
Where whenas death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew."

In an effort to immortalize the name of his beloved, the speaker writes her name “upon the strand” (on the beach) only to have the waves wash it away (lines 1-2). He tries again, and again the tide erases his beloved’s name. While his fiancée calls him “Vayne man” to try such an impossible task, he rejects her argument that her own “selue shall lyke to this decay” (line 7) by turning (as usual) to his poetry as a source of immortality. He proudly proclaims, “my verse your vertues rare shall eternize,/and in the heauens wryte your glorious name.” (lines 11-12). Even when death “shall all the world subdew” (line 13) his verse will live on (in print?) and “later life renew” (line 14).

Edmund Spenser wrote a sequence of sonnets entitled "Amoretti," of which Sonnet 75 is a part. Also titled "One Day I Wrote Her Name Upon the Strand," Edmund Spenser weaves a tale about the ocean, love and immortality. He writes about being at the beach with his beloved and writing her name in the sand. As expected, a wave comes and washes away her name. He tries it again with the same result. The woman speaks up and states that it is unreasonable for him to continue

writing her name as the waves will just continue washing it away. She compares that to her mortality, that eventually she will be erased from the earth just as her name is erased from the sand. The speaker in the sonnet then replies that he will make her immortal by writing about her in his poetry. That way, their names and love for each other will live on forever.

The theme of Sonnet 75 by Edmund Spenser is that no one lives forever, but his lady's virtues and their love for each other will be immortalized forever in the poem. The waves of the ocean in the poem represent the passing of time, and the writing in the sand represents the lady and their love.

This SONNET, like the previous one in *Amoretti,* addresses the courtship between EDMUND SPENSER and Elizabeth Boyle. The rhyme scheme follows the linked quatrain pattern of the Spenserian sonnet, and thematically it plays with the familiar CONCEIT of immortality.

The speaker begins the OCTAVE by setting a scene at the beach one day, when he writes his beloved’s name in the sand; however, as is to be expected, the waves come in and wash the name away. So once again, he writes the name upon the sand, and once again, the waves come in and wash it away. The beloved chastises him for his vanity that would allow him vainly to attempt to immortalize in this manner someone such as she, who is mortal, and who eventually will be wiped out of all memory, just as her name has been erased from the beach. In the SESTET, however, the speaker protests the beloved’s self-deprecating assessment of the situation, claiming that she shall live forever because his verses will make her name famous, and her virtues will make her eternal. Their love will live on to be renewed in the afterlife when death has subdued their world.

Edmund Spencer's *Amoretti* was published in 1595 after he met and married

his second wife Elizabeth Boyle. Amoretti translates as "little notes" or "little cupids," and were written most likely about his wife. A successful love is an unusual topic for Spencer, who usually wrote sonnets about unrequited love (902). This poem follows the Spenserian sonnet format, which is abab bcbc cdcd ee (three quatrains and an ending rhyming couplet). *Amoretti, Sonnet 75* is about the ability of love to transcend all boundaries; it will live on after death through his words.

One day I wrote her name upon the strand (shore)*,*

But came the waves and washed it away:

Agayne I wrote it with a second hand,

But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray (prey) (lines 1-4).

A man wrote his beloved's name in the sand, but it was washed away by the tide. He writes her name again, but as before the tide washes it away. He writes her name a second time expecting different results; is this an act of insanity or of mere defiance? I believe that he is repeatedly writing his beloved's name in the sand to show his relentless need to have his love be remembered forever. Man has an innate need to carve out a place in history for himself; so that he feels that his life meant something.

One thing to note is that the narrator makes the wave masculine. Typically nature is associated with femininity, because women are the creators of life and nature's job is to sustain life. Perhaps the reason the narrator makes the waves masculine is because it is destroying something; in the late 1500s women were seen as submissive, fragile creatures, who were not involved in the eradication of life or memory.

"Vayne man," sayd she, "that doest in vaine assay (attempt)*,*

A mortall thing so to immortalize,

For I my selve shall lyke to this decay,

And eek (also) *my name bee wiped out lykewize."*

"Not so," quod (said) *I, "let baser things devize* (contrive)

To dy in dust, but you shall live by fame:

My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,

And in the heavens wryte your glorious name (5-12).

In the second quatrain, a female voice (perhaps his beloved) tells him that he is working in vain to make something immortal that is not meant to be immortal. Mortal things inevitably fade from history, and there nothing that anyone can do to change that; the waves will come and wash away all trace of man, no matter how hard they try to stop it.

The reason I ventured that the female voice in the second quatrain is the voice of his beloved is because of lines ten and eleven. He tells her that **she** will live on through his verse (sonnet); the love that he wants to live on is between him and his beloved. The hope of every writer is to have their work immortalized; studied long after their death. Love transcends all bounds; even after death their love will be eternal.

Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,

Our love shall live, and later life renew" (13-14).

This last rhyming couplet is meant to sum up the poem. Death cannot extinguish love; it will live on. It will be renewed every time someone reads this sonnet; these words can never die, thus their love will never die.

Edmund Spenser: *Amoretti*: Sonnet 80

After so long a race as I have run

Through Faery land, which those six books compile,

give leave to rest me being halfe fordonne,
and gather to my selfe new breath awhile.
Then as a steed refreshed after toyle,
Out of my prison I will breake anew:
and stoutly will that second worke assoyle,
with strong endevour and attention dew.
Till then give leave to me in pleasant mew,
to sport my muse and sing my loves sweet praise:
the contemplation of whose heavenly hew,
my spirit to an higher pitch will rayse.
But let her prayses yet be low and meane,
fit for the handmayd of the Faery Queene.

Here Spenser seems to be returning to his sonnets after having worked long and hard on his masterpiece, *The Faerie Queene*. He asks “leaue to rest me…and gather to my selfe new breath awhile” (lines 3-4), having completed half the work (six books). He argues that “as a steed refreshed after toile,/out of my prison I will breake anew” to take up the epic work well-rested. Until he recuperates, he asks leave “to sport my muse and sing my loues sweet praise” (in other words, return to his sonnets of the *Amoretti*). He reassures his reader (perhaps himself or even Queen Elizabeth, to whom *The Faerie Queene* was dedicated) that he will keep his subjects in perspective: his praise for his fiancée will be “low and meane” (line 13) in keeping with her status as “the handmaid of the Faery Queene” (line 14). There is perhaps a deeper meaning here, as not only will he praise his own beloved less than he will his queen, but also his style of poetry will be “low and meane” in the sense that it takes the common sonnet form and addresses topics more suited to pastorals

than does his lofty epic, dedicated to no less lofty a subject than the Queen of England herself.

Like Sonnet 33, Sonnet 80, which is often featured in critiques of *Amoretti* that highlight its poetic achievement, contains direct references to EDMUND Spenser's ongoing project in honor of Queen ELIZABETH I,—that is, *The FAERIE QUEEN.* He opens the sonnet by referring to the "long race"—the narrator's pursuit of his elusive Lady. However, Sonnet 80 mostly references the many years the author has spent on what was to become his magnum opus. The fi rst three of a projected 12 books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1590 to great acclaim. In this context, in Sonnet 80 Spenser announces the completion of a total of six books. He then ends the sonnet by identifying the whole SONNET SEQUENCE as "handmayd" of the Faerie Queene, citing the book by name. (The edition including books 1–6 was published the next year, 1596). It is only with the third QUATRAIN that Spenser readdresses the matter at hand, having also somewhat trivialized it as "pleasant mew," a form of leisurely entertainment to give him a break from the longer work.

Acknowledging the multiple narrative paths in this sonnet, critics have praised Spenser's mastery in simultaneously referring to his other work; alluding to the fact that his Lady and his Queene are both named Elizabeth; and noting that, at least in the sense of her minor nobility, his Elizabeth is a handmaid to Queen Elizabeth just as this Amoretti is a sort of handmaid to The Faerie Queene, a minor work in which he hones his poetic skills. He simultaneously elevates his Lady by intimating that association with her will help him to "gather to myself new breath awhile" in order to complete his other, more momentous poetic work. She thus becomes the minor muse and inspiration of this piece, which allows him to later do

justice to Queen Elizabeth.

Others have extended this interpretation to claims of a metapoetic intent for the entire sequence to be a demonstration on the part of the poet, Spenser, of his versatility and accomplishment. Sonnet 80 reveals the whole to be part of a career path to the status of poet laureate that he charts for himself, a way of claiming aesthetic ground that will grant him a measure of nobility he can never attain on the basis of birth or social station. This minor work advertises the major one, in anticipation of its completion and its success. Regardless of the autobiographical, aesthetic, or social frame given its intertextual references, this sonnet projects a meaning that breaks the love-story narrative of the whole sequence, making it stand as both triumph and symptom of the poet’s work.

Christopher Marlowe

The achievement of Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), poet and dramatist, was enormous—surpassed only by that of his exact contemporary, Shakespeare. A few months the elder, Marlowe was usually the leader, although Shakespeare was able to bring his art to a higher perfection. Most dramatic poets of the sixteenth century followed where Marlowe had led, especially in their use of language and the blank-verse line. The prologue to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* proclaims its author's contempt for the stage verse of the period, in which the "jygging vaines of riming mother wits" presented the "conceits [which] clownage keepes in pay": instead the new play promised a barbaric foreign hero, the "Scythian Tamburlaine, Threatning the world with high astounding terms." English drama was never the same again.

Marlowe is believed to have written all his poems and translations as a young man studying at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He was born in 1564, the same year as Shakespeare, and was the son of a shoemaker.

Ovid’s elegies are about the pleasures and pains of love, often cheerfully erotic and comic. In the 'Fifth Elegy' of Book One, Marlowe captures the sensuality of Ovid’s writing, touched with beauty and delicacy. His heroic couplets wittily render the balance and poise of the original; the result is a marvellous celebration of sexual love.

'Hero and Leander' reworks the tragic story of Hero’s longing for Leander, the priestess of Aphrodite: he is drowned while swimming to her at night across the Hellespont and she then in despair throws herself into the sea. The first of the extracts recorded here describes an earlier swim across the Hellespont and Hero’s

wrestles with Neptune, presented as an elderly paedophile. The second brings Hero at last to Leander and describes sexual passion with delight, but also with notes of farce, embarrassment and regret.

'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' was among the best known of Elizabethan lyrics and was endlessly imitated, parodied and answered, well into the seventeenth century. A garbled version of one stanza appears in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Marlowe seems to have turned to writing plays near the end of his time at Cambridge. *Dr Faustus*, from which the speech recorded here is taken, was written in the last year of his short life. It illustrates the extraordinary mastery of the blank verse line he had achieved by the time of his death.

It has been said that Marlowe’s temperament seems to have been violent, even criminal. After Cambridge, he was employed by the Privy Council as a foreign intelligence agent. In 1589 he was involved in a street fight in which the poet T. Watson killed a man. Early in 1592 he was deported from the Netherlands for attempting to issue forged gold coins. In 1593 he was arrested at the house of Sir Thomas Walsingham and summoned to the Privy Council to answer charges of blasphemy arising from evidence given by his playwright rival, Thomas Kyd. His supporters, however, argue that he was framed, and his name blackened, by his enemies.

There is no dispute however (except by people who believe his death was faked and that he went on to write the plays of Shakespeare) that on 30 May 1593, aged twenty-nine, he was killed by an acquaintance, Ingram Frizer, in a Deptford Tavern after a quarrel over the bill.

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” by Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherds' swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

Notes:

Passionate: **1.** Capable of, having, or dominated by powerful emotions: *a family of passionate personalities.* **2.** Wrathful by temperament; choleric. **3.** Marked by strong sexual desire; amorous or lustful. **4.** Showing or expressing strong emotion; ardent: *a passionate speech against injustice.* **5.** Arising from or marked by passion: *a teacher who is passionate about her subject.*

Love: A person who is the object of deep or intense affection or attraction; beloved. Often used as a term of endearment.

Prove: *Archaic*. To find out or learn (something) through experience.

Grove: **1.** A small wood or stand of trees that lacks dense undergrowth. **2.** A group of trees planted and cultivated for the production of fruit or nuts: *an orange grove.*

Steepy = steep: Resembling a precipice [An overhanging or extremely steep mass of rock, such as a crag or the face of a cliff].

Yield, n: **a.** An amount yielded or produced; a product. **b.** A profit obtained from an investment; a return.

Yield, v: **a.** To give forth a natural product; be productive. **b.** To produce a return for effort or investment: *bonds that yield well.*

Shallow: Measuring little from bottom to top or surface; lacking physical depth.

Falls: *used with a sing. or pl. verb)* A waterfall.

Melodious: **1.** Of, relating to, or containing a pleasing succession of sounds; tuneful. **2.** Agreeable to hear: *a melodious voice; the melodious song of a bird.*

Madrigal: **a.** *Music*. An unaccompanied vocal composition for two or three voices in simple harmony, following a strict poetic form, developed in Italy in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. **b.** A short poem, often about love, suitable for being set to music.

Fragrant: Having a pleasant odor.

Posy: A flower or bunch of flowers; a nosegay.

Kirtle: A woman's dress or skirt.

Embroider: **1.** To ornament with needlework: *embroider a pillow cover.* **2.** To make by means of needlework: *embroider a design on a bedspread.* **3.** To add embellishments or fanciful details to: *embroider the truth.*

Myrtle: Any of several evergreen shrubs or trees of the genus *Myrtus,* especially *M. communis,* an aromatic shrub native to the Mediterranean region and western Asia, having pink or white flowers and blue-black berries and widely cultivated as a hedge plant.

Gown: **1.** A long, loose, flowing garment, such as a robe or nightgown. **2.** A long, usually formal dress for a woman.

Bud: A small protuberance on a stem or branch, sometimes enclosed in protective scales and containing an undeveloped shoot, leaf, or flower

Pull: draw; remove

Coral: Of a deep or strong pink to moderate red or reddish orange.

Clasp: A fastening, such as a hook or buckle, used to hold two or more objects or parts together.

Amber: **1.** *Color*. Having the color of amber; brownish-yellow. **2.** Made of or resembling amber: *an amber necklace.* [from Arabic Anbar]

Slipper: A low shoe that can be slipped on and off easily and usually worn indoors.

Buckle: **1.** A clasp for fastening two ends, as of straps or a belt, in which a device attached to one of the ends is fitted or coupled to the other. **2.** An ornament that resembles this clasp, such as a metal square on a shoe or hat.

Stud: **a.** A small ornamental button mounted on a short post for insertion through an eyelet, as on a dress shirt. **b.** A buttonlike earring mounted on a slender post, as of gold or steel, for wearing in a pierced earlobe.

Pleasue: **1.** The state or feeling of being pleased or gratified. **2.** A source of enjoyment or delight: *The graceful skaters were a pleasure to watch.* **3.** Amusement, diversion, or worldly enjoyment. **4.** Sensual gratification or indulgence. **5.** One's preference or wish: *What is your pleasure?*

Delight: **1.** Great pleasure; joy. **2.** Something that gives great pleasure or enjoyment.

Summary

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" is a pastoral lyric, a poetic form that is used to create an idealized vision of rural life within the context of personal emotion. Pastoral poems had been in vogue among poets for at least seventeen hundred years when Marlowe wrote this one. The Greek poet Theocritis, in the third century B.C.E. (Shipley 300-1,) was the first pastoralist poet, and he, too, wrote about shepherds. All pastoral poetry, including Marlowe's, is to some degree influenced by this original practitioner.

The poem is written in very regular iambic tetrameter. Each line contains exactly four heavy stresses, and the metrical feet are almost always iambic.

Similarly, most lines contain eight syllables, and the few that don't create a specific poetic effect (such as lines 3 and 4), or have easily elided syllables which may be read as eight. This regular meter, sustained through the twenty-four lines, remarkably never descends into the sing-song quality so prevalent in tetrameter, primarily because Marlowe salts his lines with a variety of devices that complement the meter without drawing too much attention to its rigid regularity. Marlowe's use of soft consonants (such as W, M, Em, F) to start lines, with the occasional "feminine" ending of an unstressed syllable (in the third stanza) lend a delightful variety to an essentially regular and completely conventional form.

In the first stanza, the Shepherd invites his love to come with him and "pleasures prove" (line 2.) This immediate reference to pleasure gives a mildly sexual tone to this poem, but it is of the totally innocent, almost naïve kind. The Shepherd makes no innuendo of a sordid type, but rather gently and directly calls to his love. He implies that the entire geography of the countryside of England "Valleys, groves, hills and fields/Woods or steepy mountains" will prove to contain pleasure of all kinds for the lovers. This vision of the bounteous earth (reminiscent of the New Testament's admonishment "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Matthew 6:26) is a very common theme in pastoral poetry. The idealization of rural life is essentially what separates pastoral poetry from simple rustic verse. Realism, which would not come into being as a poetic or literary style for many centuries after Marlowe, has little place in pastoral verse.

The next stanza suggests that the lovers will take their entertainment not in a theatre or at a banquet, but sitting upon rocks or by rivers. They will watch shepherds (of which the titular speaker is ostensibly one, except here it is implied

that he will have ample leisure) feeding their flocks, or listening to waterfalls and the songs of birds. The enticements of such auditory and visual pleasures can be seen as a marked contrast to the "hurly-burly" (a phrase Marlowe used in his later play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, Act IV, Scene 1) of the London stage plays which Marlowe would write. These are entirely bucolic, traditional entertainments; the idea of Marlowe, the young man about town who chose to live in London, actually enjoying these rustic pleasures exclusively and leaving the city behind is laughable. Again, these invitations are not to be taken literally. Marlowe may well have admired pastoral verse, and the ideals of it (such as Ovid's ideals of aggressive, adulterous heterosexual love) were not necessarily those he would espouse for himself.

The third, fourth, and fifth stanzas are a kind of list of the "delights", mostly sartorial, that the Shepherd will make for his lady love. Here it becomes clearer that the "Shepherd" is really none of the same; indeed, he is more like a feudal landowner who employs shepherds. The list of the things he will make for his lady: "beds of roses" (a phrase, incidentally, first coined by Marlowe, which has survived to this day in common speech, though in the negative , "no bed of roses" meaning "not a pleasant situation") "thousand fragrant posies," "cap of flowers," "kirtle embroidered with leaves of myrtle," "gown made of the finest wool/Which from our pretty lambs we pull," "fair-linèd slippers," "buckles of the purest gold," "belt of straw and ivy buds," "coral clasps," and "amber studs") reveal a great deal about the situation of the "Shepherd" and what he can offer his love. While certainly many of the adornments Marlowe lists would be within the power of a real shepherd to procure or make (the slippers, the belt, possibly the bed of roses (in season), the cap of flowers, and the many posies, and possibly even the kirtle embroidered with

myrtle and the lambs wool gown,) but the gold buckles, the coral clasps, and the amber studs would not be easily available to the smallholder or tenant shepherds who actually did the work of sheepherding. This increasingly fanciful list of gifts could only come from a member of the gentry, or a merchant in a town.

This is another convention of pastoral poetry. While the delights of the countryside and the rural life of manual labor are celebrated, the poet (and the reader) is assumed to be noble, or at least above manual labor. The fantasy of bucolic paradise is entirely idealized; Marlowe's Shepherd is not a real person, but merely a poetic device to celebrate an old poetic ideal in verse. Incidentally, the plants mentioned (roses, flowers, and myrtle) are conventional horticultural expressions of romance. The rose, especially, was sacred to the goddess Venus (and it is how roses have come to symbolize romantic love in some modern Western cultures.) The myrtle was associated with Venus, too, and especially with marriage rituals in Ancient Rome. This connotation would have been known to Marlowe's readers. The attribute of virginity should not necessarily be assumed here; it was not for a few more centuries that myrtle would come to symbolize sexual purity. Therefore the kirtle embroidered with myrtle is not just a pretty rhyme and a word-picture of a desirable garment. It was meant to symbolize that this was a nuptial invitation, and that the Shepherd's lady was not strictly defined (though she may well have been meant to be) a virgin bride. Myrtle was an appropriate nature symbol from the Greek and Roman mythologies (from which the first pastoral poems come) to insert into a love-poem.

The image of the Shepherd as a member of the gentry becomes complete when, in the last stanza, it is said "The shepherd swains shall dance and sing/For thy delight each May-morning." The picture here is of other shepherds doing the

speaker's bidding. A rustic form of performance – in the open air and not on a stage – is again in marked contrast to the kind of formal performance of plays on the Renaissance stage, which would make Marlowe famous at a very young age. The poem ends with an "if" statement, and contains a slightly somber note. There is no guarantee that the lady will find these country enticements enough to follow the Shepherd, and since the construction of them is preposterous and fantastical to begin with, the reader is left with the very real possibility that the Shepherd will be disappointed.

Analysis

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" was composed sometime in Marlowe's early years, (between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three) around the same time he translated Ovid's *Amores*. This is to say, Marlowe wrote this poem before he went to London to become a playwright. Thornton suggests that Marlowe's poetic and dramatic career follows an "Ovidian career model" (xiv), with his amatory poems belonging to his youth, followed later by epic poems (such as *Hero and Leander*) and *Lucan's First Book*). The energy and fanciful nature of youth is evident in "Passionate Shepherd", which has been called "an extended invitation to rustic retirement" (xv). It is headlong in its rush of sentiment, though, upon examination, it reveals itself to be a particularly well-balanced piece of poetry. This poem is justly famous: though it may not be immediately identifiable as Marlowe's (it is often mistakenly thought to be a sonnet of Shakespeare, though that is incorrect in both authorship and poetic form) it has a place in most anthologies of love-poetry. It may well be the most widely recognized piece that Marlowe ever

wrote, despite the popularity of certain of his plays.

The meter, though seemingly regular, gives a great deal of meaning and music to this poem. In line 10 the iambic pattern, so far unbroken, reverses to trochaic (stressed, unstressed). The line is innocuous "And a thousand fragrant posies" – there is no special meaning in this line that requires a complete reversal of the meter. But it is a completely complementary line to the one above it (which contains an almost perfect match of nine iambic syllables), and creates movement and motion in the poem. This kind of temporary shift of meter makes the poem lighter to read, and, while preserving regularity, lessens any sing-song quality that might occur if too many regular lines appear in sequence. This skillful change is one of the reasons this poem is so often read aloud. It is musical and regular to the ear, but it is never rigid or predictable.

Line endings, too, can create variety within regularity, and also call attention to the subject matter of the lines. The only stanza which contains the line ending termed "feminine" (that is, an additional unstressed syllable following the final stressed syllable – while it may not have been called "feminine" in Marlowe's day, the softer consonant at the end of a disyllabic word such as those in this stanza definitely can convey femininity) is the third.

"There **will** I **make** thee **beds** of **ro**ses" This is done by using disyllabic words at the end of the line. The second syllable of most two-syllable words is usually an unstressed one. These lines all end with particularly feminine objects, too – roses, posies, kirtle (a woman's garment), and myrtle. It should be noted that every other line-terminating word in the entire poem is a monosyllabic one, with the lone exception of line 22, in which the "masculine" stressed ending is forced by the hyphenated construction "**May**-morn **ing**". Marlowe chose his words with very

great care.

Scansion of poetry is never exact; while lines 1 and 20 are often read as iambic, the beginning (especially line 20) can easily be read as a spondee (two long syllables – **Come live** with me **and be** my love/ rather than
Come **live** with **me** and **be** my **love**/). A skillful and expressive reader might read this repeated line thusly, upon its second occurrence. The different stress would add pleading to the tone of the line (the emphases on the verbs "come live" and "and be") and bespeak a slight desperation on the part of the Shepherd. If read the opposite way from the first line (spondaic rather than iambic) the meaning of the line changes just enough to create a development of emotion. This is no mean feat in a poem only twenty-four lines in length. (Note that there is disputed stanza (second from the last) "Thy silver dishes for thy meat" which appears in some older editions – the latest critical editions do not include it.)

At first glance "The Passionate Shepherd To His Love" can seem to be a nice piece of pastoral frippery. Considering that it was written, probably, in Marlowe's late adolescence, and if read as a superficial exercise in the practice of a very old form of poetry, it can seem to be light and insubstantial. But any studied analysis of the poem reveals its depth; the poem can be read as containing irony (as written by an urbane man who longed for the city rather than the country, and thus constructed impossible rustic scenarios), serious and heartfelt emotion, a slight political commentary, a gentle sadness, and a transcendent love of nature. Good poetry is often many things to different readers, and Marlowe was able to create, within a codified (and one might say ossified) form of poetry a piece of clever and flexible Elizabethan verse. The Shepherd may not have been real, but the emotions and effects created by this poem have their own reality.

Sir Walter Raleigh (ca. 1552-1618)

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) is a poet, historian, courtier, explorer and colonist. He was born at Hayes Barton in Devonshire. His name was also spelled Rawleigh, Ralegh, Rawley and many other spellings. He attended Oxford for a year, but did not finish there. Queen Elizabeth I chose him as a favorite and gave him many gifts of land and money. He grew up to hate the Catholic Church, and when Queen Elizabeth I, who re-established Protestantism in England, ascended the throne in 1558, he was open to express it. In 1580, he became the captain of the army of Ireland and suppressed a rebellion there. He soon became one of the most powerful figures in England. He became Sir in 1584. In 1585 Raleigh sponsored the first English colony in America on Roanoke Island in present-day North Carolina. The colony failed, as did another one in 1587. He introduced tobacco from the New World to England. In 1588, he lost the favor of the English Court. In 1590, he was accused of atheism. In November 1603, he was accused of conspiring against King James I who had just ascended the throne, and thus was sent to the Tower of London, which was used as a royal residence and a prison where he remained for the next 13 years. Raleigh promised to give King James a fortune in gold if the king would allow him to return to South America. James agreed, but the expedition in 1616 was a disaster. Raleigh returned to England, where King James invoked the death sentence; Raleigh was beheaded in 1618. His poetry has a touch of a melancholic awareness of the transitory nature of life.

The nymph's reply to the shepherd by Walter Raleigh

If all the world and love were young,

And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold,
And Philomel becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields;
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

The gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten,—
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,

Had joys no date nor age no need,

Then these delights my mind might move

To live with thee and be thy love.

Notes:

Fold: A fenced enclosure for domestic animals, especially sheep.

Rage: To move with great violence or intensity: *A storm raged through the mountains.*

Philomel: A nightingale. [Alteration (influenced by French *philomèle*, from Latin *Philomēla*, Philomela)]

Philomela: *Greek Mythology*. A princess of Athens who, after being raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, was avenged by her sister, Procne, and was later turned into a swallow or nightingale while fleeing Tereus.

Wanton: **1.** Luxuriant; overabundant: *wanton tresses.* **2.** Frolicsome; playful. **3.** *Obsolete*. Rebellious; refractory.

Wayward: **1.** Given to or marked by willful, often perverse deviation from what is desired, expected, or required in order to gratify one's own impulses or inclinations. **2.** Swayed or prompted by caprice; unpredictable.

Reckon: To count or compute

Gall: **1.** A bitter, alkaline, brownish-yellow or greenish-yellow fluid that is secreted by the liver, stored in the gallbladder, and discharged into the duodenum and aids in the emulsification, digestion, and absorption of fats. 2. Bitterness of temper; ill humor; irascibility.

Folly: **1.** A lack of good sense, understanding, or foresight. **2. a.** An act or instance of foolishness: *regretted the follies of his youth.* **b.** A costly undertaking having an absurd or ruinous outcome.

Rotten: **1.** Being in a state of putrefaction or decay; decomposed. **2.** Having a foul odor resulting from or suggestive of decay; putrid. **3.** Made weak or unsound by rot: *rotten floorboards.* **4.** Morally corrupt or despicable: *She's rotten to the core.* **5.** Very bad; wretched: *rotten weather.*

Introduction

"The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" is Sir Walter Raleigh's response to a poem written by Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." In the Marlowe poem, the shepherd proposes to his beloved by portraying their ideal future together: a life filled with earthly pleasures in a world of eternal spring. Raleigh's reply, however, debunks the shepherd's fanciful vision. While Marlowe's speaker promises nature's beauty and a litany of gifts, Raleigh's nymph responds that such promises could only remain valid "if all the world and love were young." Thus, she introduces the concepts of time and change. In her world, the seasons cause the shepherd's "shallow rivers" to "rage," rocks to "grow cold" and roses to "fade." The shepherd's gifts might be desirable, but they too are transient: they "soon break, soon wither" and are "soon forgotten." In the end, the nymph acknowledges that she would accept the shepherd's offer "could youth last" and "had joys no date." Like the shepherd, she longs for such things to be true, but like Raleigh, she is a skeptic, retaining faith only in reason's power to discount the "folly" of "fancy's spring."

The main idea of the poem

In this poem, Raleigh imagines to nymph's reply to the request of the passionate shepherd in Marlowe's The Passionate Shepherd to His Love. This reply suggests that the pleasures that Marlowe uses to entice his nymph will fade when time passes, and only if they were everlasting could the nymph be persuaded to join

him.

The nymph draws the attention of the shepherd to the fact that life is short and nothing remains as it is forever. For the world and love cannot preserve their youth. They are as transitory as anything else. Moreover, the shepherds, of whom this particular shepherd is a member, do not tell the truth. There is no guarantee of what the shepherd promises her, because he cannot keep his promise: he is as mortal as what he promises.

Time controls all the things that the shepherd describes. It will reduce all his promised pleasures to nothing. The natural objects which he offers her will soon fade and wither. Therefore, the nymph tells him that all these things cannot move her to come to him and be his love. If he can control the effects of time upon nature and human feelings and passions, these delights might move her to live with him and be his love.

The speaker laments the passage of time and its ill effects on beauty. This lament is a clever response to the seductive claims of Marlowe's poem. In the second stanza that parallels Marlowe's second stanza, Raleigh asserts that the passage of time brings a change of seasons less romantic than the ones Marlowe describes. In the fourth stanza, the reply also contests the value of the gifts in Marlowe's third and fourth stanza by showing how time transforms those gifts as well. Raleigh mentions the rest of Marlowe's images in the fifth stanza, where he denies the value of the material things that the shepherd will make for the nymph. Raleigh not only echoes Marlowe's lines, but he also uses the images and specific examples from Marlowe's poem cleverly to denounce the shepherd. Raleigh further scorns the shepherd for an offering that is "In follie ripe, in reason rotten". This line suggests the basis for the entire poem. He takes all of Marlowe's images and shows

how none are as valuable as the shepherd claims.

Raleigh's poem also highlights one of the ways that a poet might respond to another. While it is true that a poet might choose to write topically, the poet might examine a poem to improve the logic or make the image more appropriate to his situation. When Raleigh concludes his poem, he acknowledges Marlowe's verse once more, for "could youth last and love still breed/Had joys no date nor age no need" then those delights might move the nymph to with the shepherd and be his love.

The nymph's reply might be called realistic. She basically says that everything the shepherd says would be lovely if only people didn't grow old and change. The fact that the first line starts with "If" shows that she thinks that the shepherd has some ideas that would work if only things could remain in the one moment. However, "the flowers do fade," the roses "soon wither," and as long as these things happen (all negative), she can never live with him and be his love.

Themes in “The Nymph’s Reply…”

Skepticism

This poem is a response to Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” written in 1599. In Marlowe’s poem, the shepherd asks the woman that he loves to run away with him and live the simple life outdoors, where he will make her clothes from flowers and shells and the wool of their sheep, and life will be a celebration of their youthful love. In her response, Raleigh has the nymph list reasons why the ideal life that the shepherd describes is unlikely to happen. The shepherd emphasizes his love, as if love alone can conquer any problems, and he lists the things that he is willing to do for her as well as the splendors of the simple country life. The nymph, on the other hand, looks at the darker side of human

nature. In the second line, she brings up the idea that shepherds do, in fact, lie sometimes, implying that she would be foolish to believe everything that he claims. Throughout the rest of the poem, she explains reasons why, whether he is sincere or not, she has to be skeptical that their life together would be as the shepherd describes it. Her main point is that the shepherd's plans do not account for the changes that are inevitable over time, and so the future that he foresees will almost certainly not come to pass. Her skepticism is based on the fact that she understands his hopeful vision, but that she also sees that he does not understand the world well enough to make an accurate prediction.

Abstinence and Chastity

An element that is important to understanding the nymph's reluctance, but that is never explicitly stated in the poem, is the value she places on her chastity. Her main argument is that the young lovers will probably, over time, lose interest in one another as youthful beauty fades and eventually part. To readers who assume that the two could then go on with their lives separately, this might seem unimportant. This view, however, does not take into account how much would have changed in the nymph's life by the sheer fact of having lived with the shepherd. To a young lady of the sixteenth century, the importance of retaining her chastity and the circumstances under which she would give it up could not be overstated. There would be no going back to the person she was before once she decided to live with the shepherd. To the strong Christian sensibilities of Elizabethan England, living and sleeping with the shepherd would constitute a serious sin. To a great extent, modern social mores are so different from the nymph's that today's readers cannot feel the enormity of what the shepherd is asking her to give up with such a faint possibility that their love will last. On the other hand, readers who are aware of the

immense importance earlier generations put on a woman's chastity might be surprised to hear the nymph say she actually would be willing to run off with the shepherd if she thought that their youthful enthusiasm could last.

Decay

The aging process can sometimes be seen as a period of growth and refinement. The examples that the nymph uses in this poem, however, all present aging as decay. Rivers run dry, plants shrivel, and birds die and fall silent. The nymph uses these examples to show what must inevitably become of youthful love over the course of time. In line 16, she discusses the flowers that the shepherd has offered to weave into clothes for her, and explains their eventual decay with the words, "In folly ripe, in reason rotten." Her point is that the flowers can only be thought to stay their best, "ripe," through mistaken thinking. Reason is the process of seeing the shepherd's offer through to its inevitable solution and, as this nymph sees it, all of the things that the shepherd promises, as well as all things in nature, inevitably lead to decay.

The examples that she uses to show decay, just as the examples that Christopher Marlowe previously had the shepherd use to show the vibrancy of his love, are all physical symbols from nature. This poem does little to address the issue of whether love can grow and adapt—whether it can, as line 21 puts it, "still breed." Like Marlowe, Raleigh draws a connection between love and the worldly things found in nature. The difference is that Marlowe's shepherd points out that love is as wonderful as the nature images he describes, while Raleigh's nymph points out how love eventually will be as decayed as those natural objects.

Lies

The nymph in this poem briefly mentions the possibility of the shepherd

being untrue, in the second line, but for the most part she examines his offer to her as if he is being sincere. She does not seem to think that the flowery prose Christopher Marlowe gave the shepherd to say is a trick to get her to run away with him. Instead, she briefly passes over the fact that people generally have the capacity to lie, as just one minor consideration. Contemporary readers are used to seeing writers present their works with some sort of falsehood embedded within them. The post-modern, ironic sensibility gives readers more than the surface situation that is presented, often giving the narrator a hidden, secret idea as well. In a case like Marlowe's poem, a contemporary poet would be more likely to hint that the shepherd is just using poetic language to trick the nymph into sleeping with him. The fact that the nymph only mentions this possibility in passing indicates that she probably thinks he is not lying, or, if he is, he is lying to himself as much as to her. Dramas from the Elizabethan era often present deceptive characters, indicating that lying was not unusual when Raleigh wrote this poem, only that it was not assumed in love poetry of the day.

Robert Herrick

Born on August 24, 1591, Robert Herrick was the seventh child and fourth son born to a London goldsmith, Nicholas, and his wife, Julian Stone Herrick. When Herrick was fourteen months old, his father died. At age 16, Herrick began a ten-year apprenticeship with his uncle. The apprenticeship ended after only six years, and Herrick, at age twenty-two, matriculated at Saint John's College, Cambridge. He graduated in 1617.

Over the next decade, Herrick became a disciple of Ben Jonson, about whom he wrote five poems. In 1623 Herrick took holy orders, and six years later, he became vicar of Dean Prior in Devonshire. His post carried a term for a total of thirty-one years, but during the Great Rebellion in 1647, he was removed from his position because of his Royalist sympathies. Following the restoration of Charles II, Herrick was reinstated at Dean Prior where he resided from 1662 until his death in October 1674. He never married, and many of the women mentioned in his poems are thought to have been fictional.

Poetic style and stature

Herrick wrote over 2,500 poems, about half of which appear in his major work, Hesperides.[6] Hesperides also includes the much shorter Noble Numbers, his first book, of spiritual works, first published in 1647. He is well known for his style and, in his earlier works, for frequent references to lovemaking and the female body. His later poetry was more of a spiritual and philosophical nature. Among his most famous short poetical sayings are the unique monometers, such as number 475, "Thus I / Pass by / And die,/ As one / Unknown / And gone."

Herrick sets out his subject-matter in the poem he printed at the beginning of

his collection, The Argument of his Book. He dealt with English country life and its seasons, village customs, complimentary poems to various ladies and his friends, themes taken from classical writings and a solid bedrock of Christian faith, not intellectualized but underpinning the rest. It has been said of Herrick's style 'his directness of speech with clear and simple presentation of thought, a fine artist working with conscious knowledge of his art, of an England of his youth in which he lives and moves and loves, clearly assigns him to the first place as a lyrical poet in the strict and pure sense of the phrase'.

Herrick never married, and none of his love-poems seem to connect directly with any one woman. He loved the richness of sensuality and the variety of life, and this is shown vividly in such poems as Cherry-ripe, Delight in Disorder and Upon Julia’s Clothes.

The over-riding message of Herrick’s work is that life is short, the world is beautiful, love is splendid, and we must use the short time we have to make the most of it. This message can be seen clearly in To the Virgins, to make much of Time; To Daffodils; To Blossoms; and Corinna's Going A Maying, where the warmth and exuberance of what seems to have been a kindly and jovial personality comes over strongly.

His poems were not widely popular at the time they were published. His style was strongly influenced by Ben Jonson, by the classical Roman writers, and by the poems of the late Elizabethan era. This must have seemed quite old-fashioned to an audience whose tastes were tuned to the complexities of the metaphysical poets such as John Donne and Andrew Marvell. His works were rediscovered in the early nineteenth century, and have been regularly printed ever since.

The Victorian poet Swinburne described Herrick as "the greatest song writer ever born of English race". Despite his use of classical allusions and names, Herrick's poems are easier for modern readers to understand than those of many of his contemporaries.

“To Daffodils” by Robert Herrick

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the even-song;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,

Ne'er to be found again.

Surface meaning:

In his poem 'To Daffodils', the poet Robert Herrick begins by saying that we grieve to see the beautiful daffodils being wasted away very quickly. The duration of their gloom is so short that it seems even the rising sun still hasn't reached the noon-time. Thus, in the very beginning he has struck a note of mourning at the fast dying of daffodils. The poet then addresses the daffodils and asks them to stay until the clay ends with the evening prayer. After praying together he says that they will also accompany the daffodils. This is so because like flowers, men too have a very transient life and even the youth is also very short-lived.

Deep meaning:

"We have short time to stay, as you, we have as short a spring." Robert Herrick symbolically refers to the youth as spring in these lines. He equates/compares human life with the life of daffodils. Further he says that both of them grow very fast to be destroyed later. Just like the short duration of the flowers, men too die away soon. Their life is as short as the rain of the summer season, which comes for a very short time; and the dew-drops in the morning, which vanish away and never return again. Thus, the poet after comparing the flowers to humans, later turns to the objects of nature – he has compared the life of daffodils with summer rain, dew drops.

Themes:

- the short-lived nature of life, the fleeting passage of time.
- like the flowers we humans have a very short life in this world.
- beauty is not going to stay forever.

Life is short, and world is beautiful, love is splendid and we must use the short time we live to make the most of it. This is shown in the words “haste”, “run”, “short” and “quick”.

A constant theme of the songs written by Robert Herrick is the short-lived nature of life, the fleeting passage of time. We find a note of melancholy/sadness in his poem which arises out of the realization that beauty is not going to stay forever.

In his poem ‘To Daffodils’, the poet Robert Herrick begins by saying that we grieve to see the beautiful daffodils being wasted away very quickly. The duration of their gloom is so short that it seems even the rising sun still hasn’t reached the noon-time. Thus, in the very beginning the poet has struck a note of mourning at the fast dying of daffodils.

The poet then addresses the daffodils and asks them to stay until the clay ends with the evening prayer. After praying together he says that they will also accompany the daffodils. This is so because like flowers men too have a very transient life and even the youth is also very short-lived.

“We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring.”

The poet symbolically refers to the youth as spring in these lines. He equates/compares human life with the life of daffodils. Further he says that both of them grow very fast to be destroyed later. Just like the short duration of the flowers, men too die away soon. Their life is as short as the rain of the summer season, which comes for a very short time; and the dew-drops in the morning, which vanish away and never return again. Thus, the poet after comparing the flowers to humans, later turns to the objects of nature – he has compared the life of daffodils with summer rain, dew drops.

The central idea presented by the poet in this poem is that like the flowers we humans have a very short life in this world. The poet laments that we too life all other beautiful things soon slip into the shadow and silence of grave. A sad and thoughtful mood surrounds the poem.

General Meaning

Herrick describes the beauty of daffodils which have a short life span. He also describes how short human life is, just as the daffodils do.

Detailed Meaning

Herrick begins by describing the beauty of daffodils on the first line “Fair daffodils, we weep to see” and he describes the short life span of daffodils by saying “You haste away so soon”. He expresses that the daffodils gloom is very short, and that they die way too early as it seems that even the sun has not yet reached the noon-time by clearly saying “As yet the early-rising sun” , “has not attain’d his noon”. There is a touch of sadness when he is aware that the daffodils’s bloom haste away very quick, and he begs that the daffodils to stay longer, in lines “Stay, stay” , “Until the hasting day” , “Has run”.

He then compares the life of the daffodils with the life of human which is the same, short in time. He feels that human too have a short life, as clearly says “We have as short a Spring”, so human have a short amount of time, like a Spring. “As quick a growth to meet decay” depicts that human is aging, growing and keep growing old quickly to the end. He is stating that we human and anything alive is born to die. In the line “As your hours do, and dry, away” he depicts that we were all born beautiful just as the daffodils, until the time consume it all, we are dry, we are old, weak, leaving away, and die. In the last three lines of the poem he compares and describes that our time, as if it is no longer than a summer’s rain, a season,

pearls of morning's dew, so mild and so fine, but once it is all gone, can never to return again.

Intention of The Poet

The poet conveys a message that human, we have to do our best in what we do, in the time we have, with the bright spirit and courage of our youth. We mortal creatures could be so fine and beautiful, but it does not last for so long. We could never be prettier than we are now. And life is so tempting and arresting, yet it lasts no longer than a blink of an eye. So he advises not to waste our very time and life, we have this chance only to live life to the fullest and make the most of it. Because we are not going live forever and once we are all gone, we can never coming back again.

Connotation and Imagery Use

The poet use some metaphors as the "early-rising sun" which he uses to describe the exceedingly quick life span of daffodils. He also uses many imageries to describe the short time we every mortal being have. The imagery of Spring, summer's rain, and pearls of morning's dew refer as either human or flowers life which is beautiful yet only last in a short time. The poet uses the word "dry" and "decay" which has a negative connotation. Dry as we grow, old, vulnerable, incapable of doing things once the Spring (youth) gone. Decay, which indicates death, inability, uselessness, and end. Those imageries and connotations are very well-used by the poet in order to express his intentions.

John Donne

John Donne, the poet who does so much to mould our impression of the first half of the seventeenth century, was born into a Catholic family in 1572. His father was a prosperous London ironmonger and his mother the daughter of a dramatist, John Heywood. He entered Lincoln's Inn, to train as a lawyer, in 1592, and in 1596 joined a naval expedition against Spain. On his return he became private secretary to Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and was briefly the member of parliament for Brackley, but a clandestine marriage to a relative of Egerton's led to the termination of his employment. It was in this decade that Donne probably wrote most of his love poems. Moving away from Catholicism, his attention, both in poetry and prose, began to tum more and more towards religious concerns, and in 1610 he published his most notable prose work, *Pseudo-Martyr,* which argued that English Catholics should agree to the Oath of Supremacy and swear allegiance to James 1. It was around this time that Donne wrote his 'holy sonnets', poems which reflect a dark sense of despair. In 1615 he took orders in the Church of England, and almost immediately was made a royal chaplain by James 1. In 1621 he was appointed Dean of St Paul's, a position he held until his death in 1631; in this final decade he continued to write, especially sermons.

Literary critic and poet Samuel Johnson first coined the term 'metaphysical poetry' in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets (1179-1781)*. In the book, Johnson wrote about a group of 17th-century British poets that included John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan. He noted how the poets shared many common characteristics, especially ones of wit

and elaborate style.

What Does Metaphysical Mean?

The word 'meta' means 'after,' so the literal translation of 'metaphysical' is 'after the physical.' Basically, metaphysics deals with questions that can't be explained by science. It questions the nature of reality in a philosophical way.

Here are some common metaphysical questions:

- Does God exist?
- Is there a difference between the way things appear to us and the way they really are? Essentially, what is the difference between reality and perception?
- Is everything that happens already predetermined? If so, then is free choice non-existent?
- Is consciousness limited to the brain?

Metaphysics can cover a broad range of topics from religious to consciousness; however, all the questions about metaphysics ponder the nature of reality. And of course, there is no one correct answer to any of these questions. Metaphysics is about exploration and philosophy, not about science and math.

Characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry

The group of metaphysical poets that we mentioned earlier is obviously not the only poets or philosophers or writers that deal with metaphysical questions. There are other more specific characteristics that prompted Johnson to place the 17th-century poets together.

Perhaps the most common characteristic is that metaphysical poetry contained large doses of wit. In fact, although the poets were examining serious

questions about the existence of God or whether a human could possibly perceive the world, the poets were sure to ponder those questions with humor.

Metaphysical poetry also sought to shock the reader and wake him or her up from his or her normal existence in order to question the unquestionable. The poetry often mixed ordinary speech with **paradoxes** and **puns**. The results were strange, comparing unlikely things, such as lovers to a compass or the soul to a drop of dew. These weird comparisons were called **conceits**.

Metaphysical poetry also explored a few common themes. They all had a religious sentiment. In addition, many of the poems explored the theme of *carpe diem* (seize the day) and investigated the humanity of life.

One great way to analyze metaphysical poetry is to consider how the poems are about both thought and feeling. Think about it. How could you possibly write a poem about the existence of God if you didn't have some emotional reaction to such an enormous, life-altering question?

Song: Sweetest love, I do not go: John Donne

Sweetest love, I do not go,

For weariness of thee,

Nor in hope the world can show

A fitter love for me;

But since that I

Must die at last, 'tis best

To use myself in jest

Thus by feign'd deaths to die.

Yesternight the sun went hence,

And yet is here today;

He hath no desire nor sense,

Nor half so short a way:

Then fear not me,

But believe that I shall make

Speedier journeys, since I take

More wings and spurs than he.

O how feeble is man's power,

That if good fortune fall,

Cannot add another hour,

Nor a lost hour recall!

But come bad chance,

And we join to'it our strength,

And we teach it art and length,

Itself o'er us to'advance.

When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,

But sigh'st my soul away;

When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,

My life's blood doth decay.

It cannot be

That thou lov'st me, as thou say'st,

If in thine my life thou waste,

That art the best of me.

Let not thy divining heart

Forethink me any ill;

Destiny may take thy part,

And may thy fears fulfil;

But think that we

Are but turn'd aside to sleep;

They who one another keep

Alive, ne'er parted be.

The poet tells his beloved that he is not leaving because he is tired of the relationship—instead, he must go as a duty. After all, the sun departs each night but returns every morning, and he has a much shorter distance to travel. The third stanza suggests that his duty to leave is unstoppable; man's power is so feeble that good fortune cannot lengthen his life, while bad fortune will shorten it. Indeed, fighting bad fortune only shares one's strength with it. As the beloved sighs and cries, the lover complains that if he is really within her, she is the one letting him go because he is part of her tears and breath. He asks her not to fear any evil that may befall him while he is gone, and besides, they keep each other alive in their hearts and therefore are never truly parted.

Analysis

"Sweetest love" is a lyric made up of five stanzas each with the same rhyme scheme (ababcddc). Each stanza develops an aspect of the problem of separation from one's beloved.

In the first stanza the lover wards off any fear of a weakened love on his part.

He does not leave "for weariness" of the beloved (line 2), nor does he go looking for a "fitter love" for himself (line 4). He instead compares his departure to death, saying that since he "Must die at last" (line 5), it is better for him to practice dying by "feign'd deaths" (line 8), those short times when he is separated from his love. Thus, he turns her fears about losing him into an assurance that she is the very source of his existence; when he is not with her, it is like being dead.

In the second stanza, Donne uses the sun as a metaphor for his fidelity and desire to return. He compares his leaving to the sun's setting "Yesternight" (line 9). It left darkness behind, "yet is here today" (line 10). If the sun can return each day, despite its lengthy journey around the world, then the beloved can trust that the lover will return since his journey is shorter (line 12). Besides, he will make "speedier journeys" since he has more reason to go and return than does the sun (lines 15-16).

In the third stanza, the poet turns to contemplating larger problems beyond merely being separated from a loved one. He notes how "feeble is man's power" (line 17) that one is unable to add more time to his life during periods of "good fortune" (line 18). Ironically, the poet notes, we instead add "our strength" (line 22) to misfortune and "teach it art and length" (line 23), thereby giving bad situations power over our lives. We are so powerless that even the power we have turns against us in bad fortune. Perhaps the suggestion here is that the lover has no choice but to go, not having enough strength to overcome fate.

This stanza also serves as a turning point in the song. The two prior stanzas are assurances that the lover will return quickly and faithfully. The final two stanzas focus on the harms his beloved may cause or fear.

"When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,/But sigh'st my soul away" he says

in the first line of the fourth stanza. The beloved's expressions of despair cause harm to her lover, he argues, because he is so much a part of her that he is in her breath. He may also mean that her sighs demonstrate her lack of trust in him. The same argument applies to her tears; she depletes his "life's blood" (line 16) when she cries. This is why she said to be "unkindly kind" with her tears (line 15); this oxymoron emphasizes the lover's pain in seeing the extent of her need to be with him. He concludes the stanza complaining that "It cannot be/That thou lov'st me" (lines 21-22), since she appears willing to "waste" his best parts (perhaps the beloved herself as she pines for him).

In the final stanza, the lover warning his beloved against future ills she may bring upon him if she continues to fear a future without him. He urges her "divining heart" (line 25) to avoid predicting him harm; it is possible that "Destiny may take thy part" and fulfill her fears (lines 27-28) by leading to true dangers. He prefers that she instead see his absence as a moment in the night when the two of them are in bed together, merely "turn'd aside to sleep" (line 30). He leaves her with the encouragement that two people whose love is their very lifeblood can "ne'er parted be" (line 32); they are always together in spirit.

This poem bears similarities to Donne's other work about departure from his loved one, "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." The tone of the song considered here is lighter, however, and the imagery not so controlled, poignant, or unexpected as that latter work. Nevertheless, it is worth attempting to read this poem, like so many others of Donne's, as a spiritual allegory.

"The Flea" by John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;

It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,

And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;

Thou know’st that this cannot be said

A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,

  Yet this enjoys before it woo,

  And pampered swells with one blood made of two,

  And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,

Where we almost, nay more than married are.

This flea is you and I, and this

Our mariage bed, and marriage temple is;

Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,

And cloistered in these living walls of jet.

  Though use make you apt to kill me,

  Let not to that, self-murder added be,

  And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since

Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?

Wherein could this flea guilty be,

Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?

Yet thou triumph’st, and say'st that thou

Find’st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;

  ’Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:

Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,

Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The speaker uses the occasion of a flea hopping from himself to a young lady as an excuse to argue that the two of them should make love. Since in the flea their blood is mixed together, he says that they have already been made as one in the body of the flea. Besides, the flea pricked her and got what it wanted without having to woo her. The flea's bite and mingling of their bloods is not considered a sin, so why should their love-making?

In the second stanza the speaker attempts to prevent the woman from killing the flea. He argues that since the flea contains the "life" of both herself and the speaker, she would be guilty both of suicide and a triple homicide in killing it.

The woman in question is obviously not convinced, for in the third stanza she has killed the flea with a fingernail. The speaker then turns this around to point out that, although the flea which contained portions of their lives is dead, neither of them is the weaker for it. If this commingling of bodily fluids can leave no lasting effect, then why does she hesitate to join with him in sexual intimacy? After all, her honor will be equally undiminished.

Analysis

Donne here makes use of the wit for which he eventually became famous—although in his own day his poetry was often considered too lurid to gain popular notoriety, and little of it was published during his lifetime. One of his earlier poems, "The Flea," demonstrates his ability to take a controlling metaphor and adapt it to unusual circumstances. "The Flea" is made up of three nine-line stanzas following an aabbccddd rhyme scheme.

He begins the poem by asking the young woman to "Mark this flea" (line 1)

which has bitten and sucked blood from both himself and her. He points out that she has "denied" him something which the flea has not refrained from enjoying: the intimate union of their bodily fluids (in this case, blood). This commonplace occurrence, he argues, "cannot be said/A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead" (lines 5-6); if this tiny commingling of the two people is not wrong, then how can a greater commingling be considered evil or undesirable? He even points out that the flea is able to enjoy the woman's essence "before he woo" (line 7), the implication being that he need not court the woman in order to enjoy her sexual favors.

In the second stanza the poet argues for the life of the flea, as his desired lady has made a move to kill it. He paints the flea as a holy thing: "This flea is you and I, and this/Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is" (lines 12-13).

Besides arguing for the sanctity of the flea's life, the speaker is also arguing that he and the lady have already bypassed the usual vows of fidelity and ceremony of marriage; thus, he pushes toward his point that the two of them have already been joined as one in the flea, so there is no harm in joining their bodies in sexual love.

There is a hint that he has already attempted to gain the lady's favors and failed, either through her response or that of her parents: "Though parents grudge, and you," (line 14) he says, suggesting that even her opinion does not matter anymore. The flea has already "cloister'd" them within its body's "walls of jet" (line 15, possibly also suggesting that they are alone together in a dark room). The woman's disdain for him and his suit becomes more apparent as he claims she is "apt" to kill him (line 16), following her habit of killing fleas, but he offers that she should refrain from harming the flea because in so doing she would add suicide ("Let not to that self-murder added be" line 17) by destroying the vessel holding her blood. In fact, he says, she would be guilty of "sacrilege, three sins in killing three"

(line 18) since his own blood is there too.

He fails in his defense of the flea, for she has “purpled” her finger with the flea's blood by the opening of the third stanza (line 20). It is a “sudden” but perhaps inevitable betrayal of an innocent being. The woman claims triumph over the lover's argument, responding that neither she nor the man is weaker for her having killed the flea (lines 23-24). In this way she attempts to unravel the speaker’s argument that the flea represents a sacred bond between them; the flea is simple to kill and nothing has been lost, and the single drop of blood will not be missed. Thus there is no reason to have sex.

The poet, however, is quick-witted enough to turn her argument back against her: if the death of the flea, which had partaken of just a tiny amount of their life-essences, is virtually no problem, despite his pretended fear, then any fear she might have about her loss of honor is equally a “false” fear. The act of physical union would cause virtually no serious harm to her reputation. That is, as much as she lost to the flea, “Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me, / Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee” (lines 26-27). He thus returns to his original argument from the first stanza: the flea’s intimate contact with the woman has caused her no harm, so a physical encounter with the poet will cause no harm either.

Although the lover suggests that he is in control and that it is a matter of "when thou yield'st," some feminist scholars have noted that he is powerless to do anything until the woman makes her decision. He merely utters his words of warning, but she can raise her hand and kill the flea; similarly, she can exercise her power by continuing to deny the man his desires. The flea could take what it wanted without stopping to woo, but the lover uses no force beyond the force of argument. He has not been successful so far, but we do not know what will happen next

Andrew Marvell

Most of Andrew Marvell’s poetry was not published during his lifetime, due to political controversy and the popular tradition of manuscript circulation. Poets in 17th century England often refused to print and publish their work as sign of social exclusivity, or to avoid unfounded rumors and steer clear of legal persecution. In Marvell's case, the lack of official publication has made it difficult for scholars and historians to ascertain the authorship of some of his poems. The first Folio edition of Andrew Marvell’s poetry was not published until 1681, three years after his death. It was based on a collection of papers held by his wife, Mary, but Marvell himself never officially approved their publication.

Nearly 100 years later, a more thorough collection of Marvell's poetry and prose was published. Its content came from manuscripts belonging to the descendants of William Popple, Marvell's nephew and close friend. The Popple manuscript and Mary Marvell's collection are the major sources for all subsequent printed anthologies of Marvell’s work.

Marvell is often associated with the 17th century school of English metaphysical poets, which also includes John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw, among others. Scholars and historians define these writers' style by their elaborate and often outlandish metaphorical constructs, or “conceits,” such as Marvell’s extended poetic comparison of the human soul to a drop of dew. In some cases, conservative critics have accused the metaphysical poets of bad taste, impropriety, and sacrilege for using images of bodily desire, physical pleasure, and sensuality to convey theological or sacred themes.

Marvell was also known as a charged political writer, and many of his poems – such as "An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return to England" – illustrate his strong belief in Republican government and principles that opposed absolute monarchy.

Marvell's poetry was not fully appreciated until the 20th century, when T.S. Eliot renewed critical interest in his work. Eliot published essays about the metaphysical poets, Marvell in particular, arguing for a renewed appreciation of their highly intellectual style. Eliot praised Marvell's elaborate poetic techniques, which he believed earlier generations of critics had wrongfully dismissed.

"To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell is a classic carpe diem poem in which a sophisticated and mature man, the speaker in the poem, attempts to persuade his young mistress to yield to his amorous advances. Marvell lived during the seventeenth century in England, a time of radical changes in politics and modes of literary expression. For a while during the Commonwealth Period (1649-1660), drama disappeared, public theaters closed because of fears of immoral influences, and incendiary political pamphlets circulated. The Latin phrase carpe diem or "seize the day" is a very common literary motif in poetry. This kind of poem usually emphasizes that life is short and time is fleeting as the speaker attempts to entice his listener, a young lady usually described as a virgin. Poets writing carpe diem lyrics frequently use the rose as a symbol of transient physical beauty and the finality of death. Examples include Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" and Edmund Waller's "Go, Lovely Rose." However, Marvell's poem is a more psychologically complicated and original treatment of this theme. The poem pretends to explore the dramatic argument situation between the man and his mistress when it really hides a concrete address to death; its gripping second section

is filled with unusually bold images of sterility, rotting corpses, tombs, and a shocking denial of the procreative activity of sex. “To His Coy Mistress” does much more than simply celebrate youthful passion and the flesh the way many love poems do. Marvell confronts mortality directly and develops a convincing psychological stance that argues one should capitalize on life’s opportunities. The speaker concludes in a riotous charge to live and to love to the fullest.

“To his coy mistress” by Andrew Marvell

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.
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side 5
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. 10
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: 15
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,

And the last age should show your heart.

For, lady, you deserve this state,

Nor would I love at lower rate. 20

But at my back I always hear

Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near:

And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity.

Thy beauty shall no more be found; 25

Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound

My echoing song: then worms shall try

That long-preserved virginity,

And your quaint honor turn to dust,

And into ashes all my lust. 30

The grave's a fine and private place,

But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now, therefore, while the youthful hue

Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

And while thy willing soul transpires 35

At every pore with instant fires,

Now let us sport us while we may;

And now, like amorous birds of prey,

Rather at once our Time devour,

Than languish in his slow-chapt power. 40

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 45
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Poem Summary

Lines 1-2

The basic theme of the poem is announced from the beginning, that time lays waste to youth and life passes quickly, so people should enjoy youth now and "seize the day." In the first section of the poem (to line 20), the speaker uses subjunctive mood verbs such as "would" and "were" that give a delicacy and tentativeness to his style. The speaker presents his "argument" to a listener, a young woman who holds back from reciprocating with her expression of love. The speaker says that coyness would be acceptable if time were in endless supply and if the world was big enough to accommodate all of his admiration for her.

Lines 3-4

Assuming time continues forever, the poem describes the leisurely pace of life spent in courtship and praise of the beloved, silent mistress.

Lines 5-7

Beginning with line 7 and continuing to line 20, the speaker embarks on some remarkable hyperbole to describe the praise he wants to bestow upon his mistress. He selects two rivers, India's Ganges, which is sacred to the Hindu religion and thought of as the earthly embodiment of a goddess, and England's Humber, which flows past Marvell's hometown of Hull. The wide distance of two hemispheres separating the rivers compares with the time needed to spend

adequately in courtship. That the mistress would find rubies in the Ganges underlines the exotic nature of a river in India. The Humber river in England, by comparison, is a slowmoving, dirty estuary where one is more likely to find old shoes than precious stones. The distance between the speaker (by the Humber river) and the mistress (by the Ganges river) is a metaphor for the luxurious, leisurely consumption of time spent in praise.

Lines 8-10

In these lines, the speaker describes the amount of time it would take to love his mistress and how much time she would be allowed to turn his love aside. The poem invokes eschatological or "end of the world" events to compare the allotted time—the great Flood by which God cleanses the earth in the Bible or the conversion of the Jews popularly thought to happen immediately prior to the Last Judgment. These excessive comparisons stress the unimaginably large amount of time it would take to adequately define the speaker's love for his mistress.

Lines 11-12

The speaker creates the metaphor of "vegetable love" that grows very slowly but amasses enough bulk to be larger than a great dynasty or colonial empire. Because of the depth of his love, the speaker's "vegetable love" covers much of the earth's surface, as did the British empire during its peak in the nineteenth century.

Lines 13-18

The speaker fills out the hyperbole begun in line 7. This catalogue of the amount of years devoted to worship of each of his mistress's physical attributes is outrageous; we find staggering overstatement in the 100 years for her face, 200 years for each breast, and 30,000 years devoted to the rest of her body—an exponential increase! The speaker devotes at least one generation to praise of each

part of his mistress, especially to praise of her pure heart, which is saved for last because of its special place as the seat of amorous passion. This catalogue resembles and perhaps parodies the style of Petrarchan sonnet writers, who used standard metaphors to describe their mistresses. However, Marvell's comparisons are notable for their excessiveness and originality.

Lines 19-20

In this close of section I, the speaker introduces a monetary metaphor: loving at a certain "rate," like an interest rate charged by a bank for lending money. The speaker implies that the mistress deserves this "state" of lavish praise because of her beauty.

Lines 21-22

This is the logical turn of the poem, shifting from wild exaggeration to somber images of the grave. The subject of death intrudes into this love poem, turning the mood away from the subjunctive to focus on the limitation of time. Time is personified as a driver in a chariot. In popular culture, Time is usually pictured as a robed old man holding a scythe—a sinister figure inspiring fear. The verb choice of "hurrying" introduces anxiety and darkness into a formerly light and extravagant, lyric poem.

Lines 23-24

The image of vast deserts begins a macabre list of comparisons having to do with sterility. Deserts are hot and barren, a denial of the life-giving processes of love and sexual activity. No wet, living "vegetable love" can be found in Marvell's desert.

Lines 25-27

These lines emphasize the loss of beauty that happens to all people over time,

especially pertaining to the mistress. The “marble vault” is the resting place for the deceased mistress’s corpse. The speaker’s song of praise will go unheard and unsung when death levels them both; thus the implication is that death is a final stopping place beyond which no magnificent love can escape.

Lines 28-30

The speaker’s grotesque image of the worm penetrating the virgin corpse as it consumes the rotting flesh shocks many readers. The point is that such preserved virtues mean nothing when stretched over the expanse of time. Thus, the speaker offers another persuasive reason for the mistress to give in. “Quaint honor” reflects that fact that virginity will seem a quaint but useless treasure at the end of life. The speaker alludes to the Biblical phrase of “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” (commonly used at funerals) to emphasize his thriving, passionate lust being reduced to oblivion, just like the mistress’s virginity.

Lines 31-32

With the close of section II, the poem uses understatement and irony, praising the grave as a “fine” and “private” place. This is a perfect transition to the carpe diem theme of section III. The speaker uses a grammatical pause to interrupt line 32, making him seem humble and modest. The speaker’s charm and tactfulness are implied by the restraint he uses to punctuate line 32. (In poetry, taking a pause in the middle of a line is a called a caesura.)

Lines 33-34

Section III returns to the theme of youthful lust. The speaker uses imperative mood verbs that give commands, exhortation, and urgent directions to his mistress. While youth is present, the mistress’s skin glows in vitality like the morning dew. This simile as originally published used the word “glew” instead of “dew.” Some

scholars suggested that "glew" was a dialectal form of "glow," as in "the skin's healthy glow." The alternative possibility that "glew" means "glue" is not attractive to the tone of the lover's argument. Probably the best choice in modernizing a seventeenth-century poem would be to substitute "dew" as in the present text.

Lines 35-37

The speaker says that the young soul of his mistress breathes out through her beautiful skin in "instant fires" of enthusiasm and passion for love. The speaker wants his mistress to yield to his lust now while she can still respond before time takes its toll.

Lines 38-40

The speaker makes use of a set of harsh images that lend intensity and force to his expression. The simile of "birds of prey" is an unexpected choice for a love poem; some might consider it bizarre for the poem to compare a lover and his mistress to birds of prey who want to eat, not be eaten by Time. The comparison says that the speaker wants to devour Time like a hawk devours a rabbit caught in the fields—rapidly, in the heat of the moment, unthinkingly and instinctively. Time with his "slow-chapt power" is imagined as slowly chewing up the world and its people; thus the speaker implies he and his mistress are in a desperate fight against Time.

Lines 41-44

In these lines, the poem uses the metaphor of a cannonball of "strength" and "sweetness" rolled into a concentrated package of energy that "tears" through the barriers of restraint. The juxtaposition of "strife" with "pleasures" indicates the ferocious breakthrough of the speaker's argument winning over his mistress.

Lines 45-46

In the concluding couplet, the speaker and his mistress triumphantly turn back the destructive forces of Time, avidly eating Time instead of being eaten by it. The speaker and his mistress force the sun to race them instead of passively begging the sun to stand still like Joshua did in the Bible, when he pleaded with God to make the sun stand still so the Israelites might defeat the Amorites in broad daylight.

Themes in “To His Coy Mistress”

Time

Time is clearly the most important issue bothering the speaker of “To His Coy Mistress”; the subject spans the entire length of the piece, from the first line to the forty-sixth. The most obvious relationship to time here is that this work is a traditional carpe diem poem, which means that it encourages the listener to “seize the day”—to make the most of today and not put off action until tomorrow. In this particular case, the speaker is addressing a woman with whom he wants to have sex. He uses the threat of what time will do to her “quaint honor” and “long-preserved virginity” to convince her to give both up to him before they decay. A psychological interpretation—looking beneath the surface of the speaker’s claims to see intentions that he himself is not aware of—might find the situation to be the reverse of what it seems: instead of using the idea of time to get the sex he desires, he might be using sex to push away his own awareness of time’s passing. The first section of the poem, lines 1 through 20, describes an idyllic fantasy of how the speaker would behave if time had no effect, while the second part (lines 21-32) presents time’s effects in the most gruesome terms conceivable. In the last section, the speaker concocts a scheme to battle time’s passage with a cannonball made up of “our sweetness.” This tactic hints at desperation. It may be that he is overly

anxious to take the woman's virginity and will therefore spin any elaborate hoax for which she might fall. Modern psychology, though, particularly the work of Carl Jung, might say that the fear of death the speaker stirs up is not just a ruse to weaken her defenses, it is a real fear, his fear. The poem's last image, of making the sun (representing time) run, indicates a need for distraction that applies as easily to this speaker's forty-six-line plea as it does to the person he is trying to convince.

Love and Passion

"To His Coy Mistress" begins as a declaration of the speaker's love, but, by its end, it makes the assumption that the woman being addressed is as passionate as the speaker. He declares his love in fantastic, larger-than-life terms in the first twenty lines, because he is describing an admittedly unreal situation: his love would grow to span continents and stretch from the beginning of time to the end, he tells her, *if only it could.* Readers can recognize a slight touch of irony in the way that he pretends to be frustrated with reality for not allowing his wildly elaborate "proof" of love. After frightening the woman in the middle section of the poem, with visions of what will happen that are much worse than what he would like to happen, the speaker presumes her to be as lustful as he is. There is a clear turning point in lines 31 and 32, where he presumes her agreement in his sarcasm of isolation—he could list any number of things that people do not do in the grave, but his use of the double meaning of "embrace" (none embrace the grave and none embrace each other in the grave) takes for granted that embracing is the thing to do. The last part of the poem speaks from a conspiratorial "we" stance about how they can, together, fight life's limits with sex, most overtly in the couplet "And tear our pleasures with rough strife / Through the iron gates of life."

Beauty

The woman's concern for her beauty, her vanity, is the tool that the speaker of this poem tries to use to make time's passage a threat to her. His initial flattery of her beauty is abstract, with no mention of her physical attributes at all, but only exaggerated, hyperbolic declarations of his love. In line 13, his admiration for the woman subtly shifts to praise for the parts of her he can see: her forehead, her eyes, both her breasts and "the rest." Before his inventory becomes too leering, though, he ends it with her heart, an unseen place where the physical and the spiritual come together. In line 25, he uses the impending loss of her beauty as something of a threat, as he reminds her of the ravages of death and decay and how they will destroy what she is trying to preserve by retaining her virginity.

Death

The middle section of the poem, lines 21 to 32, applies the philosophical concept of time passing to the biological reality of life. Some of the imagery used to capture the idea of death is common and familiar—the marble vault, the grave, and the dust and ashes are all details that have been used before to represent the body's fate after death. The image of worms ravaging the corpse, however, is notably rough in this context; it is a little more vivid and disgusting than the speaker's thoughtful carpe diem warning deserves. it is a tactile image, invoking the sense of touch, while the other images are visual, and, because it belongs to one of the less-used senses, it is more potent. At the same time that the poem is most graphic about death, it is also most direct about what the speaker's intent actually is: the sarcastic use of "quaint" and "long-preserved" within a context of absolute death makes it clear that honor and virginity are the central targets of his argument.

Style of the poem

"To His Coy Mistress" is a poem of 46 lines that uses rhyming couplets and

is divided into three verse-paragraphs. Marvell presents a rhetorical situation with a speaker addressing his mistress. The poem masquerades as a syllogism, a three-part argument with major premise, minor premise, and conclusion. A syllogism is used in formal logic, but the three-part structure of “To His Coy Mistress” is deceptively illogical. In part 1 (lines 1-20), the speaker says in hypothetical conjecture that if he had enough time, he would praise his beloved mistress forever. In part 2 (lines 21-32), the tone abruptly shifts as the rapid movement of time rushes past, threatening to waste the speaker’s passion and the mistress’s glorious physical beauty. In part 3 (lines 33-46), the speaker urges—in violent, forceful language—that they should enjoy each other’s company and defeat “Time” at his own game. If a syllogism is properly constructed, the conclusion is irrefutable. However, the speaker’s conclusion is illogical: the mistress’s yielding cannot stop the progress of the sun and speed it away. Yet Marvell’s poem is sophisticated, evocative, and emotionally moving, certainly among the best of seventeenth-century lyrics and one of the most artfully executed carpe diem poems of all time.

Marvell is sometimes described as a metaphysical poet, a trait seen in his style and choice of metaphors. Metaphysical poets were a group of seventeenth-century writers who attempted to reinvigorate the artificial, idealized views of human nature and love common in poems of the previous century. The Petrarchan love poem, particularly, had become standardized and unimaginative, describing lovely women with clichéd metaphors. For example, Petrarchan poets described cold and unreachable women being worshipped by distressed lovers from afar. These poets compared their mistress’s eyes to the sun, their hair to golden grain, their white skin to snow, their red lips to roses, and so forth. Metaphysical poets such as Marvell tried to reanimate the poetic line to resemble more closely the

actual verbal exchanges of people. They organized their poems in the form of heated arguments with a reluctant mistress, a friend, God, Death, or the poet himself. Metaphysical poets sometimes employed twisted, illogical turns of thought and spiced up their lines with witty metaphors and outrageous, shocking puns and paradoxes. Sometimes serious and sometimes playful, the metaphysical poets deliberately confused the language of erotic love with the language of intense religious experience. It was not until well into the twentieth century that the metaphysical poets were really appreciated for their originality.

John Milton

Milton and the Puritan Commonwealth.

The execution of Charles I by Parliament in January of 1649 signaled a sudden end to the Cavaliers' musings, and although certain poets like Waller and Herrick continued to write in this vein following the restoration of the monarchy, the decisive Puritan victory quieted such voices for a time. During the Puritan Commonwealth, many Royalist supporters were forced to flee England before returning, or like Herrick, to exist on the gifts of their friends before taking up the life they had enjoyed during the war. During the Puritan Commonwealth devotional works, religious polemics, and sensational prophecies continued to pour from England's presses, although there was little market in the heated religious climate of the 1650s for the kind of gracious and elegant poetry once championed by Cavalier society. One of the figures that continued to fuel the anxious political debates of the period was John Milton (1608–1674), who early in life had trained to be a Puritan minister, but until the 1640s had spent much of his time studying and perfecting his skills as a poet. During the Civil Wars Milton first became embroiled in the battle between Puritans and Royalists when he published a number of pamphlets attacking the episcopacy. With the establishment of the Commonwealth, he continued his activities as a propagandist for the Puritan cause, although he also served as a secretary to the Council of State. Increasingly blind, he nevertheless continued to support the cause, publishing one tract so vehement in defending the Puritan cause that it was burnt in ceremonial bonfires in several French cities. As the Commonwealth began to flounder in the months following the death of its Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, Milton tried to rally support for the increasingly

unpopular government, again by serving as a pamphleteer. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, though, he was forced into hiding, eventually arrested, and after a short imprisonment, he was fined and released. His political career now in ruins, ilton retired to his home in London where he began to write his masterpieces, *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671). Both works still rank among some of the most challenging reading in the English language, filled as they are with a complex syntax, abstruse vocabulary, numerous difficult classical allusions, and a complicated epic style. Despite their Puritan religious orthodoxy, the two monumental poems present Milton's breadth of learning and the complexities of his opinion. In *Paradise Lost* the author tells the story of man's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, and presents one of the most sympathetic portraits of Satan ever recorded in the Western tradition. Milton treats him in the manner of a tragic hero, whose fatal flaw lies in the perversions of sin. Although the story of the Fall recorded in Genesis was well known to Milton's readers, and had long been given a host of literary treatments, the poems still manage to possess considerable originality and breadth of imagination. It is for this reason that their author has long been lauded as the English poet whose powers rank second only to William Shakespeare. Yet the crowning achievements of Milton's career as a literary figure were intricately embroiled in the harsh political realities of the seventeenth-century state. Had it not been for Milton's banishment from public life because of his complicity in the Puritan Commonwealth, his great life work might never have been completed.

Milton’s Poetry

One way of approaching Milton is to consider him as a writer at an opposite remove from Donne in terms of religious sensibility. Donne questions everything

and refuses to untie the knots he creates, yet at the back of Donne's poetry is the remnant of a Catholic desire to embrace all of experience in a comprehensive and traditional world picture. Milton, by contrast, a Puritan, and indeed the most eloquent defender of Cromwell's regime, engages in fundamental religious and political rethinking. Donne in a sense looks, almost longingly, towards the past, whereas Milton is interested in the future and in establishing a new order.

Milton was born in London in 1608. His father was a scrivener (a copier of legal documents), and, it is worth noting in the context of a century where changes of religious allegiance seem widespread, a Catholic who joined the Church of England. In the course of time, Milton himself would come to regard the Church-of England as tyrannical as the Catholic Church. His early works include “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso” (both 1631), two masques (Arcades, 1633, and *Comus,* 1634), and an elegy *(Lycidas,* 1637). In 1638-9 he travelled abroad, mainly in Italy; his travels extended his intellectual and poetic interests, but also added to his hostility towards Catholicism. On his return to England, Milton began the second phase of his writing career, producing political prose against the monarchy and supporting the republican cause. Overall Milton wrote on a vast range of topics, but there is always one informing idea: that the English people are special and elect, having been chosen by God to create a new state separate from the past and based upon individual freedom and choice.

“On His Blindness” by John Milton

WHEN I consider how my light is spent
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, least he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best, his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite.

Notes

1....light is spent: This clause presents a double meaning: (a) how I spend my days, (b) how it is that my sight is used up.

2....Ere half my days: Before half my life is over. Milton was completely blind by 1652, the year he turned 44.

3....talent: See Line 3: Key to the Meaning.

4....useless: Unused.

5....therewith: By that means, by that talent; with it

6....account: Record of accomplishment; worth

7....exact: Demand, require

8....fondly: Foolishly, unwisely

9....Patience: Milton personifies patience, capitalizing it and having it speak.

10..God . . . gifts: God is sufficient unto Himself. He requires nothing outside of Himself to exist and be happy.

11. yoke: Burden, workload.

12. post: Travel.

Poem Summary

Many people are familiar with the story of Ludwig Van Beethoven. This man, in spite of being deaf, managed to become a world-renowned composer. What a terrible fate: to have the sense most integral to your art be taken away from you. Similar is the story of **John Milton**, an English poet, who, by 1655 at age 48, was blind. His ability to write was threatened and, as a result, his relationship with God became complicated.

In ***On His Blindness***, Milton is struggling to understand what God expects of him now that he is losing his sight. He's upset about wasting 'that one Talent which is death to hide' (line 3), which is a biblical reference to the parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30), in which two people invest their talents (in the story, 'talents' are money), while another just hides his talent in a hole and is punished. Milton feels that God expects him to use his talent for writing poetry in a way that honors Him.

Milton is frustrated that his lack of sight is preventing him from serving God when he wants to so badly:

...Though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account... (lines 4-6)

Milton's 'true account' refers to his religious poetry. Much of his poetry was concerned with God's relationship to mankind and he considered it a serious duty to write poetry that simultaneously made God's mysterious ways more clear to people and honored God with its craft.

At line 7, Milton wonders if God still expects him to keep writing without his sight, then decides that God is more forgiving than he was giving him credit for, Surely, knowing of his condition and strong desire to please Him, God wouldn't expect anything that he couldn't possibly accomplish, nor would he punish him.

The last half of the poem has a calmer tone. It's almost like Milton realizes that while he's writing that people can serve God in many different ways. It's the intent and the grace with which one deals with hardship that counts:

Who best
Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best.

Within 14 lines, Milton has depicted a wavering, then regaining of faith.

Theme

God judges humans on whether they labor for Him to the best of their ability. For example, if one carpenter can make only two chairs a day and another carpenter can make five, they both serve God equally well if the first carpenter makes his two chairs and the second makes his five. If one carpenter becomes severely disabled and cannot make even a single chair, he remains worthy in the sight of God. For, as Milton says in the last line of the poem, "they also serve who only stand and wait."

Lines 3-6: Key to the Meaning

Lines 3 to 6 of the poem allude to the "Parable of the Talents" in Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, verses 14 to 30. In this famous parable, an employer who is going away for a time gives his three servants money in proportion to their ability to increase its value. He distributes the money in talents, a unit of weight used in ancient times to establish the value of gold, silver, or any other medium used as money. Thus, a Roman might pay ten talents of gold for military supplies or seven

talents of silver for a quantity of food. In the "Parable of the Talents," the employer gives the first servant five talents of silver, the second servant two talents, and the third servant one talent. After the employer returns from the trip and asks for an accounting, the first servant reports that he doubled his talents to ten and the second that he doubled his to four. Both men receive promotions. The third servant then reports that he still has only one talent, for he did nothing to increase its value. Instead, he buried it. The employer denounces him for his laziness, gives his talent to the man with ten, and casts him outside into the darkness.

Analysis

Line 1-2

"When I consider how my light has spent"

Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,"

The speaker thinks that all of his light is used up ("spent") before even half his age is over. Now he lives in a world that is both "dark and wide." because he is a man without light,

The first word of the poem, "When," gives us an idea of the structure of a conditional sentence. Such as "When I broke the glass, I had to find something to sweep it up."

But the second part of this conditional sentence doesn't come until lines 7 and 8.

Most readers believe that the poem is clearly about Milton's blindness, but the poem never directly refers to blindness or even vision. Instead, we think that "light" is a metaphor for vision.

The metaphor is complicated. The speaker says that his light can be "spent," and this word suggests that he is thinking of something like an oil lamp. The light is

"spent" when the oil in the lamp runs out. To make a contemporary comparison, it would be like someone comparing his vision to a flashlight that runs out of batteries before it is supposed to.

The word "spent" also makes us think of money. Milton is reflecting on how he has used or "spent" his vision, now that it is gone.

The word "ere" means "before." Milton went completely blind at the age of 42.How does Milton know that he became blind before his life was halfway over? Actually, Milton guesses roughly how long he will live.

Finally, calling the world "dark and wide" makes it sound like a fearful place, Interestingly, Milton makes it seem as if the world has run out of light, rather than growing dark because of his blindness.

Lines 3-4

"And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodge with me…. [..]

Here, the key word is "talent." You probably read "talent" and think of skills like swimming or singing etc. But there's a double meaning. It is an allusion taken from the history of Bible . In the ancient world, a "talent" was also a unit or weight by which money was measured, just as a "pound" is a unit of both weight and currency.

You can read "Matthew 25", in The Gospel of Mathews. There is story of "The Parable of Talents."

Here is brief summary of "The Parable of Talents." A lord gives three of his servants some money ("talents") to hold on to when he leaves for a trip. Two of the servants use the money to gain more money for their master. (In present language, we know this usage of money as 'investment.') But the third servant just buries the

money, When the lord returns, he is happy with the first two servants and gives them more responsibilities (award), but furious with the third servant. He exiles the third servant into the "darkness," which is now similar to the "death."

When Milton says that talent is "death to hide," he is referring to the money in the Biblical story and also to his own "talent," and his talent is a skill.

There is no way to tell what specific talent he means, but our guess would be his intelligence and his writing and reading skills. This "talent" is "lodged" or buried within the speaker just like the money in the story. It cannot be used to make greater profit.

Lines 4-6

"[…] though my soul more bent

To serve therewith, my Maker and present

My true account, leat he returning chide"

The speaker tells us that his talent is as useless as money buried in the desert, but now he says that his unwillingness or lack of desire is not responsible for this uselessness of his skill (talent). Rather, his soul desires (is "bent") to use his skills in the service of his "Maker," God.

He thinks that when he is faced with God, he wants to have a record of accomplishment to show to God.

God is being compared with the lord from the "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25. When God "returns" to him like the master in the parable, the speaker wants to show to his muster that he has used his talents profitably.

The word "account" here means both" story" and "a record of activities with money."

If the speaker turns out to have wasted his profits, he worries that God will

scold or "chide" him. And if God is anything like the lord from the parable, the speaker could get cast into darkness even more fearful than the suffering of his blindness.

Lines 7-8

"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"

I foundly ask --- […]

It has taken the speaker six lines to get through the part of the sentence that begins "When." Now he goes on to say what happens "when" he thinks about all things he has described above. He asks whether God demands (exact) that people do hard, physical work, or "day-labour," when they don't have any light.

The speaker doesn't have any light because he's blind, but in Milton's metaphor he compares this condition to having to do work at night that you would normally do during the day – like, say, building a house or plowing a field.

The word "exact" means something like "charge," "claim," or "demand." For example ,You can "exact" 500 taka as your fees. So the speaker wants to know if God demands work as a kind of payment that is due to Him.

The first section of the poem is completed by the words "I fondly ask." The word "fondly" means "foolishly," not "lovingly." The speaker accuses himself of being a idiot for even thinking this question.

Fortunately, "patience" steps in to prevent his foolishness. More on that in the next section.

Lines 8-10

[…] but patience, to prevent

That murmur, soon replies, "God does not need

Either man's work or his own gift; who best

Patience is personified as someone who can talk to the speaker. Patience is often personified in Christian art because of its role in helping one to achieve important virtues like courage and wisdom.

The speaker is about to "murmur" his foolish question about whether God would be so cruel as to make impossible demands of work, but then his patience stops him by the answers. The rest of the poem is the reply made by patience.

First, a patience point out that God does not need anything. God is complete and perfect. He doesn't need work or talents ("gifts") of any kind.

Line 11

Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. […]

Now patience points out its second point. Patience argues that those people are the best servants of God who allow their fates to be linked with and controlled by God, as if they were wearing a yoke.

Essentially, this means accepting things as they come, especially suffering and misfortune.

A "yoke" is a wood frame that is placed around the necks of farm animals, like ox, cow, so that they can be directed.

Patience doesn't want to make God sound like an unkind slave driver, so God's yoke is called "mild," or not-that is bad. Actually It's not a matter how much you get the time on earth to be loyal to God, it's how you handle your submission to God.

Lines 11-14

[…] his state

Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed

And post o'er land and ocean without rest:

They also serve who only stand and wait.

The final point made by patience is that God is like a king, not a lord, so the "Parable of the Talents" does not strictly apply.

Lord needs everyone of his servants on his estates to work for them. A Lord is rich but not so rich that they would keep useless servant. So A Lord usually doesn't keep servants who are only for stand around and wait for. On the other hand, Kings have unlimited resources, especially if they control a "state" as large as the entire earth.

With His kingly status, God has plenty of worshiper to do His "bidding" by rushing from place to place, they do things that require light and vision. It doesn't make a difference whether one more person fulfills the role or not.

But kings also have people who "wait" on them, who stand in a state of readiness until their action is needed.

So, we believe that the sentence, "His state is kingly," is meant to contrast with the "lordly" state of the master of the Biblical parable in Matthew 25.

Of course, "wait" can also have the meaning of waiting for something to happen, as in, "I waited for the bus."

What would the speaker be waiting for? The Second Coming of Jesus? The end of history? We don't know because the poem only suggests this meaning so confusingly.

The word "post" here just means "to travel quickly."

The poem ends with a sign of the speaker's disability and this disability is forced on him by his blindness.

"Sonnet 12: I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs" by John Milton

I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
By the known rules of ancient liberty,
When straight a barbarous noise environs me
Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs:
As when those hinds that were transform'd to frogs
Rail'd at Latona's twin-born progeny
Which after held the sun and moon in fee.
But this is got by casting pearl to hogs,
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
And still revolt when truth would set them free.
Licence they mean when they cry liberty;
For who loves that, must first be wise and good.
But from that mark how far they rove we see,
For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.

Notes

1] Written after Milton's published advocacy of freer divorce had brought upon him criticisms from leading Puritans of the Presbyterian party. First printed in *Poems*, 1673.
clogs: restraints (literally, a heavy piece of wood attached to the leg to prevent escape).

2] Milton's divorce pamphlets appeal to the liberty given to the Israelites in the Old Dispensation, and to those given permanently to mankind by the law of nature.

5-7] The reference is to the noise made by the frogs into which Latona transformed the rude rustics who, by muddying the waters, prevented her drinking from

the lake Lacia, as she flew from the wrath of Juno, carrying her twin off-spring Phoebus and Phoebe, the destined rulers of sun and moon (see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 317-81.

8] Cf. "Give not what is holy unto the dogs; neither cast your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6).

9-11] Milton extends his condemnation from those who ignorantly reject his doctrine to those who ignorantly welcome it and in so doing make it an excuse for licence.

13] rove: shoot away from the mark.

14] despite the expenditure of wealth and human lives in the war for freedom.

This sonnet was one of Milton's works on his divorce. The negativity in his divorce work usually prevails over reason. This work in particular was said to be targeted at one of two groups, Presbyterians who had rejected his divorce pamphlets, or the radical sects who had welcomed them too enthusiastically.

I did but prompt the age to quit their cloggs By the known rules of antient libertie, When strait a barbarous noise environs me Of Owles and Cuckoes, Asses, Apes and Doggs.

The first section of this sonnet is Milton asking readers to leave behind their thoughts on the divorce laws and to not listen to the opinions swirling around you from others.

As when those Hinds that were transform'd to Froggs Raild at Latona's twin-born progenie Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee. But this is got by casting Pearl to Hoggs;

This part is a reference to Apollo and Diana, the deities of the sun and moon, and their mother, Latona. Latona went to drink from a pool of water, and the villagers did not allow it, so they were all turned to frogs. The line of the sun and moon holding them in fee means that Apollo and Diana could hold the villagers as their own.

That bawle for freedom in their senceless mood, And still revolt when truth would set them free. Licence they mean when they cry libertie;

In this, he targets the Prebytarians and their rejection of divorce. It was said that Milton didn't target them for taking the Reformation too far, but rather, not taking it far enough.

For who loves that, must first be wise and good; But from that mark how far they roave we see For all this wast of wealth, and loss of blood. To close the sonnet, Milton says that the civil war took a toll on the people and their quality of life, but did so in vain. It is in vain because those now in power, the Presbytarians, have reverted to old habits that should be a thing of the past, rather than spreading liberty.

II. Paraphrase

I only suggested that the age give up their weights and chains
by ancient liberty's known rules,
when suddenly I'm surrounded by a barbarous noise
of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs.
It was like those deer that were transformed to frogs
that yelled and ranted at Latona's twin-born children

Who, afterwards, held the sun and moon in their possession.
But this is what you get from casting pearl to hogs;
That cry for freedom in their senseless state of mind,
And they still revolt against the truth when the truth would set them free.
Being free from all restrictions is what they mean when they cry liberty;
For people who love liberty must first be wise and good;
But from that target, we see how far their arrows miss the mark
For all this waste of wealth, and loss of blood.

III. Background

In 1643, Milton published what is considered one of his most controversial works, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (Kerrigan et al. 857). At the time, divorce was nearly impossible in England, and if one did have a special case that could constitute a divorce, such as adultery or abuse, it was illegal to remarry. Milton argued that incompatibility and unhappiness were viable reasons for divorce, and that people should have a second chance at happiness with an opportunity to remarry. His ideas were radical, and with "Sonnet 12," Milton makes it clear that his arguments for divorce were not well-received. This piece was his second sonnet on his divorce tracts and was probably written in 1646 (148). *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* seems to have initially sparked heated conversation, but printed responses did not appear until a year after its publication (148). These responses were mostly "by Presbyterians, overwhelmingly negative, and virtually without exception exercises in ridicule rather than reasoned argument" (148). Therefore, this sonnet is Milton's response to all of the negative response towards

his previous work.

IV. Allusions

Line 2- The “known rules of ancient liberty” are the Mosaic divorce laws.

Lines 5-7: Here, Milton is alluding to Roman poet Ovid’s *The Metamorphoses.* In book six, the goddess Latona gives birth to twins Apollo and Diana on the Greek island Delos. Apollo is considered the deity of the sun, and Diana the deity of the moon. To escape Juno’s jealous wrath, Latona flees with her children to Lycia. The goddess, exhausted and parched, sees a small lake and a deep valley that is surrounded by lowly farm laborers. As she kneels to drink from the lake, these peasants deny the water to her. The goddess pleas with them, explaining that she and her children are exhausted and need to drink, and that everyone has the right to the water as nature’s gifts are public, not private. Her children stretch out their arms towards the peasants, but these peasants are unmoved. They use their hands and feet to upset the mud on the bottom of the lake so that the water will be too muddy for Latona and her children to drink. Outraged, Latona turns these rustics into frogs, cursing them to live in the swamp forever (*Metamorphoses,* Kline).

Line 8: Milton alludes to The New Testament, Matthew 7:6: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” Jesus ascends a mountain and teaches the word of God to his disciples. In the seventh chapter of the book of Matthew, he warns that judging others leads to hypocrisy.

Line 10: Here, Milton presents another Biblical reference. A group of Jews do not believe Jesus is the son of God. He says to them, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

V. Milton's Use of Allusion

Milton is a master of allusion. It is not uncommon to find both Biblical and classical references intricately entwined in his work, just as he has done in "Sonnet 12." He opens the sonnet with a Biblical allusion to Mosaic divorce law: "I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs / By the known rules of ancient liberty" (149). These lines are ambiguous- he could mean that the clogs are caused by these laws; however, he could also be suggesting that he *used* these laws to prompt others to rid themselves of their clogs. He uses "clogs" as a metaphor for these laws because the laws are like weights or chains. Like a chain would hold a person in one place, these laws are preventing people from progressing. However, notice Milton refers to them as "rules of ancient liberty," not "old, outdated nonsense." Though he is being critical, he is not dismissing or disrespecting Mosaic law. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,* Milton uses the Bible to support his argument by claiming that people have misinterpreted the words of Moses. With this allusion, Milton is suggesting that the misinterpretation of the law, not the laws itself, has become a stumbling block, and he has only used to law to encourage others to see pass their folly.

In lines five through seven, Milton references the Latona myth as described in Ovid's*Metamorphoses.* However, he adds an interesting twist to the myth- he suggests that Latona turns "hinds," or deer, into frogs instead of peasants. Immediately before this allusion, he lists animals that make up a barbarous chorus: "owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs" (Milton 149). This chorus of animals serves as a metaphor for the hostility, ridicule, and aimless uproar that followed when he "prompt[ed] the age to quit their clogs" by arguing for a change in divorce law. This serves as a kind of degeneration of the people; they are acting impulsively

and thoughtlessly (animal-like) instead of rationally (human-like).Through listing different types of animals, he adds an even deeper meaning to the metaphor, as we instinctively associate certain animals with certain characteristics. Owls are often associated with knowledge and wisdom, cuckoos with nonsense and madness, asses with foolishness, and dogs and apes are usually associated with barbarity. Therefore, Milton is using these animals to symbolize different kinds of people- some (like the owls) may be wiser and more knowledgeable than others, but when they angrily prosecute and ridicule, they become another noise in the barbarous animal chorus. In other words, some of these people are intellectuals that have stooped to a lower level, as they are getting caught up in the momentum of a fiery public opinion.

This metaphor is crucial to understanding Milton's reason for rewriting the Latona myth. With changing the farmers to deer, he has added another creature to the animal chorus. Deer are considered to be timid, kind, and noble creatures. Again, Milton is using an animal to symbolize a certain type of person. Here, we have deer (or kind, noble people) deciding to rail at Latona and her children. The speaker adds that Latona's children afterwards "held the sun and moon in fee" (Milton 149), emphasizing that they were able to overcome this cruel treatment in a spectacular way. Therefore, the speaker seems to be suggesting good people can be condemned for their hateful actions, as deer can be turned into frogs.

Latona's speech about the public use of water also adds an interesting parallel. Latona attempts to reason with peasants, saying: "Why do you forbid me your waters? The use of water is everyone's right. Nature has not made the sun, or the

air, or the clear waves, private things. I come for a public gift" (*Metamorphoses,* Kline). Due to the history and context of the poem, one can conclude that with this allusion, Milton is asserting that he too has been railed at for taking part in a public gift- the right to publicly express his opinion, beliefs, and ideas.

Directly after this classical allusion, Milton makes another Biblical allusion in line eight: "But this is got by casting pearl to hogs" (Milton 149). With this allusion, the pearls represent the speaker's ideas, as he clearly values and prizes both his ideas and the right to express them. The swine serve as another degeneration and representation of people. Therefore, the speaker is using this allusion to suggest when one casts their pearls (valuable ideas) to swine (crude people,) it can be expected that one's ideas will be trampled and torn to pieces. This quote takes place in the book of Matthew, where Jesus warns others that judgment and cruel treatment of others leads to hypocrisy. It seems our speaker makes this reference as a reminder to others, as he is promoting the same concept.

This allusion leads into another, perhaps more subtle, Biblical allusion: "That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood, / And still revolt when the truth would set them free" (Milton 149). These swine, or hateful people that trample ideas, cry for freedom, but they cannot achieve freedom because they maintain an aimless and senseless state of mind. The speaker suggests that these people cannot achieve freedom, because instead of seeking truth or reason, they bawl senselessly in hopes of freedom, a concept they don't truly understand.

VI. Poetics

Milton chose to write this poem in the form of an Italian sonnet- a poem that requires tight iambic pentameter but allows flexibility in the rhyme scheme of the sestet (last six lines of the poem.) The octave, (the first eight lines,) follows an "abba, abba" rhyme. The sestet follows "cbbcbc."

Near rhyme- Milton employs occasional near rhyme in the poem. For example, "liberty," "progeny," and "fee," as well as "mood," "good," and "blood." Of course, this was a deliberate choice, as Milton was certainly skilled enough to compose perfect rhyme. The use of near rhyme reflects the dissonance that is referenced in the poem between the speaker and the animal-like others.

Interesting pairings- Some of the pairings of rhyming words also strengthens the poem's key themes. Milton's "a" rhyme consists of words with negative associations: "clogs, dogs, frogs, hogs." The "b" rhyme mostly consists of words with positive associations, such as "liberty, me, progeny, free, see." Notice that with "me" and "see," he equates himself with enlightenment and positivity. Therefore, Milton uses rhyme to emphasize the key tension in the poem.

VII. Theme

Milton addresses several important topics that give us insight to his personal experiences, as well as an insight into the representative culture. Through his allusions, and the degeneration of his opposition through the animal chorus metaphor, Milton was clearly disappointed, frustrated, and angered with the public's consensual rejection of his divorce arguments. He was not merely upset by

negative criticism, but because he "felt that he had become infamous without being given a fair hearing" (Kerrigan et al. 148-149).

Milton introduces another metaphor that reveals his attitude towards the politics of the time; he gives us hogs that "bawl for freedom" that "still revolt when truth would set them free" (Milton 149). Milton's ideas should appeal to the Parliamentarian rebels; however, in line eleven, he suggests that these rebels are senselessly crying for licentiousness (freedom from all restrictions) instead of democratic freedom, and they are not willing to consider the changes that should be made to obtain this freedom. In the final three lines of the poem, Milton directly references his opposition and the English Civil War: "For who loves that, [liberty] must first be wise and good; / But from that mark how far they rove we see / For all this waste of wealth, and loss of blood" (Milton 149). Milton closes with his attitude about the war- he feels that he war has been a complete waste because people who are fighting for progress are maintaining the same ideas, policies, and traditions. Kerrigan elaborates these lines further: "Milton rails against the Presbyterians for rendering the sacrifice of the Civil War pointless because they have not, as promised, produced liberty but instead renewed ancient habits of spiritual bondage" (Kerrigan et al. 149).

With having knowledge of Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and the historical context of the poem, it is nearly impossible to read the poem without establishing Milton as the speaker. However, without having knowledge of the author or any historical information, one could still decipher the poem's themes. Through Milton's strong use of metaphor, simile, and allusion, he presents themes that were not only relevant to his culture, but universal themes that will always

remain relevant. With “Sonnet 12,” Milton suggests:

Everyone should be able to publically express their views.

When one presents their prized ideas to the public, they must beware of the danger of being met with hostility.

People of all kinds-even the wise and noble- may get caught up in the momentum of public opinion.

People often oppose suggestions for change with cruel ridicule and without fair consideration, which is a dangerous misapplication of the liberty for which people fight and die.

Aphra Behn (1640–1689)

Aphra Behn, one of the most influential dramatists of the late seventeenth century, was also a celebrated poet and novelist. Aphra was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Johnson of nearby Canterbury. Johnson was a gentleman related to Francis, Lord Willoughby, who appointed him lieutenant general of Surinam, for which Willoughby was the royal patentee. Whether Aphra was Johnson's natural child or fostered by him is not known, but what has been established with reasonable certainty was that in 1663 Aphra accompanied Johnson, his wife, and a young boy, mentioned as Behn's brother, on a voyage to take up residence in the West Indies. Johnson died on the way, and the mother and two children lived for several months in Surinam. This episode was to have lasting effects on Behn's life. Her most famous novel, *Oroonoko* (1688), is based on her experiences there and her friendship with a prince of the indigenous peoples.

When her husband died, Behn was left without funds. Perhaps because of her association, through him, with the Dutch, she was appointed an intelligence gatherer for the king, who was, at least, to pay for her trip to Antwerp as his spy. But Charles did not respond to Behn's requests for money for her trip home, so in December 1666 she was forced to borrow for her passage back to England. Charles continued to refuse payment, and in 1668 Behn was thrown into debtor's prison. The circumstances of her release are unknown, but in 1670 her first play, *The Forc'd Marriage* (published, 1671), was produced in London, and Behn, having vowed never to depend on anyone else for money again, became one of the period's foremost playwrights. She earned her living in the theater and then as a novelist until her death on 16 April 1689.

Even before her arrest for indebtedness Aphra Behn had written poetry. These early poems are not as polished as the later incidental poems or those from her plays, but they indicate the versatility of her literary gifts and prefigure the skill and grace that characterize all of Behn's verse. Although it was impossible to make a living from writing poems exclusively, Behn, in the tradition of famous English playwrights whose poetry was also accorded distinction, pursued verse writing as an adjunct to her more lucrative work.

Some of Behn's lyrics originally appeared in her plays, and there were longer verses, such as the Pindaric odes, published for special occasions. But the majority of her poetry was published in two collections that included longer narrative works of prose and poetry as well as Behn's shorter verses. *Poems upon Several Occasions: with A Voyage to the Island of Love* (1684) and *Lycidus: Or The Lover in Fashion* (1688) reflect Behn's customary use of classical, pastoral, courtly, and traditionally English lyric modes. Forty-five poems appeared in *Poems upon Several Occasions;* ten poems were appended to *Lycidus*. Ten more works appeared in the 1685 *Miscellany*. Posthumous publications include poems in Charles Gildon's *Miscellany Poems Upon Several Occasions* (1692) and in *The Muses Mercury* (1707-1708).

Behn's distinctive poetic voice is characterized by her audacity in writing about contemporary events, frequently with topical references that, despite their allegorical maskings, were immediately recognizable to her sophisticated audience. Although she sometimes addressed her friends by their initials or their familiar names, she might just as easily employ some classical or pastoral disguise that was transparent to the initiated. Behn's poetry, therefore, was less public than her plays or her prose fiction, as it depended, in some cases, on the enlightened audience's

recognition of her topics for full comprehension of both the expression and implications of her verse. Such poetic technique involved a skill and craft that earned her the compliments of her associates as one who, despite her female form, had a male intelligence and masculine powers of reason.

“Angellica’s Lament” by Aphra Behn

Had I remained in innocent security,
I should have thought all men were born my slaves,
And worn my power like lightning in my eyes,
To have destroyed at pleasure when offended.
—But when love held the mirror, the undeceiving glass
Reflected all the weakness of my soul, and made me know
My richest treasure being lost, my honour,
All the remaining spoil could not be worth
The conqueror’s care or value.
—Oh how I fell like a long worshipped idol
Discovering all the cheat.

To summarize the poem, Love shows us the weakness inherent in ourselves, that we'd rather not see, and the act of falling in love can totally crumble our self-image. The speaker thought herself a queen, wielding supreme power over men, able to dash their hopes "at pleasure when offended." When she fell in love, that image "fell like a long worshipped idol." She had constructed and worshiped a false self, and its fall was deeply painful.

This fall may be fortunate and liberating in some way. Love is the "undeceiving glass," that mirror which "reflected all the weakness of [the]

soul." She had lost her honor by constructing this false idol, this false self, and love had shown it to her. Whatever plunder she could have gained when she wielded her false power couldn't be worth it, having known love. At its core, this poem is a liberation, albeit painful, from false self-image due to the true reflection of self that love provides.

“Love Armed” by Aphra Behn

Song from Abdelazar

Love in Fantastic Triumph sat,
Whilst Bleeding Hearts around him flowed,
For whom Fresh pains he did Create,
And strange Tyrannic power he showed;
From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,
Which round about, in sport he hurled;
But ’twas from mine he took desire
Enough to undo the Amorous World.

From me he took his sighs and tears,
From thee his Pride and Cruelty;
From me his Languishments and Fears,
And every Killing Dart from thee;
Thus thou and I, the God have armed,
And set him up a Deity;
But my poor Heart alone is harmed,

Whilst thine the Victor is, and free.

"Love Armed" is song from the play *Abdelazar* [sometimes spelled Abdelazer] *or, The Moor's Revenge*, by Aphra Behn, her only tragedy.

In the first stanza, Love is personified as a cruel tyrant who sits in "Triumph" amid the destruction he has wrought. Blood flows all around from "bleeding hearts," and, as if that is not enough, Love continues to cause "fresh pains." He is depicted as taking "fire" from bright eyes and hurling this as a weapon, amusing himself with the suffering he inflicts. After this generalized description of the carnage Love has wrought, the speaker becomes more personal in the last couplet of the stanza: Love has taken enough "desire" or unrequited love from the speaker to "undo the Amorous world."

In the second stanza, the poem contrasts the differing effects of love on the speaker and the speaker's beloved. Love takes "sighs," "tears," "languishments" and "fears" from the narrator, whose love has been scorned and whose heart is "harmed." But while Love has taken heartbreak and suffering from the speaker, he has, in contrast, extracted opposite emotions from the one the speaker loves: "Pride," "Cruelty" and "every Killing Dart." The narrator ends by stating that together, the dynamic of the unhappy relationship has empowered Love and made it a god, but in a way that has wounded the narrator's heart while leaving the beloved's heart victorious and free.

Roman emperors staged triumphs to display the spoils of their conquests. By using figures of speech taken from warfare that show Love as a similarly cruel tyrant and by depicting the narrator as love's victim, the poem emphasizes love's darker side. However, the hyperbole and stylized nature of the situation also distances the reader emotionally.

The poem "Love Armed", by Aphra Behn, contains multiple figures of speech (or literary devices).

The first line contains personification (the giving of human characteristics to non-human/ non-living things).

Love in Fantastic Triumph sat

Love is personified. Love cannot sit; humans sit.

While there are many examples of personification throughout the poem (as defined above) the most prominent is the giving of Triumph the ability to take away things from the speaker. The speaker is basically stating that he cannot obtain triumph given it has taken everything away from him in order for him to be defeated.

The poem seems to be (given poetic interpretation is given to an individual reader) about a love stolen from the speaker. The speaker has lost his love to another and, with the love gone, has lost everything that has meant anything to him.

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720)

Anne Finch's diverse and considerable body of work records her private thoughts and personal struggles but also illustrates her awareness of the social and political climate of her era. Not only do Finch's poems reveal a sensitive mind and a religious soul, but they exhibit great generic range and demonstrate her fluent use of Augustan diction and forms.

Descended from an ancient Hampshire family, Finch was born in April 1661, the third and youngest child of Anne Haselwood and Sir William Kingsmill. At the age of twenty-one, Finch was appointed one of six maids of honor to Mary of Modena, wife of the Duke of York, in the court of Charles II. Her interest in verse writing began during this period and was probably encouraged by her friendships

with Sarah Churchill and Anne Killigrew, also maids of honor and women of literary interests. It was during her residence in the court of Charles II that she met Colonel Heneage Finch, uncle of the fifth earl of Winchilsea and gentleman to the Duke of York. Finch fell in love with Anne and courted her persistently until they married. She resigned her post, although Heneage Finch continued to serve in various government positions. Their marriage was a happy one, as attested by his letters and several of her early poems. They led a quiet life, residing first in Westminster and then in London, as Heneage Finch became more involved in public affairs with the accession of James II in 1685. The couple wholly supported James throughout his brief and difficult reign and remained forever sympathetic to the interests of the Stuart court.

Following the revolution and deposition of James in 1689, Finch lost his government position and permanently severed himself from public life by refusing allegiance to the incoming monarchs, William and Mary. The subsequent loss of income forced the Finches to take temporary refuge with various friends in London until Heneage's nephew Charles invited them to settle permanently on the family's estate in Eastwell in 1689 or 1690, where they resided for more than twenty-five years. It was during the happy yet trying years of her early married life that Anne Finch began to pursue more seriously her interest in writing poetry. She adopted the pseudonym Ardelia, and not surprisingly, many of her earliest poems are dedicated to her "much lov'd husband," who appears as "Dafnis" in her work. Finch's poetry to her husband connects passionate love and poetry in subtle ways. In "A Letter to the Same Person," she makes explicit the intertwined nature of love and verse, insisting that one is dependent on the other:

Love without Poetry's refining Aid

Is a dull Bargain, and but coarsely made;
Nor e'er cou'd Poetry successful prove,
Or touch the Soul, but when the Sense was Love.
Oh! Cou'd they both in Absence now impart
Skill to my Hand, but to describe my Heart;

Finch's early poems to her husband demonstrate her awareness of the guiding poetic conventions of the day, yet also point to the problems such conventions pose to the expression of intimate thought. In "To Mr F Now Earl of Winchilsea," for example, she appropriately invokes the Muses for inspiration, only to reject such external sources in favor of her own emotion.

In addition to celebrating her love, Finch's earliest verse also records her own frustration and sense of loss following her departure from court in 1689. She and her husband remained loyal to the Catholic Stuarts, a tenuous stance to assume given the popularity of the Protestant William and Mary in Britain in the 1690s.

As her work developed more fully during her retirement at Eastwell, Finch demonstrated an increasing awareness of the poetic traditions of her own period as well as those governing older verse. Her work's affinity with the metaphysical tradition is evident in poems such as "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat," which represents the distanced perspective of the speaker through the image of the telescope, an emblem common to much religious poetry of the seventeenth century. Finch experimented with rhyme and meter and imitated several popular genres, including occasional poems, satirical verse, and religious meditations, but fables comprise the largest portion of her oeuvre. Most likely inspired by the popularity of the genre at the turn of the century, Finch wrote dozens of these often satiric vignettes between 1700 and 1713. Most of them were modeled after the short tales

of Jean La Fontaine, the French fable writer made popular by Charles II. Finch mocked these playful trifles, and her fables offer interesting bits of social criticism in the satiric spirit of her age.

However, Finch's more serious poems have received greater critical attention than her fables. "A Nocturnal Reverie," for instance, is clearly Augustan in its perspective and technique, although many admirers have tended to praise the poem as pre-Romantic: William Wordsworth mentioned its "new images of external nature" in his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" collected in his *Poems,* first published in 1815.

"A Song" by Anne Finch

Love, thou art best of Human Joys,
Our chiefest Happiness below;
All other Pleasures are but Toys,
Musick without Thee is but Noise,
And Beauty but an empty show.

Heav'n , who knew best what Man wou'd move,
And raise his Thoughts above the Brute;
Said, Let him Be, and Let him Love;
That must alone his Soul improve,
Howe'er Philosophers dispute.

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, lived and wrote in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Her work is still read widely today and lived a fascinating life. Her verse was influential in its own time and beyond, inspiring in particular William Wordsworth. She balanced the prevailing Augustan formalities and

structures with emotional content, as she herself thought that Love and Verse were inseparable, one useless without the other, much as this particular poem explains.

Love is what separates us from lesser beasts, from the "Brute" according to Finch. When creating man, "Heav'n" said, rather beautifully, "Let him Be, and Let him Love." It's clear in Finch's poem the purpose of our being; to love, to let our thoughts be moved towards Love. Love is the "best of Human Joys" and without it, music is just noise, pleasures are toys, and beauty is hollow. It's the fuel that runs our world, and given its divine origin in this poem, I think it's clear that it has a divine context as well. Loving brings us closer to Heaven, for Finch, and I think that's a beautiful image. No matter what philosophers and thinkers say about Love, Finch has made up her mind that it improves the human soul.

"On Myself" by Anne Finch

Good Heav'n, I thank thee, since it was designed
I should be framed, but of the weaker kind,
That yet, my Soul, is rescued from the love
Of all those trifles which their passions move.
Pleasures and praise and plenty have with me
But their just value. If allowed they be,
Freely, and thankfully as much I taste,
As will not reason or religion waste,
If they're denied, I on my self can live,
And slight those aids unequal chance does give.
When in the sun, my wings can be displayed,
And, in retirement, I can bless the shade.

This is an intricately original poem. As can often be the case with sonnets

from the period, the syntax isn't always easy. To what, for example, does "their" refer to in line four? My guess is that it refers to "other people," not to trifles, for it wouldn't make sense for the trifles to move their own passions.

To some degree, the poem seems to concern a self-restraint that comes easily to the person. She doesn't deny herself things by means of excruciating self-discipline, but if she doesn't experience certain pleasant things, she is content nonetheless. Both reason and religion seem to serve as guides, but she seems to work easily within the guidelines, which do not seem oppressive. She describes herself as "weaker"--meaning what? That she is "of the 'weaker' sex"--a woman? Or that she doesn't have appetites as powerful as those of other people?

The concluding couplet sets itself apart from the rest of the poem; the couplet seems to leap to the image of a winged creature--butterfly? bird?--in sun and shade. But the leap seems to work, reinforcing the sense in which the person is both balanced and content with the balance.

In “On Myself” and “To Death,” the central lines of each poem reveal something about the narrator, be it her opinions or true feelings on the overall subject of the work. It is here that she ceases to analyze things as they are or could be. She shows the reader her inner self and uses prosody to guide he or she there. The prosodic elements of the individual line, then, are greater purposed to the poem’s overall inverted structure and grant Finch’s work more meaning at both the minute and overarching levels.

“On Myself” again displays Finch’s repeated use of inversely mirrored lines to emphasize the center of a poem. Composed of twelve lines, the work is evenly split between perfectly iambic and substituted lines. This even divide represents the poem’s overarching theme: the split between the narrator’s physical body and her

internal activities. In lines one through four, the narrator thanks her maker for giving her a woman's body without the typical, pithy interests of the gender. The height and grace of heaven is emphasized in the first foot of line one when read with a spondee and creates an aural distance between its location and that of the narrator. This reading, however, could be iambic and make the whole line so, indicating moderate reverence for the holy instead of this more exalted one. The naturalness of her created position is set up by a return to the iambic, emphasizing her status as pre-defined for her. That the content of the following three lines portray the narrator as living an internal life separate from that of her body's gender does not mean the meter matches such an irregularity. Those lines remain perfectly iambic, arguing through regularity that that is the way she was meant to be. It is normal for her to be a woman externally yet operate internally on a different level. With so few substitutions, the content of this section is made the norm to the greater structure of the poem. It is the ideas presented therein that will be reinterpreted or adjusted in the middle section and re-addressed in the final set of four lines.

Finch inserts substitutes in all four of the middle lines, marking this section as different from the two mostly iambic sections that surround it in both content and meter. This prosodic action aurally indicates what the lines literally dictate. The narrator is different from other women, from her body superficially, as well as from the other lines. At line five, the first foot is replaced with a trochee, calling attention to the list of qualities the narrator establishes as most natural to women. That the rest of the line is iambic gives the words the same meaning as the iambic does in all of Finch's poetry; this is the natural state of the subject—in this case, most women. Line six interrupts this natural order in the first foot: "But their" could be read as a trochee or an iamb. A trochee strongly indicates a difference in her attitude toward

the listed qualities of pleasure, praise, and plenty versus other women's estimation of these things. She values them no more than they are worth. Understanding this phrase as an iamb shifts emphasis from the narrator's estimation to the value of the items. The important content to note is the true value of the items, not her opinion of that value. The trochaic reading better supports and draws attention to the poem's overall efforts to distinguish the narrator as an outsider to her gender. A spondee on "just value" equates its stress level with that of "Good Heav'n" in line one (6). This emphasis accomplishes two things. One, it argues that her estimation of the qualities listed earlier is the same as the true value given them by God; and two, it draws attention to the internal struggle of the narrator.

In true Finch style, this inner disorder occurs at the middle line. She equates her responses as natural, yet possibly contradictory to the natural internal state of women. While she is externally a woman, she does not experience life as other women do. She gives experiences no extra emotion or emphasis than what they naturally elicit. Yet God created her to feel as she does even though it is contrary to how he makes other women. This struggle is reflected not only in the content, but in the struggle to metrically identify both phrases as spondees or iambs. Pairing them in this way, however, deepens the narrator's struggle. This deeper revelation is brief, however, and dissipates as the poem moves beyond the middle line and the narrator's thoughts into hypothesizing.

The pyrrhic substitution comes at the third foot of line six, but exists on either side of a caesura in the form of a period. This placement weakens the strength of the following sentence where Finch begins to describe a scenario in which her opinion is the model. Though the first and second syllable of the line are not joined together to make a foot, both are unstressed. This makes the insertion of her own

opinion the lower, or opposite of the doubly-stressed “Good Heav’n” or the “just value” of earlier (1, 6). While the narrator may not be doing this to indicate a complete inferiority to the Lord, it indicates the proper amount of reverence when comparing her opinion to that of her Lord. The trochee occurring in the first foot of line seven and the pyrrhic substitution in the third foot disrupt the iambic stress to illustrate how differently the narrator’s own thoughts stand in comparison to her fellow women. Her responses are not bound as theirs are, yet follow the regular iambic meter of reason and religion in the rest of line seven and eight. This signals the end of the central portion of the poem and closes off the reader’s glimpse into the narrator’s true perspective of the world. Just as the first four discussed how heaven normally creates a woman’s perspective, so will the last four address an alternative to her views.

Lines nine through twelve explore the narrator’s determination that if she were not to experience a response to pleasures, praise, and plenty at all, she would be just as capable of living. Her attitude toward such responses would engender the same dislike as they actually do, but to a greater degree. The reader is inclined to believe this, given that perfectly iambic meter. Instead of establishing the content as the way things are, it creates a matter-of-fact and believable tone. Such assurance continues into line eleven, where the iambs assert that when in the open, her truest self can be displayed. This creates an interesting contextual contrast to its inverse, line two, where she is framed in a weaker body. In line eleven her body is expansive through her “wings” or intellectual prowess. These distinctions return attention to the mirroring of content and meter in the beginning and end of the poem, something the final line clearly emphasizes.

As seen in “On Death,” Finch typically adds to the normal meter of the

poem in the final line. In "On Myself," this additional meter should be moved up to six; however, there is a truncated strong stress in the initial foot, leaving only the unstressed half of a trochee to begin the line. This makes the line deceptively iambic-looking and attempts to persuade the reader that her retirement is a peaceful one. The line makes an almost defiant assertion that when she is removed from the normal society or other women, she will be able to look back on her isolated position within it and elevate it to the realm of the holy. The irony is that she is already doing so within her poem. She has taken a presumably awkward position and glorified it as something God made. Despite this, her alterations to stress undermine the words' literal meanings and grant her work a much deeper meaning at the prosodic level. Again, this kind of ending attempts to detract from the honesty in the middle, but the inverse lines still place the climax of narrative transparency within the middle.

Addressing the individual substitutions and perfectly iambic lines in "On Myself" and "To Death" is necessary to understand how, at a more distant level, the truest feelings of Anne Finch's poems exist in their center lines. The inversion of a pattern at the beginning and end give the works an almost three-dimensional shape where the center is a crater of the inner workings of the narrator's mind. The individual lines both draw attention to and distract from this honesty by placing emphasis on individual subjects or ideas, leaving the impression of the poet as someone who can be emotionally honest and declare her own thoughts, but who does so only to the most attentive. Her feelings are not as transparent as those of other women, nor are they shaken at the presence of death. They are available to those who find them within the reflective meter of her poetry.

Thomas Gray (1716-71)

The dominant spirit of the 18th century was a controlled and rational scepticism. Poets did not expect great or noble deeds from their fellows nor even from themselves. Fears about man's inherent incapacity for self-improvement and doubts about his ability to alter his environment for the better led to a *laissez-faire* attitude towards politics. Man, in Pope's words, was a 'chaos of thought and passion, all confused' and any alteration in the structure of his government must, given mankind's centrifugal tendency towards anarchy, be an innovation for the worse. Hence the conservatism for which the 18th century is renowned. As such attitudes became more entrenched the longer the century advanced, it was not surprising that they invited reactions. The most notable of these was the French Revolution of 1789, which wiped out the French monarchy and aristocracy and challenged all the previously held assumptions about the sacred and inviolable structure of society. This event had repercussions throughout Europe, causing many a monarch to tremble on his throne; and it was probably the French Revolution that encouraged the nascent Romantic movement in Britain to burst forth into full flower at the end of the century.

Romanticism, however, did not arrive *tout d'un coup,* overnight on the wings

of the French Revolution. There were many harbingers in the previous decades, ranging from the 'nature' poetry of James Thomson through the 'graveyard' poetry of Edward Young to the 'Gothic' novels of Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve. Romanticism came with éclat but its way had already been prepared.

Romanticism is a term which has been attached retrospectively to categorise the new upsurge of self-confidence and the abounding energy which is evident in the works of the poets writing at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Broadly speaking, the 'Romantic' poet looked to himself, rather than to the world around him, for his subject-matter. Wordsworth's *Prelude* is subtitled *Growth of a Poet's Mind,* indicating that the poet now believed his own interior landscape to be as interesting a field study as was the human society to which he belonged. In consequence, the Romantic poet often preferred to withdraw altogether from society, the better to concentrate on mining the sources of his own hidden wealth. Such a denial of the poet's integral part in the social organism would have been unthinkable to Pope or Johnson, who considered man to be a social animal and strictly limited in respect of his own internal resources.

But where the 18th-century writer sought to impose limits upon human potential the Romantic writer strove to remove them. Where the 18th-century poem advocates passive acceptance of the human lot the Romantic poem discovers a

surge of optimism, a faith in the limitless possibilities for the individual to rise above the corruptions and degradations of his worldly environment through the force ofhis imagination. And it is this belief in imagination which distinguishes Romantic poetry from that which immediately preceded it. The

Romantics discovered the creative function of the imagination, possessed and realised to a large extent by Shakespeare and the Elizabethans but on the decline ever since until, in the Augustan era, reason had been proclaimed as man's most divine faculty to which all others must submit. For the Romantics, the rediscovery of what Coleridge called 'the shaping spirit of imagination' offered a whole new dynamic for the conception of poetry and the shackles inherited from the Augustans were joyfully thrown off. The heroic couplet was by and large discarded and blank verse, as a freer form of expression, came into a popularity it had not known since the 17th century.

What the spontaneous birth of the 'Romantic' movement involved was a fundamental shift in the role of the poet. Where he had hitherto been functioning as a mirror, passively reflecting the world around him while allowing himself the occasional sardonic remark or wry interjection, he now saw himself as a creative agent, endowed with a mind which could- through 'imagination'- arrange and reconstruct the materials that it received. The poet- and man himself- was no longer

perceived as a puny being with strictly limited possibilities of more or less worthless achievement. Once more he was conceived of in Hamlet's terms, as a being 'infinite in faculties! . . . in apprehension, how like a god!' The poet could now retire from the distraction of the city streets, the social gatherings, the pomp and circumstance of court and commercial life, to the sanctum of his own mind, where he could observe a new and more radiant cosmos. It was an exhilarating discovery.

In the middle years of the 18th century, Thomas Gray was one of the poets who were already making tentative moves in the direction of Romanticism. His **'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'** could be seen as an 'intermediary' stage, a bridge between 'classicism' and ‘Romanticism’.

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,

And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,

And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower

The moping owl does to the moon complain

Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,

Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,

Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,

Each in his narrow cell forever laid,

The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,

The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,

The cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn,

No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

A Tilt towards Romanticism: Thomas Gray 97

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,

Or busy housewife ply her evening care;

No children run to lisp their sire's return,

Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield;

Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;

How jocund did they drive their team afield!

How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,

Their homely joys and destiny obscure;

Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile

The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,

And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,

Awaits alike the inevitable hour:

The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

The poem's rhythm is emphatically iambic. From the opening line,

The curfew tolls the knell Of parting day,

The alternately stressed syllables ring out loud and clear in imitation of the steady intoning of the curfew bell, the image that ushers in the poem. This bell, with its note of sustained melancholy, establishes the tone of the poem. To the poet's mind it is a 'knell', or a parting tribute, tolling for the day that is dying. This reflection puts the poet into a meditative frame of mind and launches him on the course of rumination that he is to follow in the ensuing stanzas. Gray's elegy is 'written in a country churchyard'; and from the poem's title and the funereal note of

the opening line it is clear that death will be the dominant theme of the poet's speculation.

For such a theme the structure that Gray has chosen is most apt. He does not write in couplets but in four-line stanzas, each stanza advancing at an unhurried, measured pace, unfolding each image of the departing day and the approaching night- and the thoughts they inspire in the poet- in a simple, uncomplicated way. The poet is in no rush; the whole night stretches before him and he luxuriates in the prospect of being free to allow his thoughts to range wherever they will, even if they gravitate towards the dark topography of death. For though the corpse in its clayey resting-place is the nucleus around which the poet's fancies soon come to revolve, such a topic does not lead him to despair but rather towards an acceptance of the evident truth that 'the paths of glory lead but to the grave'. The rhythm of the poem points to the universal but undemonstrative rhythm oflife. The first stanza affirms this, with its gong-like bell, its herd of cattle taking its meandering course 'slowly' across the meadow and its farm labourer, homeward-bound, planting his tired feet with the same 'plodding' regularity, and at the same unhurried pace, as the poem itself.

These initial images create the appropriate atmosphere for the meditation that is to follow. Having observed his fellow men obeying the summons of the 'curfew'

and retiring behind their doors and shutters for the night, the poet is left alone. In the first stanza the focus narrows down from the world around him to the final 'me', the 'egotistical sublime' that Keats would detect at the centre of Wordsworth's verse. Yet, since he is not a fully-fledged 'Romantic', Gray does not see his position of solitude at this point of gathering dusk as an opportunity to plunge within himself and drag forth some long-buried psychic treasure into the light of poetic consciousness.

Instead, the poem continues as before, registering the impressions that come to the poet from both without and within, while he himself remains uninvolved. A Romantic poet, on the contrary, would have actively engaged his mind in the images that came to it, imaginatively fusing a unified vision, or 'higher reality', out of the disparate elements. Gray, by contrast, remains a somewhat dry observer, cataloguing what he sees around him without attempting to relate the phenomena of external nature too intimately to his own inner life.

Nature, which figures frequently in the poetry of the Romantics, serves them chiefly as a stimulus to wider-ranging inquiry, either inward through the chasms and caverns of the poet's own soul or outward towards an exploration of the heavens and a definition of man's part in the universal scheme of things. The 'pre-Romantic' poet, on the other hand, is much more restrained in his reflexes to the animal and

vegetable kingdoms. It is the 'external' reality of nature that strikes him, rather than its 'internal' essence or hidden meaning; and he goes about the task of tabulating its phenomena dutifully, with a detached and dispassionate eye. Thus, while Gray differs from the bulk of his contemporaries in considering the natural scene at all, he undertakes his peregrination through the nocturnal world of bestial sights and sounds with the imperturbable aplomb and exactly measured gait of a village policeman.

The second stanza clearly illustrates how Gray conceived his role as a passive receptacle of the impressions that came to his senses. The effects that the 'glimmering landscape' and the 'droning beetle' make on the sight and the hearing are duly registered but the poet himself remains disengaged, his passions undisturbed. The 'solemn stillness' that governs all around him reigns in his own soul, too. When his contemplation of nature does eventually stimulate a response in him it is not an intuitive emotional reaction but rather a carefully weighed, deliberate and, above all, rational reflection. This is not to say that Gray's more 'reasonable' attitude to the natural world is necessarily inferior to the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' characteristic of the Romantics' more participatory response. But it does suggest that for Gray the instinctive reaction to life's phenomena is not to be trusted: it must be filtered still through the funnel of reason

before finding expression in a diction and a metre intended to tranquillise rather than agitate. Gray, like his contemporaries, believed in keeping nature at arm's length; the day had not yet arrived when he might have said, as john Keats was to say more than Haifa century later, 'if a sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel'.

The 18th century, with its love of the landscaped garden and its preference for the 'picturesque' in art, desired nature to be 'tame': something that the mind could cope with. Gray's poem shows where his predilection lies: in the direction of a nature that is neither unruly nor unpredictable. Thus the images that come to him during his vigil are those he is predisposed to receive. The evening contains surprises. So, in stanza 2, the beetle 'wheels' in 'droning flight', the monotonous 'droning' sound encouraging a relaxation towards sleep. The sheep in their folds are 'lulled' by the 'drowsy tinklings' of their bells: an example of pathetic fallacy, suggesting that Gray, intent on having all the natural phenomena in consonance with his soporific [sleepy; inducing drowsiness] mood, is more interested in imposing an anthropomorphic interpretation on the sheep's behaviour than in any independent observation of the habits of such animals. Creation of the initial mood is Gray's first task: he must establish a relaxed, sleepy atmosphere so that he may proceed to meditate aloud. Thus he projects onto surrounding nature the

'drowsiness' that is an essential preliminary to his poem.

The third stanza shows more clearly how Gray credits nature with human feelings and intentions. The one creature that is stirring at this crepuscular hour is the owl, a bird traditionally identified as a harbinger of death and therefore appropriately discovered in an ancient 'ivy-mantled tower' overlooking the graveyard. Gray interprets the bird in a fanciful 'humanised' way, without doing violence to its actual behaviour: the owl's whooping call, he claims, is a sulky moan of protest levelled against the poet who dares to disturb, at this untoward hour of the night, 'her ... solitary reign'. The bird's human dimension is suggested by the use of'her' rather than 'its' ,just as when referring to the beetle the poet mentions 'his' droning flight. Gray is wrapping his night creatures up in human coats.

The poet's primary aim- the evocation of those moments before slumber when the mind, on the threshold of sleep, is relaxed and reflective - is attained. Gray selects those elements in animal life which assist this purpose, excluding those that might not. Nature is disciplined by the poet's rationalising sensibility. It is not allowed to behave too chaotically: there has to be a *reason* for the owl's weird, unearthly cry, and the poet duly supplies it. Nor is the darkness permitted to become too overwhelming: the landscape 'glimmers' in stanza 2, subsequently to be illuminated by the moon of stanza 3. It is a comfortable rather than a disquieting

obscurity: a vapour rather than a void.

In stanza 4 Gray approaches the main preoccupation of his elegy: the passing from life of the former inhabitants of this small village (the 'forefathers of the hamlet'). His thoughts are guided in this direction by the encompassing darkness and by his awareness of the trees in the churchyard, shading the graves of the villagers. These 'rude' people, uneducated but honest, are now imprisoned 'forever' in a 'narrow cell'. Yet some of the claustrophobic horror of death is lessened by Gray's euphemistic assertion that the cemetery gives 'sleep' to these worn-out peasants and not utter annihilation; an impression which is furthered by his depiction of the trees standing guard over the beds of the 'sleepers' and the turf that covers them 'heaving' like blankets tossed about by a slumberer. It appears that the hamlet's forefathers might at some future time shake off their present hibernation. The tone of the poem, though solemn, is not morbid. The graves' tenants may have departed 'forever' from this world but they arc at the same time resting prior to their journey to the next.

The freshness of the 'incense-breathing' morning and the sweet odours emanating from its opening flowers can make no impression on the olfactory organs of the grave-dwellers. Nor can the swallow's 'twittering' reach their ears. Their senses, along with their bodies, are stilled and 'mouldering' with the turf. They will

be equally heedless of the cockerel's reveille and the hunter's horn. Only the JudgementDay trumpet now has the power to reach them and 'rouse them from their lowly bed' ('lowly' signifying both their humble station during life and the subterranean nature of their present resting-place).

Gray has begun now to celebrate the life that the dead ones have left: the exhilarating scents of the fields, the chattering activity of the birds, the excitement of the fox hunt, the health and vigour of the countryside where nothing is ersatz (even the shed is 'straw-built' with materials provided by nature). He develops this in stanza 6 with an evocation of the domestic joys that are perforce a thing of the past for the churchyard's tenants. The welcoming warmth of the fire, the bustling ministrations of a matronly wife and the affectionate attentions of his offspring, all serving to compensate the workman at the end of a day's hard labour, are treasures all the more precious for their inevitable impermanence. Gray's tone here is one of nostalgia and regret, not of despair: the regular measure of the iambic feet, if nothing else, reassures us. With so much love evident in the earthly cottage, how impossible that such love should not be magnified a thousand-fold in the heavenly mansion.

In stanza 7 Gray pays tribute to the physical energy of these late husbandmen, 'rugged' as the elms which now watch over their remains. The 'yielding' of the

harvest crop suggests that the corn only surrendered after a tough struggle; and the peasant must have developed military virtues in himself to combat the 'stubborn glebe' and wrest a subsistence from it. He had to fight nature and to dominate it; and in the end even the trees of the forest 'bowed' down before him, acknowledging him as master. But for the labourers who now lie beneath Gray's feet, demobilised by death, the glory of such physical power is departed. The harvesters have themselves been harvested and the earth over which they had hitherto reigned supreme now rests on top of them. Yet there is something so 'natural' about this cycle of events that one's sorrow must be tempered by acceptance.

Gray goes on to justify his calling the attention of his literate middle and upper-class readers (personified, not too flatteringly, as 'Ambition' and 'Grandeur') to the humble lives and deaths ('destiny obscure') of the illiterate peasantry. Death, the great leveller, does not recognise social class, physical beauty or cultured accomplishment; all such superfluities must be deposited at the entrance to the 'narrow cell' that awaits poor and rich alike:

> The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

The poem has its roots evidently well-embedded in the 18th-century poetry of moral tutelage. Yet its tone is not as drily didactic as, for example, a poem on a similar theme by Johnson might have been. The graveyard atmosphere anticipates

the terrors called forth later in the century by similar settings in the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe and M.G. 'Monk' Lewis. There is in Gray, however, a passive acceptance of the known facts of life and death which is notably absent from the more febrile writings of the Gothic novelists and Romantic poets who were to follow in his wake. He is, after all, a man of his time and the moral of his meditation is none other than the classically conventional *sic transit gloria mundi* ('thus pass all the glories of this world').

There are, however, two aspects at least in which Gray foreshadows those writers of a more turbulent epoch and for which he is sometimes dubbed 'pre-Romantic'. Firstly, he has forsaken the city streets to seek stimulus from the rural environment. He shows a sensitivity towards nature and an awareness of its power to trigger off human emotions and musings, even though neither nature nor the thoughts it inspires are allowed to trespass beyond the limits pre-imposed by the poet. Secondly, the poem seems to map out, at the end of its opening stanza ('leaves the world to darkness *and to me'),* a subjective terrain which, in the event, is left unexplored. Having indicated his own place in the panorama, Gray turns his gaze outward and keeps it there. The self-examination which the first stanza seems to promise is not forthcoming. Neither chaos from the inner world nor turmoil from without is allowed to intrude to the point of disturbing the even flow of perfectly-

weighted aphorism.

Although Gray may have experienced the occasional atavistic twitch- the urge to let sentiment overrule sententiousness- he was, finally, too much a man of the 18th century to allow the last word to any other voice than that of reason.

Themes

Death

Gray's "Elegy" is one of the best-known poems about death in all of European literature. The poem presents the reflections of an observer who, passing by a churchyard that is out in the country, stops for a moment to think about the significance of the strangers buried there. Scholars of medieval times sometimes kept human skulls on their desktops, to keep themselves conscious of the fact that someday they, like the skulls' former occupants, would die: from this practice we get the phrase *memento mori,* which we say to this day to describe any token one uses to keep one's mortality in mind. In this poem, the graveyard acts as a *memento mori,* reminding the narrator to not place too much value on this life because someday he too will be dead and buried. The speaker of the poem is surrounded by the idea of death, and throughout the first seven stanzas there are numerous images

pointing out the contrast between death and life. After mentioning the churchyard in the title, which establishes the theme of mortality, the poem itself begins with images of gloom and finality. The darkness at the end of the day, the forlorn moan of lowing cattle, the stillness of the air (highlighted by the beetle's stilted motion) and the owl's nocturnal hooting all serve to set a background for this serious meditation. However, it is not until the fourth stanza that the poem actually begins to deal with the cemetery, mentioned as the place where the village forefathers "sleep." In the following stanzas, the speaker tries to imagine what the lives of these simple men might have been like, touching upon their relations with their wives, children, and the soil that they worked. They are not defined by their possessions, because they had few, and instead are defined by their actions, which serves to contrast their lives with their quiet existence in the graveyard. This "Elegy" presents the dead in the best light: their families adored them and they were cheerful in their work, as they "hummed the woods beneath their steady stroke." The speaker openly admits that they are spoken of so well precisely because they are dead, because death is such a terrible thing that its victims deserve the respect of the living. In line 90, the poet explains, "Some pious drops the closing eye requires," explaining that the living should show their respect for death with their sorrow.

Search for Self

The speaker of this poem goes through a process of recognizing what is important to him and choosing how to live his life (which leads to the epitaph with which he would like to be remembered). In stanza 8, the poem begins naming the attributes that are normally considered desirable but are now considered pointless when compared with the lives of the rustic dead in the country graveyard. Ambition and Grandeur, according to the speaker, should not think less of these people because of their simple accomplishments. He goes on to assert that Pride and Memory have no right to ignore them, and that Honor and Flattery will be as useless to the rich as to the poor when they are dead. The speaker, an educated person, gives much consideration to the subject of Knowledge, and whether the lack of it made the lives of these country people less significant. Their poverty blocked the way to knowledge, he decides, and the lack of knowledge separated them from vices as well as virtues, so that in the end he does not consider his education a factor in making him better or worse than them either. In the end, having eliminated all of the supposed benefits of the wealthy, educated world that he comes from, the speaker identifies himself with the graveyard inhabitants to such a degree that he winds up in this humble graveyard after his death. In contrast to the simple graves that he pondered over throughout his life, though, the speaker's grave is marked with a warm-hearted memorial, the "Epitaph" at the end of the poem. Assuming

that such a thoughtful person would not have been so immodest as to write this epitaph for himself, there must have been some other literate person to remember him. He is also remembered by an illiterate member of the farm community, the "hoary-headed swain" who has to ask someone to read the epitaph. Before the death of the poem's narrator, this Swain established a nonverbal relationship with him, observing him from afar, wondering

Class Conflict

A superficial reading of this poem might leave the impression that the author intends to present members of the lower class as being more worthy of praise than their upper-class counterparts. This would be a reasonable assumption, since so much of the poem is devoted to praising the simple virtues of the poor. In the larger scope, though, the position that Gray takes is that all people, poor or rich, are equal. This is a meditation on death, which has been called the "great equalizer" because no can avoid it. The reason that the poem seems to favor one class over the other is that it is working against the assumption that only those of the upper class are worthy of attention when they die. It is the humble condition of the country churchyard, with gravestones unmarked or possibly marked just with names by illiterate people unable to read, that draws attention to the virtues of the poor and uneducated (which society often forgets), and so much of the poem is spent praising

their moral strength. The virtues of the wealthy and famous are not denied, they just are not explored in this poem because they are already so familiar. Evidence of the poem's evenhandedness about the different classes can be seen in the fact that, while praising the poor country people throughout, Gray also acknowledges that education, which may give them opportunity to develop moral excellence, may also lead them to corruption: as he says in stanza 17, the humble circumstances of the poor limited the growth not only of their virtues but also of their crimes. The poem thus leaves open the question of superiority. Society glorifies the rich, and the poem's narrator glorifies the poor, but, as he reminds us, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

References

1- Fenton, J. (2003). *An Introduction to English Poetry*. London: Penguin Books.

2- Ferguson, M., Salter, M. J., & Stallworthy, J. (2005). *The Norton anthology of poetry*. (5th ed.). New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.

3- Greenblatt, S. (2006). (gen. ed.). *The Norton anthology to English literature*. Vol. 1. (8th ed.). New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.

4- http://www.gradesaver.com/donne-poems

5- http://www.gradesaver.com/thomas-gray-poems

6- http://www.gradesaver.com/robert-herrick-poems

7- http://www.gradesaver.com/andrew-marvell-poems

8- http://www.gradesaver.com/christopher-marlowes-poems

9- http://www.gradesaver.com/popes-poems-and-prose

10- http://www.gradesaver.com/shakespeares-sonnets

11- http://www.gradesaver.com/the-faerie-queene

12- http://www.gradesaver.com/spensers-amoretti

13- http://www.gradesaver.com/collected-poems-of-sir-thomas-wyatt

14- http://learn.lexiconic.net/elementsofpoetry.htm

15- https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/anne-finch