



**South Valley University  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of English**

# *Poetry and Criticism* **3<sup>rd</sup> year**

مقرر الفرقة الثالثة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلية التربية

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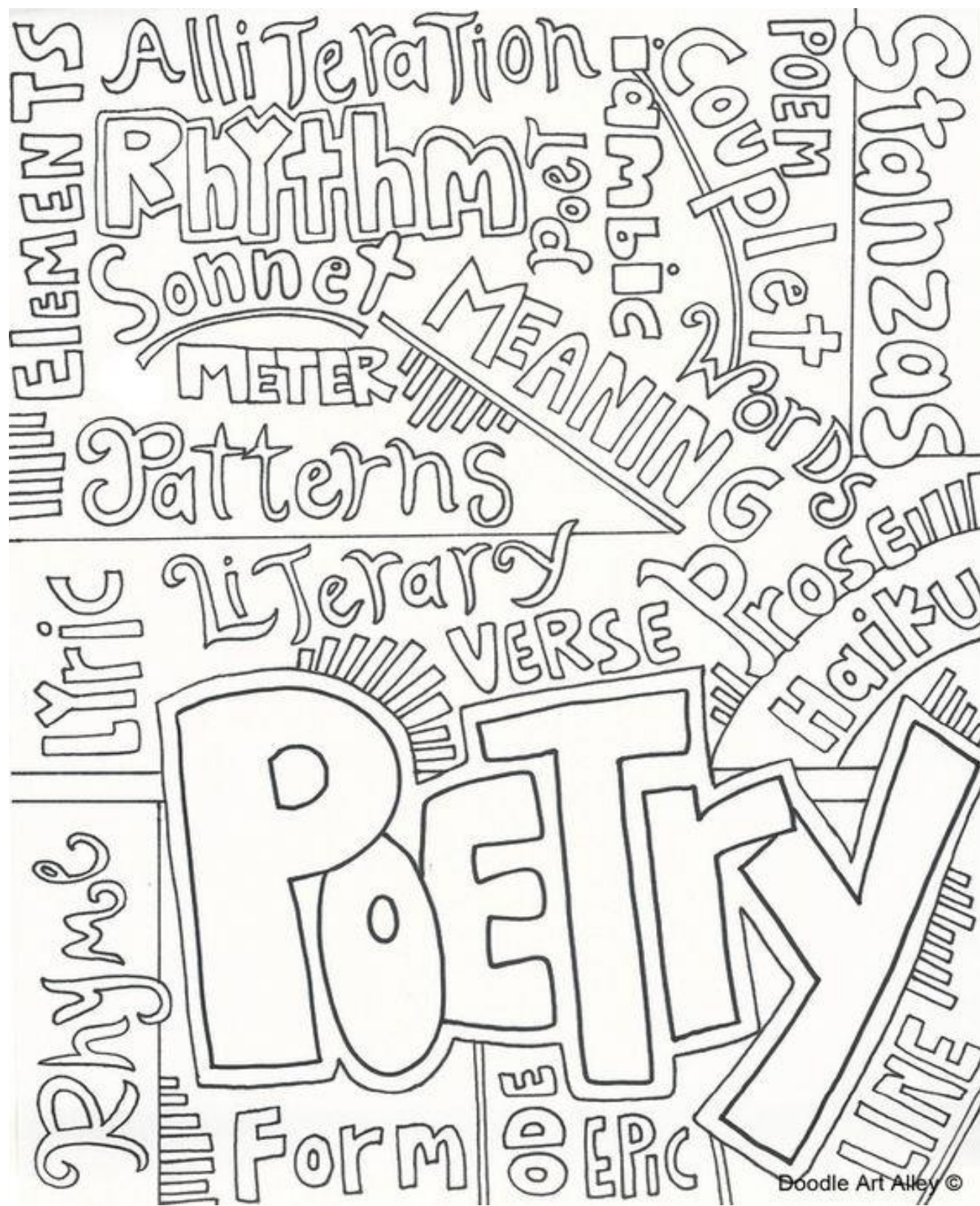
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**2023-2024**



# *Neoclassicism*

## **Definition of Neoclassicism**

The term Neoclassicism is a combination of two words: *Neo* and *Classic*. The word *neo* has been derived from a Greek word *neo*, which means new, recent, revived, modified, while the word *classic*, according to the Webster Dictionary, refers to the style and works of the ancient authors of Greece and Rome. To combine these words, we get the meaning of *Neoclassicism* as the rebirth and restoration of Classicism. Hence, *Neoclassicism* is the movement in the history of English literature, which laid immense emphasis on revival of the classical spirit. Writers of this period immensely endeavored to follow the footpaths of the writers of the period of Augustus, emperor of Rome, which produced unparalleled writers as Horace, Virgil and Ovid. That is the reason; the age of Pope and Dryden is also called the Augustan Age.

Neoclassical Poetry is a type of poetry, which follows the pattern of poetry authored by the poets of ancient time i.e., Greek and Rome. Pope and Dryden were the leading writers, who deviated from the traditional schools of poetry

and sought guidance in the works of ancient Greek and Roman writers. According to **Encyclopedia Britannica**:

*"Classicism and Neoclassicism, in the arts, historical tradition or aesthetic attitudes based on the art of Greece and Rome in antiquity. In the context of the tradition, Classicism refers either to the art produced in antiquity or to later art inspired by that of antiquity; Neoclassicism always refers to the art produced later but inspired by antiquity. Thus the terms Classicism and Neoclassicism are often used interchangeably."*

Neoclassicism flourished between 1660, when the Stuarts returned to the throne, and the 1798 publication of Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, with its theoretical preface and collection of poems that came to be seen as the beginning of the Romantic Age. Neoclassicism was the era which emphasized logic and reason. It was preceded by The Renaissance and followed by the Romantic era.

### **Stages of Neoclassicism**

Regarding English literature, the Neoclassical Age is typically divided into three periods: the Restoration Age (1660-1700), the Augustan Age (1700-1750), and the Age of Johnson (1750-1798).

## **The Restoration Age**

It is called the Restoration Period, as King Charles II restored the monarchy in England in this era. The Restoration Period lasted from 1660-1700. Writers of this age, Dryden and Milton, endeavored to use grand style and scholarly allusions, and restrict the intense use of imagination. In the Restoration Age, in poetry, the classical forms of the heroic couplet and the ode became popular.

## **The Augustan Age**

The Augustan Age is also called the Age of Pope. Pope was the leading poet in this age. Poetry sparkled with the couplets of Pope. Mock epic was a common form of verse at that time. The Augustan Age lasted from 1700 to 1750.

## **The Age of Johnson**

The Age of Johnson was a period of transition. It lasted up to 1798, when the Romantic Movement was underway with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. In the Age of Johnson the greatest literary figure was Johnson himself as poet, critic, novelist, journalist as an embodiment of the ideals of neoclassical period.

## Characteristics of Neoclassical Poetry

### Adherence to Classical Rules

The neoclassical poets were undoubtedly great adherents of classical rules. They went all-out to revive the Classicism in their poetry. Neoclassical poetry tended to be written in a much more elevated manner, using classical models such as epics, odes, and pastorals.

### Scholarly Allusions

The neoclassical poets always loved to make use of scholarly allusions in their poetry. As they were all highly educated and well-versed in various fields of studies, they knew a lot about religious, biblical and classical literature. Allusions helped them to convey their message to their readers effectively and easily. Their poetry has plentiful allusions to classical writers i.e., Virgil and Homer. They desired to write in the manner of their classical masters.

### Rationalism

Rationalism is the most essential feature of neoclassical poetry. Neoclassical poets viewed reason as the mainspring of learning, knowledge and inspiration for their poetry. Neoclassical poetry is a reaction against the renaissance

style of poetry. It is a unique outcome of intellect, not fancy and imagination. Unlike romantic poetry, which is entirely the result of sentiments of the poet, neoclassical poetry is a fabricated and stereotypical type of poetry. In romantic poetry, sentiments play a vital role in writing of poetry, while in neoclassical poetry; reason and intellect are dominant elements. The neoclassical poets made an effort to disregard imagination, emotion and feelings, while composing their poetry.

## **Realism**

The neoclassical poets, unlike romantic poets, were not living in their own world of imagination. They were hard realists and they presented the true picture of their society. They didn't turn their eyes from the harsh realities of life. These poets were not escapists like romantic poets, who turned their back to the harsh realities of life and tried to escape from them with the help of plight of imagination.

Neoclassical poets were men of action and practically lived in the midst of people. That is why; they had a very keen observation of their society. Dryden's and Pope's poetry are replete with excellent examples of realism. They avoided imaginative thoughts and idealism in their poetry.

## **Objectivity**

Objectivity is another important feature of neoclassical poetry. As these poets were completely against subjectivity in poetry, they endeavored hard to write objective poetry. They avoided giving vent to their feelings; rather they dwelt upon the miseries, hardships and problems of the people around them. That is why; we find very little information about the lives of neoclassical poets in their poetry.

## **Didacticism**

Neoclassical poets rebelled against the romantic nature of poetry of the Renaissance Period. Romantic poets loved to compose poetry just for the sake of poetry like John Keats. They tried hard to sidestep morality and didacticism in their poetry. Their foremost purpose was to give vent to their feelings. On the other hand, the neoclassical poets were chiefly concerned with the didactic aspects of their poetry. They endeavored hard to fix the teething troubles of humanity through the magical power of poetry.

Consider the following lines taken from Alexander Pope's poem *An Essay on Man*, which is absolutely an excellent example in this regard:



*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As to be hated needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*

(An Essay on Man by Alexander Pope)

## **Concept of Nature**

The concept of nature was an important characteristic of the Neoclassical age. By nature, they never meant the forest nature, but for them, nature meant the general human nature. The general human nature was not what the ordinary men and women felt and thought, but the standard view of human nature as held by Homer and Horace. The Neoclassical writers thought of human nature also was something standard, which is the same in all men and remains the same at all times.

*Those RULES of old discovered, not devised,  
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodized;  
Nature, like Liberty, is but restrained  
By the same Laws which first herself ordained.*

(Essay on Criticism by Alexander Pope)

The neoclassicists directed their concept of man as an individual within a larger social context, seeing human nature

as dualistic and needing to be curbed by reason and decorum.

### **Poetic Diction**

Poetic diction of neoclassical poetry is completely different from that of romantic poetry. In romantic poetry, the diction is flexible and easy to use, while in the neoclassical poetry, it is restrained, concrete and rigid. The neoclassical poets were fond of using a different language for poetry. They thought that there should be a dividing line between the language of prose and poetry. That is why; they laid emphasis on specific style for poetry. They were of the view that decorum, specific style and mannerism are the vital elements of poetry.

### **No Passionate Lyricism**

Romantic poetry is popular for its lyrical quality, while neoclassical poetry is lacking in lyrical features due to apathy of the neoclassical poets for passion, feelings and emotions. They looked at the passion with distrust and suspicion. That is the reason; very few lyrics were written in the age of Pope and Dryden. They didn't give free play to their imagination; rather they dwelt upon the intellectual aspects of poetry.

## Heroic Couplet

Heroic couplet is another hallmark of neoclassical poetry. The neoclassical poets were primarily responsible for reputation of heroic couplets in the history of English literature. They were the champions of heroic couplet. No poet, in the history of English literature, can compete with the mastery of neoclassical poets in handling heroic couplet. They excelled each and every poet in this regard. Chaucer was the first poet, who employed heroic couplet in his poetry. Though many renowned poets of the world tried their hands on heroic couplet, yet Dryden and Pope are the only poets, who outdid everyone in this regard. They are considered as the real masters of heroic couplet. What is most important about these two poets is that they polished the heroic couplet, corrected it, made it regular, more flexible and a polished medium of poetic expression. Look at the following example:

*Good nature and good sense must ever join;  
To err is human, to forgive, divine.*

(An Essay on Criticism by Alexander Pope)

## **Mock Epic**

A Mock-epic is a long epic poem which is written about a subject that is not really worthy of an epic. Mock epic is the product of Neoclassical age.

Pope's *The Rape of Lock* is a good example of the Mock-epic poem. The term Mock epic is often applied to other dignified poetic forms. e.g. Thomas Gray's comic, *Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat* (1748 A.D.)

## **Neoclassical Poets**

English poets from 1660 A.D. to 1798 A.D. are generally known as Neoclassical poets. They are so-called because they had great respect for classical writers and imitated much from them. For them, poetry was an imitation of human life.

## **John Dryden (1631- 1700)**

John Dryden is an English poet, playwright, translator, essayist, and literary theorist. Along with Shakespeare and Milton, he is considered as one of the most influential and greatest representatives of English Literature of the 17th century. He is highly regarded for his critical writings as well as his satirical and didactic poems. Throughout his lengthy,

varied career, Dryden fashioned a vital and refined language that served as a foundation for the writers of English prose and verse who followed him.

Dryden was born August 9, 1631, in Northampton-shire, England, to Erasmus Dryden and Mary Pickering, both moderate Puritans. He grew up during the seven-year-long English Civil War, a conflict between the Puritans, who wanted to abolish the monarchy, and the Royalists, who supported the monarchy. A royal scholarship allowed Dryden to attend Westminster School, where he received a classical education and published his first poem.

The Puritans came to power under Oliver Cromwell in 1649, deposing the monarchy and executing King Charles I not a half mile from where Dryden was studying. It is believed that Dryden's lifelong concern for political stability was a result of growing up during the war. In 1650, Dryden began studying at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree. Next, it appears he worked for Cromwell's government, probably in the Office of Latin Secretary along with poets John Milton and Andrew Marvell.

Following Cromwell's death and during the short-lived government of Cromwell's son Richard, Dryden published *Heroique Stanza* (1658), a group of verses that

portray Cromwell as the architect of a great new age. In the following years, Dryden continued to publish politically oriented poems, including the notable *Astraea Redux* (1660). This poem celebrated Charles II's 1660 return from exile and restoration to the English throne. In 1663 he married Lady Elizabeth Howard and some years later, in 1668, was made poet laureate of England.

In the early 1680's Dryden became a Catholic and then wrote the religious work *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). In 1688 he returned to writing both for the theatre and critical pieces. Dryden also worked, during this period on a large number of translations of, among others, Horace, Homer, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Ovid. Dryden died in London on May 1, 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

*In the late 17th century, Dryden penned two of the most celebrated verse-satires of the period – **Mac Flecknoe** (written in 1676–77) and **Absalom and Achitophel** (1681). Dryden has been depicted as a satirist committed to defending his ideals about writing (*Mac Flecknoe*) and the succession to the throne of James II (*Absalom and Achitophel*).*

## Mac Flecknoe

Though Dryden wrote poetry before the Stuart Restoration in 1660, he wrote no satire to speak of until well after Charles II's accession to the throne. A high percentage of the satire written in the 1670s is personal and abusive, and Mac Flecknoe, Dryden's first major satire, is no exception.

Mac Flecknoe is one of the four major satires of esteemed English poet John Dryden. The poem is **personal** satire that has for its target Thomas Shadwell, another poet who had offended Dryden with his political tendency. It is also **literary** satire, and is considered one of the most famous mock-heroic verses in the English tradition. It is 218 lines of rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter. Like Dante's *Inferno*, the poem has numerous references to Dryden's contemporaries

Dryden's original intentions, however, were to do damage to Shadwell, a personal rival. That abusive impulse must not be ignored. In a quoted passage, Dryden alludes to the fact that the leaves of unsold works were recycled in bakers' shops and outhouses (outdoor toilets):

*From dusty shops neglected Authors come,  
Martyrs of Pies, and Reliques of the Bum.*

*Much Heywood, Shirly, Ogleby there lay,  
But loads of Sh----- almost choakt the way. (ll. 100–03)*

Is Dryden primarily making an object lesson of what he regards as 'bad' literature, and therefore defending high cultural standards? Perhaps so, but Mac Flecknoe does not, after all, transcend the abuse of Shadwell. Dryden's personal hostility was real.

Let's take a moment to step out of the kingdom of nonsense and back into reality. The poem is a personal satire. Shadwell and Dryden were once friends, but their relationship soured over several disagreements. They had divergent political views, as Dryden supported the Stuart monarchy while Shadwell was a member of the opposing party, the Whigs. They had religious differences, too, given Dryden's Catholic sympathies and Shadwell's Protestantism. They had a running debate over the merits of Shakespeare and his contemporary Ben Jonson; Dryden was a Shakespeare fan, while Shadwell considered himself the leading student and heir to Jonson's legacy. This conflict between the two writers reached a boiling point when Shadwell published "The Medal of John Bayes" in 1682, which attacked Dryden head-on. Dryden responded within the year with "Mac Flecknoe."



It is also literary satire, and is considered one of the most famous mock-heroic verses in the English tradition. The poem grew out of a longstanding debate that Dryden and Shadwell had over the nature of comedy. During the Restoration, Shadwell was considered a playwright of considerable brilliance, but Dryden did not agree with this assessment. In Dryden's opinion, Shadwell was a subpar poet and dramatist who believed much too highly of himself.

The first line of the poem creates the illusion of its being an epic poem about a historical hero. The next lines talk about Mac Flecknoe, a monarch who instead of ruling an empire, rules over the realm of Nonsense. The king is old and thus must choose a successor to his throne. Dryden wonders whether the king will choose a poet who has talent and wit or if he will choose someone like him, a man with no literary talent. Flecknoe decides upon his son Shadwell, a man with no talent and who is stupid and always at war with wit. Shadwell is described as the worst writer in all the land, and thus, the perfect man for the job. Upon arriving in the city of August (a.k.a. London), Shadwell is crowned king of the realm of nonsense. Mac Flecknoe himself delivers a brief speech on his son's merits during the coronation. In the end, crowned and ready to rule in his father's footsteps.

**Mac Flecknoe**  
**A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.**

*All humane things are subject to decay,  
And, when Fate summons, Monarchs must obey:  
This Fleckno found, who, like Augustus, young  
Was call'd to Empire, and had govern'd long:  
In Prose and Verse, was own'd, without dispute [5]  
Through all the Realms of Non-sense, absolute.  
This aged Prince now flourishing in Peace,  
And blest with issue of a large increase,  
Worn out with business, did at length debate  
To settle the succession of the State: [10]  
And pond'ring which of all his Sons was fit  
To Reign, and wage immortal War with Wit;  
Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for Nature pleads that He  
Should onely rule, who most resembles me:  
Sh—— alone my perfect image bears, [15]  
Mature in dullness from his tender years.  
Sh—— alone, of all my Sons, is he  
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But Sh—— never deviates into sense. [20]  
Some Beams of Wit on other souls may fall,*

*Strike through and make a lucid interval;  
But Sh——'s genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising Fogs prevail upon the Day:  
Besides his goodly Fabrick fills the eye, [25]  
And seems design'd for thoughtless Majesty:  
Thoughtless as Monarch Oakes, that shade the plain,  
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.*

In these first lines, Dryden clearly establishes his satiric voice. He is using grand language, tone, ideas, and historical allusion to discuss the leader of the realm of Nonsense, assuredly *not* the name readers were expecting. Comparisons to Rome, the evocation of such universal themes such as death and fate, and the use of heroic couplets serve to discomfit and amuse the reader when they start to realize what Dryden is up to.

From this initial couplet, Dryden creates the atmosphere of an epic, a story of gods and kings, in line with the tradition of poetic big names like Homer or Milton. This is no epic; it's a satire written in mock-epic form. Dryden begins with a commentary on mortality, God, and kings, his introduction to what we can only assume will be an epic. As we will soon discover, the entirety of the poem is written in rhymed heroic couplets, typical of the epic style.

Here's our first appearance from the title character, one Mac Flecknoe. This could be a reference to Richard Flecknoe, an Irish poet. Flecknoe was known for having to pay to get his poems published. Like Augustus, the first emperor of Rome, Flecknoe's rule was long and successful. But of course Flecknoe's domain isn't Rome, but rather the "realms of Non-sense," of which he is the poet-king.

The end of our king's life is near, however, and it is time now for him to declare his successor to the throne. He has been blessed with a "large increase" and he must choose which one of his children will inherit the kingdom. So how will he make this decision? He will choose the heir who is most like the king himself, in wit and poetic ability. In his supreme dullness and stupidity, it is Shadwell alone who appears fit to inherit the throne from Flecknoe. Instead of writing out the full name of "Shadwell," Dryden's original text actually reads "Sh—", implying the name of the writer: Shadwell

Here, the irony present in Dryden's mock-heroic style becomes clear. Dryden drops insult after insult in the language and style that might be used to exalt the many virtues of a Homeric hero. He's thoughtless as an oak, Dryden (using a simile) says of Shadwell. We guess he probably had more intellect than a tree.

## → Mac Flecknoe Literary Elements

- **Speaker or Narrator, and Point of View**

The poem is told in the third person from the point of view of an unnamed narrator whom we can conclude with certainty is Dryden. From time to time, the narrator recounts lines as though quoting directly from characters in the story, and accordingly switches to first person.

- **Form and Meter**

Heroic couplets

- **Metaphors and Similes**

**Simile:**

*Shadwell is "Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain" (line 27). This suggests he is still and dull.*

**Metaphor:**

*"Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray, / His rising fogs prevail upon the day" (lines 23-24).*

Dryden uses a metaphor of night and fog to show how Shadwell is all darkness, admitting no light or sense.

- **Alliteration:**

1. *"...did at length debate / To settle the succession of the State" (lines 9-10).*

2. *"And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign" (line 28).*

- **Irony:**

The poem is utterly stuffed with irony; its tone is ironic, its imagery is ironic, its entire conceit is ironic. Much of this is discussed in the analysis, but here are a few examples:

1. It is ironic that the realm of Nonsense is compared to the great Roman empire.
2. It is ironic that Flecknoe is so proud of someone who is dull and has no sense.

- **Genre**

Poem; satire; mock-heroic

- **Setting**

Late-17th-century Restoration England

- **Tone**

Satirical and ironic

- **Personification**

*"Fate summons" (line 2).*

### → Mac Flecknoe Glossary

- **Satire**

Satire is a poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, especially as a form of social or political commentary.

- **Pentameter**

Pentameter is a line consisting of five metrical feet.

- **Heroic Couplet**

A heroic couplet is a rhyming couplet in iambic pentameter - by the middle of the seventeenth century, it was regarded as the proper form for dealing with "heroic" subjects (e.g., deeds of high accomplishment and matters of public interest and admiration).

- **Simile**

A simile is a comparison of one thing with another, especially as an ornament in poetry or rhetoric.

- **Epic Poetry**

Epic poetry is a genre of poetry characterized by a long, narrative poem that typically tells of heroic deeds and events that are significant to the culture of the poet.

### → **Mac Flecknoe Character List**

- **Richard Flecknoe**

Richard Flecknoe (1600-1678) was an English dramatist and poet. His work was ridiculed by Dryden as well as poet Andrew Marvell (1621-1678). In Mac Flecknoe, he is cast in the fictional role of the "King of Nonsense." He is getting older and decides he must appoint a successor in one of his sons. He chooses Shadwell because he is the most like him; he is dull and devoid of wit and sense.

- **T.S., Sh--, or Shadwell (i.e., Thomas Shadwell)**

Thomas Shadwell is the target of Dryden's satire and derision in *Mac Flecknoe*. Shadwell was an English dramatist and poet laureate. In *Mac Flecknoe*, Dryden casts him as the heir of the fictional "Kingdom of Nonsense," which is presided over by Flecknoe. Shadwell has no sense.

- **Augustus**

He is the founder of the Roman empire and the first emperor. Also known as Octavian or Octavius, he was adopted by Julius Caesar.

## **Absalom and Achitophel**

Satire, particularly *political satire*, became exceedingly popular in Restoration England as a means to address problems within the government and society as a whole, and John Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" is one such work.

"Absalom and Achitophel" is described as an *allegory* regarding contemporary political events, and a *mock heroic narrative*. In the prologue, "To the Reader", Dryden states that "the true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction".

On the surface, John Dryden's poem "Absalom and Achitophel" is about the story of David, the third king of Israel, and his illegitimate son Absalom, who rebels



against his father and tries to take over his throne. However, this biblical story is merely an allegory, a form of extended metaphor, for the political events that unfolded in Dryden's time. Absalom and David are veiled metaphors for Charles II of England and his illegitimate son, James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth.

In 1678, an alleged Catholic conspiracy to assassinate King Charles II, known as the Popish Plot, swept across England, creating mass anti-Catholic feelings and prompting the Exclusion Crisis of 1679. The Exclusion Crisis lasted until 1681 and attempted to exclude James, King Charles's brother, from royal succession because he was a Roman Catholic rather than a Protestant. After the death of Charles II in 1685, Monmouth and an army of followers attempted to seize the crown from Charles's brother, James II, the next heir in the line of succession. James was a Roman Catholic, and Monmouth and his Protestant followers opposed a Roman Catholic on the throne. During the summer of 1685, the Monmouth Rebellion fought a sequence of battles against the English military led by John Churchill. Monmouth's army was ultimately defeated at the Battle of Sedgemoor on July 6, and on July 15, the 1st Duke of Monmouth was executed for treason. Monmouth's uncle,

James II, ignored the people and Monmouth's pleas for mercy, even after Monmouth vowed to convert to Catholicism. James II remained on the throne until 1688, at which time he was overthrown by William of Orange during the Glorious Revolution. In 1701, the Act of Settlement was passed by Parliament, which officially excluded Roman Catholics from royal succession and mandated that the throne be occupied by Protestants only.

Through the use of satire and allegory in "Absalom and Achitophel," Dryden ultimately argues that the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis were ploys to divert the rightful order of succession and prevent James II from ascending the throne.

Absalom is David's illegitimate son and the protagonist of "Absalom and Achitophel." Achitophel begins to convince Absalom to rebel against David and Absalom agrees to rebel against him. David loses patience with both Absalom and Achitophel and asserts his power as king before the people of Israel and effectively shuts down Absalom's rebellion, but Dryden never does say what becomes of Absalom. Absalom metaphorically represents Charles II's illegitimate son James Scott, the 1st Duke of Monmouth, who rebelled against Charles and the throne in Dryden's time. Through the

character of Absalom, Dryden argues that Charles and his brother James both have a divine right to the crown that is not extended to Monmouth.

Achitophel is deceitful counselor to King David and the antagonist of "Absalom and Achitophel." He encourages David's son Absalom to rebel against him. Achitophel hates David's brother, the heir presumptive, and he wants to make sure that he never ascends the throne. Dryden's Achitophel represents Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 1st Earl of Shaftesbury, a Member of Parliament during Dryden's time and the main supporter of the Exclusion Bill. Shaftesbury was the founder of the Whig party, which sought to exclude Charles II's brother James from the throne, and he was a major opponent of Charles throughout his reign. What comes of Achitophel is never revealed in Dryden's poem, but historically speaking, Shaftesbury was tried for treason after encouraging Charles's son the Duke of Monmouth, to rebel against the crown, but he was later acquitted. Through Achitophel, Dryden suggests that Charles and James both have just claims to the throne and is not for Shaftesbury, Monmouth, or Parliament to infringe on that power.

Zimri is One of Achitophel's men, a man full of all the wrong opinions. He takes on numerous professions and is obsessed with women. He is prone to railing, praising, and squandering riches; he is characterized by extremes. Dryden describes as a "buffoon" who has tried several professions. In the Bible, Zimri is king of Israel for seven days, but he is no real threat to David or the throne in "Absalom and Achitophel." Zimri likely represents George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham, an English statesman and poet who had disgraced himself in war, organized an unsuccessful plot against the government, and was accused of treason. He played an active role within the Popish Plot.

**Character of George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham  
(from Absalom and Achitophel; II; 544-568)**

*Some of their chiefs were princes of the land,  
In the first rank of these did Zimri stand:  
A man so various, that he seem'd to be  
Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome.  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;  
Was everything by starts, and nothing long:  
But in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon:  
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking;*

*Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.  
Blest madman, who could every hour employ,  
With something new to wish, or to enjoy!  
Railing and praising were his usual themes;  
And both (to show his judgment) in extremes:  
So over violent, or over civil,  
That every man, with him, was god or devil.  
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art:  
Nothing went unrewarded, but desert.  
Beggard by fools, whom still he found too late:  
He had his jest, and they had his estate.  
He laugh'd himself from court; then sought relief  
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief:  
For, spite of him, the weight of business fell  
On Absalom and wise Achitophel:  
Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,  
He left not faction, but of that was left.*

### **→ Absalom and Achitophel Literary Elements**

- **Speaker or Narrator, and Point of View**

"Absalom and Achitophel" features third-person narration from an omniscient narrator. This enables the poet to skillfully explore the progression of humanity over time and

to consider universal themes such as morality and humanity, making sweeping statements about human nature. It also allows the poet to focus in detail on the distinct characters.

- **Form and Meter**

The poem is composed in iambic pentameter, where there are five iambs (an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable) per line. "Absalom and Achitophel" is written in heroic couplet – iambic pentameter where pairs of lines form a rhyme. There is an AABB rhyming scheme.

- **Genre**

The poem is predominantly a political satire that explores the conflict between Catholics and Protestants during the rule of King Charles. It also shares many features with Religious Poetry due to its biblical allusions.

- **Setting**

The poem is set in King David's Israel, but it is meant to be a commentary on England in the seventeenth century.

- **Tone**

The tone is predominantly serious and philosophical as it explores grim aspects of human nature, such as hypocrisy and rebellion.

- **Allusions**

The poem is filled with biblical allusions. The main characters also share names with biblical characters.

## **Alexander Pope (1688–1744)**

Alexander Pope was one of the most popular and influential writers of his time. He was writing during what we now call the Enlightenment era, which lasted from about 1660 to around 1800. Enlightenment thinkers emphasized the importance of science and reason and claimed that the world is knowable and testable.

Alexander Pope was a central figure in the Neoclassical movement of the early 18th century. He is acknowledged as a master of the heroic couplet of the Augustan age. He was known for having perfected the rhymed couplet form of his idol, John Dryden, and turned it to philosophical purposes.

Pope was born on May 21, 1688. In the same year, the Protestant William of Orange took the English throne. Because Catholics were forbidden to hold office, practice their religion, attend public schools, or live within ten miles of London, Pope grew up in nearby Windsor Forest and was mostly self-taught, his education supplemented by study with private tutors or priests. At the age of twelve, he contracted spinal tuberculosis, which left him with permanent physical disabilities. He never grew taller than four and a half feet, was hunchbacked, and required daily care throughout adulthood.

His irascible nature and unpopularity in the press are often attributed to three factors: his membership in a religious minority, his physical infirmity, and his exclusion from formal education. However, Pope was bright, precocious, and determined and, by his teens, was writing accomplished verse.

Pope published his first major work, *An Essay on Criticism*, at the age of 23. The appearance of *The Rape of the Lock* made him famous in wider circles. In the 1730s, Pope published two works on the same theme: *An Essay on Man* and a series of “imitated” satires and epistles of Horace (1733-38). *An Essay on Man* is didactic and wide-reaching and was meant to be part of a larger work of moral philosophy that Pope never finished. Its four sections, or “epistles,” present an aesthetic and philosophical argument for the existence of order in the world, contending that we know the world to be unified because God created it. Thus, it is only our inferior vision that perceives disunity, and it is each man’s duty to strive for the good and the orderly.



## An Essay On Criticism

“*An Essay on Criticism*” is a didactic poem by Alexander Pope, first published when the author was 22 years old. The poem, written in heroic couplets (or two rhyming lines of iambic pentameter), is influenced by Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. It offers a sort of master-class not only in doing criticism but in being a critic: addressed to those who would rise above scandal, envy, politics and pride to true judgment. The work’s brilliantly polished epigrams (e.g., “A little learning is a dang’rous thing,” “To err is human; to forgive, divine,” and “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread”), while not original, have become part of the proverbial heritage of the English language.

“*An Essay on Criticism*” is a work of both poetry and criticism. Pope attempts in this long, three-part poem to examine neoclassical aesthetics in poetry and argues that the best kind of poetry is that which is closest to his conception of “Nature.”

Pope’s ‘*Essay on Criticism*’ is broken into three different parts. The **first part** opens by describing the ways literary critics can actually cause harm. Pope argues that critics must be both careful and humble when critiquing a piece of literature, for the writing of bad criticism actually hurts poetry

more than the writing of bad poetry does. Pope points out that each critic has his or her own opinion, and, if applied incorrectly, a critic can actually censure a talented writer.

However, Pope argues that if a critic is honest, doesn't fall prey to envy and listens to the seeds of understanding that are naturally a part of him or herself, one can become a wise critic. The Greeks came to understand poetry through following the rules of nature, argues Pope, and contemporary critics must do the same. Pope assures that good taste derives from Nature and that critics should imitate the ancient rules established by classical writers.

In the **second part**, Pope lists the many ways in which critics have deviated from these rules. He describes some of the ways that critics develop bad judgment, the chief of which is pride. The key to avoiding this is to know your own faults and limitations. Moreover, critics must study well and focus on conventions passed down from the masters of poetry. Pope warns that critics must be careful of becoming slaves to the rules that others have developed and to not let the popularity of an author misguide a critic's appreciation of an author's work. One of the products of adhering too closely to conventions is that critics become fascinated with extremes and forget the essential truth that beauty and good

poetry are made up of the combination of all of their parts, rather than each part by itself.

In the **third part** of the poem, Pope discusses the characteristics of a good critic, concludes with a short history of literary criticism and a catalog of famous critics. He offers some wisdom that critics should follow. Once again, Pope emphasizes the importance of humility and studying deeply, particularly studying those poets and critics who truly understand poetry and follow nature. Pope then reflects on the ups and downs of literature and literary critics since Greek culture, explaining how the understanding produced by the Greeks and Romans was lost and is only beginning to be appreciated again.

### **An Essay On Criticism: Part 1**

*Si quid novisti rectius istis,  
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum*  
[If you have come to know any precept more correct than these,  
share it with me, brilliant one; if not, use these with me] (Horace,  
Epistle I.6.67)

#### **PART 1**

- 1 'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
- 2 Appear in writing or in judging ill;
- 3 But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' offence
- 4 To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.
- 5 Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
- 6 Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;

7 A fool might once himself alone expose,  
8 Now one in verse makes many more in prose.

9 'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none  
10 Go just alike, yet each believes his own.  
11 In poets as true genius is but rare,  
12 True taste as seldom is the critic's share;  
13 Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,  
14 These born to judge, as well as those to write.  
15 Let such teach others who themselves excel,  
16 And censure freely who have written well.  
17 Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,  
18 But are not critics to their judgment too?

19 Yet if we look more closely we shall find  
20 Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind;  
21 Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light;  
22 The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.  
23 But as the slightest sketch, if justly trac'd,  
24 Is by ill colouring but the more disgrac'd,  
25 So by false learning is good sense defac'd;  
26 Some are bewilder'd in the maze of schools,  
27 And some made coxcombs Nature meant but fools.  
28 In search of wit these lose their common sense,  
29 And then turn critics in their own defence:  
30 Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,  
31 Or with a rival's, or an eunuch's spite.  
32 All fools have still an itching to deride,  
33 And fain would be upon the laughing side.  
34 If Mævius scribble in Apollo's spite,

35 There are, who judge still worse than he can write.

36 Some have at first for wits, then poets pass'd,  
37 Turn'd critics next, and prov'd plain fools at last;  
38 Some neither can for wits nor critics pass,  
39 As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.  
40 Those half-learn'd wittlings, num'rous in our isle  
41 As half-form'd insects on the banks of Nile;  
42 Unfinish'd things, one knows not what to call,  
43 Their generation's so equivocal:  
44 To tell 'em, would a hundred tongues require,  
45 Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire.

46 But you who seek to give and merit fame,  
47 And justly bear a critic's noble name,  
48 Be sure your self and your own reach to know,  
49 How far your genius, taste, and learning go;  
50 Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,  
51 And mark that point where sense and dulness meet.

52 Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,  
53 And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit:  
54 As on the land while here the ocean gains,  
55 In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains;  
56 Thus in the soul while memory prevails,  
57 The solid pow'r of understanding fails;  
58 Where beams of warm imagination play,  
59 The memory's soft figures melt away.  
60 One science only will one genius fit;  
61 So vast is art, so narrow human wit:

62 Not only bounded to peculiar arts,  
63 But oft in those, confin'd to single parts.  
64 Like kings we lose the conquests gain'd before,  
65 By vain ambition still to make them more;  
66 Each might his sev'ral province well command,  
67 Would all but stoop to what they understand.

68 First follow NATURE, and your judgment frame  
69 By her just standard, which is still the same:  
70 Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
71 One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,  
72 Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,  
73 At once the source, and end, and test of art.  
74 Art from that fund each just supply provides,  
75 Works without show, and without pomp presides:  
76 In some fair body thus th' informing soul  
77 With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,  
78 Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve sustains;  
79 Itself unseen, but in th' effects, remains.  
80 Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse,  
81 Want as much more, to turn it to its use;  
82 For wit and judgment often are at strife,  
83 Though meant each other's aid, like man and wife.  
84 'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed;  
85 Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed;  
86 The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,  
87 Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

88 Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd,  
89 Are Nature still, but Nature methodis'd;

90 Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd  
91 By the same laws which first herself ordain'd.

92 Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,  
93 When to repress, and when indulge our flights:  
94 High on Parnassus' top her sons she show'd,  
95 And pointed out those arduous paths they trod;  
96 Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,  
97 And urg'd the rest by equal steps to rise.  
98 Just precepts thus from great examples giv'n,  
99 She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n.

100 The gen'rous critic fann'd the poet's fire,  
101 And taught the world with reason to admire.  
102 Then criticism the Muse's handmaid prov'd,  
103 To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd;  
104 But following wits from that intention stray'd;  
105 Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid;  
106 Against the poets their own arms they turn'd,  
107 Sure to hate most the men from whom they learn'd.  
108 So modern 'pothecaries, taught the art  
109 By doctor's bills to play the doctor's part,  
110 Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,  
111 Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.  
112 Some on the leaves of ancient authors prey,  
113 Nor time nor moths e'er spoil'd so much as they:  
114 Some drily plain, without invention's aid,  
115 Write dull receipts how poems may be made:  
116 These leave the sense, their learning to display,  
117 And those explain the meaning quite away.

118 You then whose judgment the right course would steer,  
119 Know well each ANCIENT'S proper character;  
120 His fable, subject, scope in ev'ry page;  
121 Religion, country, genius of his age:  
122 Without all these at once before your eyes,  
123 Cavil you may, but never criticise.  
124 Be Homer's works your study and delight,  
125 Read them by day, and meditate by night;  
126 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,  
127 And trace the Muses upward to their spring;  
128 Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse;  
129 And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.

130 When first young Maro in his boundless mind  
131 A work t' outlast immortal Rome design'd,  
132 Perhaps he seem'd above the critic's law,  
133 And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:  
134 But when t' examine ev'ry part he came,  
135 Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.  
136 Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design,  
137 And rules as strict his labour'd work confine,  
138 As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line.  
139 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
140 To copy nature is to copy them.

141 Some beauties yet, no precepts can declare,  
142 For there's a happiness as well as care.  
143 Music resembles poetry, in each  
144 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,  
145 And which a master-hand alone can reach.



146 If, where the rules not far enough extend,  
147 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)  
148 Some lucky LICENCE answers to the full  
149 Th' intent propos'd, that licence is a rule.  
150 Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,  
151 May boldly deviate from the common track.  
152 Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
153 And rise to faults true critics dare not mend;  
154 From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,  
155 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,  
156 Which, without passing through the judgment, gains  
157 The heart, and all its end at once attains.  
158 In prospects, thus, some objects please our eyes,  
159 Which out of nature's common order rise,  
160 The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice.  
161 But tho' the ancients thus their rules invade,  
162 (As kings dispense with laws themselves have made)  
163 Moderns, beware! or if you must offend  
164 Against the precept, ne'er transgress its end;  
165 Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need,  
166 And have, at least, their precedent to plead.  
167 The critic else proceeds without remorse,  
168 Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.

169 I know there are, to whose presumptuous thoughts  
170 Those freer beauties, ev'n in them, seem faults.  
171 Some figures monstrous and misshap'd appear,  
172 Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,  
173 Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,  
174 Due distance reconciles to form and grace.

175 A prudent chief not always must display  
176 His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,  
177 But with th' occasion and the place comply,  
178 Conceal his force, nay seem sometimes to fly.  
179 Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,  
180 Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

181 Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,  
182 Above the reach of sacrilegious hands,  
183 Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,  
184 Destructive war, and all-involving age.  
185 See, from each clime the learn'd their incense bring!  
186 Hear, in all tongues consenting pæans ring!  
187 In praise so just let ev'ry voice be join'd,  
188 And fill the gen'ral chorus of mankind!  
189 Hail, bards triumphant! born in happier days;  
190 Immortal heirs of universal praise!  
191 Whose honours with increase of ages grow,  
192 As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow!  
193 Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,  
194 And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!  
195 Oh may some spark of your celestial fire  
196 The last, the meanest of your sons inspire,  
197 (That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights;  
198 Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)  
199 To teach vain wits a science little known,  
200 T' admire superior sense, and doubt their own!

Alexander Pope in his “An Essay on Criticism” calls for a “return to nature” is complex. On the cosmic level Nature signifies the convenient order of the world and the universe, a hierarchy in which each entity has a proper assigned place of its own. Nature can refer to what is central, common and universal to all human experience, encompassing the spheres of morality and knowledge. It also signifies the rules of proper moral conduct as well as archetypal or representative patterns of human reason.

It means having qualities that makes someone one of a kind. Nature for him is thus, is a universal and general regulation that beyond human beings control or grasp but is indispensable in influencing their literary creation. It seems more of a divine source of inspiration or a sort of sacred rules than personal skills or individual talent. Pope says that Nature has the capability to render “life, force and beauty” to an art. Literary creation and appreciation is redefined and regulated by Nature. Nature constitutes and functions as “the Source, and End, and Text of art”.

To acquire a better judgment and redefined taste of Literature depends on Nature, which is “just”, “unerring”, “divinely bright”, “clear” and “universal”. Any art that fails to reflect nature is not worth to be called an art at all.

In the essay “An Essay on Criticism”, Pope puts a great emphasis on the word “Wit”. The word wit in Pope’s time could refer in general to intelligence, it also meant in the modern sense of cleverness, as expressed in figures of speech and especially discerning unanticipated similarities between different entities. Wit according to Pope is the general ability of a writer to express the truth and morality. According to Pope, wit is the reflection of imitation. True wit, exists in the relationship among ideal image and expression. Wit is like an everlasting sea.

Pope’s exploration of wit lines up with the central classical virtues, which are themselves equated with Nature: “True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,/ What oft was Thought, but ne’er so well Exprest” (297-298).

Pope subsequently says that expression is the “Dress of Thought” and that “true expression” throws light on objects without altering them. The lines above are concentrated expressions of Pope’s classicism. If wit is the “dress” of nature, it will express nature without altering it.

While Pope says that the good poets makes the best critics, and while he notice that some critics are failed poets, he points out that both the best poetry or the best criticism are divinely inspired: “Both must alike from Heav’n derive

their Light” (13-14). Pope sees the endeavor of criticism as a noble one, provided it abides by Horace’s advice for the poet:

*But you who seek to give and merit Fame,  
And just bare a Critick’s noble Name,  
Be sure yourself and your own Reach to know,  
How far your Genius, Taste, and Learning go:  
Launch not beyond your Depth... (46-56)*

Apart from knowing his own capacities, the critic must also be fully familiar with every aspect of the author whom he/she is examining. Pope suggests the critic that he base his interpretation on the author’s intention: “In ev’ry Work regard the Writer’s End, / Since none can compass more than they Intend”. (233-234, 255-256).

Pope notes down two other guidelines to be followed by the writers and the critics. The first is to recognize the overall unity of a work and thereby to avoid falling into partial assessments based on the writer’s use of poetic, conceits, ornamented language, meters as well as judgments which are biased towards either archaic or modern styles or based on the reputations of given writers.

Pope, finally advises that a critic needs to possess a moral sensibility, as well as a sense of balance and proportion, this he indicates in the lines: “Nor in the Critick

let the Man be lost! / Good-Nature and Good-Sense must ever join” (523-525). Pope then, ends his advice with a summary of an ideal critic:

*But where’s the Man, who counsel can bestow,  
And Love to Praise, with Reason on his Side? (631-642)*

The qualities of a good critic are primarily attributes of humanity or moral sensibility rather than aesthetic qualities. Indeed, the only specifically aesthetic quality mentioned here is “taste”. The remaining virtues might be said to have theological ground, resting on the ability to overcome pride. Pope transposes the language of theology (“soul” and “pride”). The reason to which Pope appeals is a universal representation in human nature, and is a result of humility. It is thus, a disposition of humility – an aesthetic humility, if you will – which enables the critic to avoid the foregoing faults.

Now, Pope goes on to provide advice to both poet and critic. The utmost important advice here is to “follow Nature,” whose restraining function he explains:

*Nature is all fix’d the Limits fit,  
And wisely curb’d proud Man’s pretending Wit;  
One Science only will one Genius fit;  
So vast is Art, so Narrow Human Wit ... (52 – 53)*

Pope, designates human wit generally as an instrument of Pride. He, however, clarifies that in the scheme of nature, man's wit finds an appropriate place. It is in this context Pope says that:

*First follow NATURE, and your Judgement frame  
By her just Standard, which is still the same;  
Unerring Nature, which is still divinely bright,  
Once clear, unchang'd and Universal Light,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
At once the Source, and End, and Test of Art. (68 – 73)*

Pope unlike other medieval rhetoricians, does not entirely believe that poetry is a rational process. He seems to assert the primacy of wit over judgement, of art over criticism, viewing art as inspired and as transcending the norms of conventional thinking in its direct appeal to the heart. The critic's task here as Pope suggests, is to recognize the superiority of great wit. While these emphasis strides beyond many medieval and Renaissance aesthetics, it must of course be read in its own poetic context. He warns the writers and authors that should not just rely on their own insights but draw on the common store of poetic wisdom, established by the ancients.

Pope's exploration of wit lines up with the central classical virtues, which are themselves equated with

Nature: “True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,/ What oft was Thought, but ne’er so well Exprest” (297-298). Pope subsequently says that expression is the “Dress of Thought” and that “true expression” throws light on objects without altering them. The lines above are concentrated expressions of Pope’s classicism. If wit is the “dress” of nature, it will express nature without altering it.

The poet’s task here is twofold: not only to find the expression that will most truly convey nature, but to ensure that the substance he is expressing is indeed a natural insight or thought.

Another classical ideal urged by Pope is that of organic unity and wholeness. The expression or style must be suited to the subject matter and meaning: “The Sound must seem an Echo to the Sense ” (365)

Pope advises both Poet and critic to follow the Aristotelian ethical maxim: “Avoid Extremes”. For those who excess in any direction display “Great Pride, or Little Sense” (384 – 387).

Indeed the central passage in “An Essay on Criticism”, as in the later “Essay on Man”, Pope views all the major faults as stemming from pride. It is pride which leads critics and poets to overlook universal truths in favour of subjective



whims: pride which cause them to value only certain parts but not the whole, which disables them to attain a harmony between wit and judgment, and pride which underlies their excesses and biases.

Pope's final strategy in "An Essay on Criticism" is to equate the classical literary and critical traditions with nature, and to sketch a redefined outline of literary history from classical times to his own era. Pope insists that the rules of nature were merely discovered, not invented, by the ancients: "Those Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd, / Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz'd" (88-89).

Pope's advice for both critic and poet is clear: "Learn hence for Ancient Rules a just Esteem; / To copy Nature is to copy Them" (139 – 140). Pope traces the genealogy of "nature", as embodied in classical authors.

### **An Essay On Man**

"An Essay *on Man*" consists of four epistles, written in heroic couplets. **Epistle I** examines the nature of man and his place in the universe; **Epistle II**, man as an individual; **Epistle III**, man's place in society; and **Epistle IV**, man's pursuit of happiness. Pope attempts to warn man against excessive pride, explaining that he is not the center of all

things. Man's perception of the world is simply limited by his imperfect state. Man should therefore accept his place in God's order, which can lead to happy and virtuous lives. On the whole, *An Essay on Man* is an affirmative poem of faith and takes an optimistic view of the world.

### **An Essay On Man In Four Epistles: Epistle II**

#### **I.**

- 1 Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
- 2 The proper study of mankind is man.
- 3 Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
- 4 A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
- 5 With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
- 6 With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
- 7 He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
- 8 In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
- 9 In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
- 10 Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
- 11 Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
- 12 Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
- 13 Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd;
- 14 Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
- 15 Created half to rise, and half to fall;
- 16 Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
- 17 Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:
- 18 The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!
  
- 19 Go, wondrous creature! mount where science guides,

20 Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;  
21 Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,  
22 Correct old time, and regulate the sun;  
23 Go, soar with Plato to th' empyreal sphere,  
24 To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;  
25 Or tread the mazy round his follow'rs trod,  
26 And quitting sense call imitating God;  
27 As Eastern priests in giddy circles run,  
28 And turn their heads to imitate the sun.  
29 Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule—  
30 Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!

31 Superior beings, when of late they saw  
32 A mortal Man unfold all Nature's law,  
33 Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape,  
34 And showed a Newton as we shew an Ape.

35 Could he, whose rules the rapid comet bind,  
36 Describe or fix one movement of his mind?  
37 Who saw its fires here rise, and there descend,  
38 Explain his own beginning, or his end?  
39 Alas what wonder! Man's superior part  
40 Uncheck'd may rise, and climb from art to art;  
41 But when his own great work is but begun,  
42 What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone.

43 Trace science then, with modesty thy guide;  
44 First strip off all her equipage of pride;  
45 Deduct what is but vanity, or dress,  
46 Or learning's luxury, or idleness;

47 Or tricks to show the stretch of human brain,  
48 Mere curious pleasure, or ingenious pain;  
49 Expunge the whole, or lop th' excrescent parts  
50 Of all our Vices have created Arts;  
51 Then see how little the remaining sum,  
52 Which serv'd the past, and must the times to come!

## II.

53 Two principles in human nature reign;  
54 Self-love, to urge, and reason, to restrain;  
55 Nor this a good, nor that a bad we call,  
56 Each works its end, to move or govern all:  
57 And to their proper operation still,  
58 Ascribe all good; to their improper, ill.

59 Self-love, the spring of motion, acts the soul;  
60 Reason's comparing balance rules the whole.  
61 Man, but for that, no action could attend,  
62 And but for this, were active to no end:  
63 Fix'd like a plant on his peculiar spot,  
64 To draw nutrition, propagate, and rot;  
65 Or, meteor-like, flame lawless through the void,  
66 Destroying others, by himself destroy'd.

67 Most strength the moving principle requires;  
68 Active its task, it prompts, impels, inspires.  
69 Sedate and quiet the comparing lies,  
70 Form'd but to check, delib'rate, and advise.  
71 Self-love still stronger, as its objects nigh;  
72 Reason's at distance, and in prospect lie:

73 That sees immediate good by present sense;  
74 Reason, the future and the consequence.  
75 Thicker than arguments, temptations throng,  
76 At best more watchful this, but that more strong.  
77 The action of the stronger to suspend,  
78 Reason still use, to reason still attend.  
79 Attention, habit and experience gains;  
80 Each strengthens reason, and self-love restrains.

81 Let subtle schoolmen teach these friends to fight,  
82 More studious to divide than to unite,  
83 And grace and virtue, sense and reason split,  
84 With all the rash dexterity of wit:  
85 Wits, just like fools, at war about a name,  
86 Have full as oft no meaning, or the same.  
87 Self-love and reason to one end aspire,  
88 Pain their aversion, pleasure their desire;  
89 But greedy that its object would devour,  
90 This taste the honey, and not wound the flow'r:  
91 Pleasure, or wrong or rightly understood,  
92 Our greatest evil, or our greatest good.

### III.

93 Modes of self-love the passions we may call:  
94 'Tis real good, or seeming, moves them all:  
95 But since not every good we can divide,  
96 And reason bids us for our own provide;  
97 Passions, though selfish, if their means be fair,  
98 List under reason, and deserve her care;  
99 Those, that imparted, court a nobler aim,

100 Exalt their kind, and take some virtue's name.

101 In lazy apathy let Stoics boast  
102 Their virtue fix'd, 'tis fix'd as in a frost;  
103 Contracted all, retiring to the breast;  
104 But strength of mind is exercise, not rest:  
105 The rising tempest puts in act the soul,  
106 Parts it may ravage, but preserves the whole.  
107 On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,  
108 Reason the card, but passion is the gale;  
109 Nor God alone in the still calm we find,  
110 He mounts the storm, and walks upon the wind.

111 Passions, like elements, though born to fight,  
112 Yet, mix'd and soften'd, in his work unite:  
113 These 'tis enough to temper and employ;  
114 But what composes man, can man destroy?  
115 Suffice that reason keep to nature's road,  
116 Subject, compound them, follow her and God.  
117 Love, hope, and joy, fair pleasure's smiling train,  
118 Hate, fear, and grief, the family of pain,  
119 These mix'd with art, and to due bounds confin'd,  
120 Make and maintain the balance of the mind:  
121 The lights and shades, whose well accorded strife  
122 Gives all the strength and colour of our life.

123 Pleasures are ever in our hands or eyes,  
124 And when in act they cease, in prospect, rise:  
125 Present to grasp, and future still to find,  
126 The whole employ of body and of mind.

127 All spread their charms, but charm not all alike;  
128 On diff'rent senses diff'rent objects strike;  
129 Hence diff'rent passions more or less inflame,  
130 As strong or weak, the organs of the frame;  
131 And hence one master passion in the breast,  
132 Like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest.

133 As man, perhaps, the moment of his breath,  
134 Receives the lurking principle of death;  
135 The young disease, that must subdue at length,  
136 Grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength:  
137 So, cast and mingled with his very frame,  
138 The mind's disease, its ruling passion came;  
139 Each vital humour which should feed the whole,  
140 Soon flows to this, in body and in soul.  
141 Whatever warms the heart, or fills the head,  
142 As the mind opens, and its functions spread,  
143 Imagination plies her dang'rous art,  
144 And pours it all upon the peccant part.

145 Nature its mother, habit is its nurse;  
146 Wit, spirit, faculties, but make it worse;  
147 Reason itself but gives it edge and pow'r;  
148 As Heav'n's blest beam turns vinegar more sour.  
149 We, wretched subjects, though to lawful sway,  
150 In this weak queen some fav'rite still obey:  
151 Ah! if she lend not arms, as well as rules,  
152 What can she more than tell us we are fools?  
153 Teach us to mourn our nature, not to mend,  
154 A sharp accuser, but a helpless friend!

155 Or from a judge turn pleader, to persuade  
156 The choice we make, or justify it made;  
157 Proud of an easy conquest all along,  
158 She but removes weak passions for the strong:  
159 So, when small humours gather to a gout,  
160 The doctor fancies he has driv'n them out.

161 Yes, nature's road must ever be preferr'd;  
162 Reason is here no guide, but still a guard:  
163 'Tis hers to rectify, not overthrow,  
164 And treat this passion more as friend than foe:  
165 A mightier pow'r the strong direction sends,  
166 And sev'ral men impels to sev'ral ends.  
167 Like varying winds, by other passions toss'd,  
168 This drives them constant to a certain coast.  
169 Let pow'r or knowledge, gold or glory, please,  
170 Or (oft more strong than all) the love of ease;  
171 Through life 'tis followed, ev'n at life's expense;  
172 The merchant's toil, the sage's indolence,  
173 The monk's humility, the hero's pride,  
174 All, all alike, find reason on their side.

175 Th' eternal art educing good from ill,  
176 Grafts on this passion our best principle:  
177 'Tis thus the mercury of man is fix'd,  
178 Strong grows the virtue with his nature mix'd;  
179 The dross cements what else were too refin'd,  
180 And in one interest body acts with mind.

181 As fruits, ungrateful to the planter's care,



182 On savage stocks inserted, learn to bear;  
183 The surest virtues thus from passions shoot,  
184 Wild nature's vigor working at the root.  
185 What crops of wit and honesty appear  
186 From spleen, from obstinacy, hate, or fear!  
187 See anger, zeal and fortitude supply;  
188 Ev'n av'rice, prudence; sloth, philosophy;  
189 Lust, through some certain strainers well refin'd,  
190 Is gentle love, and charms all womankind;  
191 Envy, to which th' ignoble mind's a slave,  
192 Is emulation in the learn'd or brave;  
193 Nor virtue, male or female, can we name,  
194 But what will grow on pride, or grow on shame.

195 Thus nature gives us (let it check our pride)  
196 The virtue nearest to our vice allied:  
197 Reason the byass turns to good from ill,  
198 And Nero reigns a Titus, if he will.  
199 The fiery soul abhorr'd in Catiline,  
200 In Decius charms, in Curtius is divine:  
201 The same ambition can destroy or save,  
202 And make a patriot as it makes a knave.

#### **IV.**

203 This light and darkness in our chaos join'd,  
204 What shall divide? The God within the mind.

205 Extremes in nature equal ends produce,  
206 In man they join to some mysterious use;  
207 Though each by turns the other's bound invade,

208 As, in some well-wrought picture, light and shade,  
209 And oft so mix, the diff'rence is too nice  
210 Where ends the virtue, or begins the vice.

211 Fools! who from hence into the notion fall,  
212 That vice or virtue there is none at all.  
213 If white and black blend, soften, and unite  
214 A thousand ways, is there no black or white?  
215 Ask your own heart, and nothing is so plain;  
216 'Tis to mistake them, costs the time and pain.

#### V.

217 Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
218 As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;  
219 Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
220 We first endure, then pity, then embrace.  
221 But where th' extreme of vice, was ne'er agreed:  
222 Ask where's the North? at York, 'tis on the Tweed;  
223 In Scotland, at the Orcades; and there,  
224 At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where:  
225 No creature owns it in the first degree,  
226 But thinks his neighbour farther gone than he!  
227 Ev'n those who dwell beneath its very zone,  
228 Or never feel the rage, or never own;  
229 What happier natures shrink at with affright,  
230 The hard inhabitant contends is right.

#### VI.

231 Virtuous and vicious ev'ry man must be,  
232 Few in th' extreme, but all in the degree;

233 The rogue and fool by fits is fair and wise;  
234 And ev'n the best, by fits, what they despise.  
235 'Tis but by parts we follow good or ill,  
236 For, vice or virtue, self directs it still;  
237 Each individual seeks a sev'ral goal;  
238 But heav'n's great view is one, and that the whole:  
239 That counterworks each folly and caprice;  
240 That disappoints th' effect of ev'ry vice;  
241 That, happy frailties to all ranks applied,  
242 Shame to the virgin, to the matron pride,  
243 Fear to the statesman, rashness to the chief,  
244 To kings presumption, and to crowds belief,  
245 That, virtue's ends from vanity can raise,  
246 Which seeks no int'rest, no reward but praise;  
247 And build on wants, and on defects of mind,  
248 The joy, the peace, the glory of mankind.

249 Heav'n forming each on other to depend,  
250 A master, or a servant, or a friend,  
251 Bids each on other for assistance call,  
252 'Till one man's weakness grows the strength of all.  
253 Wants, frailties, passions, closer still ally  
254 The common int'rest, or endear the tie:  
255 To these we owe true friendship, love sincere,  
256 Each home-felt joy that life inherits here;  
257 Yet from the same we learn, in its decline,  
258 Those joys, those loves, those int'rests to resign;  
259 Taught half by reason, half by mere decay,  
260 To welcome death, and calmly pass away.

261 Whate'er the passion, knowledge, fame, or pelf,  
262 Not one will change his neighbour with himself.  
263 The learn'd is happy nature to explore,  
264 The fool is happy that he knows no more;  
265 The rich is happy in the plenty giv'n,  
266 The poor contents him with the care of heav'n.  
267 See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing,  
268 The sot a hero, lunatic a king;  
269 The starving chemist in his golden views  
270 Supremely blest, the poet in his Muse.

271 See some strange comfort ev'ry state attend,  
272 And pride bestow'd on all, a common friend;  
273 See some fit passion ev'ry age supply,  
274 Hope travels through, nor quits us when we die.

275 Behold the child, by nature's kindly law,  
276 Pleas'd with a rattle, tickl'd with a straw:  
277 Some livelier plaything gives his youth delight,  
278 A little louder, but as empty quite:  
279 Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,  
280 And beads and pray'r books are the toys of age:  
281 Pleas'd with this bauble still, as that before;  
282 'Till tir'd he sleeps, and life's poor play is o'er!

283 Meanwhile opinion gilds with varying rays  
284 Those painted clouds that beautify our days;  
285 Each want of happiness by hope supplied,  
286 And each vacuity of sense by Pride:  
287 These build as fast as knowledge can destroy;

288 In folly's cup still laughs the bubble, joy;  
289 One prospect lost, another still we gain;  
290 And not a vanity is giv'n in vain;  
291 Ev'n mean self-love becomes, by force divine,  
292 The scale to measure others' wants by thine.  
293 See! and confess, one comfort still must rise,  
294 'Tis this: Though man's a fool, yet God is wise.

The subtitle of the second epistle is “Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Himself as an Individual” and treats on the relationship between the individual and God’s greater design.

Here is a section-by-section explanation of the second epistle: **Section I (1-52)**: argues that man should not pry into God’s affairs but rather study himself, especially his nature, powers, limits, and frailties.

**Section II (53-92)**: shows that the two principles of man are self-love and reason. Self-love is the stronger of the two, but their ultimate goal is the same.

**Section III (93-202)**: describes the modes of self-love (i.e., the passions) and their function. Pope describes the ruling passion and its potency. The ruling passion works to provide man with direction and defines man’s nature and virtue.

**Section IV (203-16):** indicates that virtue and vice are combined in man's nature and that the two, while distinct, often mix.

**Section V (217-30):** illustrates the evils of vice and explains how easily man is drawn to it.

**Section VI (231-294):** asserts that man's passions and imperfections are simply designed to suit God's purposes. The passions and imperfections are distributed to all individuals of each order of men in all societies. They guide man in every state and at every age of life.

The second epistle adds to the interpretive challenges presented in the first epistle. At its outset, Pope commands man to "Know then thyself," an adage that misdescribes his argument (1). Although he actually intends for man to better understand his place in the universe, the classical meaning of "Know thyself" is that man should look inwards for truth rather than outwards. Having spent most of the first epistle describing man's relationship to God as well as his fellow creatures, Pope's true meaning of the phrase is clear. He then confuses the issue by endeavoring to convince man to avoid the presumptuousness of studying God's creation through natural science. Science has given man the tools to better understand God's creation, but its intoxicating power

has caused man to imitate God. It seems that man must look outwards to gain any understanding of his divine purpose but avoid excessive analysis of what he sees. To do so would be to assume the role of God.

The second epistle abruptly turns to focus on the principles that guide human action. The rest of this section focuses largely on “self-love,” an eighteenth-century term for self-maintenance and fulfillment. It was common during Pope’s lifetime to view the passions as the force determining human action. Typically instinctual, the immediate object of the passions was seen as pleasure. According to Pope’s philosophy, each man has a “ruling passion” that subordinates the others. In contrast with the accepted eighteenth-century views of the passions, Pope’s doctrine of the “ruling passion” is quite original. It seems clear that with this idea, Pope tries to explain why certain individuals behave in distinct ways, seemingly governed by a particular desire. He does not, however, make this explicit in the poem.

Pope’s discussion of the passions shows that “self-love” and “reason” are not opposing principles. Reason’s role, it seems, is to regulate human behavior while self-love originates it. In another sense, self-love and the passions dictate the short term while reason shapes the long term.

## **Samuel Johnson (1709- 1784)**

Samuel Johnson, also known as "Dr. Johnson," was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, England on September 18, 1709. He was born ill with tuberculosis. He faced many physical illnesses such as almost blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. Despite the physical illnesses, his mind was his strongest part.

It is claimed that Samuel Johnson grew up in poverty. His father was a poor bookseller. At the age of about sixteen, Johnson's father was deeply in debt. To earn money, Johnson began to stitch books for his father, and it is presumable that Johnson spent much time in his father's bookshop reading and building his literary knowledge. The family remained in poverty until the cousin of Johnson's mother, Elizabeth Harriotts, died in February 1728 and left enough money to send Johnson to college. Oxford did eventually award him with the degree of Master of Arts. Johnson was also awarded an honorary doctorate in 1765 by Trinity College Dublin and in 1775 by Oxford.

Samuel Johnson became the prominent figure of the eighteenth century. He didn't write much, but it was his perfection in each of his work that made him popular. Johnson is known for writing poetry, fiction, moralizing



essays, and political pieces. Johnson wrote *A Dictionary of The English language* and produced several editions during his life. He was so famous that his writing years are known as the Age of Johnson.

His last major work was his *Lives of the Poets*; the longest entries were on Dryden, Milton, Swift, and Pope. In his last years, Johnson suffered from a stroke and other illnesses. He died on September 13th, 1784. He is buried at Westminster Abbey.

Samuel Johnson's "*London*" and "*Vanity of human wishes*" were his most popular poems. His first poem *London* was published in 1738. *London* is a political satire that captures the spirit of Juvenal's third satire which aims at society and culture.

*The Vanity of Human Wishes* is an imitation of the satires of Juvenal. The poem reflects Juvenal's tenth satire, in which he served the philosophical purpose. It has a melancholy tone. This poem is Johnson's first work published with his name, but earlier he was writing anonymously. It is widely regarded as Johnson's effort to convey the essence of the Christian ethos through verse and imagery.

## London: A Poem

### In Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal

———*Quis ineptæ*

*Tam patiens Urbis, tam ferreus ut teneat se?*

Juv.

- 1 Though grief and fondness in my breast rebel,
- 2 When injur'd Thales bids the town farewell,
- 3 Yet still my calmer thoughts his choice commend,
- 4 I praise the hermit, but regret the friend,
- 5 Who now resolves, from vice and London far,
- 6 To breathe in distant fields a purer air,
- 7 And, fix'd on Cambria's solitary shore,
- 8 Give to St. David one true Briton more.
- 9 For who would leave, unbrib'd, Hibernia's land,
- 10 Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
- 11 There none are swept by sudden fate away,
- 12 But all whom hunger spares, with age decay:
- 13 Here malice, rapine, accident, conspire,
- 14 And now a rabble rages, now a fire;
- 15 Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
- 16 And here the fell attorney prowls for prey;
- 17 Here falling houses thunder on your head,

18 And here a female atheist talks you dead.  
19 While Thales waits the wherry that contains  
20 Of dissipated wealth the small remains,  
21 On Thames's banks, in silent thought we stood,  
22 Where Greenwich smiles upon the silver flood:  
23 Struck with the seat that gave Eliza birth,  
24 We kneel, and kiss the consecrated earth;  
25 In pleasing dreams the blissful age renew,  
26 And call Britannia's glories back to view;  
27 Behold her cross triumphant on the main,  
28 The guard of commerce, and the dread of Spain,  
29 Ere masquerades debauch'd, excise oppress'd,  
30 Or English honour grew a standing jest.  
31 A transient calm the happy scenes bestow,  
32 And for a moment lull the sense of woe.  
33 At length awaking, with contemptuous frown,  
34 Indignant Thales eyes the neighb'ring town.  
35 "Since worth," he cries, "in these degen'rate days,  
36 Wants ev'n the cheap reward of empty praise;  
37 In those curs'd walls, devote to vice and gain,  
38 Since unrewarded science toils in vain;  
39 Since hope but soothes to double my distress,  
40 And ev'ry moment leaves my little less;

41 While yet my steady steps no staff sustains,  
42 And life still vig'rous revels in my veins;  
43 Grant me, kind heaven, to find some happier place,  
44 Where honesty and sense are no disgrace;  
45 Some pleasing bank where verdant osiers play,  
46 Some peaceful vale with nature's paintings gay;  
47 Where once the harass'd Briton found repose,  
48 And safe in poverty defied his foes;  
49 Some secret cell, ye pow'rs, indulgent give.  
50 Let ----- live here, for ----- has learn'd to live.  
51 Here let those reign, whom pensions can incite  
52 To vote a patriot black, a courtier white;  
53 Explain their country's dear-bought rights away,  
54 And plead for pirates in the face of day;  
55 With slavish tenets taint our poison'd youth,  
56 And lend a lie the confidence of truth.  
57 "Let such raise palaces, and manors buy,  
58 Collect a tax, or farm a lottery,  
59 With warbling eunuchs fill a licens'd stage,  
60 And lull to servitude a thoughtless age.  
61 "Heroes, proceed! What bounds your pride shall hold?  
62 What check restrain your thirst of pow'r and gold?  
63 Behold rebellious virtue quite o'erthrown,

64 Behold our fame, our wealth, our lives your own.  
65 "To such, a groaning nation's spoils are giv'n,  
66 When public crimes inflame the wrath of Heav'n:  
67 But what, my friend, what hope remains for me,  
68 Who start at theft, and blush at perjury?  
69 Who scarce forbear, though Britain's court he sing,  
70 To pluck a titled poet's borrow'd wing;  
71 A statesman's logic unconvinc'd can hear,  
72 And dare to slumber o'er the Gazetteer;  
73 Despise a fool in half his pension dress'd,  
74 And strive in vain to laugh at H----y's jest.  
75 "Others with softer smiles, and subtler art,  
76 Can sap the principles, or taint the heart;  
77 With more address a lover's note convey,  
78 Or bribe a virgin's innocence away.  
79 Well may they rise, while I, whose rustic tongue  
80 Ne'er knew to puzzle right, or varnish wrong,  
81 Spurn'd as a beggar, dreaded as a spy.  
82 Live unregarded, unlamented die.  
83 "For what but social guilt the friend endears?  
84 Who shares Orgilio's crimes, his fortune shares.  
85 But thou, should tempting villainy present  
86 All Marlborough hoarded, or all Villiers spent,

87 Turn from the glitt'ring bribe thy scornful eye,  
88 Nor sell for gold, what gold could never buy,  
89 The peaceful slumber, self-approving day,  
90 Unsullied fame, and conscience ever gay.  
91 "The cheated nation's happy fav'rites, see!  
92 Mark whom the great caress, who frown on me!  
93 London! the needy villain's gen'ral home,  
94 The common shore of Paris and of Rome;  
95 With eager thirst, by folly or by fate,  
96 Sucks in the dregs of each corrupted state.  
97 Forgive my transports on a theme like this,  
98 I cannot bear a French metropolis.  
99 "Illustrious Edward! from the realms of day,  
100 The land of heroes and of saints survey;  
101 Nor hope the British lineaments to trace,  
102 The rustic grandeur, or the surly grace,  
103 But lost in thoughtless ease, and empty show,  
104 Behold the warrior dwindled to a beau;  
105 Sense, freedom, piety, refin'd away,  
106 Of France the mimic, and of Spain the prey.  
107 "All that at home no more can beg or steal,  
108 Or like a gibbet better than a wheel;  
109 Hiss'd from the stage, or hooted from the court,

110 Their air, the dress, their politics import;  
111 Obsequious, artful, voluble and gay,  
112 On Britain's fond credulity they prey.  
113 No gainful trade their industry can 'scape,  
114 They sing, they dance, clean shoes, or cure a clap;  
115 All sciences a fasting monsieur knows,  
116 And bid him go to hell, to hell he goes.  
117 "Ah! what avails it, that, from slav'ry far,  
118 I drew the breath of life in English air;  
119 Was early taught a Briton's right to prize,  
120 And lisp the tale of Henry's victories;  
121 If the gull'd conqueror receives the chain,  
122 And flattery subdues when arms are vain?  
123 "Studious to please, and ready to submit,  
124 The supple Gaul was born a parasite:  
125 Still to his int'rest true, where'er he goes,  
126 Wit, brav'ry, worth, his lavish tongue bestows;  
127 In ev'ry face a thousand graces shine,  
128 From ev'ry tongue flows harmony divine.  
129 These arts in vain our rugged natives try,  
130 Strain out with fault'ring diffidence a lie,  
131 And gain a kick for awkward flattery.  
132 "Besides, with justice, this discerning age

133 Admires their wond'rous talents for the stage:  
134 Well may they venture on the mimic's art,  
135 Who play from morn to night a borrow'd part;  
136 Practis'd their master's notions to embrace,  
137 Repeat his maxims, and reflect his face;  
138 With ev'ry wild absurdity comply,  
139 And view each object with another's eye;  
140 To shake with laughter ere the jest they hear,  
141 To pour at will the counterfeited tear,  
142 And as their patron hints the cold or heat,  
143 To shake in dog-days, in December sweat.  
144 How, when competitors like these contend,  
145 Can surly virtue hope to fix a friend?  
146 Slaves that with serious impudence beguile,  
147 And lie without a blush, without a smile;  
148 Exalt each trifle, ev'ry vice adore,  
149 Your taste in snuff, your judgment in a whore;  
150 Can Balbo's eloquence applaud, and swear  
151 He gropes his breeches with a monarch's air.  
152 "For arts like these preferr'd, admir'd, caress'd,  
153 They first invade your table, then your breast;  
154 Explore your secrets with insidious art,  
155 Watch the weak hour, and ransack all the heart;



156 Then soon your ill-plac'd confidence repay,  
157 Commence your lords, and govern or betray.  
158 "By numbers here from shame or censure free,  
159 All crimes are safe, but hated poverty.  
160 This, only this, the rigid law pursues,  
161 This, only this, provokes the snarling muse;  
162 The sober trader at a tatter'd cloak,  
163 Wakes from his dream, and labours for a joke;  
164 With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze,  
165 And turn the varied taunt a thousand ways.  
166 Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,  
167 Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest;  
168 Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,  
169 Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.  
170 "Has heav'n reserv'd, in pity to the poor,  
171 No pathless waste, or undiscover'd shore;  
172 No secret island in the boundless main?  
173 No peaceful desert yet unclaim'd by Spain?  
174 Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore,  
175 And bear oppression's insolence no more.  
176 "This mournful truth is ev'rywhere confess'd,  
177 SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPRESS'D:  
178 But here more slow, where all are slaves to gold,

179 Where looks are merchandise, and smiles are sold;  
180 Where won by bribes, by flatt'ries implor'd,  
181 The groom retails the favours of his lord.  
182 "But hark! th' affrighted crowd's tumultuous cries  
183 Roll through the streets, and thunder to the skies;  
184 Rais'd from some pleasing dream of wealth and pow'r,  
185 Some pompous palace, or some blissful bow'r,  
186 Aghast you start, and scarce with aching sight  
187 Sustain the th' approaching fire's tremendous light;  
188 Swift from pursuing horrors take your way,  
189 And leave your little ALL to flames a prey;  
190 Then through the world a wretched vagrant roam,  
191 For where can starving merit find a home?  
192 In vain your mournful narrative disclose,  
193 While all neglect, and most insult your woes.  
194 "Should heav'n's just bolts Orgilio's wealth confound,  
195 And spread his flaming palace on the ground,  
196 Swift o'er the land the dismal rumour flies,  
197 And public mournings pacify the skies;  
198 The laureate tribe in servile verse relate,  
199 How virtue wars with persecuting fate;  
200 With well-feign'd gratitude the pension'd band  
201 Refund the plunder of the beggar'd land.

202 See! while he builds, the gaudy vassals come,  
203 And crowd with sudden wealth the rising dome;  
204 The price of boroughs and of souls restore,  
205 And raise his treasures higher than before.  
206 Now bless'd with all the baubles of the great,  
207 The polish'd marble, and the shining plate,  
208 Orgilio sees the golden pile aspire,  
209 And hopes from angry Heav'n another fire.  
210 "Could'st thou resign the park and play content,  
211 For the fair banks of Severn or of Trent;  
212 There might'st thou find some elegant retreat,  
213 Some hireling senator's deserted seat;  
214 And stretch thy prospects o'er the smiling land,  
215 For less than rent the dungeons of the Strand;  
216 There prune thy walks, support thy drooping flow'rs,  
217 Direct thy rivulets, and twine thy bow'rs;  
218 And, while thy beds a cheap repast afford,  
219 Despise the dainties of a venal lord:  
220 There ev'ry bush with nature's music rings,  
221 There ev'ry breeze bears health upon its wings;  
222 On all thy hours security shall smile,  
223 And bless thine evening walk and morning toil.  
224 "Prepare for death, if here at night you roam,

225 And sign your will before you sup from home.  
226 "Some fiery fop, with new commission vain,  
227 Who sleeps on brambles till he kills his man;  
228 Some frolick drunkard, reeling from a feast,  
229 Provokes a broil, and stabs you for a jest.  
230 "Yet ev'n these heroes, mischievously gay,  
231 Lords of the street, and terrors of the way;  
232 Flush'd as they are with folly, youth, and wine,  
233 Their prudent insults to the poor confine;  
234 Afar they mark the flambeau's bright approach,  
235 And shun the shining train, and golden coach.  
236 "In vain, these dangers past, your doors you close,  
237 And hope the balmy blessings of repose:  
238 Cruel with guilt, and daring with despair,  
239 The midnight murd'rer bursts the faithless bar;  
240 Invades the sacred hour of silent rest,  
241 And plants, unseen, a dagger in your breast.  
242 "Scarce can our fields, such crowds at Tyburn die,  
243 With hemp the gallows and the fleet supply.  
244 Propose your schemes, ye senatorian band,  
245 Whose ways and means support the sinking land;  
246 Lest ropes be wanting in the tempting spring,  
247 To rig another convoy for the k--g.

248 "A single jail, in Alfred's golden reign,  
249 Could half the nation's criminals contain;  
250 Fair justice then, without constraint ador'd,  
251 Held high the steady scale, but dropp'd the sword;  
252 No spies were paid, no special juries known,  
253 Blest age! but ah! how diff'rent from our own!  
254 "Much could I add, -- but see the boat at hand,  
255 The tide retiring, calls me from the land:  
256 Farewell! -- When youth, and health, and fortune spent,  
257 Thou fly'st for refuge to the wilds of Kent;  
258 And tir'd like me with follies and with crimes,  
259 In angry numbers warn'st succeeding times;  
260 Then shall thy friend, nor thou refuse his aid,  
261 Still foe to vice, forsake his Cambrian shade;  
262 In virtue's cause once more exert his rage,  
263 Thy satire point, and animate thy page.

*'London'* was written by Samuel Johnson in imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal. It is written in heroic couplet. This poem consists of 263 lines. The first 34 lines of the poem are spoken by the narrator or Johnson. For the rest, Thales is the sole speaker.

This poem is an imitation of Juvenal's Third Satires. Juvenal wrote many satirical poems in the early 2nd century A.D. Johnson was a great lover of Roman poets and Augustan poets. As Juvenal describes Umbricius leaving Rome to escape from the problems of the city. Like that Johnson also describes Thales's journey to Wales in order to escape from the problems of London.

Thus Samuel Johnson describes the social problems of London during his time. He describes the problems of London city like crime, and corruption. The condition of the poor was also very bad at that time. Here the poet describes a man who is disturbed with the problems of the city London. He wants to leave London for solitude and peace.

### **Analysis: The poem London**

The poem London starts with the description of a man named Thales. He wants to go to Wales in order to escape from the problem of London city. He is standing on the banks of the river the Thames and waiting for the boat to take him to Wales. The Thames is a river that flows through London. Thus Thales is ready for leave to some rural place in wales to get peace and solitude.

Here the narrator expresses his view of the problems of London. The name of the narrator is not mentioned here. The narrator came to give farewell to his friend Thales who is going to Wales to escape from the dangers of the city London. The poet shows the bad condition of London through this poem. He points out the vices of the city London like selfishness, greed, violence, murder and the scene of bloodshed. He wants to give a message to the readers about the vices of the city. This poem also has a political point of view of his time.

The narrator was both happy and sad for his friend. The narrator praises his friend as a hermit but he is also sad because his close friend is going away from him. He says that his friend is now going far from the problems of the city and he will get peace and solitude there. Now he can live his life with purity in Wales. He further says that now he will live in Cambria forever. Cambria is named for wales here. That place is full of peace and solitude. He says that one more British also going to settle there in the place near S.t David who also left Hibernia's land for peace. There nobody is thrown away by the sudden fate. But hunger can torture them as they grow old.

But here is spread hatred, robbery, accidents, conspiracy in the country. Here the scenes of angry crowd and sufferings are common now. People have changed in an angry crowd. Young people have become now a villain and rogue. They do not protect people from robbery and other problems. There is a state of anarchy in the country.

When Thales was waiting for the Wherry on the bank of the Thames who had some remaining things with her, that time it was seeming as Greenwich is smiling upon the silver flood. Here poet indicates the birth of Elizabeth, the queen of Britain. the poet says that with the birth of Elizabeth a new hope arose in his heart as his dream had come true and a blissful Age was about to start.

The poet describes the problems of London in this poem. He says that people have become selfish and bad persons were rewarded while virtuous people were punished. Laziness was rewarded while hard work was not appreciated. Still, the poet has hope for a new world of peace but sometimes he becomes disappointed to see these types of problems in the country. He wants to find a good place to live where honesty is rewarded in place of corruption. The poet says that he is searching for a place where the poor are not tortured. There is everywhere the



scenes of murder, robbery and hustle. So he is very disappointed to see it all. Therefore his friend wants to go to Wales for peace.

**The Vanity of Human Wishes: A Poem**  
**In Imitation of The Tenth Satire of Juvenal**

Let observation with extensive view,  
Survey mankind, from China to Peru;  
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,  
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;  
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,  
O'erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate,  
Where wav'ring man, betray'd by vent'rous pride  
To tread the dreary paths without a guide,  
As treach'rous phantoms in the mist delude,  
Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good.  
How rarely reason guides the stubborn choice,  
Rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant voice,  
How nations sink, by darling schemes oppress'd,  
When vengeance listens to the fool's request.  
Fate wings with ev'ry wish th' afflictive dart,  
Each gift of nature, and each grace of art,  
With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,  
With fatal sweetness elocution flows,  
Impeachment stops the speaker's pow'rful breath,  
And restless fire precipitates on death. (1-20)

But scarce observ'd the knowing and the bold,  
Fall in the gen'ral massacre of gold;  
Wide-wasting pest! that rages unconfi'd,  
And crowds with crimes the records of mankind,  
For gold his sword the hireling ruffian draws,  
For gold the hireling judge distorts the laws;  
Wealth heap'd on wealth, nor truth nor safety buys,  
The dangers gather as the treasures rise.  
Let hist'ry tell where rival kings command,  
And dubious title shakes the madd'd land,  
When statutes glean the refuse of the sword,  
How much more safe the vassal than the lord,  
Low sculks the hind beneath the rage of pow'r,  
And leaves the wealthy traitor in the Tow'r,  
Untouch'd his cottage, and his slumbers sound,  
Tho' confiscation's vultures hover round. (21-36)

The needy traveller, serene and gay,  
Walks the wild heath, and sings his toil away.  
Does envy seize thee? crush th' upbraiding joy,  
Increase his riches and his peace destroy,  
New fears in dire vicissitude invade,  
The rustling brake alarms, and quiv'ring shade,  
Nor light nor darkness bring his pain relief.  
One shews the plunder, and one hides the thief. (37-44)

Yet still one gen'ral cry the skies assails,  
And gain and grandeur load the tainted gales,  
Few know the toiling statesman's fear or care,  
Th' insidious rival and the gaping heir. (45-48)

Once more, Democritus, arise on earth,  
With cheerful wisdom and instructive mirth,  
See motley life in modern trappings dress'd,  
And feed with varied fools th' eternal jest:  
Thou who couldst laugh where want enchain'd caprice,  
Toil crush'd conceit, and man was of a piece;  
Where wealth unlov'd without a mourner died;  
And scarce a sycophant was fed by pride;  
Where ne'er was known the form of mock debate,  
Or seen a new-made mayor's unwieldy state;  
Where change of fav'rites made no change of laws,  
And senates heard before they judg'd a cause;  
How wouldst thou shake at Britain's modish tribe,  
Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe?  
Attentive truth and nature to decry,  
And pierce each scene with philosophic eye.  
To thee were solemn toys or empty show,  
The robes of pleasure and the veils of woe:  
All aid the farce, and all thy mirth maintain,  
Whose joys are causeless, or whose griefs are vain. (49-68)

Such was the scorn that fill'd the sage's mind,  
Renew'd at ev'ry glance on humankind;  
How just that scorn ere yet thy voice declare,  
Search every state, and canvas ev'ry pray'r. (69-72)

Unnumber'd suppliants crowd Preferment's gate,  
Athirst for wealth, and burning to be great;  
Delusive Fortune hears th' incessant call,

They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall.  
On ev'ry stage the foes of peace attend,  
Hate dogs their flight, and insult mocks their end.  
Love ends with hope, the sinking statesman's door  
Pours in the morning worshiper no more;  
For growing names the weekly scribbler lies,  
To growing wealth the dedicator flies,  
From every room descends the painted face,  
That hung the bright Palladium of the place,  
And smok'd in kitchens, or in auctions sold,  
To better features yields the frame of gold;  
For now no more we trace in ev'ry line  
Heroic worth, benevolence divine:  
The form distorted justifies the fall,  
And detestation rids th' indignant wall. (73-90)

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When first the college rolls receive his name,  
The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame;  
Through all his veins the fever of renown  
Spreads from the strong contagion of the gown;  
O'er Bodley's dome his future labours spread,  
And Bacon's mansion trembles o'er his head.  
Are these thy views? proceed, illustrious youth,  
And virtue guard thee to the throne of Truth!  
Yet should thy soul indulge the gen'rous heat,  
Till captive Science yields her last retreat;  
Should Reason guide thee with her brightest ray,  
And pour on misty Doubt resistless day;

Should no false Kindness lure to loose delight,  
Nor Praise relax, nor Difficulty fright;  
Should tempting Novelty thy cell refrain,  
And Sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain;  
Should Beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,  
Nor claim the triumph of a letter'd heart;  
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,  
Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;  
Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,  
Nor think the doom of man revers'd for thee:  
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,  
And pause awhile from letters, to be wise;  
There mark what ill the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.  
See nations slowly wise, and meanly just,  
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.  
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend,  
Hear Lydiat's life, and Galileo's end. (133-162)

Nor deem, when learning her last prize bestows  
The glitt'ring eminence exempt from foes;  
See when the vulgar 'scape, despis'd or aw'd,  
Rebellion's vengeful talons seize on Laud.  
From meaner minds, tho' smaller fines content  
The plunder'd palace or sequester'd rent;  
Mark'd out by dangerous parts he meets the shock,  
And fatal Learning leads him to the block:  
Around his tomb let Art and Genius weep,  
But hear his death, ye blockheads, hear and sleep. (163- 172)

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Enlarge my life with multitude of days,  
In health, in sickness, thus the suppliant prays;  
Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know,  
That life protracted is protracted woe.  
Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,  
And shuts up all the passages of joy:  
In vain their gifts the bounteous seasons pour,  
The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flow'r,  
With listless eyes the dotard views the store,  
He views, and wonders that they please no more;  
Now pall the tasteless meats, and joyless wines,  
And Luxury with sighs her slave resigns.  
Approach, ye minstrels, try the soothing strain,  
And yield the tuneful lenitives of pain:  
No sounds alas would touch th' impervious ear,  
Though dancing mountains witness'd Orpheus near;  
Nor lute nor lyre his feeble pow'rs attend,  
Nor sweeter music of a virtuous friend,  
But everlasting dictates crowd his tongue,  
Perversely grave, or positively wrong.  
The still returning tale, and ling'ring jest,  
Perplex the fawning niece and pamper'd guest,  
While growing hopes scarce awe the gath'ring sneer,  
And scarce a legacy can bribe to hear;  
The watchful guests still hint the last offence,  
The daughter's petulance, the son's expense,  
Improve his heady rage with treach'rous skill,  
And mould his passions till they make his will.

Unnumber'd maladies his joints invade,

Lay siege to life and press the dire blockade;  
But unextinguish'd Av'rice still remains,  
And dreaded losses aggravate his pains;  
He turns, with anxious heart and crippled hands,  
His bonds of debt, and mortgages of lands;  
Or views his coffers with suspicious eyes,  
Unlocks his gold, and counts it till he dies.

But grant, the virtues of a temp'rate prime  
Bless with an age exempt from scorn or crime;  
An age that melts in unperceiv'd decay,  
And glides in modest innocence away;  
Whose peaceful day Benevolence endears,  
Whose night congratulating Conscience cheers;  
The gen'ral fav'rite as the gen'ral friend:  
Such age there is, and who could wish its end?

Yet ev'n on this her load Misfortune flings,  
To press the weary minutes' flagging wings:  
New sorrow rises as the day returns,  
A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.  
Now kindred Merit fills the sable bier,  
Now lacerated Friendship claims a tear.  
Year chases year, decay pursues decay,  
Still drops some joy from with'ring life away;  
New forms arise, and diff'rent views engage,  
Superfluous lags the vet'ran on the stage,  
Till pitying Nature signs the last release,  
And bids afflicted worth retire to peace.

But few there are whom hours like these await,  
Who set unclouded in the gulfs of fate.  
From Lydia's monarch should the search descend,  
By Solon caution'd to regard his end,  
In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,  
Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise?  
From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,  
And Swift expires a driv'ler and a show.

The teeming mother, anxious for her race,  
Begs for each birth the fortune of a face:  
Yet Vane could tell what ills from beauty spring;  
And Sedley curs'd the form that pleas'd a king.  
Ye nymphs of rosy lips and radiant eyes,  
Whom Pleasure keeps too busy to be wise,  
Whom Joys with soft varieties invite,  
By day the frolic, and the dance by night,  
Who frown with vanity, who smile with art,  
And ask the latest fashion of the heart,  
What care, what rules your heedless charms shall save,  
Each nymph your rival, and each youth your slave?  
Against your fame with fondness hate combines,  
The rival batters and the lover mines.  
With distant voice neglected Virtue calls,  
Less heard and less, the faint remonstrance falls;  
Tir'd with contempt, she quits the slipp'ry reign,  
And Pride and Prudence take her seat in vain.  
In crowd at once, where none the pass defend,  
The harmless freedom, and the private friend.  
The guardians yield, by force superior plied;



By Int'rest, Prudence; and by Flatt'ry, Pride.  
Now Beauty falls betray'd, despis'd, distress'd,  
And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest.

Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects find?  
Must dull Suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?  
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?  
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,  
No cries attempt the mercies of the skies?  
Enquirer, cease, petitions yet remain,  
Which Heav'n may hear, nor deem religion vain.  
Still raise for good the supplicating voice,  
But leave to Heav'n the measure and the choice.  
Safe in his pow'r, whose eyes discern afar  
The secret ambush of a specious pray'r.  
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,  
Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best.  
Yet when the sense of sacred presence fires,  
And strong devotion to the skies aspires,  
Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,  
Obedient passions, and a will resign'd;  
For love, which scarce collective man can fill;  
For patience, sov'reign o'er transmuted ill;  
For faith, that panting for a happier seat,  
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat:  
These goods for man the laws of Heav'n ordain,  
These goods he grants, who grants the pow'r to gain;  
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,  
And makes the happiness she does not find. (253- 366)

The ascension of George I coincided with the ascendancy of the Whig Party, which dominated between 1715 and 1760. This period saw the investment of significant power in the Whig leader Robert Walpole (1676–1745), often referred to as Great Britain's first prime minister—although he personally rejected this label. Throughout his career, Johnson often wrote texts criticizing Walpole and his government. Great Britain used its vast navy to expand and protect its commercial and colonial interests, with major colonies in North America, the Caribbean, and India. This commercial empire included a massive slave trade and the suppression of native populations, both of which Johnson often criticized.

*The Vanity of Human Wishes*, is Johnson's most impressive poem as well as the first work published with his name. Some of the definitions Johnson later entered under "vanity" in his *Dictionary* suggest the range of meaning of his title, including "emptiness," "uncertainty," "fruitless desire, fruitless endeavor," and "empty pleasure". The poem is loosely divided up into sections which deal with different kinds of power and ambition. The speaker investigates all the kinds of human beings and their desires and wishes, which ultimately comes to the point of futility.

To justify his point of vanity of human wishes, he brings forth many examples of political, financial, intellectual and even sexual power, and finally proves that all the desires and wishes to be superior and powerful has nothing to do. All the things are futile and meaningless and these things don't bring peace of mind. In every human wish there is pain and in every desire there is suffering, whether we desire some great or small, the result is after all is same. Johnson supports this argument with the example of a rich traveler whom both the darkness and the light cause the suffering. If it is the day time, he may be looted and if it is the night time he may be theft. The desire to become rich leads us to the suffering.

He supports the vanity of human wishes with the example of the gold. All the human beings love gold, but gold is 'wide wasting pest'. It destroys everyone. The judge destroys the law to collect the gold, people undertake the crimes to collect the same gold. It is because of gold, criminals record increases.

Johnson gives the example of Lord Wolsey to justify the vanity of human wishes. He wanted to acquire power after power so that everyone submit in front of his will. But once he reached to the power everyone hates him. He did not get

any followers nor did he get any warmth and affection from people. The desire of absolute power leads him to the public hatred and dislikes. He supports the vanity of human wishes with the example of Swedish king who wanted to conquer the whole world. He has the desire to accumulate all the properties of the world. But having conquered the world he had to end up in the barren land. His desire for power and property leads him to death.

In the concluding part of the poem, Johnson suggests to develop the right frame of the mind. We should not complain against anything. We should control the passion and wills and be loving and mindful to mankind and that is sufficient for our happiness. The only way to get happiness is God. The ultimate conclusion of the poem is that the only chance at a happy life we have is through God. It's only through our faith in God that we can hope to find peace and contentment. The poem surpasses any of Johnson's other poems in its richness of imagery and powerful conciseness.

Johnson combines the opposites in the poem. Anti-thesis can be found in his lineation, light and darkness, shows and hides, pleasure and pain, are some of the structural anti thesis in the poem in order to give striking conclusions. Whenever he brings anti-thesis, he points to a moral lesson.

This poem can be taken as a satire against all those who want to gather the wealth power and property. Since the end is same, the quest of the things is useless.

### → *Themes*

#### **Death**

Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes" deals with the inevitability of death. It's always waiting for us. However, according to Johnson's speaker, our mortality can teach us a lot about how we should live our lives. Part of the reason we make such stupid decisions is because we forget that, one day, we're going to die. Johnson's speaker suggests that we should turn our attention on the next world, not on this one.

#### **Religion**

Religion is another big theme in "The Vanity of Human Wishes," though the speaker only discusses religious faith explicitly in the final stanza of the poem. Christianity, according to the speaker, is our only hope. It's the only thing that can save us from the troubles of this world. The poem's emphasis on Christianity is also an important way in which Johnson differs from his literary predecessor, Juvenal. In Juvenal's "Tenth Satire," there is no mention of Christianity.

## **Power**

There's an old saying: "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Power is a big theme in "The Vanity of Human Wishes." The speaker explores all types of power: from political power to sexual power to intellectual power. Johnson's speaker suggests that we're only human, after all. We're not God, and so our pursuit of power is misguided.

## **Pride**

In "The Vanity of Human Wishes," Johnson's speaker dwells on the dangers of pride by demonstrating how it can often corrupt people and lead them to bad ends. Not only that, but the speaker suggests that it's often our pride that gets in the way of our judgment. When we're too proud, we can't make good decisions.

# *Romanticism*

## **The Roots of Romanticism**

Romantic Movement dates its origin in 1798 A.D. with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. *Lyrical Ballads* is a collection of poems written and jointly published by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. The volume is of such importance that its 1798 publication date is often considered the beginning of the Romantic Period.

The poetry in *Lyrical Ballads* marks a distinct change in both subject matter and style from the poetry of the 18th century. Romanticism began as a rebellion against the principles of classicism. Whereas classicism espoused the literary ideals of ancient Greece and Rome—objectivity, emotional restraint, and formal rules of composition that writers were expected to follow—romanticism promoted subjectivity, emotional effusiveness, and freedom of expression.

English poets such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Blake, and Lord Byron produced work that expressed spontaneous feelings, found parallels to their own emotional

lives in the natural world, and celebrated creativity rather than logic.

Often the term Romantic literature, particularly poetry, evokes the connotation of nature poetry. Although nature is an important component in much Romantic literature, Romanticism is much more than recording the beauties of the natural world. Romanticism is certainly not what modern readers usually think of when we hear the words romance and romantic; Romanticism does not refer to romantic love.

Romanticism grew from a profound change in the way people in the Western world perceived their place and purpose in life. The early Romantic period thus coincides with what is often called the "age of revolutions"--including, of course, the American (1776) and the French (1789) revolutions--an age of upheavals in political, economic, and social traditions, the age which witnessed the initial transformations of the Industrial Revolution. Events such as the American Revolution in 1776, the French Revolution in 1789, and the Industrial Revolution in the period from about 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840 restructured society and the way individuals viewed themselves and their relationship to each other and to the social order.



A revolutionary energy was also at the core of Romanticism, which quite consciously set out to transform not only the theory and practice of poetry (and all art), but the very way we perceive the world. Some of its major precepts have survived into the twentieth century and still affect our contemporary period.

This extended chronological spectrum (1770-1870) also permits recognition as Romantic the poetry of Robert Burns and William Blake in England, the early writings of Goethe and Schiller in Germany, and the great period of influence for Rousseau's writings throughout Europe.

In terms of borrowing from literary sources, Germany served the Romantic Movement quite as much as France had served the Neoclassical Movement and Italy had served the Renaissance Movement. While the Renaissance Movement began in Italy and Neoclassical Movement in France, the Romantic Movement made its first appearance in Germany. The French writers like Rousseau and German writers like Kant, Hegel and Schiller had a great impact on the thinking and mindset of the English Romantics.

Rousseau's emphasis on the dignity of man as a man and on nature's influence on the growth of human personality had a tremendous impact on the writers of the

Romantic Age in England. Rousseau's *Emile* and *Social Contract* were the monuments of Romantic Humanism which emphasized the equal and natural rights of every individual on the one hand and regenerating power of love on the other. Rousseau's slogans like "go back to nature" and "man is born free" became the watch-words of the Romantic Period all over Europe and America. Voltaire's emphasis that God is inseparable from nature, combined with Rousseau's glorification of Nature, as the nursing mother of man gave rise to the ideas of pantheism (God exists everywhere) which we find in the poetry of Wordsworth.

The entire stream of romantic poetry between William Blake and John Keats gives expression to the philosophy of idealism showing various aspects of individualism, spiritualism, and organism.

### **Characteristics of Romantic Poetry**

#### **Medievalism**

Rather than looking for forms and subject matter from classical literature, Romantic-era writers prefer nostalgic views of the Middle Ages as a simple, less complicated time not troubled by the complexities and divisive issues of industrialization and urbanization. Often a Romantic

medieval vision is not realistic, ignoring the violence and harshness of the Middle Ages with its religious persecution, political wars, poverty among the lower classes in favor of a fairy tale view of knights in shining armor rescuing beautiful damsels in distress. Or, from another perspective, the castles and mysterious aura of the so-called Dark Ages provide an ideal setting for Gothic literature.

Some Romantic poets felt irritated with the tyranny and ugliness of materialistic life of their age and to avoid the life of uneasy restlessness, they escaped from the problems of the world to a world of beauty and joy which their poetic definitions had pictured. In many ways, Romantic Poetry proved to be the poetry of escape from the sorrows and sufferings of worldly life and their times to the Middle Ages, where they found the eternal bliss.

### **Interest in Rural Life**

Nature had practically no place in Neo-classical Poetry. A renewed interest in the simple life marked the poetry of the poets of the Romantic Age. In the poetry of Romantic Revival, the interest of poets was transferred from town to rural life and from artificial decorations of drawing rooms to the natural beauty and loveliness of nature.

Nature began to have its own importance in the poetry of this age. Wordsworth was the greatest poet who revealed the physical and spiritual beauty of nature to those who could not see any charm in the wildflowers, green fields and the chirping birds.

### **Imagination**

In his Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth describes the poet as a “man speaking to men” but an individual who is extraordinarily perceptive. Wordsworth believes that the power of the Imagination enables poets to perceive the spiritual dimension found in the ordinary, in, as Coleridge says, all of animate nature. Sensibility allows the poet to understand and to convey the inner being of man and nature.

Belief in the importance of the imagination is a distinctive feature of romantic poets such as John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and P. B. Shelley, unlike the neoclassical poets. Keats said, “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination- What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth.” For Wordsworth and William Blake the imagination is a spiritual

force, is related to morality, and they believed that literature, especially poetry, could improve the world.

In Romantic Poetry, reason and intellect were subdued and their place was taken by imaginations, emotions, and passion. Imagination was elevated to a position as the supreme faculty of the mind. This contrasted distinctly with the traditional arguments for the supremacy of reason. Imagination is dynamic, an active, rather than passive power, with many functions. It is the primary faculty for creating all art.

## **Mysticism**

Romantic mysticism is the belief that the physical world of nature is a revelation of a spiritual or transcendental presence in the universe. Mysticism is not pantheism (worshipping nature). Romantic writers would worship not the tree, but the spiritual element manifested by the tree. Romantic literature, particularly poetry, is often characterized as nature poetry; mysticism explains the evident love of nature. Romantic writers love nature not only for its beauty but primarily because it is an expression of spirituality and the Imagination.

## **Sensibility**

In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth defined poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” Thus Wordsworth identifies sensibility rather than reason as the source of poetry.

The overwhelming emotional reaction to nature seen in Wordsworth’s poetry, the emotional sensitivity to other individuals and their circumstances, particularly those from the lower socio-economic classes, and the supernatural evocation of terror in Gothic literature all are expressions of sensibility.

A feeling of humanitarianism colored the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron. Thus Romantic Poetry was marked by intense human sympathy and a consequent understanding of the human heart.

## **Primitivism and Individualism**

Arising from two sources, philosophical theories that posit innocence is found in nature and the ideals of democracy, Romanticism values the primitive individual, the person who does not have the artificial manners of high society, the cultivated façade of the aristocracy. Individuals

who are closer to nature are better able to recognize and exemplify goodness and spiritual discernment. Wordsworth espouses the common man and incidents from ordinary life as the appropriate subject for poetry. Romanticism places the individual in the center of life and experience.

### **Concept of Nature**

Nature takes on additional significance for poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge as nature is a source of divine revelation. For others such as Shelley, nature is the means to tapping into the collective power of the human mind. Nature is the source of human innocence and goodness because nature is a manifestation of the Divine.

For Romantic writers, then, the source of poetry is not a conscious crafting of lines of a certain number of syllables in a certain metrical pattern and rhyme scheme. Instead, the source of literature is the inspiration that comes from connecting, through nature, with the divine or the transcendental properties of the human mind. Romantic writers use the term Imagination to refer to this connection. The power of God to create nature is parallel to the poet's power to create through the Imagination. Coleridge pictures

all of nature, including humans, as harps creating music when touched by the breeze of Imagination.

Other Characteristics of Romantic Poetry are represented in William Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads. In the 1802 edition of Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth includes a Preface, an introductory explanation, to Lyrical Ballads to explain his theory of how poetry should be written.

The following points from the Preface delineate the characteristics that make these poems markedly different from poetry of the preceding century:

- **The subject of poetry should be events from the real lives of common people.**

### **Subjectivity**

Wordsworth believes that common, ordinary situations are worthy topics for poems, events such as farmers plowing their fields. He further believes that through the Imagination he could make his audience more aware of the significance of common scenes that they might otherwise take for granted.

- **The language of poetry should be real language spoken by common people.**



## Poetic Diction

The poetry of the Romantic movement is in direct contrast to that of Neoclassical. In the 18th century, poetry was governed by set rules and regulations. There were well-prepared lines of poetic composition. Any deviation from the rules was disliked by the teachers of poetic thought. The first thing that we notice in the poetry Romantic age is the break from the slavery of rules and regulations. The poets of the Romantic Age wrote poetry in freestyle without following any rules and regulations.

Notice also that much of Wordsworth's poetry rejects the uniform stanzas and line lengths that were popular in the 18th century. Much of his poetry is free in form—lines and stanzas of varying lengths in the same poem, more like the “selection of language really used by men.”

During the 18th century, many poets used what Wordsworth called “poetic diction,” flowery or ornate words for ordinary things such as feathery flock instead of birds or finny tribe instead of fish. Wordsworth protests that people don't use such expressions; therefore poetry shouldn't either.

The style of the Romantic Poets is varied but the stress was laid on simplicity. Instead of an artificial model of the

expression of classical poets, we have a natural diction and spontaneous way of expressing thoughts in Romantic Poetry.

### **lyricism**

In Romantic Poetry, lyricism predominates and the poets of this school have, to their credit, a number of fine lyrics excelling the heroic couplet of the Neoclassical Age in melody and sweetness of tone. A lyric is a brief poem, expressing emotion, imagination, and meditative thought, usually stanzaic in form.

### **Ballad**

A ballad is a narrative poem or song. Ballads originated as songs that were part of an oral culture, usually simple and regular in rhythm and rhyme. The typical ballad stanza is 4 lines rhyming abab. Because of their simplicity and their role as part of folk culture, ballads were popular with many Romantic writers.

### **Romantic Ode**

As used in the Romantic Period, the ode is a lyric poem longer than usual lyrics, often on a more serious topic, usually meditative and philosophic in tone and subject.

## **Romanticism and Neoclassicism**

Romanticism is a reaction against many facets of Neoclassicism. The following chart lists contrasting views of Neoclassicism and Romanticism.

<b>Neoclassicism</b>	<b>Romanticism</b>
use and imitation of literary traditions from ancient Greece and Rome	use and imitation of literary traditions from the Middle Ages (including the medieval romance)
beauty in structure and order	beauty in organic, natural forms
art from applying order to nature	art from inspiration
heroic couplets	lyric poetry
focus on external people and events	focus on self-expression of the artist
reason	mysticism
Reason leads to spiritual revelation	Nature leads to spiritual revelation
urban (glorifies civilization and technological progress)	rural (sees the evils of civilization and technological progress)
values wit and sophistication	values primitive, simple people
Human nature needs artificial restraints of society	Restraints of society result in tyranny and oppression
the head	the heart

## **Romantic Poets**

In 1798, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge joined together to publish the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems that is considered by many to be the starting point of the Romantic Era. While the first edition was published in 1798, Wordsworth later added more of his poetry and a preface and re-published the work in 1800.

### **William Wordsworth (1770- 1850)**

Wordsworth was born in the Lake District of northern England. Much of his poetry was inspired by the dramatic landscapes of the Lake District. Both Wordsworth's parents died before he was 15, and he and his four siblings were left in the care of different relatives. To deal with the great deal of grief and depression Wordsworth experienced, he indulged in writing poetry. He moved on in 1787 to St. John's College, Cambridge.

The most important thing he did in his college years was to devote his summer vacation in 1790 to a long walking tour through revolutionary France. He became an enthusiast for the ideals of the French Revolution. Upon taking his Cambridge degree—an undistinguished “pass”—he returned

in 1791 to France. In December 1792, Wordsworth had to return to England and was cut off there by the outbreak of war between England and France.

The years that followed his return to England were the darkest of Wordsworth's life. Unprepared for any profession, rootless, virtually penniless, bitterly hostile to his own country's opposition to the French, he lived in London and learned to feel a profound sympathy for the abandoned mothers, beggars, children, and victims of England's wars. This experience brought about Wordsworth's interest and sympathy for the life, troubles, and speech of the "common man." These issues proved to be of the utmost importance to Wordsworth's work.

This dark period ended in 1795 when Wordsworth received a legacy from a close relative and he and his sister Dorothy went to live together without separation. Two years later they moved again, to live near the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was an admirer of Wordsworth's work. They collaborated on 'Lyrical Ballads', published in 1798. This collection of poems, mostly by Wordsworth but with Coleridge contributing 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', is generally taken to mark the beginning of the Romantic movement in English poetry.

William Wordsworth was an innovative writer who marked the start of the Romantic Period in literature. He was a pioneer of Romanticism and the Poet laureate of England from 1843 till his death in 1850.

### **I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud**

"I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is one of the most famous and best-loved poems written in the English literature by William Wordsworth. It was written as a lyric poem to capture the bewitching beauty of the wildflowers and express a deeper feeling and emotions of the poet. It has become an eternal classic for describing the nature and its scenic beauty.

The poem is based on one of Wordsworth's own walks in the countryside of England's Lake District. During this walk, he encountered a long strip of daffodils. In the poem, these daffodils have a long-lasting effect on the speaker, firstly in the immediate impression they make and secondly in the way that the image of them comes back to the speaker's mind later on. "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is a quintessentially Romantic poem, bringing together key ideas about imagination, humanity and the natural world.

## **I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud**

I WANDERED lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,

They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

### **Paraphrase**

The poet explains about his one day occasional aimless wandering. The term “wandered” means walking free of their own accord. The poet is referring to himself as the ‘cloud’ in a metaphorical sense of the word. Although the clouds mostly travel in groups, this cloud prefers singular hovering. However, he clearly mentions his passing through valleys and hills on a routine walk, simplifying the narrative.

The poet comes across a bunch of daffodils fluttering in the air. He’s dumbfounded by the beauty of those golden daffodils. Although, yellow would be more suitable for daffodils the poet intends to signify its beauty by using golden color. The daffodils are termed as hosts/ crowd since they are together in a collective bunch. The daffodils are a source of immense beauty for the poet.

The daffodils are firmly perched beside a lake, beneath some trees. It’s a windy day overall and the flowers dance and flutter as the wind blows. Let’s take a step back for a



brief moment to locate the premises of the poet's inspiration. The poet resided in the infamous Lake District, a region rich in scenic locations entailing hills, valleys and lakes. As a result, the location is realistic in its entirety. The poet refers to daffodils dancing, a trait relatable to humans.

The above allegory is a clear and direct referral to our native galaxy Milky Way. The space continuum holds great mystery for our Romantic Era poet as he envisions the daffodils to be in a constant state of wonder as are the stars beyond the reach of humans.

Comparing the daffodils to stars in the sky, the speaker notes how the flowers seem to go on without ending, alongside a bay. The speaker guesses there are ten thousand or so daffodils, all of their heads moving as if they were dancing.

The poet makes an allusion to Milky Way, our galaxy filled with its own planetary solar systems stretched beyond infinity. The lake supposedly has a large area since the daffodils are dispersed along the shoreline. Along the Milky Way's premises lie countless stars which the poet alludes to daffodils fluttering beside the lake.

By ten thousand, he meant a collection of daffodils were fluttering in the air, spellbinding the poet at the beauty of the

scene. It's just a wild estimation at best as he supposes ten thousand daffodils at a glance. The term sprightly comes from sprite which is primarily dandy little spirits people deemed existed in such times. They are akin to fairies.

Near the daffodils, the waves are glinting on the bay. But the daffodils seem more joyful to the speaker than the waves. A poet couldn't help being cheerful, says the speaker, in the cheerful company of the daffodils. The speaker stares at the daffodils slowly, without yet realizing the full extent of the positive effects of encountering them.

After the experience with the daffodils, the speaker often lies on the couch, either absent-minded or thoughtful. It is then that the daffodils come back to the speaker's imaginative memory—access to which is a gift of solitude—and fills the speaker with joy as his mind dances with the daffodils.

### **Commentary**

Considered one of the most significant examples of Romantic poetry, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” explores the relationship between nature and humanity. In doing so, it makes two key points. Firstly, it argues that humanity is not separate from nature, but rather part of it. And secondly, it suggests that the natural world—and a strong bond with it—

is essential to human happiness. Though the reader might be fooled by the suggestion of solitude in the title, this is an optimistic poem with a positive outlook on the world. This happiness is drawn from the speaker's interaction with nature, in turn encouraging the reader to appreciate the natural majesty that is all around them.

The poem introduces the idea of loneliness in the first line, but the speaker is not really alone at all. The speaker is in the presence of "a host of golden daffodils," whose delicate "dancing" in the wind has a long-lasting effect on the speaker's mind. This set-up introduces a sense of togetherness between humanity (represented by the speaker) and nature (represented by the daffodils). And though this togetherness is partly rendered by the personification of the daffodils that runs throughout the poem—they are "dancing" in every stanza—the speaker preemptively flips this personification on its head in the very first line. Here, the speaker compares himself to a natural element: a cloud. So, the human component of the poem is like nature, and the natural component is like humanity. They are, in a word, together.

The poem suggests that this togetherness is something instinctive. It's clear that the beauty of the daffodils had an

instant impact on the speaker—which is why the speaker “gazed and gazed”—but it was only later, when the experience “flashed” again in the speaker’s mind, that the speaker realized its full significance. In this quiet moment, the speaker draws on the experience of the daffodils as an avenue to happiness. That is, everything that the daffodils represent—joy, playfulness, survival, beauty—“fills” the speaker with “bliss” and “pleasure.” In the speaker’s mind, the speaker is again dancing “with the daffodils.” The poem, then, is arguing that communion with nature is not just a momentary joy, but something deeper and long-lasting. The reader is left with the distinct impression that, without these types of experiences with nature, the speaker would be returned to a genuine loneliness only hinted at by the title.

Stanzas 2 and 3 also make it clear to the reader that the togetherness described above is, of course, not solely about daffodils, but rather about nature more generally. “The stars” and “the sparkling waves” are both mentioned, suggesting a series of links between the smaller, less noticeable elements of the natural world (like the daffodils), humankind (like the speaker), and the wider universe (the stars). All are presented as a part of nature; though they are different, they are all in communion with one another. However, people

have to make an effort to notice this and to engage with the natural world like the speaker does. The poem, then, is an argument for active engagement with nature—a message perhaps even more important now than it was at the time, given humanity’s wide-ranging effects on the planet it inhabits.

“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” is a Poem of Nature. As this poem is about the captivating beauty of nature, it has been written from the subjective point of view. It details the poet’s encounters with the majestic daffodils in the field beside the lake. The expression of wonder can be felt throughout the poem. The feeling of enjoying the beauty of nature and its impacts on the human mind can leave the reader desiring to spend more time with nature.

Throughout the poem, Wordsworth engages with themes of nature, memory, and spirituality. These three are tied together as the speaker, Wordsworth himself, moves through a beautiful landscape. He takes pleasure in the sight of the daffodils and revives his spirit in nature. At the same time, Wordsworth explores the theme of memory. The flowers are there to comfort him in real-time but also as a memory from the past.

## **The Solitary Reaper**

Along with “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” “The Solitary Reaper” is one of Wordsworth’s most famous post-Lyrical Ballads lyrics. The poem was inspired by the poet’s trip to Scotland in 1803 with his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. In the poem, the speaker tries—and fails—to describe the song he heard a young woman singing as she cuts grain in a Scottish field. The speaker does not understand the song, and he cannot tell what it was about. Nor can he find the language to describe its beauty. The poet appreciates its tone, its expressive beauty, and the mood it creates within him, rather than its explicit content, at which he can only guess.

### **The Solitary Reaper**

BEHOLD her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain;  
O listen! for the Vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.  
No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome notes to weary bands

Of travellers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands:  
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings? –  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago:  
Or is it some more humble lay,  
Familiar matter of to-day?  
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending;  
I saw her singing at her work,  
And o'er the sickle bending; –  
I listen'd, motionless and still;  
And, as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more.

## Paraphrase

In the First stanza of “The Solitary Reaper,” Wordsworth describes how the Reaper was singing all alone. The poet, while travelling in the Highland valleys, comes across a lonely Highlander reaper girl who is harvesting the crops and singing. She had no one to help her out in the field. So she was singing to herself. She was singing without knowing that someone was listening to her song. He tries to draw the attention of the passers-by to the girl by calling them to ‘behold her’. The poet urges them to stop there and listen to her song, or to pass by gently without disturbing her in her singing. She was immersed in her work of cutting and binding while singing a melancholy song. For the poet, he is so struck by the sad beauty of her song that the whole valley seems to overflow with its sound.

In the second stanza of “The Solitary Reaper,” the poet compares the young woman’s song with ‘Nightingale’ and ‘Cuckoo’ – the most celebrated birds by the writers and poets for the sweetness of voice. But, here he complains that neither ‘Nightingale’ nor the ‘Cuckoo’ sang a song that is as sweet as hers. He says that no nightingale has sung the song so soothing like that for the weary travelers. For, the song of the girl has stopped him from going about his



business. He is utterly enchanted that he says that her voice is so thrilling and penetrable like that of the Cuckoo Bird, which sings to break the silence in the 'Hebrides' Islands. He symbolically puts forth that her voice is so melodious and more than that of the two birds, known for their voice.

In the third stanza of "The Solitary Reaper," the poet depicts his plight over not understanding the theme or language of the poem. The poet couldn't understand the local Scottish dialect in which the reaper was singing. So he tries to imagine what the song might be about. Given that it is a 'plaintive number' and a 'melancholy strain' he speculates that her song might be about some past sorrow, pain or loss 'of old, unhappy things' or battles fought long ago. Or perhaps, he says, it is a humbler, simpler song about some present sorrow, pain, or loss, a 'matter of today.' He further wonders if that is about something that has happened in the past or something that has reoccurred now.

In the fourth stanza, the poet decides not to probe further into the theme. He comes to the conclusion that whatever may be the theme of her poem, it is not going to end. Not only her song but also her suffering sounds like a never-ending one. He stays there motionless and listened to her song quite some times. Even when he left and mounted up

the hill, the song could no longer be heard from there, but he bore the music, the melody of the solitary reaper's song in his heart. Such was the impression of the song upon his mind.

### **Commentary**

Wordsworth was one of the leading figures of English Romanticism. intense emotion. "The Solitary Reaper" is a clear example of Romantic poetry, since its speaker reflects on a powerful experience of nature. By placing this praise and this beauty in a rustic, natural setting, and by and by establishing as its source a simple rustic girl, Wordsworth acts on the values of Lyrical Ballads.

The poem's structure is simple—the first stanza sets the scene, the second offers two bird comparisons for the music, the third wonders about the content of the songs, and the fourth describes the effect of the songs on the speaker—and its language is natural and unforced. Additionally, the final two lines of the poem ("Its music in my heart I bore / Long after it was heard no more") return its focus to the familiar theme of memory, and the soothing effect of beautiful memories on human thoughts and feelings.

## **Samuel Taylor Coleridge ( 1772 - 1834)**

Samuel Coleridge is an English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher and one of the most influential and controversial figures of the Romantic period. His Lyrical Ballads, written with William Wordsworth, heralded the English Romantic movement, and his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is the most significant work of general literary criticism produced in the English Romantic period. His career as a poet and writer was established after he befriended Wordsworth and together they produced *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798.

As a child, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was described as a dreamer. He was already an extraordinary reader, and he immersed himself to the point of morbid fascination in romances and Eastern tales such as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. At both school and university he continued to read, particularly in works of imagination and visionary philosophy.

Early in 1798 Coleridge was preoccupied with political issues. The French Revolutionary government had suppressed the states of the Swiss Confederation, and Coleridge expressed his bitterness at this betrayal of the principles of the Revolution in a poem entitled "France: An Ode."

For most of his adult life he suffered through addiction to opium. His most famous works – 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan' – all featured supernatural themes and exotic images, perhaps affected by his use of the drugs. Throughout his life Coleridge suffered from poor health and probably from poor mental health as well. By the early 1800's he had become addicted to opium. His addiction became so severe that he moved in with a doctor in London who helped him keep his drug use under control.

In his later years, Coleridge delivered a highly successful series of lectures on Shakespeare, wrote respected works of literary theory and criticism, and developed a reputation as an intellectual. His joint publication of "Lyrical Ballads" with William Wordsworth marked the beginning of the Romantic Period in literature.

### **The Rime of the Ancient Mariner**

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is the longest major poem by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, written in 1797–98 and published in 1798 in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Along with other poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, it is often considered a signal shift to modern poetry and the beginning of British Romantic literature.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner recounts the experiences of a sailor who has returned from a long sea voyage. The mariner stops a man who is on his way to a wedding ceremony and begins to narrate a story. The wedding-guest's reaction turns from impatience to fear to fascination as the mariner's story progresses, as can be seen in the language style: Coleridge uses narrative techniques such as personification and repetition to create a sense of danger, the supernatural, or serenity, depending on the mood in different parts of the poem.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is unique among Coleridge's important works— unique in its intentionally archaic language, its length, its bizarre moral narrative, and its thematic ambiguity. The scholar notes the archaic language produces the impression (intended by Coleridge) that the "Rime" is a ballad of ancient times. Upon its release, the poem was criticized for being obscure and difficult to read. The use of archaic spelling of words was seen as not in keeping with Wordsworth's claims of using common language.

While "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" departed from Romantic stylistic tendencies, it exemplified many of the genre's themes. The most central of these is the subjectivity

of experience and the importance of the individual. The poem is told from the Ancient Mariner's perspective, despite the minor involvement of a separate narrator, who describes the Ancient Mariner and Wedding Guest's actions.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" also exemplified the Romantic fascination with the holy in nature. Coleridge places the Ancient Mariner out in the open ocean for much of the poem, making him very small in comparison to the forces of nature. The Romantics also went against the earlier trend of championing religious institution and instead locating the spiritual and sublime in nature. Despite the Ancient Mariner's expression of love for communal prayer, his message reveals his belief that the true path to God is through respecting nature.

## **The Rime of the Ancient Mariner**

### **Argument**

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

## **PART I**

1 It is an ancient Mariner,  
2 And he stoppeth one of three.  
3 'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
4 Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?  
5 The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,  
6 And I am next of kin;  
7 The guests are met, the feast is set:  
8 May'st hear the merry din.'  
9 He holds him with his skinny hand,  
10 'There was a ship,' quoth he.  
11 'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!  
12 Eftsoons his hand dropt he.  
13 He holds him with his glittering eye--  
14 The Wedding-Guest stood still,  
15 And listens like a three years' child:  
16 The Mariner hath his will.  
17 The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:  
18 He cannot choose but hear;  
19 And thus spake on that ancient man,  
20 The bright-eyed Mariner.

21 'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,  
22 Merrily did we drop  
23 Below the kirk, below the hill,  
24 Below the lighthouse top.  
25 The Sun came up upon the left,  
26 Out of the sea came he!  
27 And he shone bright, and on the right  
28 Went down into the sea.  
29 Higher and higher every day,  
30 Till over the mast at noon--'  
31 The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,  
32 For he heard the loud bassoon.  
33 The bride hath paced into the hall,  
34 Red as a rose is she;  
35 Nodding their heads before her goes  
36 The merry minstrelsy.  
37 The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,  
38 Yet he cannot choose but hear;  
39 And thus spake on that ancient man,  
40 The bright-eyed Mariner.  
41 And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he



42 Was tyrannous and strong:  
43 He struck with his o'ertaking wings,  
44 And chased us south along.  
45 With sloping masts and dipping prow,  
46 As who pursued with yell and blow  
47 Still treads the shadow of his foe,  
48 And forward bends his head,  
49 The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,  
50 And southward aye we fled.  
51 And now there came both mist and snow,  
52 And it grew wondrous cold:  
53 And ice, mast-high, came floating by,  
54 As green as emerald.  
55 And through the drifts the snowy clifts  
56 Did send a dismal sheen:  
57 Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken--  
58 The ice was all between.  
59 The ice was here, the ice was there,  
60 The ice was all around:  
61 It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
62 Like noises in a swound!

63 At length did cross an Albatross,  
64 Thorough the fog it came;  
65 As if it had been a Christian soul,  
66 We hailed it in God's name.  
67 It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
68 And round and round it flew.  
69 The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
70 The helmsman steered us through!  
71 And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
72 The Albatross did follow,  
73 And every day, for food or play,  
74 Came to the mariner's hollo!  
75 In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
76 It perched for vespers nine;  
77 Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,  
78 Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'  
79 'God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
80 From the fiends, that plague thee thus!--  
81 Why look'st thou so?'--With my cross-bow  
82 I shot the ALBATROSS.

**"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"** has become an important landmark in the literary canon since its publication, and has also contributed certain phrases to common speech. The most notable of these is the secondary definition of the word "albatross," often used to denote "a constant, worrisome burden" or "an obstacle to success." Also in common usage are the poem's most famous lines: "Water, water, everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink." The phrase has come to mean any situation in which one is surrounded by the object of one's desire but is unable to partake.

### → Summary

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is about three guys who are on their way to a wedding celebration when an old sailor (the Mariner) stops one of them at the door-steps (Who will be called the Wedding Guest). He uses his mesmerizing eyes to hold all the attention of Wedding Guest and starts telling him a story about the unfortunate and destructive journey that he took. The Guest wants to go to the celebration, but he doesn't seem to pry himself away from this old mariner. The Mariner begins his story.

They leave the port and ship sails down near Antarctica to keep themselves safe from the severe storm. But

suddenly they get themselves caught in a deadly foggy course. An albatross shows up to steer them into the fog and provides them good winds, but the mariner decides to shoot it. Soon the sailor loses their wind, and it gets really hot. They run out of the water. Now at this point, everybody blames the Mariner. The ship seems hunted by a cruel spirit, and weird stuff starts appearing, they see the slimy creatures walking on the sea.

Mariner's crew decides to hand the albatross body around his neck to remind him of his grave mistake that he made. Due to his mistake, everyone is dying due to thirst. Mariner happened to see another ship is sailing at some distance from his ship. He desires and tries to yell out loudly, but his mouth is too dry to yell. To moisten his lips, he sucked his own blood. He thinks that they are safe now. But sadly the ship is a ghost ship and piloted by two spirits. Then starts the game of death.

Who wants to save himself? Who has to be the last member you want to meet on a journey? Everyone dies on the mariner's ship. The guest realizes, "Oh! You are a ghost"! But the Mariner replies him patiently, saying "well I am the only one who didn't die that day." After that, he continues his ballad and says he's on the boat with all the

dead bodies full of slimy spirits surrounded by an ocean. Severe, these slimy things are nasty water snakes.

The Mariner falls into sleep, and when he wakes up, it's raining. A storm strikes up in some distance, and he sees all his crew members floating on the water like zombies. Sailors don't come back to life. It seems the supernatural spirits and angels fill their bodies and push the boat.

The Mariner hears some voices, saying that how cruelly he killed the albatross and still he has more sufferings. These mysterious voices explain all the situation that how the ship is moving. The Mariner says that he still has the same painful need to tell all the story. That is why he stopped that guest on this very occasion. In the end, Mariner says that he needs to learn how to express his love, how to say prayers, how to live people and many other things. Then he goes back home and wakes up the next day, just like the famous lines go "a sadder and wiser man."

## **Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822)**

Percy Bysshe Shelley was one of the famous English romantic poets. He was one of the best lyric and epic poets in the English poetry and literature. Shelley did not see fame during his lifetime, but recognition for his poetry grew steadily following his death.

### **Autumn: A Dirge**

The warm sun is falling, the bleak wind is wailing,  
The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,  
And the Year  
On the earth is her death-bed, in a shroud of leaves dead,  
Is lying.  
Come, Months, come away,  
From November to May,  
In your saddest array;  
Follow the bier  
Of the dead cold Year,  
And like dim shadows watch by her sepulchre.

The chill rain is falling, the nipped worm is crawling,  
The rivers are swelling, the thunder is knelling  
For the Year;

The blithe swallows are flown, and the lizards each gone  
To his dwelling.  
Come, Months, come away;  
Put on white, black and gray;  
Let your light sisters play--  
Ye, follow the bier  
Of the dead cold Year,  
And make her grave green with tear on tear.

### **Analysis**

The power of seasons changing in this poem nicely evokes the overall power yet grace the natural world consists of. Here, the elements themselves seem to be moaning about the injustice that is corrupting the society. Autumn is a fitting background for Shelley's own vision of political and social revolution because it can have such a drastic change on the Earth's physical appearance. Shelley often suggested that the natural world held a sublime power over his imagination. Nature also had a creative power over him because he was very inspired by the natural world and what nature is capable of.

Nature is bleak and bare in autumn. The sun's rays are less warm, and the wind is chilly. The boughs are bare, and

the flowers are withering. Even the worms feel the pinch of cold. The swallows are gone. The year is lying dead.

The poet invites the months to come and attend the funeral procession of the year. When the burial is over, they are to watch her grave and shed tears on it so that it may remain green.

**LI. 3-5.** And the year on.....is lying. Shelley describes the bleakness and bareness of nature during autumn. The sun's rays are less warm than they used to be. The wind is chilly and the boughs are bare. Every sign of life in nature is absent. The year is nearing its end. The poet pictures the year as a dead maiden, lying on the earth and profusely covered by dry, yellow leaves which serve as a shroud. Her death means that nature also is dead.

**LI. 6-11.** Come, months, come.....sepulchre. The poet invites all the months from November to May to follow the funeral of the year. He imagines the year as a lady who has for her hand-maidens, the months. These maidens are now to put on their mourning costume and attend the funeral of the year who is dead in autumn. When the funeral ceremony is over, the months are to remain near the grave and carefully guard it, for the year will come to life again in spring.



**LI 13-16.** The rivers are swelling.....dwelling. Shelley here describes some of the common sights and sounds of autumn. Autumn is a season when all signs of life and jollity are absent. The cold rain falls, and even the worms feel the pinch of cold. Rivers swell due to the rains, and there are continuous peals of thunder. The poet fancies that the peals of thunder are ringing the knell of the dead year, as it were. The merry swallows have fled to warmer climates, and even reptiles have sought the shelter of their lairs.

**LI. 17-22.** Come, months, come.....tear. These lines form the conclusion of the poem. The poet asks the months from November to May to come and attend the funeral procession of the year. He imagines the year as a beautiful lady, lying dead in autumn. She is covered by a shroud of dry, yellow leaves. The months are her daughters or hand-maidens. The other five months (from June to October) belong to the cheerful seasons of high spring and summer. They are not serious and sombre enough to take part in the solemn ceremony. Let them enjoy themselves with merry-making and gay festivities. But these seven months belong to the colder seasons of the year. They must accompany the funeral procession. When the burial is over, they must shed tears on the grave of the year, so that the spot may remain

green and fresh. (The idea is that the year will come to life again in spring. It is the duty of the colder months to make the earth fertile with rains. This helps the revival of nature in spring.)

## **Mutability - II.**

I.

The flower that smiles to-day  
To-morrow dies;  
All that we wish to stay  
Tempt and then flies.  
What is this world's delight?  
Lightning that mocks the night,  
Brief even as bright.

II.

Virtue, how frail it is!  
Friendship how rare!  
Love, how it sells poor bliss  
For proud despair!  
But we, though soon they fall,  
Survive their joy, and all  
Which ours we call.

III.

Whilst skies are blue and bright,  
Whilst flowers are gay,

Whilst eyes that change ere night  
Make glad the day;  
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,  
Dream thou-and from thy sleep  
Then wake to weep.

### **Analysis**

All things in this world are transitory and have a fleeting nature. The flower that blooms today dies tomorrow. The things that we wish to stay forever, stay for a while and fly away. Hence the delights of this world are transitory. Even the lightning is as brief as its brightness. Virtue is frail, love is nothing but exchange of happiness which results in despair. Though these things are transitory, yet they survive their joy. In the final Stanza, the poet advises us how to enjoy life. The ultimate end of life is to suffer and weep. Hence as long as joy and beauty exist, we should enjoy it. Happiness is like a dream which vanishes when one wakes up. Instead of worrying over lost happiness, it is better to enjoy it while it survives.

Shelley was obsessed by the idea of mutability or change. He was a pessimist in life and was always overpowered by the sense of sorrow and suffering in the

world. His sad and melancholic feeling over the fleeting nature of beautiful and lovely things is reflected in this poem.

The poet's pessimistic view is lessened by his own consolatory words: since beauty and joy are transitory, we should enjoy them when they are bright and shining with dazzling brightness. Man's ultimate end is to suffer and weep. Hence why not enjoy life as long as there is joy and beauty to please us? Thus the poet overcomes his sorrow and melancholy.

This poem gives a reflection of the poet's personal life. Shelley finds 'frailty' in virtue, rarity in friendship and dishonesty in love, because in his own life, he hardly found any faithful friend. Above all he found weaknesses in virtuous persons too. This realization has made him generalize. 'Mutability' brings out how nothing is permanent in the world except for change.

To discover the beauty of English poetry, we could study "Mutability," a poem written by Percy Bysshe Shelley. His art is magnificently used in it: he succeeds to create melancholy only by the power of his words and his style; he also succeeds to arouse a new sight on life and people.

If we see the poem again, we notice that each stanza is built with the following form: ababccc: the first line rhymes

with the third one, the second one with the fourth one, and the three last ones together.

By a first analysis, we can learn some things about the poem. For example, we discover that the speaker (the Voice) is "we", humans in general. By this choice, the poet wants to share with us a deep thought on humankind, which we will tackle later. In a melancholy atmosphere and a gloomy tone, the poet tackles the theme of gloominess and fleeting beauty. Whole the poem contributes to these characteristics and we will analyze some details more specifically.

In his poem, Shelley shows that nature and beauty is fleeting: "The flower that smiles today / Tomorrow dies;". This personification is beautiful: the flower can smile and die like a human; but the contrast between today and tomorrow, and between smiles and dies is disturbing. We become aware of the fragility of nature, of beauty, of life. Beauty comes, but it flies as soon as we are tempted: "All that we wish to stay, / Tempts and then flies." The contrast between stay and flies and their position in the lines emphasize on their meaning. Why is beauty so fleeting? Sherry uses irony when he asks: "What is this world's delight?" In this line, delight means the opposite of his real meaning; it means

absurd. And Shelley continues with a new personification with the "Lightning that mocks the night, / Brief even as bright.", using in the same time an antithesis between lightning, night and bright - and an alliteration in the last line (brief, bright). Brief, the flower, the symbol of Beauty, is fleeting and the poet wants that we become aware of this.

In the second stanza, we discover the real nature of the Beauty of the flower and we understand the image of the first stanza. The flower, and his beauty, represent the ideal of the best human nature. Virtue, friendship and love are the qualities of wise and sincere people. Unfortunately, "Virtue, how frail it is! / Friendship how rare! / Love, how it sells poor bliss / For proud despair!" These qualities are very difficult to find, and the poet shows the absurdity of this situation by making an antithesis between poor bliss and proud despair, with amazing word arrangements. The poet continues by making an alliteration in the last line of the following three lines: "But we, though soon they fall, / Survive their joy and all / Which ours we call."

In the last stanza, new images are used. Shelley begins by using an anaphora by repeating whilst at the beginning of the first, second, third and fifth line:

"Whilst skies are blue and bright,  
Whilst flowers are gay,  
Whilst eyes that change ere night  
Make glad the day,  
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,

These lines show a beautiful nature where happiness seems to be the law. The "skies are blue and bright", the "flowers are gay", full of colors, the "eyes that change ere night / Make glad the day": these expressions give an impression of serenity, near heaven. But a change happens at the fifth line: the word yet emphasizes the fourth whilst. Effectively, "the calm hours creep," slowly move, "Dream thou - and from thy sleep / Then wake to weep." The words are all giving a calm impression when a climax presents words in the order of their increasing strength, up to the final surprise, which is written as an alliteration. First, "the calm hours creep"; then, the word dream is used, followed by sleep and wake. The final surprise is that we quit our dream to cry: "Then wake to weep." Heaven is a dream. In fact, it is difficult to find virtue, friendship and love among humans, and like the flower that smiles a day and dies the next one, each time we find something interesting, tempting, it flies and never comes back.

On the whole, Percy Bysshe Shelley has succeeded to share his thoughts about humankind with his poem entitled "Mutability". He has succeeded by his style and by the good choice of words. But more than a share of thoughts, a poem is a form of language where the reader goes to discover his own emotions aroused by it and a place where the reader can play the creator's role by filling in the parts where the poet stays deliberately unclear.

**Structure:**

This poem is divided into four stanzas consisting of four lines each. It follows the simple rhyme scheme 'abab cdcd efef ghgh'.

***Stanza 1:***

The poem begins with the collective pronoun 'we', wherein he refers to himself and the human race as a whole. He calls all of humans to be clouds that concealed the moon, restless and quivering as they delight in streaking across the darkness of the night. Yet, as soon as night ends, they disappear. This shows how human life is impermanent as opposed to the might of nature.

***Stanza 2:***

In this stanza, humans are compared to 'forgotten lyres'. Each string of a lyre produces a different music with no two



being the same, just like how the course of a human life is constantly differing.

***Stanza 3:***

This stanza delves into the routine life of humans. Humans sleep, they wake, and go through the same emotions of happiness and sadness, to worry and not to everyday.

***Stanza 4:***

The emotions of the previous stanza, according to the poem, are all the same, even though they appear to be different. In the end, nothing lasts forever except mutability or frequent change, the change that humans go through every day. It ultimately leads to nothing but death, the only sure thing in life.