

PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, discipline specific / generic elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern, which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive and continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the University has been recently accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with grade "A".

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes of all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Materials (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English / Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this, we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed, and I congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish the venture a grand success.

Prof. (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar
Vice-Chancellor

NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

Under Graduate Degree Programme

Choice Based Credit System

Subject : Honours in English (HEG)

Course Title : British Poetry and Drama: 17th and 18th Centuries

Course Code : CC-EG-03

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**Netaji Subhas
Open University**

**UG : English
(HEG)**

Course Title : British Poetry and Drama : 17th and 18th Centuries

Course Code : CC-EG-03

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MODULE 1

England after Queen Elizabeth

UNIT 1 □ England from 1603 - 1660 : Society & Politics

Structure

- 1.1.0 Introduction**
- 1.1.1 The Importance of 1603 and 1660**
- 1.1.2 Political Condition**
 - 1.1.2 (a) James I**
 - 1.1.2 (b) Charles I**
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- 1.1.3 Religious Condition**
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- 1.1.8 Suggested Readings**

1.1.0 Introduction

The Tudors ruled England for one hundred and eighteen years - starting with Henry VII becoming the king of England in 1485, and Queen Elizabeth passing away in 1603. The Tudor age had the best times in Queen Elizabeth's reign and the best poet in Shakespeare. With the death of the Queen ends the Tudor age and starts the Stuart era. In this opening Unit you will learn about.

1.1.1 The importance of 1603 and 1660

We have noted above that 1603 is the end of the rule of Tudors and the beginning of the rule of the Stuarts. An in 1660 Charles II was restored to the throne which marks the Restoration Period in history. The Stuarts, however, ruled upto 1714 - closing with the reign of Queen Anne who ruled from 1702 - 14.

1.1.2 Political Condition

1.1.2 (a) James I

We shall now have a brief account from the rulers of 1603-60 and see the political condition in England during these fifty eight years.

After Queen Elizabeth her cousin James VI of Scotland (1567 - 1625) became king James I of England, and his son Charles I ruled from 1625 till 1649. James I is generally held to be the most learned man who ever occupied the British throne. He was highly educated. He wrote some pieces of prose and verse. He was a good reader and a good rider as well. He had a nice sense of humour and large ideas. When the age was in favour of war his motto was "Beati Pacifici" (Blessed are peacemakers). He was an advocate of tolerance. He alone realised the great value of the political union of Scotland and England. (This union, however, was achieved in 1707). In England some called him "Solomon of England" out of flattery. Unlike Queen Elizabeth was lavish in bounty. His first ambition was to create a single unified monarchy - England Scotland and Ireland - that he put in his first Parliament. He wanted common Citizenship - Citizen of Great Britain - and an end to trade barriers, a pan - British Court, elevation of Scots to the English peerage and Englishmen to the Scottish and Irish Peerage.

As James I was the son of Queen Marie who was an orthodox Catholic, the English Catholics, therefore, had great expectations from him. On the other hand, the English Puritans had similar expectations as the king was brought up in Scotland's Puritan atmosphere. They also expected that the king should give up Elizabeth's religious policy. But neither the Catholics nor the Puritans of England could meet their goals through the king. The Millenary Petition (1603) prompted the king to call the leading bishops, resulting in the Hampton Court Conference (1604) where he made it clear that the extremists had no place in the church. He agreed to create better -educated and better - paid clergy. By far the greatest gift of the conference is the initiatives of the King for the Authorised Version of the Bible or King James's Bible (1611).

The next important event in the reign of James I is the Gunpowder plot (Nov. 5, 1605). The king wanted a reconciliation of the Catholics and Protestants, Liberals of all churches took his offer seriously. He was ready to suspend or ameliorate the laws against the Catholics if they would take a binding oath of political obedience. But some disappointed Catholics plotted to kill him by blowing up the Houses of Parliament using gunpowder secretly stored in a cellar immediately beneath the House of Lords. The plot failed. The result was that the King passed extreme laws of severity against

the Roman Catholics. Guy Fawkes was the leader of the plot. His plan was to kill the MPs and the king, capture the King's son, proclaim him the King of England, and then to organise a Roman Catholic Government. Guy Fawkes Day (Nov, 5), however, became a day of celebration, when the effigy of Guy Fawkes is burnt to remind of the animosity between the Catholics and Protestants. T. S. Eliot alludes to Guy Fawkes in his (*The Hollow Men*) and praises him for his courage and determination.

James' view that the King is answerable only to God and none else; and that he is free to violate the laws of the land, were no more sustainable. Expansion of trade and commerce, peace and discipline in the country, Puritan attitude to life prompted the people to question this divine right and absolute power of the King.

The great continental event of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) broke out in Germany. Germany then consisted of some three hundred states. And James daughter Elizabeth was married to Frederick, a King of one of the states. By the War Frederick lost his crown. The Protestant subjects of England wanted the King to help his Protestant son-in-law, but James planned to marry his son Charles to the princess of Spain, and by the help of the Spanish King, he could restore Frederick to his position.

In the first Parliament 1611 of James discussed the question of taxation and extra duties. It was dissolved in 1611 and for the next ten years there was no Parliament except in 1614. The Third Parliament was called in 1621. It was on raising money to support the Protestant cause. It also revived the right of impeachment. This Parliament also tried the bribe-case against Francis Bacon the Chancellor. Bacon was deprived of Chancellorship and he died shortly afterwards. The fourth Parliament of 1624 resolved the issue of declaring war on Spain. On March 27, 1625, the old King died.

To sum up we might say that James I failed to unite England and Scotland and also failed to reconcile the Catholics and Protestants. Elizabeth had left a debt of £ 400000 and James made it £1 million by 1624. The *Authorised Version of the Bible* is his singular contribution to the world. All his erudition and experience were thus of no avail when he ruled England. That is why the French King once called him "The Wisest Fool in Christendom".

1.1.2. (b) Charles I

James I was succeeded by Charles I. He was gentle and shy in character and physically deformed with a speech defect. But he was devoted to his wife and children, fond of good literature especially Shakespeare. His wife, Henrietta Maria was a French Roman Catholic and hugely unpopular.

The reign of Charles I started with economic crisis, war with Spain, a series of bad

grain harvests and a virulent plague. He needed more and more money to fund naval wars against France and Spain. More pains were in store for him regarding arbitrary taxation. Moreover he was Catholic but the Parliament was Puritan and anti Catholic. Parliament distrusted his ministers like Buckingham in the first four years' and Strafford and Land in 1640. In the early years of his rule, the Parliament was angry with his foreign policy. The main conflict was rooted in the Parliament's attempt to control the Government and the King's unwillingness in it. These reasons resulted in the King-Parliament disharmony, that finally surface in the Civil War of 1642 and later the revolution of 1688.

Charles's first Parliament in 1625 met for raising money to pay for the large subsidies to the King of Denmark and to send a fleet to Spain. The Parliament granted tannage and poundage to the King only for a year. not for life. The Parliament granted only one seventh of the money he needed. The second Parliament in 1626 impeached Buckingham. The third Parliament in 1628 checked the abuse of King's power by the **Petition of Right** which stated that loans and taxes without the consent of the Parliament were illegal and all imprisonments without cause were also illegal. The second session of the third Parliament passed Eliot's **Three Resolutions** restricting the power of the King. The next eleven years saw no parliament (1629 - 40). The period is called the **Eleven Years' Tyranny**. In 1640 there was the **Short Parliament** lasting for three weeks on the bargain for subsidies in return for giving up ship money. Ship money was an ancient levy by which revenue was raised for the outfitting of warships. Although it was normally collected only in the ports in times of emergency, Charles extended it to inland communities and declared pirates a national menace. But John Hampden, a Buckinghamshire Squire, refused to pay. His case was heard in the 1637 trial. The judges decided by seven to five that ship money was legal. The arguments of Hampden's lawyers were circulated over the entire kingdom. And the opinions of John Milton, the noted poet of the time, were heard in his *Lycidas*.

The Short Parliament brought John Pym to limelight, a great speaker and a clever tactician. The Second Bishops' war followed the Short Parliament. And the Parliament which met in November 1640 is known as the **Long Parliament**. It laid down that taxation of all sorts may be imposed only with the consent of the Parliament; that the Parliament is to be summoned every three years (*The Triennial Act*); that the Prerogative courts are to be abolished i.e. people must be judged by jury. It also attacked the King's advisors : Strafford was tried and executed. Land was imprisoned (1640) and executed (1645). It also attacked the intrigues of the Queen with France. Irish rebellion gave rise to the belief that the King was plotting with the Catholics and meant to use the Irish troops. Apprehending that a war was imminent, Parliament brought in a bill

to gain control of the militia. **The Grand Remonstrance** of Pym further strengthened the Parliament; it held Charles guilty of many offences; proposed that only ministers should be appointed of whom the House of Commons should approve. The Parliament was divided into **Royalists** and **Parliamentarians**. This division surfaced in the Civil War (1642-45).

1.1.2 (c) Civil Wars

In the Civil War the Parliamentary Party was supported by at least two thirds of the population and controlled three quarters of the wealth of the Country. It controlled navy as well as London and chief ports. The Royalists had the control of the cavalry and could collect tax and impose duties. The Parliamentary party upheld the points of the control of taxation, liberty of the subject, trial by jury, Protestant cause etc. The Royalists believed that the King was the upholder of the Constitution and that his power came from "Divine Right".

In mid-1643 it looked as if the king was about to defeat his opponents, but later that year the Parliamentarians concluded a military alliance with the Scots. Consequently the King's forces were defeated at Marston Moor in 1644. The north of Britain went out of his grip. The following year Charles was defeated by Parliament's New Model Army at Naseby, and thus the Royalist cause was fully lost. The King did not surrender to the Parliamentarians. He gave himself up to the Scots. The Scots handed him over to the Parliamentarians. Still Charles attempted to stir a fresh violence known as the Second Civil War. The New Model Army won it in four weeks. Now some MPs and officers realised that the Kings presence and place in England were incompatible. They charged the King with high treason. He was tried, found guilty and beheaded in January 1649.

1.1.2 (d) Cromwell

After Charles's execution a Republican regime was established in England. The new rulers wanted the traditional dominance over Ireland. Oliver Cromwell went with a force and completed the reconquest in 1652.

By the **Instrument of Government** Cromwell was installed as "Lord Protector" in 1653 of the new Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. He alone could summon Parliament and veto any of its acts, and could dissolve it, Modern dictatorship started with him. He ruled England for six years.

Born at Huntingdon in 1599, Cromwell became a member of Parliament at twenty nine. At forty three (1642) his military career began. He made his reputation in the cavalry in the Civil War. In the *Long Parliament* he showed his interest in religious questions. He said to his soldiers "Trust in God and keep your powders dry", Though

the hated Roman Catholics, he was large - hearted and tolerant. He imposed a ban on all undesirable amusements. In his reign England colonised Jamaica in 1655. The Parliament in its "Humble Petition and Advice" requested him to take the title of the "King" which he did not. He died in 1658.

1.1.2 (e) Restoration of Charles II

After Cromwells death, his son Richard Cromwell became the next Lord Protector. But he was not fit to rule England, nor had he command on the soldiers. So he abdicated eight months later. There was a vacuum of power in the Kingdom. The Rump also failed to do anything. At that time George Monck, the 1st Duke of Albemarle once a Royalist and now one of the ablest army officers, came from Scotland to London. He realised that only the restoration of Charles II could put an end to the crisis. In 1660 Charles II became the King. With this monarchy was restored; Parliament returned, Catholicism was restored and drama was restored to the stage. You will learn more about this in a later course.

1.1.3 Religious Condition

In the previous section we have noted how the issues of religion affected the administration. Had the Gunpowder plot been successful, British history would be written in a different way.

The relation between the Church and Crown, Crown and Parliament were not happy ones either in the Tudor times. or it in the period of 1603-1660. The two contestants - the Catholics and the Protestants were eager to control the King and the Parliament. The Anglicans or the Arminians believed in the divine right of kings". In matters of church government they were strong upholders of the power of the bishops. They wanted England to be a Roman Catholic country.

The Puritans claimed to be the pure Christians. They were from the middle as well as the lower social classes. They were not fully averse to pleasure. But they united against Roman Catholicism. They looked upon the Pope as antichrist. They thought that a return to Roman Catholicism would be simply a religious catastrophe for England. The Presbyterians also became a great force. The Independents believed in the right of every man to think for himself. Puritans had some hundred and seventy sects after the Civil War. But all these different sects opposed the claims of the bishops and priests to special powers. They made the Bible their rule of faith and conduct. Their opinion generally clashed with those of the Crown, as we have seen in the cases of James I and Charles I.

In 1650 an Act had been passed to punish adultery with death. The religious condition in England from 1603 - 60 shows that no religious party / group - Roman Catholic or Arminian or Presbyterian — except Independents had the spirit of tolerance. We also note how the Presbyterian's proclaimed the licensing order (1643) to gag all dissenting voices, against which Milton wrote *Areopagitica* to establish the freedom of expression. Milton was a puritan, but this Pamphlet has remained as an instance of an intellectual's love of liberty and freedom of expression for all countries and all times with a secular foundation.

1.1.4 Economic Condition

The economic condition of England in the years 1603 - 1660 was almost the continuation of the Elizabethan era. Agriculture, industry and commerce continued in the same manner. The companies founded in the reign of Elizabeth for trading to distant parts of the world grew in wealth and influence. The East India Company founded by Elizabeth's charter of 1600 held the monopoly among her subjects of trading with the East Indies. Under the early Stuarts the Company established small trading stations at Madras, at Surat of north of Bombay, and by 1640 in Bengal. London was the headquarter fo the Company. Charles I set up a second Company for Indian trade - the Courteen Association, which affected English Trade in the Far East at this time of the Long Parliament, but during the Protectorate, the old East India Company with the help Cromwell, re-established its connection with India. It happened to protect English trade and interests all over the World. Colonies were founded in Virginia, New England and West Indian islands like Barbados. The slave trade, which Hawkins had begun with the Spanish colonies, now supplied cheap labour to Virginia and the English West Indian Islands.

Population increase created severe economic problems and also a long-term price - inflation. By the begining of the 17th century London contained more than a quarter of a million of people. Poor migrants flocked to the capital in search of work or charity. London dominated not only the English mercantile world but also the rural economy. Initially woolen cloth industry with its spinning and weaving provided employment for thousands of families in the northeast and southeast parts of England. But the downturn of this industry created economic problems especially during the Thirty years war, when trade routes became disrupted.

The rural economy was predominantly agricultural with mixed animal and grain husbandry. Systematic efforts to grow luxury market crops like wheat drove many smaller tenants from the land. So too did the practice of enclosure, which allowed for more productive land used by large holders at the expense of their poorer neighbours. Harvest failures resulted in starvation rather than hunger. In the middle

of the century rural economy recovered and entered a period of sustained growth. There was however, no banking system, nor any regular stock market.

1.1.5 Social Condition

English society was organised hierarchially both in the family and the state. Male domination was the rule. The social hierarchy reflected gradation of wealth and responded to changes in the economic fortunes of individuals.

Titular peerage system prevailed. Between 75 and 100 peers formed the apex of the social structure. Their titles were hereditary. They were the wealthiest subjects of the state. It was also the military class of the nation. In the counties peers held the office of Lord Lieutenant .

The gentry were below the peers. They composed only five percent of the rural population. The gentry were not distinguished by title, though many were knights. Hereditary knighthood was created in 1611. They served as militia captains and justices of peace. The justices had the responsibility to mediate local disputes and collectively to try petty crimes. As the magistracy the gentry were the backbone of governance in the country.

Beneath the gentry were the yeomen. They were also involved in local government. Yeomen were village elders, constables and tax collectors. The husbandmen, cottagers and labourers filled out the ranks of rural society.

In towns, tradesmen and shopkeepers occupied the ranks below the ruling elites. They were called the middling sort and were active in civic and church affairs. They were also active participants in urban politics.

Social hierarchy and the government were closely connected. Rank, status and reputation were the criteria that enabled members of the local elite to serve the crown either at the court or the counties. Most of the aristocracy and gentry were the king's own tenants who had to serve by joining military or collecting taxes or holding local offices.

The king could not abridge the laws and customs of England, nor seize the persons or property except in cases of emergency. The king had a court— a floating body of royal servants, officeholders and place seekers. Most of the aristocracy obtained lucrative posts or became fortune seekers. Members of the elite who were educated at Universities and the Law courts, made ground tours of Europe where they studied language and literature. Some of them entered into royal service not by their merit but by patronage of family members and connections.

The king composed the *Privy Council* with members belonging to his court. There was no fixed limit of members of it. The Lord Treasurer, who oversaw revenue, the Lord Chancellor who was the crown's chief legal officer, and the Lord Chamberlain who was in charge of the king's household obviously belonged to it. The Privy Council advised the king on foreign and domestic policy. Naturally the privy councillors had to be very respectable, reliable and responsible persons. They had to keep in mind the interest of the centre and the localities as well.

The same hierarchy was also found in the composition of the Parliament comprising of the King, Lords and commons. Every peer of the realm was personally summoned to sit in the House of Lords. The House of Commons was composed of representatives selected from the counties and boroughs of the nation. Selection to the House of Commons was a mark of distinction. Very few members of the House of Commons were selected competitively. The MPs served the dual function of representing the views of the localities to the king (who alone could summon the Parliament), and of representing the views of the king to the localities. There were very often clashes between the King and the Parliament, and yet all members of the royal Government had the responsibility of enforcing the laws created at Westminster. Most Parliaments were summoned to provide revenue in times of emergency, usually for defence.

1.1.6 Summing up

Thus English society in the years 1603-1660 had religious rifts, hierarchical class structure, unequal economic conditions, scramble for getting a place in the royal government, expansion of economic activities abroad and increase in agricultural output. The cultural ethos were a legacy of the Tudor period, but things changed after the restoration of Charles II in 1660 when French fashions and manners entered into England. The Stuart period thus found decadence in literature and the Restoration period in culture.

1.1.7 Comprehension Exercises

A. Broad Answer Type Questions :

- i) Briefly write on the relation between James I and the Parliament
- ii) Discuss the events leading to the restoration of Charles II.
- iii) Write on the religious condition of England in the period 1603-1660.
- iv) Show how hierarchy dominated English Society and Government

UNIT 2 □ Jacobean Drama

Structure

- 1.2.0 Introduction
- 1.2.1 The Jacobean Period: A Brief Survey
- 1.2.2 Convention and Innovations
- 1.2.3 Jacobean Stage and Theatre
- 1.2.4 Jacobean Tragedy
- 1.2.5 Jacobean Tragicomedy
- 1.2.6 Jacobean Comedy
- 1.2.7 Masques
- 1.2.8 Summing Up
- 1.2.9 Comprehension Exercises
- 1.2.10 Suggested Reading

1.2.0 Introduction

Following on the heels of the previous Unit on Jacobean society and politics, here you will be given a comprehensive idea of Jacobean drama. As involved learners, it will be your task to comprehend how closely the dramatic output of a period can be linked to its social dynamics. This Unit is intended to provide an in-depth understanding of the period, convention and innovations in dramatic form and staging. Through an introduction to the historical, political and literary background of the Jacobean period, the growth and development of drama shall be traced. Different forms of drama that were prevalent during the period, the style and language, and the contribution of different playwrights shall be described.

1.2.1 The Jacobean Period (1603-1625) : A Brief Survey

The Jacobean period in the history of England and Scotland **extends from the accession of James I in 1603 to the end of his reign in 1625.** These twenty-two years of the reign of James I produced the finest works in the annals of English literature. The period marks a continuation of the spirit of the Elizabethan Age that was called a nest of sweet singing birds as well as an age of drama. The period was influenced by the Renaissance with renewed interest in the Italian forms of

performance, plays of Plautus and Terence and Senecan closet plays, adapted for public performance. The period also marks innovations in generic conventions and mixed theatricality. The Jacobean stage utilised the full effect of the revival of learning both for the private court performance and public theatres.

What is of abiding interest here is to see how the Jacobean plays combined the intellectual and aesthetic faculties of the Renaissance. The Reformation had awakened interest in moral, ethical and spiritual issues. The popularity of the public theatre, the circulation of the Bible in easily readable vernacular among English people, the geographical exploration and discovery of new worlds beyond the seas, and the expansion of trade and commerce, further enlarged the imagination of creative thinkers of the age. Since the days of King Henry VIII, England had evolved as an independent nation throwing off the yoke of foreign power and disassociating itself from Roman Catholicism. The fierce feuds of Catholic and Protestant by this time had ended and all the discordant elements had bonded in harmonious co-existence under James I, irrespective of the Gun Powder plot and underground activities of the dissenters.

The extravagant loyalty to Queen Elizabeth I was, however, missing during the rule of James I, who was brought from Scotland where he ruled as James VI. William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson carried the spirit of the Elizabethan age into the theatrical culture of the Jacobean age and instead of shaping the theatre attuned their own dramaturgy to changing ethos of the age. The classical dramaturgy of the University wits was then replaced by innovations, in both form and content. While Shakespeare stepped into the new world order that was ripe unto rotteness with his *Hamlet*, Ben Jonson, with a Roman satirical temperament, brought cynicism to the stage with his play *Volpone*. John Webster introduced a maddening world of chaos and decadence with a grotesque macabre of death and his contemporaries like Chapman, Beaumont, Fletcher, Marston, Ford, and many others, brought to the Jacobean stage a great range and variety. While the world of Jacobean tragedy is a dark and sinister, a world of chaos, corruption, perversion, blood and lust; the world of comedy is more city-oriented, with characters obsessed with money and sex. The distinctions between tragedy and comedy gradually blurred in Jacobean tragicomedies and the new theatrical experience brought the audience closer to the contemporary crises in morality, politics, society and economic structures. Another form of performance called masque became popular in the courts of James I and the nobility.

1.2.2 Convention and Innovations

During the Jacobean period performance in the public theatre was very popular. The Elizabethan groundlings became more robust during the Jacobean period and

much of the theatre arena was occupied by beggars, loafers, petty criminals, pick-pockets, drunkards, orange sellers, theatre lovers, atheists and conspirators. Theatres became hotspots of sin and crime. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean period several theatre groups were formed, several public theatres sprang up, writers and players honed their skills, and the managers put the plays on different types of performance space – Public, Street, Inn-yards, Church, Court, open ground, etc. The competition was most unhealthy, often crime/ghost-infested, but nevertheless most productive, with every competitor trying to outsmart the other and gain access to the best performance space and audience, and make the act commercially successful. If the piece became popular, rival managers often stole it by sending to the performance a clerk who took down the lines in shorthand. Neither authors nor managers had any protection from pirate publishers, who frequently issued copies of successful plays without the consent of either. After the play had had a London success, it was cut down, both in length and in the number of parts, for the use of strolling players.

Jacobean theatre offered more scope for a more flexible use of improvisational and transformational acting, overt spectacle and inset plays, blending of different forms of performance that the playwrights drew from the streets of London and medieval performances. The theatre became equally infested with ghosts, black magic, exorcism, murder, violence and cruelty. Edward Gordon Craig in his article “Shakespeare’s Collaborators” (1913) suggests that “the dramas were created by Shakespeare in close collaboration with the manager of the theatre and with the actors; in fact, with practically the whole of the company who invented, produced and acted them” (155). The production process involved the knowledge and experience and exposure to different performative arts of the improvisators involved in the making of the play.

The reasons behind the commercial success of most of the Jacobean plays may be attributed to the producers and actors who kept improvising on the production techniques by adding new props, visual and aural effects, and acting techniques. The acting or performance style was heavily indebted to the popular Italian form *commedia dell arte* and stories were mostly drawn from Italy and Greece. Shakespeare’s use of Plutarch’s history of the Greeks and Romans went alongside Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, while Jonson and Webster were fonder of Italian stories for the stage.

1.2.3 Jacobean Stage and Theatre

With the coronation of King James I in 1603, the court became the centre of theatrical activities. The plays were commissioned for court performance almost on

a regular basis. For example, this “Court calendar” of court performances of Shakespeare’s plays in last two months of 1604, listed by E. K. Chambers, in Volume IV of *The Elizabethan Stage*, would show the demand for plays during that period:

- Nov. 1. King’s (*Othello*).
- Nov. 4. King’s (*Merry Wives of Windsor*).
- Nov. 23. Prince’s.
- Nov. 24. Prince’s.
- Dec. 14. Prince’s.
- Dec. 19. Prince’s.
- Dec. 26. King’s (*Measure for Measure*).
- Dec. 27. Mask for wedding of Sir Philip Herbert and Lady Susan Vere.
- Dec. 28. King’s (*Comedy of Errors*).
- Dec. 30. Queen’s (*How to Learn of a Woman to Woo*). (119)

Few academic plays, mostly in Latin, were performed at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Travelling players carried the truncated plays to provincial England and the church retained the medieval tradition of religious drama. The plays that succeeded on the public stage were usually invited for court performances along with customised plays or masques suited for court performances. The public theatre was meant for the masses and made theatre an integral part of popular mass culture of that period.

In 1587 Philip Henslowe built the Rose Theatre and when he joined Admiral’s Men he shifted the performance of the group to the Rose theatre, and under his financial management several theatre companies acted there from 1592 to 1603. Most of the playwrights of the Jacobean age wrote their plays keeping in mind the apron/thrust stage of the Rose or the Globe theatres. The Globe was erected with the timber smuggled from the site of the Theatre in 1599 and used an identical stage like other public theatres on the south bank of the river Thames such as the Swan and Fortune.

The stage of the Rose Theatre had a diameter of about 70 feet (21 m) and the theatre had a capacity of about 2,200. Our knowledge about the architecture of the stage is mainly based on the following drawing of the Swan theatre by Johannes de Wit:

If you look at the figure closely, you will notice that the raised wooden platform of about 4-5 feet had three performance spaces: the apron jutting across the ground visible to the spectators from three sides; the middle stage with two pillars and a roof; and the inner stage chamber. The elevation (about 25 feet) of the stage had three levels for performance: the lower level representing the hell (4/5 feet) below the raised platform; the wooden platform with trap door/s (earth); the upper balcony (6-7 feet above the platform) and an upper level representing the heaven.



The staging of the act of devilry in the Jacobean plays required the use of this stage with a trap in the middle to allow the supernatural characters to appear/vanish through it. The 1598 inventories of the Rose Theatre, recorded by Henslowe, reveals that a good deal of investment was made to buy properties for staging of *Doctor Faustus* like “dragon in fostes,” “the sittie of Rome,” and “Faustus Jerkin his clok,” “invisible cloak,” etc. (*Henslowe Papers*, 118). More such stage props were added during the Jacobean period, specially for the plays of Shakespeare and Webster. Apart from this stage architecture large halls were modified for theatrical performance such as the Blackfriars. The staging of masques in the Jacobean courts shifted from open theatricality towards proscenium theatre. There was an astonishing diversity of experiment in Jacobean drama that was gradually liberating itself from Renaissance conventions. Different types of plays were performed during the Jacobean period, ranging from histories to tragedies, comedies, tragicomedies, farces to melodramas and masques, among others.

1.2.4 Jacobean Tragedy

The greatest among the Jacobean playwrights, writing successful tear-jerking tragedies, was William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The Jacobean period was remarkable for Shakespearean plays dealing with the darker side of human experience. Between 1601 and 1607, Shakespeare composed his great tragedies that were produced during the Jacobean period: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. During the same period, he wrote tragic plays based on Grecian and Roman history, plays like *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Timon of Athens*. These seven plays exemplify the highest achievement of English Renaissance tragedy. The reshaping of the historical

materials in the form of tragedy was a popular method to disguise contemporary issues under the garb of history. If *Hamlet* prepares the audience for the new type of tragic experience on the Jacobean stage while epitomising the values of Renaissance Humanism, Shakespeare's tragic universe gradually became more and more dark and sinister, manifesting the "metaphysic of evil." The pricks of conscience that keeps Hamlet procrastinating the final act of revenge go missing in Macbeth who is hell bent to write his own destiny without any moral scruples. Othello's suspicious nature, sexual jealousy, and a sense of deprivation lead him to commit rash acts of violent uxoricide and suicide. King Lear's irascible nature, possessive instinct, power-mongering, senile dementia, culminating in tragic loss of Cordelia, ending with his own death, stretched pain beyond human endurance. Macbeth is drenched in blood, committed to his obsessive pursuit of power through violent acts of sin, and displays no mark of repentance, even at the moment of death.

If Shakespeare provided a solid foundation for the development of Jacobean drama, it was John Webster (1580-1625) who gave a distinctive identity to Jacobean drama. The first notice of John Webster as a playwright was marked as a collaborator paid for his contribution for writing few lines in a play. His career as dramatist can be traced in the closing years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and seems to have lasted through the reign of James I. He belonged to a group of writers who often collaborated to write play. This group included Munday, Drayton, Middleton, Dekker, Chettle, Heywood, and Wentworth Smith, among others. The following are the tragic plays, written wholly or in part by Webster, of which trace has come down to us, according to C. Vaughan: *The Guise* (1601), *Caesar's Fall*. (1602), *The White Devil or Vittoria Corombona* (1612), *The Duchess of Malfi*. (Printed in 1623), *The Devil's Law-Case*(1623).

During the Jacobean period, Senecan revenge tragedy became more popular especially after the success of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In such tragedies, the revenge plot revolves around a crime, usually usurpation or murder, the pursuit of detective-avenger, the identification of the criminal and, finally, the execution of revenge. In Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the main object of revenge is the Duchess and the avengers are her brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal. A tool-villain is appointed by the avengers, Bosola, who accomplishes the task of avenging the violation of degree by the Duchess. She has married her steward against the prohibitions imposed on her by her brothers. She is a young propertied widow and although rich widows could remarry during that time, she becomes a victim of honour-killing. Once the revenge is accomplished, her brother, Duke Ferdinand asks Bosola, "By what didst thou execute / This bloody sentence?" and Bosola reminds him "By yours," Ferdinand rebukes him, "Mine? Was I her judge?" [Act IV, sc ii].

J.W. Lever has pointed out that “Webster based the action on a vendetta resulting from an unconventional match, leading to the deaths of both the revengers and their victim” (86-7). But the revengers are not “motivated solely by their resentment at the innocent marriage of a pair” as Lever has argued (89). The marriage may be “wanton and irreligious” and “their difference of rank... a shocking violation of degree” but the victim is more “sinned against than sinning” (Lever 89; *King Lear*). Ferdinand by his own confessional words at the moment of his death reveals the objective of revenge:

Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,
Like diamond we are cut with our own dust. [*Dies*](Act V, scene v, 72-3)

The Duchess is thus a victim of inexplicable incestuous lust of Ferdinand along with a “sin” of blood and Ferdinand’s greed. Once dead, the Duchess inspires Bosola to take up arms against the offenders and transform himself from a tool villain to an avenger. The second revenge plot too falters: Bosola kills Antonio, whose life he promised to save. Finally, he kills both the offenders and gets killed in the process.

In the tragedies of Jacobean playwrights like John Ford (1586-1640), a sense of foreboding doom and immoral act is visible, as in *The Broken Heart*. Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625) did much work in collaboration. According to W.H. Hudson, “Their moral tone is often relaxing, their sentiment strained, and their characterisation poor; but they have many redeeming features, and such plays as *Philaster* [a tragicomedy] and *The Maid’s Tragedy* successfully challenge comparison with anything in the romantic drama outside Shakespeare” (79). George Chapman (1560-1634) wrote tragedies like *Bussy D’Ambois* (1604), *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron, Marshal of France* (1608) and *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois* (1610). Philip Massinger (1583-1640) wrote a tragedy about the Emperor Domitian, *The Roman Actor* (1626) for the King’s Men and collaborated with Nathan Field (1587-1620) in *The Fatal Dowry* (1618) and with Thomas Dekker (1570-1632) in *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), based on the martyrdom of St. Dorothy.

A new form of naturalistic domestic tragedy developed during the Jacobean period that were not set in the exotic locales (usually Italy), as used by Webster and John Ford. Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and two anonymous plays – *Arden of Feversham* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* – are English family plays. There is a dominant sense of tragic doom and the characters try to escape from problems arising out of love or money.

1.2.5 Jacobean Tragicomedy

Tragicomedy developed through generic hybridity of tragedy and comedy, either by providing a happy ending to a tragic story or by a blending of serious and light moods. The term may be applied to plays of mixed means combining the conventions of tragedy and comedy. Italian playwright Battista Guarini (1537-1612) mixed 'high' and 'low' characters in *Il Pastor Fido* (1583). Beaumont and Fletcher followed his example in their *Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding* (1609) and George Chapman (1560-1634) wrote *The Widow's Tears* (1612). Problem plays of Shakespeare like *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), *All's Well that Ends Well* (1604) and *Measure for Measure* (1604) mixed serious and comic scenes. Between 1608 and 1612, Shakespeare wrote tragicomedies and dramatic romances such as *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale* and historical plays like *Pericles* (in collaboration with George Wilkins) and *Henry VIII* (with John Fletcher). These plays blur the distinction between tragedy and comedy.

Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding* (1609) was perhaps the most popular tragicomedy of the Jacobean period. The play deals with dethronement of Philaster by King of Calabria. Philaster is in love with the usurper's daughter, Artheusa, who is engaged to the Spanish prince, Pharamond, whose amorous affair with Megra is exposed by Artheusa. She becomes the object of Pharamond's revenge and accused of an affair with Bellario. Philaster believes in this story and plans to kill the pair and commit suicide. He is arrested and kept in the custody of Artheusa who promptly marries him. It is revealed that Bellario is a girl who is infatuated with Philaster and has disguised as a boy. Thus all is well at the end: the usurper is overthrown and Philaster is restored to the throne.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has been classified as a pastoral tragicomedy dealing with a similar theme of usurpation, revenge, matrimonial alliance and restoration of the throne. Prospero, the erstwhile and exiled Duke of Milan, has taken up a twelve-year residence with his daughter Miranda in an island after usurping Sycorax, mother of Caliban. With his magical power, he uses Ariel to bring all the offenders to the island. Ferdinand, the son of King Alonso of Naples, falls in love with Miranda, Antonio restores the dukedom of Milan to Prospero, Ariel is freed, the island is returned to Caliban, and the Italians prepare to sail back to their home. Serious issues of usurpation, colonisation, revenge, and liberty are interwoven with romance, comedy and farce in *The Tempest* that is set in a pastoral world.

1.2.6 Jacobean Comedy

Ben Jonson (1572-1637), among Jacobean playwrights, was the most prolific and successful. He experimented with various theatrical styles and genres and was

immensely influenced by the works of Roman playwrights like Plautus and Terence. His earlier Elizabethan Comedy of Humours was appropriated with the Jacobean moral ethos. Most of his characters are obsessed with love, marriage or money. Using the dramaturgy of Plautus, he allows a farcical build-up towards a climactic exposure of human deceit and cunning. Ben Jonson's reputation rests mainly on comedies written between 1605 and 1614: *Volpone* (1605) "assails gross vice"; *Epicoene, or, The Silent Woman* (1609) "ridicules various sorts of absurd persons"; *The Alchemist* (1610) "castigates quackery and its foolish encouragers"; and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) "is a coarse but overwhelming broadside at Puritan hypocrisy," according to R.H. Fletcher (114).

Volpone, or The Fox, according to Andrew Sanders "is Jonson's most savage comedy" (171). Jonson uses Italianate menagerie of characters like Fox, Flesh-fly, Vulture, Crow, Raven, etc., in the play. *The Alchemist* is much closer to the Roman comedies of Plautus. In the play, Lovewit leaves London at the time of plague leaving the care of his house to his servant, Face. With the help of his henchman, Subtle, Face uses his master's house as a centre of fraud. Subtle poses as an alchemist with possession of the philosopher's stone and dupes the gullible. Characters from different walks of life are thus looted by them. Sir Epicure Mammon is the main target of the tricksters. Finally, the master returns and discovers the frauds and keeps the booty. Face cleverly plants Dame Pliant as a suitable bride and Lovewit marries her. The servant is reconciled with the master at the end of the play.

The light-hearted romantic comedies of the Elizabethan period go missing from the Jacobean stage and Jacobean city comedies are tinged with unhappy marriages, debts, adultery, corruption and deceit. Comedy became more critical and exposed human shortcomings. Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) is one of the earliest of city comedies remarkable for the gallery of characters it presents. Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) wrote city comedies for boy actors from 1602 to 1607 such as *A Mad World, My Masters* (1604), *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605) and *Michaelmas Term* (1606). His comic masterpiece *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611) was written for adult companies. The play parodies mercantile double-dealing exposing obsession with sex, money, procreation and inheritance. According to Andrew Sanders:

For Middleton, however, social anomalies, new mercantile value-systems, and the equation of money and sex suggest the corruption of urban society. In each play foxes have to be outfoxed and the old who lack both spritely wit and integrity are successfully outwitted by the young. (167)

Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) is a burlesque comedy that parodies the conventions of old-fashioned romantic knight errantry. In the play a city apprentice, Ralph, becomes a "grocer errant" with a burning pestle as

his device in the titular "play-within-the-play." Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1622), one of the most popular social comedies of the period, presents Sir Giles Overreach, a cruel extortioner, who snatches the property of his nephew, Frank Wellborn.

1.2.7 Masques

During the reigns of James I masque emerged as an important theatrical form specially for court entertainment, performed at the court on special occasions. The performance of masque differed from the public theatre performances at the Globe, the Blackfriars, and the other London theatres. The masques were performed in private royal halls, such as the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall. The production of the masques was expensive, with lavish costumes, elaborate stage designs and spectacular effects. Inigo Jones, who designed the sets and introduced the proscenium arch, borrowed from Italy, and a new architectural style to English theatre. The masques depended on the spectacular scenic effects, music, dance, and a celebratory atmosphere. Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Beautie*, was intended "to glorify the Court," and give the courtiers an opportunity to perform. According to Ifor Ivans, in 1605 Jonson "prepared *The Masque of Blackness* for which Inigo Jones did the designs, and in which the Queen and her ladies appeared" (165). This is perhaps the first record of female performers on the Jacobean theatre. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* an inset betrothal masque is performed to entertain and bless Miranda and Ferdinand. This masque also requires female roles, elaborate costume, music and dance. Later in the seventeenth century, Jacobean open thrust stage, was replaced by this new theatre architecture.

1.2.8 Summing Up

In this Unit therefore, you have received a fair idea about the turns that English Drama was taking since the flowering of the mature genius of Shakespeare, and how social changes were beginning to tell upon the nature of audiences. You have also learnt about the different theatrical forms that had flourished, drawing upon the manifold humanist perspectives that the Renaissance had opened up. All of these will serve as good background as you approach the text of John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* in the next Unit.

1.2.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions :

1. Write a short note on the range and variety of Jacobean drama.
2. Evaluate the development of Jacobean tragedy.

3. Write an essay on Jacobean Citizen Comedy.
4. Write a note on the development of tragicomedy as a dramatic form during the Jacobean period.

Medium Length Questions :

1. Write a short note on the contribution of William Shakespeare to the development of Jacobean drama.
2. Define masque. Identify the characteristics of the genre with reference to any masque of the Jacobean period.
3. Write a short note on the historical and literary background of the Jacobean period.

Short Length Questions :

1. Name two writers of Jacobean comedy and their works.
2. Name two tragicomedies of the early seventeenth century.
3. Write a short note on Middleton.
4. Write a short note on the contribution of Beaumont and Fletcher.

1.2.10 Suggested Reading

Albert, E. *History of English Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 1976.

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UNIT 3 □ John Webster : *The Duchess of Malfi*

Structure

- 1.3.0 Introduction
- 1.3.1 John Webster: A Bio-Brief
- 1.3.2 *The Duchess of Malfi*: Composition, Production and Publication
- 1.3.3 Webster's handling of the Sources
- 1.3.4 Critical Reception of the Play
- 1.3.5 Dramatis Personae
- 1.3.6 Plot
- 1.3.7 Chaos, Decadence and Jacobean Moral Order
- 1.3.8 Revenge
- 1.3.9 Imagery, Symbols, Ceremonies
- 1.3.10 Theatricality, Music and Songs
- 1.3.11 Summing Up
- 1.3.12 Comprehension Exercises
- 1.3.12 Suggested Reading

1.3.0 Introduction

To begin from where we left off in the previous lesson, the present Unit aims to provide you a comprehensive idea of the life and works of John Webster with special reference to his play *The Duchess of Malfi*. You will be provided with a comprehensive discussion on the history of composition, production and publication of the play. The discussion includes Webster's handling of his sources, the critical reception of the play, insights into the plot and characters. You will see that the play represents the chaos, decadence and subversions in Jacobean moral order, revolving around the theme of revenge. Discussion on Webster's use of poetic images, symbols, and reversal of ceremonies will help you align the literary text with these thematic issues. The conventions of dramatic form and staging are discussed and attention has been drawn to Webster's remarkable innovations in theatricality, use of music and songs. At the end of the Unit, you should be in a position to understand the drift in playwriting from Shakespeare to the contemporary dramatists.

1.3.1 John Webster : A Bio-Brief

About John Webster not much is known. Information about the life of this Jacobean playwright is based on conjecture. According to Sidney Lee, Webster was probably born in 1580 and died in 1625. He probably joined as a parish clerk of St. Andrew's, Holborn. The only certain dates that the biographers of Webster confirm are related to the production or publication of his works. The first notice of John Webster as a playwright was marked as a collaborator paid for his contribution for writing few lines in a play. His career as dramatist can be traced in the closing years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and seems to have lasted through the reign of James I. According to Martin W. Sampson:

The earliest record we have of Webster is of his collaborating for Henslowe in 1602 with a number of others in writing four plays, *Caesar's Fall*, *Two Harpes* (perhaps *Two Harpies*), *Lady Jane* and *Christmas Comes but Once a Year*. The other members of the group of writers were Munday, Drayton, Middleton, Dekker, Chettle, Heywood, and Wentworth Smith: in each play at least four of them had a hand. (vii)

The following are the plays, written wholly or in part by Webster, of which trace has come down to us, according to C. Vaughan:

The Guise. [Dedication to *The Devil's Law-Case* and *Henslowe's Diary*: Nov. 1601].

Caesar's Fall. [Written in partnership with Munday, Drayton, Middleton, etc. *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 221: May 1602].

The Two Harpes (?) [Written in partnership with Munday, Drayton, Middleton, and Dekker. *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 222: May 1602].

Lady Jane. [Written in partnership with Chettle, Dekker, Heywood, and Smith; probably part of the first version of what was afterwards (1607) published as *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 242: Oct. 1602].

Christmas Comes but Once a Year. [Written in partnership with Chettle, Dekker, and Heywood. *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 243-4, Nov. 1602].

Additions to Marston's *Malcontent*. [The later Quarto of 1604. But it is probable that Webster only wrote the Induction].

Westward Ho. [Printed as Quarto in 1607: possibly acted as early as 1605. In partnership with Dekker].

Northward Ho. [Printed as Quarto in 1607. In partnership with Dekker].

A Cure for a Cuckold. [Attributed on the Title-page of the Quarto of 1661, the earliest known text, to Webster and Rowley].

The White Devil or Vittoria Corombona. [Printed in 1612].

The Duchess of Malfi. [Printed in 1623].

The Devil's Law-Case. [Printed in 1623].

A Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother. [Licensed in 1624. In partnership with Ford].

Appius and Virginia. [Printed in 1654].

Monuments of Honour. [A City Pageant or Masque, printed in 1624].

A Cure for a Cuckold printed in 1624,

The Thracian Wonder, as “written by John Webster and William Rowley,” 1624.

A Monumental Column, a fine Elegy on the death of Prince Henry, 1613.

(v-vi)

1.3.2 *The Duchess of Malfi* : Composition, Production and Publication

In 1612 Webster's *The White Devil* was published. The text was based on a performance “as acted” by the Queen's Majesty's Men. Webster started working on the next play *The Duchess of Malfi* which was perhaps performed before 1615. The play was first printed as a small Quarto in 1623, and was reprinted, with some minor variations in 1640 and 1678. The First Edition is considered as the most correct of the Quartos. According to John Russell Brown, “the title-page announced that it [*The Duchess of Malfi*] had been ‘presented privately, at the Blackfriars, and publicly at the Globe, by the King's Majesty's Servants’” (xviii). The play was performed by the leading actors of the period like Richard Burbage (as Ferdinand), John Lowin (as Bosola), and Richard Sharp (as the Duchess).

The staging of the play suited the requirements of an enclosed auditorium space like the Blackfriars with provisions for intimate scenes with artificial lighting of torches and lanterns. Several scenes of the play require an enclosed darkened space for generating suspense and shock effect. The play also required scenic designs appropriate to both private and public space. The internal evidence on staging is provided by the stage directions that are more suitable for the Blackfriars. The printed text follows the quarto edition that was probably used for private performance in the Blackfriars. The same text was probably adapted for performance at open theatres like the Globe where darkness and night scenes were implied through words and stage props like torches and lanterns.

1.3.3 Webster's Handling of the Sources

Webster's transformation of source materials into a well-made tragedy filled

with suspense and thrill displays a mastery over both the form and the content. The primary source of the play has been identified in Matteo Bandello's twenty-sixth *Novella* (1554). Bandello's stories are based on events that happened in his lifetime eye-witnessed by him or compiled as contemporary news and scandals. Bandello, for greater narrative fidelity, may have imagined himself as the Delio of the story, giving a circumstantial account of events that happened during the period 1508-1513. Bandello recounted the story of Antonio Beccadelli di Bologna, his secret marriage to Giovanna [the Duchess in Webster's play] after death of her first husband, and the wrath of her two brothers – a Duke and a Cardinal. Bandello recorded that the avenging brothers arranged the kidnapping of the Duchess, her maid, and two of her three children by Antonio, and arranged for the murder of all the hostages. Antonio, escaped to Milan with his oldest son, where he was later assassinated by a gang led by one Daniele Bozzolo.

Webster's legal eyes and theatrical acumen could easily trace in such high-class feudal gossip a Senecan revenge plot suitable for the Jacobean audience. Bandello's work was translated into French by Belleforest in his second volume of *Histories Tragiques* (1565) with fictional elaboration and linguistic embellishment. Such quasi-historical romance was then adapted as a conduct book on morality by William Painter in the second volume of *Palace of Pleasure* (1567) in a chapter titled "The infortunate marriage of a gentleman called Antonio Bologna with the duchesse of Malfi, and the pitifull death of them both." Webster perhaps used the latest version of the story but nevertheless retained the foundation of earlier versions, including the original Italian source text.

In Painter's version the Duchess is presented as a lascivious and voluptuous widow; in Webster's version, she stands against the conservative and hypocritical imperatives of patriarchal society, asserting with dignity her integrity and free will. Webster's method was much advanced for his times as he, according to John Russell Brown, "accepted the main outline of Painter's story, but modified, reshaped, and elaborated it to sustain a wider interest and lead to a wider conclusion" (xxviii). Webster fabricated the factual plot with fictional departures and invented characters. The agents and spies employed to detect the secret story of a rich widow engaged in an amorous relationship with a man below her degree, the tool villain to avenge the wrongs done by the Duchess and the avenger of his own sinful act, are all combined in the persona of Bosola.

While working on the additions to Marston's *The Malcontent* in 1604, Webster must have drawn his model for the character of Bosola from the deposed Duke Altoufront who is disguised as a discontented parasite Malevole. The final change in

Bosola from a tool-villain to an avenger of Duchess's death and the onstage slaughter of the Aragonian brothers – Ferdinand and Cardinal – cater to the Jacobean obsession with onstage revenge and bloodshed, drawn from several sources including *The Jew of Malta*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Machiavelli's *The Prince* must have provided materials for the creation of characters like Julia, Cardinal and Bosola.

1.3.4 Critical Reception of the Play

The Duchess of Malfi well-suited for performance in the indoor Blackfriars and produced successfully with leading actors of the day in the Jacobean public theatres did face hostile reception on moral and religious grounds. Orazio Busino, Venetian envoy in England in 1618, objected the play for religious reasons. After rising briefly to great heights, Webster's power in the field of tragedy seems to have declined perhaps because of the rise of the Puritans who opposed such on-stage liberties. After the restoration of the theatres in 1660 there was a new found interest in the plays of Webster.

As per archival records, the play was successfully performed on 30 September 1662, with talented actors Betterton playing Bosola, Mary Saunderson as the Duchess, and Henry Harris as Ferdinand. A female actor performing the role of the Duchess perhaps for the first time on the English stage received good reception. John Downes notes that it was "so exceedingly excellently acted in all parts." The play was staged twice at Covent Garden on 4 and 6 April 1733, with a new name "The Fatal Secret" with Mrs Hallam as the Duchess. Lewis Theobald writes of Webster's violation of the unities and his "wild and undigested Genius" and revised the play in 1733 into an unintentional tragic farce: no children are born, morals are overlaid, horrors are softened, and Webster's lines thought to be crude, are made to disappear. True to its new moralistic title, "The Fatal Secret" met with the fate it deserved.

Charles Lamb's generous selection of the play in anthology led to renewed awareness of Webster as a literary artist and poet in 1809 among his contemporaries. Webster's plays vanished from the English stages for over a century only to reappear on 20 November 1850 at the Sadler's Wells Theatre. The review, however found Webster guilty of charges:

Instead of 'holding the mirror up to nature,' this drama holds the mirror up to Madame Tussaud's and emulates her 'chamber of horrors' but the 'worst remains behind,' and that is the motiveless and false exhibition of human nature. (Moore 91)

The Victorian Age appreciated Webster's poetry and tragic vision on the one hand and attacked play for its episodic structure, absurd improbabilities, melodramatic

excesses and immorality. The female-centric play offered the female actors the scope to excel in the theatres of England and America.

A.C. Swinburne was Webster's most enthusiastic champion in the late nineteenth century with his excessive admiration of Webster's imagery and impressionism. William Archer in 1893 refuted such critical over-praise and found the play "loose-strung," with an ill-made plot and "go-as-you-please romances in dialogue" (Moore 141). Bernard Shaw branded Webster as "Tussaud laureate" in 1898 for his display of wax-work effigies and melodramatic excesses. T.S. Eliot in 1918 poem "Whispers of Immortality" wrote :

Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin;
And breastless creatures under ground
Leaned backward with a lipless grin.

Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
Stared from the sockets of the eyes!
He knew that thought clings round dead limbs
Tightening its lusts and luxuries. [1-8]

However, Eliot would later criticize Lamb's appreciation of Webster and for beginning a near-fatal dichotomy between drama and poetry. John Webster, somewhat like his Duchess, is seen "going into a wilderness" without any "friendly clue as [his] guide." Critical reputation of Webster became much stronger with the critical essays of J.W. Lever, Clifford Leech, Travis Bogard, James L. Calderwood and Catherine Belsey in the second half of twentieth century.

1.3.5 Dramatis Personae

The following list of Dramatis Personae appeared in the printed version of the play. The list reveals the hierarchical order and gender division in the feudal patriarchal society of Amalfi. The degree of order is violated by the Duchess who marries her steward against the wishes of her brothers. Webster's satire exposes the hypocrisy of the society that gives more importance to hierarchy and patriarchal order rather than to merit and integrity. As a renaissance tragedy, the play upholds the argument in favour of merit, virtue, integrity and free will.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

FERDINAND, Duke of Calabria
CARDINAL, his brother
ANTONIO BOLOGNA, Steward of the Household to the Duchess
DELIO, his friend
DANIEL DE BOSOLA, Gentleman of the Horse to the Duchess
CASTRUCCIO
MARQUIS OF PESCARA
COUNT MALATESTI
RODERIGO
SILVIO
GRISOLAN
DOCTOR
The Several Madmen

DUCHESS OF MALFI
CARIOLA, her woman
JULIA, Castruccio's wife, and the Cardinal's mistress
Old Lady

**Ladies, Children, Pilgrims, Executioners, Officers,
and Attendants.**

1.3.6 Plot

Despite some structural flaws *The Duchess of Malfi* has a well-made plot. Although the unity of plot is violated and episodic digressions into comedic action dilute the intensity of the tragic plot, the play has a power to generate suspense and hold the attention of the audience. The audience is given a foreknowledge of the events and are involved in the formation of the plot.

➤ Act I

The opening serves as an expository prologue: set in the court of Malfi, the play introduces the theme, characters, action and motives. Antonio, who has just returned from France, states that “the court of princes is like a common fountain.” Delio introduces Bosola as “the only court gall” afflicted by corruption and evil;

“slighted thus” Bosola aspires the life of scavengers: “black birds that fatten best in foul weather.” Bosola describes the Aragonian brothers as “plum trees growing crooked over standing pools, laden with ripe fruits accessible to crows, pies and caterpillar.” The action moves in a rapid pace and the exposition prepares firm ground for the rising action and complication. Bosola’s cynic observations in choppy prose, the suppressed violence of his words, his sense of injury and desire for revenge prepare the audience for Webster’s tragedy. The Duchess’ twin brother Ferdinand, the Duke of Calabria, appears next, followed by his brother Cardinal. Once the characters are exposed, that we meet the Duchess with her waiting woman Cariola, according to the instruction of Duke Ferdinand, the Duchess agrees to keep Bosola as the Master of the Horse in her court, an implant to spy on the Duchess and report Ferdinand about her suitors and private life. Antonio and Bosola are commoners who depend upon the nobility and both are ambitious. Ferdinand and the Cardinal warn the Duchess against remarriage. When they leave, the Duchess summons Antonio for a secret meeting and presents herself as a woman of flesh and blood. She offers her love to Antonio and participates in a secret betrothal ceremony, hoping that “time will easily / Scatter the tempest”. Cariola senses the crisis. This secret marriage leads to the necessary and probable action of spying and revenge.

➤ Act II

There is a lapse of few months the Duchess and Antonio have been able to keep their marriage private. Cariola and Delio are their confidante. Bosola is seen accosting a mid-wife and offering insightful comment that we hide our human diseases under rich tissue of deception. He offers a pregnancy detection test to the Duchess with apricots ripened with horse dung. She is tempted to taste the fruit and fails in the test. She feels unwell, hurries away to her bedroom and goes into labour. Antonio concocts the story of the theft of jewellery to mask the scream of labour pain as the Duchess gives birth to a baby boy. Later in the night, Bosola snoops around for some evidence and suspects Antonio of lying. When Antonio hurriedly leaves, a horoscope with blood mark is found by Bosola. It is his son’s horoscope, prophesying a violent death of the new born child. Bosola must now find out who the father is. He sends a message to Ferdinand and the Cardinal through Castruchio. The scene shifts to Rome, where the Cardinal is with his mistress, Julia, the wife of Castruchio. Cardinal calls Julia false and inconstant. Delio, an old suitor of Julia enters. Their meeting is interrupted by a servant, who informs Julia that her husband is in town, delivering a letter that puts Ferdinand “out of his wits” (II. iv. 69). Ferdinand and the Cardinal read the letter: Ferdinand rants, declaring himself as mad as he appears, cursing his sister; the Cardinal is colder, more composed, trying to quiet his brother. Ferdinand vows violence upon his sister.

➤ Act III

Act III opens after a lapse of some years. Antonio tells Delio that he and the Duchess have had two more children. Ferdinand has just arrived at her court, and is quiet. Duchess's morals are being doubted and Antonio's suspected to be corrupt. Ferdinand tells the Duchess that he wants her to marry a count named Malateste whom the Duchess rejects. Ferdinand wants to know more. Bosola says that the Duchess has three children though their father is not known. Bosola gives Ferdinand a duplicate copy of the key to the Duchess' bedroom. The next scene shifts to the privy chamber: Antonio, Cariola and the Duchess are joking in a jovial spirit. Antonio and Cariola, playfully, withdraw to another room, hoping to annoy her. Alone she combs her hair and muses aloud about the danger from her brothers. Ferdinand appears, holding a poniard. He accuses her of betrayal and when she tells him she is married, Ferdinand denounces her. Antonio and Cariola are informed about Ferdinand's visit. She asks Antonio to leave. She tells Bosola that Antonio has been embezzling her money. Antonio is asked by her to go to Ancona with her jewellery and as an eyewash, they enact a scene denouncing and sacking Antonio. Later, Bosola defends Antonio's honesty and praises him to win the confidence of the Duchess. Bosola's trick succeeds - she tells him that she is married to Antonio. The Duchess takes Bosola into her confidence, asking him to deliver her jewels to Antonio. She announces her plan to visit the shrine of Loretto, near Ancona, and meet Antonio there. The next scene moves to Rome. The Cardinal, asked by the Emperor to join a military campaign, is seen planning with Malateste. Bosola reveals the secret plan to the Cardinal and Ferdinand. Ferdinand is enraged and the Cardinal plans to go to Ancona. The play shifts to the shrine in Ancona: the Cardinal banishes the Duchess and her family from the shrine. Bosola meets the Duchess and her family. The Duchess urges Antonio to leave for Milan with their eldest son. Bosola enters with an armed guard and takes away the Duchess.

➤ Act IV

Ferdinand meets Bosola and the Duchess is told that Ferdinand wants to visit her in darkness, since he has sworn not to see her. The lights are taken away. Ferdinand enters and gives her a dead man's hand with a ring upon it. The Duchess "affectionately kiss[es] it" (IV. I. 44). Ferdinand leaves and as the lights are brought, wax figures of Antonio and her children appear dead. The Duchess thinks that they have all been killed. In profound grief, she begins to contemplate death. Bosola urges her not to despair. Bosola asks Ferdinand to stop tormenting the Duchess. Ferdinand torments her further with a group of madmen drawn from a different profession – a priest, a doctor, a lawyer, an astrologer, a tailor, an usher and a farmer - who talk and sing song. Bosola comes in dressed as an old man, heralding

her death. Her integrity and courage impress him. Executioners arrive and the Duchess faces Bosola boldly, asking him to pay due respect to her dead body. Cariola is strangled and the children too are killed. Ferdinand on seeing the corpses blames Bosola for obeying his orders and banishes Bosola. Betrayed thus, Bosola takes upon himself to save Antonio and avenge his suffering.

➤ Act V

The last act of the play ties up all loose ends. A doctor informs Pescara about Ferdinand's lycanthropy –a wolf-like behaviour, digging up graves, carrying off the corpses. Ferdinand enters complaining that he is haunted by his own shadow and in fit of rage throws himself upon his shadow. The Cardinal sends Bosola to find Antonio. Julia confesses that she has fallen in love with Bosola. He asks her to spy on the Cardinal for him but instead she reveals the murder of the Duchess to the Cardinal. He makes her swear not to tell anyone, by kissing his poisoned bible and Julia dies. Cardinal bribes Bosola to kill Antonio. Antonio and Delio are spotted outside the Cardinal's citadel: as they converse, an echo arises from the Duchess' grave, repeating words and phrases like "deadly," "sorrow," "Never see her more." The Cardinal prepares to dispose Julia's body and reveals his plan to kill Bosola. The plan is heard by Bosola. Ferdinand enters, still raving, and exits. At that moment Bosola enters in darkness and stabs Antonio by mistake. Bosola is shocked: he has killed Antonio whom he intended to save. Bosola turns into an avenger. Bosola stabs the Cardinal who cries aloud and Ferdinand bursts in with a sword, and stabs both Bosola and the Cardinal. Bosola manages to kill Ferdinand. With the stage strewn with dead bodies, Delio enters with Antonio's eldest son and laments the tragic spectacle.

With the help of this summary, you are to read the entire text. As you go through the play, prepare to be shocked with the great deal of spying, treachery, personal/public intrigues, and bloodshed that happens on the stage. Notice that this is so different from classical conventions of dramaturgy that you have read of in CC 2, it is also fundamentally different from Shakespearean tragedies where such horror and gruesome killings are kept off-stage and only reported. Try to read *The Duchess of Malfi* as a Revenge Tragedy in the Senecan mode.

1.3.7 Chaos, Decadence and Jacobean Moral Order

In *The Tragedy of State*, J. W. Lever argues that "Jacobean tragedy it is not primarily [concerned with] the conduct of the individual, but of the society which

assails him, that stands condemned” (8). Bosola is seen as presenting the “plight of the intellectual in the world of state, at once its agent and victim” (94). The fundamental flaw is not in the characters or their conduct, but in the political and social order in which they inhabit. The play grows out of the morality tradition and warns the transgressors in the chaotic and decadent moral order of Jacobean age. Webster not only saw the rotten carcass hid under an artificial social façade, he put that as the central theme of the play. He wanted to reveal the sinister under-current of society that has lost morality. The polarity of virtue and vice is so messed up that there is the prevalence of immorality and evil all around. The evil is not destroyed by virtue in this Jacobean play of crumbling values; evil is destroyed by greater evil, which in turn destroys itself. Webster’s path is satanic, like Euripides and Marlowe, as Una Ellis Fermor has pointed out. The inscrutable powers that lead to the suffering of human beings are not held by supernatural agencies, they are man-made, self-inflecting disasters, in a decadent society, ripe unto rotteness.

In his essay “Four Elizabethan Dramatists,” T. S. Eliot regarded Webster as a “genius directed toward chaos.” Later critics such as Travis Bogard saw in Webster, a vision based on the fusion of tragedy and satire. The order emerges out of a chaotic world order as pointed out by Irving Ribner in “Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order” (1962). Through this play, as Swinburne pointed out, Webster emerged as a moral poet with his poetic imagination and critical insight. J.A.Symonds also recognises Webster’s “firm grasp upon the essential qualities of diseased and guilty human nature.” If the play is immoral, so was the Jacobean ethos, and Webster, the moralist, presents the importance of integrity in this decadent world of chaos and disorder. On the other extreme, Kenneth Tynan, in *A View of the English Stage* (1975), has stated:

Webster is not concerned with humanity. He is the poet of bile and brainstorm, the sweet singer of apoplexy: ideally, one feels, he would have had all his characters drowned in a sea of sweat. (299)

1.3.8 Revenge

During the Jacobean period, Senecan revenge tragedy became more popular especially after the success of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. A revenge plot is based on a crime, usually usurpation or murder, the pursuit of detective-avenger, the identification of the criminal and, finally, the execution of revenge. All these come late in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The main object of revenge is the Duchess and the avengers are her brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal. The tool-villain appointed by the avengers is Bosola. The Duchess becomes the object of revenge for her violation of

degree through her inter-class marriage with her steward, that too against the prohibitions imposed on her by her brothers. She is a young propertied widow and has one son from her previous marriage. Rich widows could marry again during that time and the prohibitions imposed on her by her brothers seem inappropriate.

There is much procrastination in the act of revenge as the marriage has been preserved as a closely guarded secret despite several evidences collected by Bosola. Babies are born, they grow up, and finally the order of honour-killing is given to Bosola. Once the revenge is accomplished, the main avenger comes and asks, “By what didst thou execute / This bloody sentence?” When Bosola reminds him “By yours,” Ferdinand rebukes him, “Mine? Was I her judge?” [Act IV, sc ii]. Then why did the Duchess become an object of revenge? Ferdinand tries to explain that had she continued as a widow he might have “gain’d / An infinite mass of treasure by her death” [ibid]. This might have been plausible only in absence of an heir, but the Duchess has a son by her previous marriage (mentioned at the end of Act III, scene iii by Ferdinand), who, however remains conspicuous by his absence even at the end of the play where Delio enters “with Antonio’s son,” the possible “heir.”

J.W. Lever has pointed out that “Webster based the action on a vendetta resulting from an unconventional match, leading to the deaths of both the revengers and their victim” (86-7). But the revengers are not “motivated solely by their resentment at the innocent marriage of a pair” as Lever has argued (89). The marriage may be “wanton and irreligious” and “their difference of rank... a shocking violation of degree” but the victim is more “sinned against than sinning” (Lever 89; *King Lear*). Ferdinand by his own confessional words at the moment of his death reveals the objective of revenge:

Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,
Like diamond we are cut with our own dust. [*Dies*](Act V, scene v, 72-3)

The Duchess is thus a victim of inexplicable incestuous lust of Ferdinand along with a “sin” of blood and Ferdinand’s greed. Once dead, the Duchess inspires Bosola to take up arms against the offenders and transform himself from a tool villain to an avenger. The second revenge plot too falters: Bosola kills Antonio, whose life he promised to save. Finally, he kills both the offenders and gets killed in the process.

1.3.9 Imagery, Symbols, Ceremonies

Imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi* is perceptible through “concrete” objects, stage props, scenes, action and diction. The set of images used is both mental pictures, appealing to senses, and concepts, appealing to thought and imagination. The concrete

imagery drawn from nature reveals both the malign and benign forces. The predatory world of ferocious animals and the rotten world of the scavengers are juxtaposed to the avian imagery associated with liberty and free will. Bosola, in the opening scene of the play, introduces the imagery of “dog days” to reveal the picture of contemporary society:

I will thrive some way: blackbird fatten best in hard weather: why not I, in these dog days? (Act I, scene i, 47-9)

The Aragonian brothers are described by Bosola with the following simile:

He and his brother are like plum trees that grow crooked over standing pools: they are rich o’erl aden with fruit, but none but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them. (*ibid* 51-4)

The world of the play is infested with the scavengers and predators.

The benign forces of nature are left at the mercy of these forces. The Duchess of Malfi associates herself with the birds, specially nightingale:

The robin red-breast and the nightingale

Never live long in cage (Act IV, scene ii, 8-9)

Ferdinand in Act V, scene ii, defines his loneliness with the help of bird imagery:

Eagles commonly fly alone: they are crows, daws, and starlings that flock together.

(30-1)

The malignant forces of nature, red in tooth and claw, find expression in the vituperative energy of Ferdinand’s outbursts:

Methinks I see her laughing:

Excellent hyena! (Act II, scene v, 38-9)

Ferdinand’s lycanthropic behaviour at night, strolling in the graves, disinterring the corpses, reveals an unresolved anxiety and latent incestuous obsession. The wolf-imagery is associated with him.

Images in the play suggest meanings and associations that gobeyond simple metaphors or similes. These images based on concrete objects become symbolic. There are several clusters or patterns of the matic imagery of animals, worms, disease, blood, death, necromancy, etc in the play. Delio describes the Cardinal:

Then the law to him
 Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:
 He makes it His dwelling, and a prison
 To entangle those shall feed him. (Act I, scene ii, 105-8)

Michael Neill, in “Monuments and ruins as symbols in *The Duchess of Malfi*” refers to “the importance of tombs and monuments in the iconography of English Renaissance drama” (71). According to Neill, “Graves, monuments and decaying ruins are recognisable staples of Webster’s imagery” (74). Webster has been called a “Tussaud laureate” for his gothic extravaganza through the display of dead man’s hand, waxen effigies of the dead, and grotesque murder scenes.

James L. Calderwood relates the release of violent passions of the characters through reversal of ceremonies that involves symbols of disorder and imagery of chaos and decadence. Replete with several symbols and complex poetic imagery, *The Duchess of Malfi* manifests the finest poetic achievement of the Jacobean age.

1.3.10 Theatricality, Music and Songs

Webster’s play is meant for theatrical performance although it has the poetic intensity of Senecan closet drama. Suitable for both the enclosed and darkened space of the Blackfriars and the open staging at the public theatres of Jacobean London, the play combines several means of performance and staging. The theatricality was much advanced and incorporates most of the time-tested popular theatrical devices of the Jacobean period. For example, the secret betrothal scene in Act I scene i, is performed on an intimate closet space that is verbally and visually created just after the scene enacted on the public court space. After the exit of her brothers, the Duchess instructs Cariola “Leave me: but place thyself behind the arras” and “[Cariola withdraws behind the arras].” After the secret ceremony, “CARIOLA comes from behind the arras” and Antonio is shocked. The scene is reminiscent of the then popular scene of *Hamlet* where Hamlet stabs Polonius who was hiding behind the arras. In Act II scene iii, Bosola appears on the stage “with a dark lantern” encounters Antonio and discovers the horoscope of the son delivered by the Duchess.

The use of Jacobean theatrical technique can be seen in the famous closet scene of Julia, echo scene, madmen scene, execution scene, etc. Clifford Leech in *John Webster: A Critical Study* (1951) has pointed out that the play exhibits “a new naturalism, an acting style which was appropriate to the new drama of infirm orientation...” (63). The gothic and sensational scenes are carefully blended with scenes that require naturalism and psychological insight. Structural flaws are also rife interspersed in a plot that has a fluid time and flexible spatial orientation. There

are of course melodramatic excesses in the play and an orientation towards a mixed genre of sardonic humour and tragedy.

Music and songs contribute to the theatrical effect of the play. Music, however, is cacophonous and chaotic. The “intemperate noise” produced by Ferdinand is out of tune, according to the Cardinal. The erratic laughter of hyena, the wolverine grunts of Ferdinand, the “wild consort / Of madmen,” the song by a “Madman... sung to a dismal kind of music” create a theatre of cruelty, disorder and violence. For the Duchess “nothing but noises and folly/ can keep [her] in [her] right wits” (Act IV, scene ii, 4-7). The dance performed by “eight madmen with music answerable thereunto” produce a maddening world of chaos and violence.

1.3.11 Summing Up

In this Unit, you have been introduced to one of the most significant texts under the category of Jacobean Revenge Tragedy. You have seen for yourselves how much more complex motivations relating to power in private and public domains are explored by Webster. While Shakespeare’s exploration of the female mind is at one level in his plays, you have also seen the new dimensions in gender perspectives that Webster has invested his play with. The theatrical impact of the play, its varying receptions across ages, and the manifold critical perspectives to which the text lends itself have also been explored for your understanding.

1.3.12 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Discuss *The Duchess of Malfi* as a Revenge tragedy.
2. Write a note on Webster’s art of characterisation with reference to the range and variety of characters in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
3. Analyse Webster’s use of images and symbols in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
4. Discuss the role and function of Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
5. Why does the Duchess become the object of Ferdinand’s revenge? Discuss with reference to *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Medium Length Questions:

1. Write a short note on Webster’s theatricality in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
2. Comment on the generic classification of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

3. Write a short note on the portrayal of Duke Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
4. Comment on Webster's handling of sources in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
5. Write a short note on the critical reception of Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Short Length Questions:

Locate, annotate and explain:

1. "By what didst thou execute
This bloody sentence?"
2. "Mine? Was I her judge?"
3. "Then the law to him
Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:
He makes it His dwelling, and a prison
To entangle those shall feed him."
4. "The robin red-breast and the nightingale
Never live long in cage."
5. "I am Duchess of Malfi still."

1.3.13 Suggested Reading

- Belsey, Catherine. *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Bradbrook, M. C. *John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist*. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1980.
- Brown, John Russell. Ed. *John Webster's "The Duchess of Malfi"*. Cambridge: CUP, 1983.
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- Chambers, E. K. *The Elizabethan Stage*. 4 Volumes. 1923. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974. Vol. 3.
- Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. 1984. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986.

MODULE 2

The Restoration

UNIT 4 □ England in the Wake of the Restoration

Structure

- 2.4.0 Introduction**
- 2.4.1 Historical Background of the Age**
- 2.4.2 Political Analysis of the Period**
- 2.4.3 Contemporary Social Picture**
- 2.4.4 Urban Growth**
- 2.4.5 The Cultural Scenario**
- 2.4.6 Literature of Documentation**
- 2.4.7 Summing Up**
- 2.4.8 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.4.9 Suggested Reading**

2.4.0 Introduction

From the 16th to the 17th century is in many senses a major transition in the history of England and commensurately, in the literature of the period that we are now studying. The opening Unit of this Paper has acquainted you with the very basic question as to why these years are labeled as ‘The Restoration’ in England. You will see for yourselves how monarchy and nobility of this period was strikingly differently from the trends witnessed in Elizabethan and the subsequent Jacobean periods. Concurrently, the social picture of the times will be reviewed, as this is of vital importance in grasping the predominant tendencies witnessed in the literature of the Restoration period. It would ideally be a fitting study of the cultural milieu if we could study the resultant implications of polity and societal trends in their entirety; but from an academic point of view we shall limit ourselves broadly to the literature of the period. Looking upon literary texts as ‘Cultural Texts’ does indeed gain a new dimension in this period, and they will give you a fitting idea of the times. For those of you who are interested in more, the Reading List will definitely provide keys to a wider comprehension of cultural trends of the period.

2.4.1 Historical Background

Authority and succession are the twin concerns of rulers everywhere, as also in England. To comprehend the complexities of this period, we shall have to cast serious look at the historical events and their political implications in some detail.

Elizabeth Tudor died unwed in 1603, thus bringing to an end the famous Elizabethan period, of which you have read in your previous Paper. Her cousin James IV of Edinburgh became James I of United Kingdom by joining the crowns of England and Scotland purely on a personal basis. This period is known in British history as the Jacobean period. The constraints of managing the genuine affronts of an English Parliament were much more than a weak Scottish Parliament that he was so long used to.

You must understand that Parliament in England at this time was fundamentally different from what we know of it today in the context of our country, as being a national body of elected representatives. Though it functioned as an advisory body and was summoned at the will of the monarch, yet the Parliament had both the power and the resources to raise revenues far in excess of any other means available at the disposal of the monarch. By the seventeenth century, Parliament's tax-raising powers had come to be derived from the fact that the gentry was the only stratum of society with the ability and authority to actually collect and remit the most meaningful forms of taxation then available at the local level. This meant that if the king wanted to ensure a smooth collection of revenue, he needed the co-operation of the gentry. For all of the Crown's legal authority, by any modern standard, its resources were limited to the extent that, if and when the gentry refused to collect the king's taxes on a national scale, the Crown lacked any practical means with which to compel them. Therefore, in order to secure their co-operation, monarchs permitted the gentry (and only the gentry) to elect representatives to sit in the House of Commons. When assembled along with the House of Lords, these elected representatives formed a Parliament. Parliaments therefore allowed representatives of the gentry to meet, primarily (at least in the opinion of the monarch) so that they could give their sanction to whatever taxes the monarch expected their electorate to collect. In the process, the representatives could also confer and send policy proposals to the king in the form of bills. However, Parliament lacked any legal means of forcing its will upon the monarch; its only leverage with the king was the threat of its withholding the financial means required to execute his plans. Against this backdrop, the fact that James I was an extravagant and peace loving man put him in perennial crisis of funds and it was imperative for him to seek extra-Parliamentary sources of income. He died in 1625 and was succeeded by his son Charles I.

Charles I (1625-49) took upon himself to unite England, Scotland and Ireland into a single kingdom in order to fulfill his father's dream. This did not go down well with many English Parliamentarians who had suspicions that such a move might destroy the old English traditions which had bound the English monarchy. As Charles shared his father's position on the power of the crown (James had described kings as "little gods on Earth", chosen by God to rule in accordance with the doctrine of the "Divine Right of Kings), the suspicions of the Parliamentarians did indeed have some justification.

Charles' marriage to a Roman Catholic, the French princess Henrietta Maria added further fuel to the already seething rage amongst parliamentarians. The Parliament refused to assign him the traditional right to collect customs duties for his entire reign, deciding instead to grant it only on a provisional basis and negotiate with him. The sending of forces to relieve the Protestant French Huguenots (French Protestants inspired by John Calvin) who were being persecuted by the French troops could have been a saving grace for the monarch's marriage to a Catholic; but that did not happen as Charles I arbitrarily conferred command of the English forces upon George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, who was immensely unpopular with the Parliament. When Parliament opened impeachment proceedings against Buckingham after the failure of the relief expedition, the King dissolved Parliament in 1627.

Obviously this was not well taken, and besides, the crown naturally fell short of revenues. A new Parliament was assembled in 1628, which included the likes of Oliver Cromwell and Edward Coke as elected members, and needless to say, monarchy was now challenged by the **Petition of Right**. This Petition imposed restrictions on non-Parliamentary taxation, forced billeting of soldiers, imprisonment without cause, and the use of martial law. Eminent jurists like Coke also used it to evoke **Magna Carta** extensively, which argued against the divine rights of monarchy.

The king's avoidance of calling Parliament for the next eleven years (infamously known as the Eleven Years Tyranny), his insistence on High Anglicanism, the Edinburgh riots over religious impositions, the Short Parliament (so called because it was dissolved after 2 weeks) of 1640, the Scottish invasion, the more hostile Long Parliament in late 1640 that was even more hostile to monarchy than the previous one – the reign of Charles had all the ingredients of misrule and a decadent crown. This progressive decay abetted by several other happenings, finally led to the King having to leave London for the north of the country in early 1642, and the beginning of the first Civil War. With conflicting loyalties, the Royalists and the Parliamentarians gradually began to take opposed positions even as the wars continued with altering fortunes. The culmination came when the Army led by the commanding officer Thomas Pride marched on Parliament, set up a High Court of Justice with

75 anti-monarchical members in the name of the people of England, tried Charles I on charges of treason, and had him beheaded on a scaffold in front of the Banqueting House of the Palace of Whitehall on 30 January 1649. Fairfax, a constitutional monarchist and moderate, refused to participate whatsoever in the trial and resigned as head of the army, allowing Oliver Cromwell to ascend in power. For more details of the upheavals of this period, you are advised to read books on the social history of England, or consult the internet that could be a ready reckoner.

Cromwell was a good administrator and governed England as **Lord Protector** of the **Commonwealth** between 1653–1658. The term **Commonwealth** or **Commonwealth of England**, was the period from 1649 onwards when England, along later with Ireland and Scotland was ruled as a republic following the end of the Second English Civil War and the trial and execution of Charles I. At home Lord Protector Cromwell reorganised the national church, established Puritanism, readmitted Jews into Britain and presided over a certain degree of religious tolerance. Abroad, he ended the war with Portugal (1653) and Holland (1654) and allied with France against Spain, defeating the Spanish at the Battle of the Dunes (1658). Cromwell died on 3 September 1658 in London. After the Restoration his body was dug up and hanged.

At his death he appointed his son as successor. The people were unhappy with this arrangement and tired of repressive, unbending puritan rule, a period that the monarchists also called the **Interregnum**. Led by Anglican factious, Parliament offered the throne to Charles II, son of the beheaded king, then living in exile in France, Thus both monarchy and the Stuart dynasty were restored after what had been virtually a military dictatorship. The period 1660-1698 is hence known as the Restoration.

2.4.2 Political Analysis of the Period

Religion and politics were greatly in English life for many years now and would continue so till the **Glorious Revolution** which placed William and Mary of Orange as joint rulers of England. The Tudors (Henry VIII and Elizabeth I) had assumed authority over Church and State. The early Stuarts relished their 'divine right' to rule but lacked the wisdom required in administration. Both James I (the wisest fool in Christendom") and Charles I tactlessly annoyed Parliament by defying, over ruling, even dissolving it for long periods. The Civil War of 1642 was English Parliament's rebellion against the crown, It has also been seen as a religious war: **Puritans** and **Presbyterians** (ROUNDHEADS COMMONERS) against **Anglo – Catholics** (CAVALIERS/ROYALISTS). Yet others describe it as the rebellion of the middle-class against the noble class; as a struggle between town and country interests.

Landing on English soil in 1660. Charles II was welcomed jubilantly by the public, but the old tensions remained. The religion of the king was suspect. Officially Anglican Protestant, his leanings and decisions gave reasons for doubt. His brother James was avowedly Catholic, and he was heir to the throne. There were constant fears that Catholic forces within England would regain power, aided and abetted by France and Spain – both Catholic countries. Holland was a Protestant ally with great naval and commercial strength, therefore a threat to England's commercial interests, Suspicions against Catholic favourites of the king were rife. Papist plots real or imagined, were unearthed almost daily. The lies of the unsavoury Titus Oates (an English perjurer who fabricated the “Popish Plot”, supposedly a Catholic conspiracy to kill Charles II) brought matters to a head when Earl of Shaftesbury proposed the “ exclusion” bill in Parliament to ensure that Duke of Monmouth replace James as heir to the throne. The monarchy was shaken yet again and Charles II managed to fend this off just barely.

Practically, the government came to be largely controlled by five Ministers – Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashle and Lauderdale – a **CABAL**, A cabal as we know is a small group of politicians working in secret. They were a kind of ‘cabinet’ government, and they reported to the king bypassing Parliament, thus a cause for disaffection. Two groups emerged. The ‘Tories’ were mainly royalist landed gentry who conservatively held that government should be appointed freely by the king, The ‘Whigs’ on the other hand were merchant squires with overseas. business interests, keen on modern methods and economic development. They believed that above everything, government must be controlled not by royal monopolies and nepotism but by the House of Commons, New elections were called and the fresh Parliament was almost entirely “Whig”. The Whigs also insisted that war with Holland end, so royal expenditure would be reduced and their trading and colonial enterprises could flourish.

James II upon accession in 1685, almost immediately exposed his Roman Catholic bias. He was “replaced” by Protestant Sovereigns William and Mary in a “bloodless” (no battle was fought, no blood was shed), “glorious” revolution of 1688. Parliament came to control the governance of England by appointing ministers, confirming the rule of law and the two party system. Most of the old power of the crown lay now in the hands of the Parliament, and the forms of control were listed in the Bill of Rights.

Thereafter, religious passions gradually faded from public affairs. It was victory for democracy and a marked shift from court-centric to people centric culture.

You must now have realized how eventful these years had been for British politics in particular and for a large chunk of Europe in general.

2.4.3 Contemporary Social Picture

Popular English imagination thus rightly sees these years 1660-1698 as a watershed of history, Dryden in his poem *Astrea Redux* hailed Charles II as “Augustus” or emperor of Rome (31 BC). With the restoration of monarchy and under the ‘auspices’ of the king returned from France, the whole atmosphere of the nation changed from the mood of a gloomy prayer meeting to one of licence, ribaldry and unashamed pleasure. Country life remained largely the same, though mining and industry had increased Urban life gained prominence. The king set the tone for metropolitan life. You will find striking depictions of this town-country binary in comedies of the period. The royal courtiers and the upper class led a gay, cynical, permissive and profligate kind of life to match the “merry Monarch’s” indecorum. New type of gentlemen ‘fops’ and ‘rakes’ crowded the court and London streets. They lived only for fashion in dress, appearance and manners. The ‘town’, that is to say fashionable London, became the centre of all social glitter. Provincial England and the middle classes did not, however participate in the brilliant life of this closed society. Everything favours the constitution of aristocratic or clique literature. We will study this in greater detail a little later.

2.4.4 Urban Growth

As discussed in the earlier section, the predominant trend of the Age was an insistence on metropolitan culture. The economic and cultural heart of England was thus naturally the city of London. Between 1660-1780 London was transformed from a late medieval into an early modern city. The worst plague epidemic for centuries thinned the population; the great fire of 1666 (described vividly by Dryden, Pepys and others) flattened a large section of the walled city. Rebuilding was mostly in stone: over fifty of its churches were designed by the great architect Sir Christopher Wren, and some of their woodwork was carved by Grinling Gibbons. Civic amenities were improved, streets lighted, houses had gardens and wealthy merchants moved outside the city walls into gracious, spacious mansions that were stately, airy, fit for leisure, study and energetic economy. Whitehall and Westminster gradually merged into a bustling centre admired by European visitors.

2.4.5 The Cultural Scenario

The city soon began to flaunt concert rooms where music by composers like Purcell could be publicly performed. Theatres had re-opened but moved indoors though only two were licensed. Naturally the drama – audience had contracted though

its attractions had increased. Actresses were now seen on stage that boasted sophisticated scenery and machines. Plays mostly reflected the cynicism and flippancy of the court circle. Characters were urban aristocrats; anyone outside the blessed circle was a booby, villain or a butt of ridicule. Writers of quality wrote more and better plays for them, often with naughty themes and titles like *She Would if She Could* and *An Evening's Love*. But we must remember that it was only a tiny segment of the nation that watched these “restoration comedies.”

Sober elements of English society disapproved of the manners of the so called refined elite. Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* sternly condemned a theatre that was a sink of iniquity where virtue was ridiculed and vice recommended. Theatres in due course became more economically viable only when they began to make a definite appeal to the middle class with plays of a different category. But this happened some years later. We will study these Restoration play both tragedies and comedies in greater detail in the later modules. It is necessary to remember here that the plays of William Wycherley, George Etherege, William Congreve and Thomas Shadwell vividly reflect the fashionable worlds that they wrote for, often with liberal doses of humour and satire. Their plays share in the virtues and vices of that small segment of the English people that arose as a result of the foppish elegance set in by the Restoration of monarchy in England. Never in England since that time has literature belonged so exclusively to a limited class.

Yet already the classes were fluid in composition, and the rise of the middle classes began to change equations, both in terms of the distribution of wealth and morality. They shifted seamlessly as new monarchs rewarded new favourites to peerage. Quakers and dissenters began to acquire new fortunes in trade, old aristocrats in disfavor withdrew to farming in straitened circumstances, and their younger sons collaborated with merchants in business ventures which had gained respectability with prosperity. In later Restoration comedy the country squire was the uneducated, clumsy dupe, while a valet would be shown as intelligent and witty, Such pictures are however not to be trusted. A better knowledge of these times, both political and social, can be gained from the many diaries, histories, memoirs and autobiographies of the time.

2.4.6 Literature of Documentation

While the subsequent modules of this course will deal with various genres of fictional and non-fictional literature of the period, the scope and purview of this Unit makes it imperative to focus on such literature that provides a chroniclers'

viewpoint of the multiple strands of Restoration England. Accordingly, you will be acquainted with forms like diary writing, historical accounts and other miscellaneous writings of the age – things that are not much syllabised, yet are important in evolving a comprehensive understanding of this extremely complicated time.

➤ **DIARISTS:**

SAMUEL PEPYS (1633-1703)

A well – educated man in public life, he rose to be Secretary to the Admiralty, a Member of Parliament and also patronised the Royal Society. His celebrated diary covers a ten year span (Jan 1, 1660 – May 31, 1669) and records with a charming candidness the frailties and misconduct of himself and his contemporaries. It is a historical source book for facts, anecdotes, scandals, public events like Charles II's coronation, the Great London Fire of 1665, the Dutch naval threat and the plague. An intensely human document of everyday life, it contains comments on drama productions (of Shakespeare), published books and sartorial styles. Written in a fresh intimate conversational mode, it captures wholly the spirit of the times including critique of dissolute court life as damaging to public welfare.

JOHN EVELYN (1620-1700)

A distinguished man in public service, he was the author of many books of a practical nature on varied subjects such as forestry, agriculture, engraving and the evil of coal smoke over London. His conduct and his diary, unlike those of Pepy were both discreet and balanced. Sober in habit and style, his writing is lucid. It is dull reading but is a reliable source of information because both in character and taste he is rather representative of the best elements of English people as a whole - deeply committed to public welfare and governance, yet truly relishing the life of a country gentleman.

➤ **HISTORICAL WRITING**

A zealous preoccupation with the immediate and the present characterises Restoration life. Their works record daily life in choice of content and in manner – to be used as warning or delight or both. Hence chronicles, lives, treatises are aplenty.

EDWARD HYDE (1609-1674) First Earl of Clarendon

Possibly the foremost statesman of the 17th century, the keynote to Clarendon's whole career was respect for law, constitutional monarchy and the Church, Consequently he was a firm royalist. As advisor to Charles II and as Chancellor of England, he had seen the seasons change in politics. Nevertheless he was a stern

critic of the excesses and laxities of governance of both kings. While in exile he wrote *History of the Rebellion* and later, his *Life*. They were written “with fidelity and freedom” – an unbiased version of circumstances leading to the Civil War, so that the mistakes would not be repeated in future.

He reported unflinchingly the unpleasantness of contemporary life, his own faults – all with honesty and a balanced vision – drawing the best historical portraits of his time, appreciating all types of characters yet retaining his personal integrity and courage. His easy prose style reflected both his strict principles and accurate judgment of minds and actions and an acerbic wit. Like a good journalist he wrote in his essay “On an Active and on a Contemplative Life”, that a historian’s essential quality was “a lively Perception of Persons and Actions which makes a Reader present at all they say or do”.

GEORGE SAVILE: (1633-95) Marquis of Halifax.

Famous statesman, belonged to the latter part of the period. Like Clarendon, his level headedness was based on moral principles. Though a Whig, he disconcerted his contemporaries by seeing good points in both sides. His moderation and willingness to compromise earned him the label of ‘THE TRIMMER’. He proudly titled his book *Character of the Trimmer*. It dealt with contemporary problems, propounded no theories but maintained that change was essential for human progress. Balance between liberty and tyranny, tolerance and holding to a wise middle course were his watchwords. His prose comes across as sensibly colloquial with a fair degree of humour. Despite the ordinariness of style, his sentences echo Bacon’s epigrammatic ring. His *Advice to a Daughter* is a more general work. In Savile we find an approach to the essay manner of Addison who was to illuminate the literary scene some time later.

Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715)

Learned, forthright and a good historian, for he traces and acknowledges his sources. He is memorable for *History of the Reformation of the Church in England* (Vol. 1 in 1679) and *The History of My Own Time* (begun in 1683) are both important works in this context.

The English statesman and essayist **Sir William Temple’s (1628 – 1699)** *Memoirs of the Life, Works and Correspondence* (1691) must not be forgotten either.

2.4.7 Summing Up

You will by now have realized that these forty years distinctly fall into two parts, both from political and literary points of view. Having read this Unit, it will be your task to identify the dividing lines, matching political and literary scenarios. Recall the circumstances that led to the convoluted political spectrum, how the initial euphoria of the reinstating of royalty soon gave way to reactionary responses against the frivolity and nepotism ushered in by the Restoration. Sober civic feelings, social values infused into public life with emerging dimensions of class matrices, and a colourful divergent dynamic literature – a well marked transition leading to the age of classicism – these should be uppermost in your mind as you study these years from a literary point of view in the forthcoming modules.

2.4.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Types

1. Distinguish between the two Civil Wars of this period, giving dates and causes.
2. Explain the reasons behind the social changes of the Restoration.
3. How do you think the historical events of the period and their political implications affected the literature of the Restoration?

Medium Length Answers

1. Give a brief account of the historical events that led to the overthrow of monarchy in England.
2. What paradigm shift in the cultural milieu do you notice in moving from Elizabethan – Jacobean periods to the Restoration?
3. Write an account of the literature of documentation that flourished in Restoration England.

Short Answer Types

1. Who was Oliver Cromwell? What was his role in contemporary British politics?
2. What do you know about urban growth in the England of this period?
3. Mention the important diarists of the Restoration Age and discuss the significance of their works.

UNIT 5 □ Neo-Classicism : Impact on Literary Thought

Structure

- 2.5.0 Introduction**
- 2.5.1 Defining Neo-Classicism: It's Pervasive Influence**
- 2.5.2 Neo-Classicism in English Literature– The French Connection**
- 2.5.3 Neo-Classicism in English Literature – The Classical Factor(s)**
- 2.5.4 The Scientific Spirit**
- 2.5.5 Neo-Classical Impact on Literary Criticism**
- 2.5.6 Neo-Classical Impact on Poetry**
- 2.5.7 Neo-Classical Impact on Prose**
- 2.5.8 Summing Up**
- 2.5.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.5.10 Reading List**

2.5.0 Introduction

In the previous Unit we have studied at length the socio-political-cultural implications of the Restoration of monarchy to England in 1660. The present Unit is a logical follow through to the earlier, where we shall be looking at the impact of this event on literature *per se*. We shall see how a totally new phenomenon called Neo-Classicism, which literally means a new and vigorous emulation of the classics, became the hallmark of this era. In our efforts to understand the intellectual cross-currents of the time, we shall note the major influences that affected the Age. Our attempts shall also be directed at enumerating the significant writers in prose and poetry who made signal contributions in this period. The genre of drama shall be dealt with in a separate Unit.

2.5.1 Defining Neo-Classicism: It's Pervasive Influence

From your study of the Renaissance in Paper 2, you have a fair idea of how it was an all-embracing movement that ushered in the study of Classical Literature into English. Evidently, Neo-classicism means 'new-classicism' ¾ that is to say, a

fresh interest, admiration and emulation of the great writers of the past. Like the Renaissance, Neo-Classicism too is an umbrella term given to Western movements in the decorative and visual arts, literature, theatre, music, and architecture. It drew inspiration from the “classical” art and culture of Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome. The main Neo-Classical movement coincided with the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, and continued into the early 19th century, latterly competing with Romanticism. In architecture, the style continued throughout the 19th, 20th and even up to the 21st century. For the present however, we are mostly concerned with its implications on literature and more immediately, why this movement took roots in English soil at this point of time. We shall also try to identify the major points of difference between the Renaissance understanding of classical literature and the Neo-Classical point of view.

Activity for the Learner

As you read this sub-section on Neo-Classicism, work out in tabular form the differences between the revival of classical learning in the Renaissance and the new wave of classicism that came about since the Restoration. Take major texts from each genre to substantiate your findings. Your counselor will help you in this activity.

You will definitely remember that Charles II was in exile in France before he was brought back to England and proclaimed the monarch. He had a long stint in France, during which he acquired French tastes and manners, along with an irresistible liking for French literature. And in this he was not alone; English writers and the nobility too had a great admiration for everything French! Since literature of this period was basically court and nobility centric, panegyrics to the king were aplenty. In keeping with the French manner, the focus of emulation was mainly the Roman writers like Horace, Juvenal and Martial. Contemporaries of Charles II even equated his reign with that of Augustus Caesar, and thereby the insistence on appropriateness and correctness in contemporary literature, following the high Roman fashion.

The English Neo-Classical movement was thus predicated upon and derived from both classical and contemporary French models, (see Boileau’s *L’Art Poetique* (1674) and Pope’s “Essay on Criticism” (1711) as critical statements of Neoclassical principles). It embodied a group of attitudes toward art and human existence — ideals of order, logic, restraint, accuracy, “correctness,” “restraint,” decorum, and so on, which would enable the practitioners of various arts to imitate or reproduce the structures and themes of Greek or Roman originals. Though its origins were much earlier (the Elizabethan Ben Jonson, for example, was as indebted to the Roman poet Horace as Alexander Pope would later be), Neoclassicism

dominated English literature from the Restoration in 1660 until the end of the eighteenth century, when the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Wordsworth and Coleridge marked the full emergence of Romanticism. In that sense the Neo-Classical spirit will be seen to pervade a large part of the time frame covered in Papers 3 and 4 of your syllabus. In this section, we shall bring out for your understanding the entire essence of Neo-Classicism.

For the sake of convenience the Neoclassic period can be divided into three relatively coherent parts: the **Restoration Age (1660-1700)**, in which Milton, Bunyan, and Dryden were the dominant influences; **the Augustan Age (1700-1750)**, in which Pope was the central poetic figure, while Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett were presiding over the sophistication of the novel; and the **Age of Johnson (1750-1798)**, which, while it was dominated and characterized by the mind and personality of the inimitable Dr. Samuel Johnson, whose sympathies were with the fading Augustan past, saw the beginnings of a new understanding and appreciation of the work of Shakespeare, the development, by Sterne and others, of the novel of sensibility, and the emergence of the Gothic school — attitudes which, in the context of the development of a cult of Nature, the influence of German romantic thought, religious tendencies like the rise of Methodism, and political events like the American and French revolutions — established the intellectual and emotional foundations of English Romanticism. You can well understand both the chronological and thematic expanse of Neo-Classicism. In the present Paper, we are basically concerned with the first phase of the movement, which is inherently important as laying the foundations for over a century of English literature that was to experience wide cross-currents.

To a certain extent Neoclassicism represented a reaction against the optimistic, exuberant, and enthusiastic Renaissance view of man as a being fundamentally good and possessed of an infinite potential for spiritual and intellectual growth. Neoclassical theorists, by contrast, saw man as an imperfect being, inherently sinful, whose potential was limited. They replaced the Renaissance emphasis on the imagination, on invention and experimentation, and on mysticism with an emphasis on order and reason, on restraint, on common sense, and on religious, political, economic and philosophical conservatism. They maintained that man himself was the most appropriate subject of art, and saw art itself as essentially pragmatic — as valuable because it was somehow useful — and as something which was properly intellectual rather than emotional.

Neo-Classical Assumptions and their Implications

As students of literature you would definitely be wondering as to why this

paradigm shift came along in the wake of the Restoration. The Neo-Classical thinkers came to use the past as a guide for the present because they assumed that human nature was constant - essentially the same regardless of time and place. Art, they believed, should express this essential nature. Of course, all great art has this sort of significance, but Neo-Classical artists more consciously emphasized common human characteristics over individual differences, as we see in the type-named characters of Moliere. If human nature has remained constant over the centuries, it is unlikely that any startling new discoveries will be made. Hence neoclassical artists did not strive to be original so much as to express old truths in a newly effective way. They aimed to articulate general truth rather than unique vision, to communicate to others more than to express themselves.

This would explain the Neo-Classical emphasis on proper subject matter; and their attempts to subordinate details to an overall design, to employ in their work concepts like symmetry, proportion, unity, harmony, and grace. All this, it was presumed, would facilitate the process of delighting, instructing, educating, and correcting the social animal which they believed man to be. Notice the dual insistence on delight and instruction, which is a direct adaptation from the classical debate on edification and gratification as twin ends of literature, as espoused by Horace. The favorite Neo-Classical prose literary forms were the essay, the letter, the satire, the parody, the burlesque, and the moral fable; in poetry, the favorite verse form was the rhymed couplet, which reached its greatest sophistication in heroic couplet of Pope; while the theatre saw the development of the heroic drama, the melodrama, the sentimental comedy, and the comedy of manners.

2.5.2 Neo-classicism in English Literature : The French Connection

To repeat something that has been stated earlier and yet merits repetition because of its importance, Charles II's long exile in France had enabled him to acquire an indefatigable interest in French tastes and manners. His admiration for French literature governed English writers as well. He was an intelligent monarch, personally involved with many distinguished intellectuals from all walks of life. The king's bias for the French dramatists Corneille, Racine and Moliere influenced Restoration heroic tragedy and comedy. Corneille's lengthy prefaces to his plays *Discours* and *Examens* were emulated by Dryden, as were the critical views of Boileau expressed in *The Art of Poetry*. Boileau advocated "good sense" as a mark of good style in poetry; reduced versification to certain principles – that is, value workmanship for its own sake and stressed the need for sound judgment at every step, as opposed to

excessive impulse or emotion. These stylistic standards and intellectual discipline were documented – almost codified in Dryden’s critical essay “The Author’s Apology for Heroic Poetry, and Poetic Licence” as an accepted standard of the time.

From the exploration and expansiveness of the Renaissance to this reaction in the direction of order and restraint – this was the crux of Neo-Classicism that developed in France in the mid 17th century and was imported to England some thirty years later. Writers turned from inventing new words to regularising vocabulary and grammar. Complex, boldly metaphorical language, such as Shakespeare used in his major tragedies, is clarified and simplified—using fewer and more conventional figures of speech. Mystery and obscurity are considered symptoms of incompetence rather than signs of grandeur. The ideal style is lucid, polished, and precisely appropriate to the genre of a work and the social position of its characters. Tragedy and high comedy, for example, use the language of cultivated people and maintain a well-bred tone. The crude humor of the gravediggers in *Hamlet* or the pulling out of Gloucester’s eyes in *King Lear* would no longer be admitted in tragedy. Structure, like tone, becomes more simple and unified. In contrast to Shakespeare’s plays, those of the Neo-Classical playwrights such as Racine and Moliere develop a single plot line and are strictly limited in time and place (often, like Moliere’s *The Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe*, to a single setting and a single day’s time). In all, French Neo-Classical influence toned down and sobered the rhapsodic energy levels that characterized Elizabethan literature. Gradually, the composition of literature was turning to an organised and conscious activity that required immense learning and knowledge not just of classical texts but also the rules of composition.

2.5.3 Classical Influence

It is easy to be critical about something when it is seen from a distance and with a detached objective perspective. Thus in the light of subsequent times, one can be critical about the fact that Restoration thought was mostly status quo in nature; and that contemporary society and culture really meticulously shied away from change as progress, innovation or ingenuity in thought and expression. All these aspects are heavily reflected in the literature of the period.

But for the restored regime, it was first and foremost important to see itself as re-establishers of order and peace in society after years of passion and turmoil. The period is called Neo-Classical because its writers looked back to the ideals and art forms of classical times, emphasizing even more than their Renaissance predecessors the classical ideals of order and rational control. Their respect for the past led them to be conservative both in art and politics. Always aware of the conventions

appropriate to each genre, they modeled their works on classical masterpieces and heeded the “rules” thought to be laid down by classical critics.

In political and social affairs, too, they were guided by the wisdom of the past: traditional institutions had, at least, survived the test of time. No more than their medieval and Renaissance predecessors did neoclassical thinkers share our modern assumption that change means progress, since they believed that human nature is imperfect, human achievements are necessarily limited, and therefore human aims should be sensibly limited as well. It was better to set a moderate goal, whether in art or society, and achieve it well.

Thus, moderation and balance were valued qualities tempered by reason and tolerance. Thinking minds turned to Latin writers for guidance and inspiration. Horace, Juvenal, Cicero and Quintilian became the models for prose, satirical poetry, odes and eclogues. Writers strove to emulate the ancients as “correctly” as possible by evolving a number of “rules” to be followed rigidly both in content and style. Disciplined expression, social/public themes (realistic evocation of contemporary events or issues) were the norms. Printing had by now widened readership somewhat and works were addressed no longer only to the beloved or a privileged group but to a public audience.

It was however another matter that the literature that was written did not have much of the common man as its subject. Regimented attempts at innovations in poetry and prose resulted in an abundance of epigrams, satires, odes, panegyrics. Blank verse lost its supremacy as it was too flexible and un-controlled. Emphasis was placed on the use of heroic couplets. The English creative spirit did retain its sway at a sub-liminal level but was disapproved of by many critics. Your reading of several texts along this course will bring you to a more complete understanding of these aspects.

2.5.4 The Scientific Spirit

In 1660 Charles II gave a charter to the Royal Society, a club for scientists such as Isaac Newton Robert Boyle and Edmund Halley. (The society exists till today: remember doctors still aim for a MRCP/FRCS label) The members were intelligent men who aspired to widen knowledge by new ways of inquiry, but necessarily without negating religious orthodoxy. Their motto was NULLIS IN VERBA ³/₄ “on the words of no one.”

Experimental and empirical in method, they insisted that a proposition could be accepted only after examination, scrutiny and proof – NOT on the strength of

clever argument. The only real truth was that discovered by inductive and mathematical means. You can also see here the beginnings in spirit of what later came to be called the Age of Prose and Reason. Like Descartes on the Continent, Francis Bacon, Hobbes and Locke analysed tenets of political systems on the basis of constant universal reason. To them, the universe appeared as a great machine and its functions explained the ultimate rationality of creation, In their understanding, fact and reason **illuminated**, while “enthusiasm” **blurred**. Hobbes held that society needed authoritative control (a strong ruler) as man was naturally selfish “brutish” and “nasty.” No humanistic idealism here as pervaded the Renaissance!. Locke however was more tolerant. In his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) he stated the central idea that the legislative branch of government must control power. The authority of the governor, he said, derived solely from the consent of the governed and the boundary of his power was the welfare of those governed by him. Government was therefore a matter of practical usefulness.

In philosophy too, Locke used in his “Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (1690) a scientific stance. With clarity he established that knowledge comes only from sense experience and from reflection upon that experience $\frac{3}{4}$ NOT from innate ideas.

The Royal Society also sought to reform English prose and improve language. Committee members included the likes of Dryden, Evelyn, Waller, Pepys, Cowley, Duke of Buckingham and Christopher Wren $\frac{3}{4}$ all persons of stature and learning and practitioners of literary craft. They set standards of style for English prose that eschewed florid ornate courtliness for “close naked natural way of speaking.....” Positive, direct expressions, a mathematical plainness, a shortness and simplicity were advocated. These ideals, obviously essential to scientific exposition were reinforced by the conversational tradition of elegant French prose, and together initiated what came to be called the great age of prose and reason.

2.5.5 Neo-Classical Impact On Literary Criticism

Aristotle’s analytical method had been honoured from Renaissance onward. His emphasis was on ‘form’ and ‘structure’ of the epic and tragedy, not on how effective it was. Horace and Cicero’s rhetorical focus came to be valued now. Poetry is seen as refined oratory $\frac{3}{4}$ to change public opinion and to persuade. Extreme originality or “invention” to appeal to the “passions” was discredited in favour of “moral instruction”.

➤ JOHN DRYDEN (1631 – 1700):

Towered over the age in every genre of literary production and was “the first

great modern critic.” Best known for the Prefaces to his plays and *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (which you will study in Module 3), **Reason** played a great part in Dryden’s judgments.

- He stood apart from his contemporaries in his support of “Englishness.”
- Despite their deviations from the ancients he admired Shakespeare, Chaucer and Jonson.
- He saw unity of structure as a prime aesthetic quality.
- He admired French rules of composition but realized they were “too tied up.”
- Admitted ‘irregularity’ in structure can improve variety.
- Admitted that Roman comic plays lacked warmth of love.
- Abhorred a constricted imitation of the ancients and copy-book rules.
- Applauded “delight” to be the chief and ultimate end of poetry.

The material of art was **NATURE** which was variously synonymous with **TRUTH** (permanent truths about man and the universe) and **REASON** (good sense/balance or mere realism). Adherence to the practice or imitation of the ancient writers (different from Aristotle’s imitation, meaning representation of the actions of men) was the mark of excellence.

STOP, THINK, RECALL, MOVE ON

After Sidney in the Elizabethan era, Dryden is the second major theorist and literary artist to reckon with reverence in English literature. Notice how despite being an early Neo-Classical, he does not slavishly follow the trends of the Age. With help from your counselor, attempt a comparative study of Philip Sidney and John Dryden as literary critics. Analyse for yourselves, how both respond to the demands of their respective milieus and yet stand above it in their foresight, analytical prowess and understanding of the purpose of literature.

➤ **THOMAS HOBBS (1588-1679):**

Regarded as the father of Neo-Classical rationalistic aesthetics. His ‘Answer’ to Davenant’s Preface, his own Preface and his translation of the *Odyssey*, and a few pages in his philosophical writings – all prove that he believed poetry modifies the minds of others. He insists on **control** in art and on **judgment** as a check to wild fancy and ornamentation.

➤ **THOMAS RYMER (1641-1713)**

Notable lawyer, able researcher in history but notorious as an unimaginative

Neo-Classical critic who reduced poetic matters to “common sense” and “decorum”. He attacked Shakespeare for lack of probability, and florid poetry. His obsession with rules subverted his keen perception of design and plotting in epic and tragedy. His views are presented in his ‘Essay Concerning Critical and Curious Learning’ (1698). Rymer lauded the three unities wholeheartedly.

➤ **Sir William Temple**

He must also be remembered in this context as one wholly devoted to the ancient norms, as manifest in his ‘Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning’ (1690).

2.5.6 Neo-Classical Impact on Poetry

An age that discredited imagination or controlled it with prescriptions and rules, wouldn’t naturally have much poetry of the lyric kind. Translations or other types of poetry can be seen. The noteworthy rhymers are: -

❖ **JOHN DRYDEN**

Together with other kinds of literary work, he produced abundant poetry of variety & freshness.

- Poetry celebrating public occasions – heroic in tone and using the new heroic couplet: -
 - ASTREA REDUX* (1660): Saluting Charles II’s return
 - ANNUS MIRABILIS* (1667): Great Fire of London and the Dutch war.
- **Satires** on political themes in Horatian pattern. Brilliant satirical allegories *ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL* (1681); the 2nd part with Nahum Tate in 1682. Duke of Mowmouth’s aspiration for the throne was retold in the Biblical tale with deadly effect in this work.
 - MACFLECKNOE* 1682
 - THE MEDAL* 1682
- **Religious allegories**
 - RELIGIO LAICI* (1682)
 - THE HIND AND THE PANTHER* (1687)
- **TRANSLATIONS** – His easy fluid translations of Virgil’s *ECLOGUES*, *GEORGICS*, *AENEID*; Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer were so vigorous and free that much of it was Dryden’s own and teems with individuality.

- **Lyric poetry** was perforce small in bulk but outstanding in its melody and variety.

‘SONG FOR ST CECELIA’S DAY’ 1687

‘ALEXANDER’S FEAST’ 1697

‘To The Pious Memory of the Accomplish’d Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew’ (1686)

❖ THE COURTIER POETS AND OTHERS

Almost all of them of noble birth, they wrote madrigals, odes, treatises in verse very like the cavalier poets, but the gallantry and the ardour are more intellectual. These slight verses are superficial but possess metrical polish and a gift for language.

- John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-1680) is most memorable in his ‘Ode to Solitude’
- Sir Charles Sedley (1639(?) - 1701)
- Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset (1638-1706)
- John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire (1648-1721)
- Charles Cotton Both wrote good pastorals and lyrics which
- Mrs Aphra Behn were often inserted in the plays of the time.

❖ SATIRISTS:

Though Milton, Cowley, Denham and Waller (the last two are credited with the introduction of the heroic couplet to England) were alive and productive during these years, they are considered to belong to a pre-Restoration ethos. The most acclaimed poems were in general satirical or didactic. Dryden apart, the most eminent writer was **SAMUEL BUTLER** (1612-1680) His reputation was based on *Hudibras*, (1663-78) a satire on the puritans, in three parts. In general outline it is modelled on the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and is written in an odd jiggling octosyllabic couplet. It is believed he also wrote *The Rehearsal* (1670) jointly with Rochester, which parodied the literary vices of the time, especially those of the heroic play. You will learn more about *Hudibras* in Module 2 Unit 3. Suffices to say for now that the popularity of the text was so great that it gave rise to what is called Hudibrastic verse. For the poem, Butler invented a mock-heroic verse structure. Instead of pentameter, the lines were written in iambic tetrameter. The rhyme scheme is the same as in heroic verse (aa, bb, cc, dd, etc.), but Butler used feminine rhyme for humour. A **feminine rhyme** is a rhyme that matches two or more syllables, usually at the end of respective lines, in which the final syllable or syllables are

unstressed. It is also commonly known as double rhyme. The hudibrastic has been traditionally used for satire. Jonathan Swift, for example, wrote nearly all of his poetry in this form.

JOHN OLDHAM's (1653-83) *Satires upon the Jesuits* (1681) written during the Popish Plot, owed its great success to the national hysteria that the event excited. He depicts Loyola on his deathbed instructing his followers on future behaviour.

JOHN WILMOT, EARL OF ROCHESTER

His devastating *A Satire against Reason and Mankind* is an un-sparing critique against public immorality. The poem addresses the question of the proper use of reason and is generally assumed to be a Hobbesian critique of rationalism. The narrator subordinates reason to sense. It is based to some extent on Boileau's version of Juvenal's eighth or fifteenth satire, and is also indebted to Hobbes, Montaigne, Lucretius and Epicurus, as well as the general libertine tradition. Confusion has arisen in its interpretation as it is ambiguous as to whether the speaker is Rochester himself, or a satirised persona. It criticises the vanities and corruptions of the statesmen and politicians of the court of Charles II.

On the whole, this survey of the poetry of the period will have shown you that the cult of reason, intellectualism, an exaltation of norms and rules were all contributory factors to the rise in popularity of verse satire. The revival of classicism and admiration for Horace accelerated the rise of this genre in this period.

2.5.7 Neo-Classical Impact on Prose

The Restoration period shows a significant variety of developments in prose forms – the principal type in vogue being Christian **Religious writing**. Given the bent of the Age, it will be observed that such religious writing often strayed into the domains of political and economic writing, and vice versa. Among the major works of this kind, mention may be made of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*. Both works use a veiled manner to suggest how the individual can prevail against temptations of mind and body in the search for salvation.

At the other extreme perhaps, we could place a work like Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667) which was a candid setting forth of the principles of empirical science. He praised a spare, clean, and precise vocabulary for science and explanations that are as comprehensible as possible. In Sprat's account, the Royal Society explicitly rejected anything that seemed like scholasticism. For Sprat, as for a number of the

founders of the Royal Society, science was Protestant: its reasons and explanations had to be comprehensible to all. There would be no priests in science, and anyone could reproduce the experiments and hear their lessons. Similarly, he emphasized the need for conciseness in description, as well as reproducibility of experiments.

The Restoration also saw the publication of a number of significant pieces of political and philosophical writing that had been spurred by the actions of the Interregnum. Additionally, the court's adoption of Neo-classicism and empirical science led to a degree of receptiveness toward significant philosophical works. The works of William Temple and John Locke are significant in this context. Locke for one, makes an amazing synthesis between scientific methods and the social contract; it is understandable why his works became the corner-stone for quite many national and international events in the days to come.

Apart from this, we also see the beginnings of two new genres – **Fiction** and **Journalism**, both of which were to become very important in the forthcoming centuries. To talk of journalism first, the earliest efforts at news sheets and periodicals, though spotty, were noticed in *The News* and *City Mercury* by Roger L'Estrange. None of these were sustained efforts, yet were a significant development over the earlier broadsheets; and paved the way for Henry Muddiman's *London Gazette*. *The Athenian Mercury* in 1691 by John Dunton and the Athenian Society was the first regularly published periodical in England, begun just at the onset of the reign of William and Mary. This journal, which first published the poetry of Jonathan Swift and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, was thus the fore-runner of periodicals like publications like *Spectator*, *Gray's Inn Journal* and others. Thus the period saw the beginnings of the first professional and periodical (meaning that the publication was regular) journalism in England. Journalism per se develops late, generally around the time of William of Orange's claiming the throne in 1689. You will be interested to know that England began to have newspapers just when William came to court from Amsterdam, where there were already newspapers being published.

❖ PROSE FICTION

The development of prose fiction was slight during these forty years and largely of little note, though its advent was significant. Roughly speaking they fall into two groups based on class, though this must be taken with a pinch of salt. One was the impact of the existing tradition of Romance fiction in France, as exemplified in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and the novels of Gauthier de Costes, seigneur de la Calprenède. Courtly readers imported romances from France. Some were translated into English or written in the same mould of escapist romances set in

aristocratic life. Margaret Cavendish Duchess of Newcastle was one such writer who included philosophical and educational elements in her fiction and sub-titled them “serious romance.” The pervasive presence of the romance element associated such novels with effeminacy; the second group that began to emerge dealt with ordinary men or picaresque figures. One of the most significant figures in the rise of the novel in the Restoration period is Aphra Behn. She was not only the first professional female novelist, but she may be among the first professional novelists of either sex in England.

❖ **APHRA BEHN (1640 – 1689):**

Short narratives known as shilling novels were popularly though confusingly known as NOVELS (In fact *Pamela* by Richardson was sub-titled “a dilated novel”) The most praised and condemned single writer of such novels was Aphra Behn as she produced about twelve such works besides being a playwright. *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684), *The Fair Jilt*, *Oroonoko* or ‘The Royal Slave’ (1688) are the best known of her works. The last mentioned work is the love story of a Negro slave of noble body and mind, set in Surinam, - to Holland, to England, has elements of the spy thriller and the exotic. *Oroonoko* is by common acclaim a fictional biography and there is recorded history of Behn herself having visited Surinam, a British colony then. Other novels are weak in psychology but focus on women characters quite heavily.

❖ **JOHN BUNYAN (1628-88)**

The only writer to achieve permanent distinction though writing chiefly for the artisans and merchants was the “mechanic” preacher, Bunyan the tinker. He made proletarian narrative forms into vehicles for spiritual instruction. All his works are forms of religious autobiographies voiced in allegorical form, combining travel story and conversion from ungodliness moving steadily towards epiphany. A born storyteller, the episodes and personages are vividly alive holding a natural suspense. Abstractions are made psychologically real. Much social satire exposing the vanity of the world indicates he was not naïve in his thinking. Always salvation of the soul is his prime aim. His major works are:

- *Grace Abounding*: 1666
- *Pilgrim’s Progress* Part I : 1678
- *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*: 1680
- *The Holy War*: 1682
- *Pilgrim’s Progress* Part II 1684

His prose style is powerful without being coarse, intense without being hysterical, homely but not vulgar plain but not monotonous. For more on Bunyan, see Module 3 Unit 1.

2.5.8 Summing Up

As you see, these forty years of the Restoration period are in their social and literary aspects closely related to the eighteenth century proper. A transition period, yet it laid the foundations for modern English national life. Politically we see the settling of the constitutional problem from the Commonwealth regime to the return of monarchy, however flawed that might have been. Socially the diluting of class distinctions by marking the rise of the middle class was an important phenomenon that had widespread implications on the cultural scenario as well. Intellectually we notice the growing impetus science and technology, thereby clearing the decks for the arrival of an age of reason. Stylistically, literature takes diverse avenues from now on. While we temporarily bid adieu to humanism and high flown imagination, the rise of new poetic forms remains an abiding aspect of the history of English literature. Most importantly, the Restoration marks the development of a wide variety of English prose that promises to be muscular in nature, to say the least.

2.5.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Types

1. What do you understand by the term Neo-Classicism? How did it turn into a pervasive influence on contemporary literature?
2. They were men of other professions, yet their writings illumine the times. Write on any two such men whom you have studied in this Unit in detail.
3. Highlight and comment on two significant factors that contributed to the rise of the Neo-Classical spirit in contemporary England.

Medium Length Answers

1. Analyse the contribution of two great diarists of the period to Restoration literature.
2. How would you account for the co-existence of the scientific spirit with the satiric mood in England of the Restoration?
3. Trace the changes in prose style that occurred during the Restoration. What were the reasons behind this change?

UNIT 6 □ Emergent Literary Forms

Structure

- 2.6.0 Introduction**
- 2.6.1 Relation Between an Age and Literary Forms**
- 2.6.2 The Dominant Spirit of the Restoration**
- 2.6.3 The Major Emerging Literary Forms**
- 2.6.4 Summing Up**
- 2.6.5 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.6.6 Suggested Reading**

2.6.0 Introduction

In the previous Unit you have formed some idea about the Restoration period in English literature. You have also seen how the age saw the literary documentation in various literary forms. In this Unit we shall discuss the spirit working behind literary compositions and the literary forms emerging from it.

2.6.1 Relation Between an Age and Literary Forms

Very often there is a close relation between the age and its literary forms, just like the society and its literature. You have seen how the Elizabethan poets found the forms of lyric, sonnet and song the most convenient mode of expressing their emotional exuberance. The Renaissance humanism brought the writers close to Greek and Roman literature. They brought the sonnet from Italy, drama from Greece and Italy, pastoralism from both Greece and Italy or again how the Revenge Tragedy holding the Jacobean stage considerably was brought from Seneca, and how it matched well with the decadent culture of the period. In the Restoration period also, the literature and the literary forms are in keeping with the dominant spirit of the age.

2.6.2 The Dominant Spirit of the Restoration

The restoration of the Stuarts in the person of Charles II in 1660 is contained in the appellation of the Restoration. It was also the restoration of Catholicism and of drama. Naturally the literature of the time mostly reflects reaction against Puritanism. At the

same time there were the receptiveness of French influence and the dominance of Classical point of view in literary criticism and original compositions. We should keep in mind that besides the restoration of monarchy, two other important historical events viz the Roman Catholic controversy and the Revolution of 1688 also decided the spirit of the period. And this spirit comprising of the following forces breeds a new society and new literature the Restoration.

- As empiricism (i.e. acting on observation and experiment) becomes the governing law it dispels juvenile errors, high ambitions and illusions.
- The Elizabethan period saw the passionate life of imagination as its base, but now, as thought becomes more powerful, emotions and their expression turn more complex.
- The fountain of imagination becoming exhausted in the closing years of the reign of Elizabeth, an intellectual and rational equivalent was foreshadowed by Bacon and Donne, and this tendency gathers more strength in the Restoration.
- This emphasis on intellectual rather than emotional ardour bred the desire for order and balance between inspiration and expression.
- Romanticism of the Elizabethan age is naturally replaced by classicism.
- The Elizabethan writers, under the impact of humanism of the Renaissance, also drew upon the classical writers. The difference between the two ages in this respect is found in the freedom of the Elizabethan writers in handling the classical rules, but the humble imitation of the same by the Restoration writer. It brought forth the "Correct" School.
- The King and his court, the aristocrats and the privileged class became the new arbiter of social mores.
- As fashionable London housed the above, the provincial England came to be neglected by the writers.
- Refinement as sought in culture and its literature was also eager to prove its superiority over the literature of the previous periods.
- The Puritans had eliminated all types of pleasure emanating from entertainments through festivals, theatre, pre-marital love etc. Restoration restored all these and the liberty ran to sensual joy, voluptuousness and licentiousness.
- The French trends in literature, fashion, manners brought by the exiled courtiers to London became viral in the period.
- The writers beyond the patronage of eminent persons faced hard times for survival by writing.

- The gradual re-appearance of political strife and the Popish Plot modified the tone of literature.
- British imperialism that had started with the formation of the East India Company under Elizabeth in 1600 found rivals in the Dutch and the Portuguese and yet established factories in Bombay (1661) and Calcutta (1690). The colonial tendency of the British was thus gathering momentum.
- Dryden, Evelyn and Waller were members of the Royal Society founded in 1662 to promote scientific discussion.
- The years after 1688 saw many changes in the socio-political spheres. And the classical tendency initiated by Milton and Dryden became more developed in the eighteenth century.

You will see many of these aspects noted in Module 4 in the discussion on Restoration Drama.

2.6.3 The Major Emerging Literary Forms

In this Unit we shall briefly note some of the most important literary forms which brought novelty to English literature.

(a) Lyric

As lyric is an old form since the Anglo Saxon or Old English period we, cannot consider it as an emergent form. Rather we note how the aristocratic and artificial society generating fashionable scepticism precluded passion, feeling and strong imagination. The Restoration was averse to the cultivation of lyricism. So *Dryden's Alexander's Feast*, *Song for St Cecilia's Day*, *Ode to the Memory of Mrs Anne Killigrew* show how the lyrical gusto is largely in abeyance. Some lyrics by Earl of Roscommon (eg *Ode on Solitude*) Sir Chales Sedley, Nahum Tate (eg *Midnight Thought*) anticipate the lyrics of the Transitional Poets of the eighteenth century. A subconscious Romanticism flares up in their lyrics. Otherwise the lyric poetry of the Restoration is inconsiderable both in bulk and beauty.

(b) Satire

If the Restoration failed to shine in lyric poetry, it had a dazzling performance in satire. For the age was congenial to the cultivation of the form of satire.

A satire blends a critical attitude with humour and art to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved. A satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man's devising, and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to

inspire a re-modelling. The tone may vary from tolerant amusement (as in the satires of the Roman poet Horace) to bitter indignation (as in the satires of another Roman poet Juvenal). If the critic only abuses he is writing invective, if he is personal and splenetic he is writing sarcasm; if he is sad and morose over the state of society he is writing a Jeremiad.

The golden age of Satire starts with the Restoration. Several contemporary conditions favoured the flourish of satire in the period. These conditions can be summed up in the following manner :

The people of the Restoration were engrossed in worldly life and neglected the conventional moral values. Satire thus had ample material to be butt of their ridicule.

Political strife of the time, the civil war, the Protectorate, the Whigs and Tories made the satirists take this or that side. The conflicts found expression in their Satires.

Classical influences also favoured the practice of Satire. In ancient days the satirists were honoured. The study of classics in the Restoration brought them close to the works of Persius, Horace and Juvenal. These writers were translated and imitated.

The French influence was found in drama and fashion of the time. No less was it found in Satire. Boileau, a noted French satirist, was imitated largely.

As far as the satirists of the Restoration are concerned, Dryden (1631-1700) tops the list. When he began to write satire, he was a matured artist in verse. He wrote satires on many topical issues. *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) is a political satire in which Dryden appears as a literary champion of monarchy in the context of the controversial Exclusion Bills. Absalom is the Duke of Monmouth and Achitophel is Shaftesbury, his councillor. They are surrounded by a cluster of political figures who are all given Biblical names. *The Medal* (1682) is another political satire directed against Shadwell. *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) has the coarseness of a lampoon. The second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* appeared in 1682, which is a violent attack on Shadwell. *The Hind* and *The Panther* (1687) is a religious satire defending the Roman Catholic faith. Dryden's art is made more perfect by Alexander Pope in the Eighteenth Century.

Samuel Butler's (1612-80) *Hudibras* (1663) is a mockheroic poem. It is a biting satire on the Puritans. At the time of the Civil War, Sir Hudibras, the grotesque knight rides out with his squire Ralpho. The knight undergoes many absurd adventures, falls in love with a widow, and after receiving learned advice from an astrologer, suddenly vanishes. Cervantes supplies the plot and the setting; Rabelais supplies the parody and comic extravagance. The turn of art, racy metaphors, quaint rhymes, and allusions have made this poem on a topical subject an English classic with a universal appeal. Like Swifts *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *Hudibras* is a general criticism of society of man and the thoughts that guide man.

John Oldham's (1653-83) *The Satyr against Vertue* (1679), *Satires upon the Jesuits* (1681) owe much to Juvenal. He also uses heroic couplet. The satire / criticism is here rather impersonal. The classical spirit in the poems raises them above the ordinary lampoons.

The Earl of Rochester's (1647-80) *Satire against Mankind* (1679) is a free and original imitation of Boileau, a French poet and critic and one of the major legislators of neo-classical theory of the period. This short poem is universal in appeal.

Verse satire gives distinction to the Restoration, just as novel and essay mark the age of Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Restoration satire is largely political, religious, personal and general. The chamsiness of the satires of John Donne and Andrew Marvell of the pre-Restoration period are gone, and a new freshness and point are obtained especially by the use of heroic couplet which Pope later on handles with great metrical skill.

(c) Epic

Milton's (1608-74) *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671) belong to the Restoration Period. This literary form was earlier practised in *Beowulf*, *Spenser's* (1552-99). *The Faerie Queene* (1589, 1596), Abraham Cowley's (1618-67), *Davidis* (1656), Sir William Davenant's (1606-68), *Gondibert* (1651), but they are either incomplete or fail to reach the epic grandeur in the classical sense. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is not only complete in twelve books but also satisfies all the features of a Secondary Epic like Virgil's *Aeneid*, which followed the features of primary epics of Homer — the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Some of the features of both Primary and Secondary Epics are :

The hero is a figure of imposing stature, of national or international importance and of great historical or legendary significance.

The setting is vast in scope, covering great nations, the world, or even the universe at times.

The action consists of deeds of great value or requiring superhuman courage, the *deus ex machina* or the participation of gods, angels and demons is a determining force.

The style is one of sustained elevation.

Some of the epic conventions are commencing the narrative in the *medias res*, (in the middle of the action, unlike in tragedy as prescribed by Aristotle) opening with an invocation, statement of the theme, catalogue of warriors, ships, armies, extended formal speeches frequent use of epic similes etc.

You will have further discussion on Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Module 3, Unit 8. We

can conclude as of now that the Restoration can boast of the only complete and perfect epic in English literature. And it gives inspiration to subsequent writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

(d) Heroic Drama

In the sphere of poetry we have noted how epic and satire enriched English literature. In the domain of drama there are heroic drama and comedy of manners which are the gifts of the Restoration to English dramatic literature.

Heroic drama is a type of tragedy and tragi-comedy that flourished during the Restoration. It is characterised by excessive spectacle, violent emotional conflicts in the main characters. Extravagant bombastic dialogue as used for producing the desired effect. Epic personages are the chief characters. The setting is often in distant lands like Mexico, Morocco, India. The hero is constantly swinging between love and honour / duty to the country. The heroine is a paragon of virtue and honour. Like the hero she is torn by the conflict between loyalty to the villain - father and love for the hero. The villain is usually a tyrant and usurper and with a base love for the heroine. It can thus be said that a heroic drama is something like a heroic poem made manifest to the eye.

The influences behind the development of heroic drama were the romantic plays of the Jacobean, the development of opera in England, the French court romances by Scudery and La Calprenede. Some of these romances were brought to England by the exiled lords. Davenant's *Siege Rhodes* contains some features of heroic play. *The General* (1664) by the Earl of Orrey is the first full-fledged heroic drama. Dryden's *The Indian Emperor* (1665), *Tyrannick Love* (in two parts : 1669, 1670), *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) are the best and worst specimens of the genre. Though some other writers wrote heroic drama, this literary form lost its popularity after 1680.

You will have more discussion about heroic tragedy in Unit 10 of Module 4.

(e) Comedy of Manners

In Module 4, Unit 10 you will see a broad discussion on the Restoration Comedy of Manners. Here let us note some of features of this literary form which is an exclusive gift of the Restoration to English Drama.

Comedy of Manners is realistic and satirical. It is concerned with the manners and conventions of an artificial and sophisticated society. The characters are rather types than individualised humans. Intrigues control the plot. The dialogue is witty and brilliant. The follies and foibles of the society are here satirised. The society is elegant and mostly London based. Rural England has hardly any place in such

comedies. The charge of immorality was levelled against such comedy. Congreve's *The way of the World* (1700) is the best specimen, besides Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1674), Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676).

This literary form was not only popular in the Restoration, but was also revived in the eighteenth century by Oliver Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), Sheridan in *The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777); and in the nineteenth century by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

(f) Novel

In the Elizabethan period some writers wrote prose romances as well as romances in verse eg Spenser, Sidney, Lodge etc. Some of these romances contain elements of the novel, though they cannot be called novel proper. For romance differs from novel as it presents a fictional story that relates improbable incidents / adventures of idealised characters in some remote or enchanted land / setting with a tendency to oppose realism. A novel, on the other hand, demands a greater degree of realism, and it tends to describe a recognizable secular social world. The characters may be static or developing. The plot shows the organizing principle illustrating a theme or idea. It may concentrate on character excluding incident or plot, or it may be a series of incidents strung together as a PICARESQUE NOVEL is. It may be a NATURALISTIC NOVEL by its detached and objective presentation. It may present the unconscious flow of emotions as in a STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS NOVEL. It may be a COMIC EPIC NOVEL as in *Tom Jones*. It may be the autobiography of the narrator as an AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL is. It may deal with the development of a young person as he grows, which is called BILDUNGSROMAN. These are some of the forms of the novel. And English novel is essentially an eighteenth century product. Richardson, Fielding, Swift etc are the founders of English novel.

Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* in 1791; Richardson's *Pamela* was published in 1741; Fielding's *Tom Jones* was published in 1749; but much before them Aphra Behn (1640-89) wrote *Oroonoko or the History of the Royal Slave* in 1688. It is said to be the earliest philosophical novel. The setting is Africa under the British colonial rule. The royal slave Oroonoko loves and marries Imoinda but kills her, who dies willingly, when his revolt against colonisers fails. He is cruelly executed. The novel is remarkable as an early protest against slave trade. It is also an anti-colonial discourse. Behn is realistic in the presentation of the class, colour, gender, slavery, economy etc, particularly because she made several visits to Surinam.

Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1928) acclaims Behn as the first English woman to earn her living by writing.

In 1681 William Congreve's novel *Incognita* was published. It is a novel of intrigue, and shortly he devoted himself to Comedy of Manners where intrigue plays an important role.

(g) Diaries

Restoration literature alone can boast of the greatest diarist of England in Samuel Pepys (1633-1703). It was he who made diary a literary form and an art. It is not that diary-writing was first attempted by Pepys, but he alone made the form a creative art. John Evelyn (1620-1706), a fellow of the Royal Society, was another diarist. His diary was not, however, a daily account, but a journal account.

Diary is a day-by-day chronicle of events. Usually it is personal and more or less intimate record of event and thoughts kept by an individual. A journal on the other hand is not regular and not so intimate. A diary is autobiographical in interest as it records the writer's reactions to persons, places and events. A note of honesty and sincerity marks the records a note of confession and spontaneity helps the reader judge the writer, though the diaries are not written for publication. That is why most diaries are published posthumously. Diary helps the student of literature interpret the setting of a literary work without any prejudice as it records the social, political, religious national events more truthfully than a historian. Thus a diary is both autobiographical and historical in essence.

It was William Upcott (1779 - 1845), the literary antiquary employed by Lady Evelyn, who was behind the finding and publication of Evelyn's diary in 1818. The volumes of Evelyn contained many references to Pepys. Pepys wrote his diary in shorthand, which was deciphered by John Smith and published in selections in 1815. Evelyn's work covers a great part of his life, Pepys can be dated from 01.01.1660 to 31.05.1669.

Pepys neither applauds, nor condemns. He simply re-creates. This is evident in his presentation of Charles II's coronation, the Great Fire of London (1666), the plague etc. His 12.08.1665 record reads. "The people die so, that now it seems they are not fain to carry the dead to be buried by daylight, the nights not sufficient to do it..." In fine, Pepys told the truth about himself and others. Thus his records are an instance of personal becoming impersonal, and impersonal becoming personal.

(h) Memoirs

We have already seen how diary can be autobiographical and historical. Now we shall discuss about another Restoration literary form, the Memoir, which is personal as well as historical.

Memoir is a form of autobiographical writing. It deals with the recollection of

prominent people, or people who have been a part of or have witnessed significant events. Unlike an autobiography, a memoir is concerned with persons and events beyond the author's subjective self. Secondly the autobiographical mode of a diary stresses on intropection, this is not quite the case with a memoir.

Some of the important memoirs of the Restoration are Bulstrode Whitelocke's (1605-75) *Memorials of the English Affairs* (1682), Edmund Ludlow's *Memoirs* (1698), Samuel Pepys's *Memoires of the Navy* (1690).

2.6.4 Summing Up

We can now safely sum up that the Restoration of Charles II changed the spirit of the age after the rule of the Protectorate. And it brought changes in social and literary spheres. The chief emergent literary forms were Heroic Drama, Comedy of Manners and Satire which were influenced by the socio-cultural scenario. Milton was not the innovator of the epic form and yet he refined and made the form perfect. These are also subtle references to the social evils in the Epic Novel, Diary, Memoirs are the other forms to which the period made considerable contributions.

2.6.5 Comprehension Exercises

A. Long Answer Types :

1. Account for the flourish of Satire in the Restoration.
2. Mention the Chief features of Epic.
3. Bring out the Chief features of Comedy of manners.

B. Medium Length Answer Types :

1. Show the importance of Aphra Behn in the development of the literary form of the novel.
2. Mention the Chief features of Heroic Drama.
3. Write briefly on the handling of the form of Diary in the Restoration.

C. Short Answer Types :

1. Show the differences between Romance and Novel.
2. Show the differences between Diary and Memoir.
3. Why should you call *Hudibras* a general Satire on a topical subject?

MODULE 3

Poetry of the Restoration

UNIT 7 □ New Beckonings in post-Shakespearean Poetry

Structure

- 3.7.0 Introduction**
- 3.7.1 Post-Shakespearean Era and New Beckonings in Poetry**
- 3.7.2 Ben Jonson (1572-1637)**
- 3.7.3 The Metaphysical Poets**
- 3.7.4 Poetry of Andrew Marvell and John Milton**
- 3.7.5 Caroline Poetry**
- 3.7.6 Restoration Poetry of John Dryden (1631-1700) and Samuel Butler (1612-1680)**
- 3.7.7 Summing Up**
- 3.7.8 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.7.9 Suggested Reading**

3.7.0 Introduction

In this Unit we shall examine the new trends following the literature of the Shakespearean Age. While Shakespeare marked the high-point of Renaissance humanism with his belief in the potential of man to achieve his ambitious desires, in the later part of the Renaissance the validity of these very desires are questioned. Jacobean poetry witnesses a decline in the grandeur of these passions and uses wit and satire for these debates. Nevertheless Jacobean poetry and the following Caroline poetry is also a literature of praise. This admixture of idealization and irony culminates in the mock-heroic poetry of the Restoration. From the romantic poetry of Shakespeare to the verse satires of the Restoration, the new beckonings in post-Shakespearean poetry cover a wide range of themes and genres.

3.7.1 Post-Shakespearean Era and New Beckonings in Poetry

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was a popular writer of the Elizabethan Age. During his last years, Great Britain witnessed a rise in religious sectarianism,

socio-political divergences and intellectual scepticism. In this section, we shall enumerate the major phases of literary history, key historical and political events and their dramatic influence on the poetic literature of the times:

- The Jacobean Age began with the accession of King James VI of Scotland who also became King James I of England and Ireland in 1603. He was the ‘King of Peace’ who signed peace treaties with the Catholic Spain. However, in Protestant England, especially in the House of Commons, King James’ legislations like the demand for free trade between England and Scotland was disallowed. King James wanted all moderate Roman Catholics and Protestants to live in harmony in the Anglican Church. In Scotland, when the rituals of the Anglican Church were forced upon, it was widely resisted. He also commissioned a new translation and a compilation of approved books of the Bible. This *Authorized Version of the Bible* was published in 1611, to be used by the Anglican Church. Poetry of the post-Shakespearean age included these religious controversies, especially in **Jacobean poetry** and **Metaphysical poetry**. Factionalism and sectarianism also added to the theme of satire in post-Shakespearean poetry.
- To support his extravagances, King James wanted the Parliament to impose new custom duties. When the Parliament refused to allow such legal enactments he dissolved the Parliament in 1611. Like his father, King Charles I believed in the **Divine Right of Kingship**. He dissolved parliament three times between 1625 and 1629. In 1629, he dismissed parliament and resolved to rule alone. This forced him to raise revenue by non-parliamentary means which made him increasingly unpopular.
- Beginning in this period and continuing into the Interregnum, is the **Caroline** era, which refers to the period in English and Scottish history named for the 24-year reign of King Charles I (1625–1649). In this period, **Cavalier poetry** and some writers of metaphysical poetry flourished.
- In 1641 Parliament presented to King Charles I the **Grand Remonstrance**, listing grievances against the king. The King did not accept it and the gulf between him and his critics in the House of Commons increased. **John Milton** wrote a number of political and epic poems in this period and was a major figure in the post-Shakespearean poetic era.
- When in 1642 the king left London to raise an army, and events drifted toward the **Civil War**, the Commonwealth of England was ruled by republican forms of government with greater power to the Parliament and Senior Officers. Theatres were closed in 1642 and poetry remained the only form of art. In 1653, **Oliver Cromwell** was appointed the pre-eminent

Grandee (Senior Officer). Cromwell had almost absolute control, like any ruler, in this period of **Interregnum**, dissolving the Parliament in 1655. A number of poetic eulogies were written for him like **Andrew Marvell's** 'An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland'.

- The monarchy was restored with **King Charles II** returning to London in 1660. During the Restoration, the historical parallel between the early imperialism of Rome and the restored English monarchy, both of which had

replaced republican institutions, was not lost on the ruling and learned classes. In addition to the rationalism of the new scientific experimentation begun by the *Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge*, philosophical and political treatises had a great impact on the new poetic ideal established under the influence of John Dryden, Sir John Denham and Edmund Waller.

English Civil Wars, also called **Great Rebellion**, (1642–51), fighting that took place in the British Isles between supporters of the monarchy of Charles I (and his son and successor, Charles II) and opposing groups in each of Charles's kingdoms, including Parliamentarians in England, Covenanters in Scotland, and Confederates in Ireland. The wars finally ended in 1651 with the flight of Charles II to France and, with him, the hopes of the British monarchy.

3.7.2 Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

While Shakespearean poetry was more romantic, Jonson's poetry was classicist. In an age of increasing mistrust and sectarianism, poetry achieved an artistic decorum, and for it looked to the writers of the classical age. Yet, as **Ben Jonson (1572-1637)** writes, Shakespeare may know "small Latin and less Greek" he is "not of an age but for all time!" **Epitaphs** on Jonson's own children, namely 'On My First Son' and 'On My First Daughter' are very **subjective** but 'An Epitaph on S.P.: A Child of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel' and an epitaph on the Countess of Shrewsbury are more **public** in nature. 'To Heaven' is somewhat **religious** but in the **Ode** 'To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of That Noble Pair, Sir

'If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greatest wit, Shakespeare was the Homer or father of our dramatic poet. Jonson was the Virgil, the partner of elaborate writing, I admire Him (Jonson), but I love Shakespeare.' (Neander in *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* by John Dryden)

Lucius Cary and Sir Henry Morison' are funeral elegies which are **celebratory**. This tone also marks the verses and songs in his 'masques' like *The Masque of Beauty* (1608) and *The Masque of Queens* (1609). As a **non-aristocratic humanist** he engaged in action obliquely by speaking to the powerful, offering praise to encourage the elite in the wise conduct of life and authority in *Timber, or Discoveries*. With the poems collected as *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest* in the 1616 Folio that Jonson's **direct debt to the Roman poets** became most evident (the name of *The Forrest*, for example, translated the Latin word 'silva', both a forest and a collection). The *Epigrammes* contain pithy addresses to his Muse, to King James, to prominent noblemen and noblewomen, to literary friends, allies, and enemies, all expressed as rhymed English adaptations of the compact forms perfected in Latin by Juvenal and Horace. Yet he avoided the debates about rhyme and meter which consumed the Elizabethan classicists like Thomas Campion and Gabriel Harvey. **Refinement** in gentlemanly retirement and **social ideal** marks 'To Penshurst', an address to the country estate of Sir Robert Sidney (Mary Wroth's father). The poem's learned recalls of certain of Martial's epigrams and its replay of the **anti-urban moralism** which pervades Roman poetry of the first century AD help shape a tribute to the aristocratic values that Jonson chooses to see as eternal. However his epistles are more **colloquial** in tone namely, 'An Epistle answering to One that asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben'. Like the epistles and other more or less epistolary longer poems, Jonson's **satirical epigrams** are, in form, primarily linguistic acts. They are self-consciously brief remarks, aiming to capture the essence of a character—sometimes, implicitly, to reduce an object to its true dimensions like 'On Reformed Gamester'. They may also be comments "on" or "to" someone like 'To William Roe'.

3.7.3 The Metaphysical Poets

Dr Johnson identified a 'race of poets' between Donne and Cowley, since known as the 'metaphysical poets'. Dryden had said that **John Donne (1572-1631)** 'affects the metaphysics' in his love poems, perplexing 'the fair sex' with 'nice speculations of philosophy'. Johnson objected to the relentless ingenuity of John Donne's comparisons, his **metaphysical conceit** in 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', which compares parted lovers to a pair of compasses. Sincerity, said Johnson, would express itself more simply. In his 'Elegy' for Donne, Thomas Carew upholds Donne's "universal monarchy of wit". Later poets learned from both Donne and Jonson, but none had Donne's wit or impropriety. Henry King wrote in his 'Exequy' to his dead wife:

"But hark! My pulse, like a soft drum
Beats my approach, tells thee I come;
And, slow howe're my marches be,
I shall at last sit down by thee."

Metaphysical Poets like Richard Crashaw, George Herbert and Henry Vaughan have the paradoxes of their Christian perspectives. **Richard Crashaw (1613-1649)** was a regular visitor to and keeper of vigils at Little Gidding. He was the son of a particularly zealous Puritan ‘Preacher of Gods worde’ who had made himself conspicuous as an anti-Papist. The series of ‘Divine Epigrams’ suggests a particular fondness for miraculous or alchemical changes of substance: not only does water become wine, or wine blood, but tears are pearls and drops of blood rubies; the water of Christ’s baptism “is washt it selfe, in washing him”; the water with which Pilate washes his hands is “Nothing but Teares; Each drop’s a teare that weeps for her own wast”; the naked Lord on the cross is clothed by “opening the purple wardrobe of thy side”. His English poetry - collected as *Steps to the Temple: Sacred Poems, with other Delights of the Muses* and later as *Carmen Deo Nostro*- clearly shows the nature of his religious inclinations, both Anglican and Roman.

Between the crises which began James’s reign and ended his son’s, **George Herbert (1593-1633)** wrote devotional verse. The accomplished Herbert, a younger son of a gifted family, not finding a career, became a village parson. The poems of this country priest have made him an unofficial saint of Anglicanism. His *Life* - told with piety and charm by Izaak Walton, author of *The Compleat Angler*- describes an ideal rather more gentlemanly than Chaucer’s pilgrim Parson. Herbert’s poems are homely in imagery and simple in language, and often about the church; his volume is called *The Temple*. These prayer-poems differ from similar poems by Donne, Marvell, Crashaw, Vaughan or Traherne, being personally addressed to God in an intimate tone. Christ was for Herbert a human person to whom one speaks, and who may reply. This intimacy became rare after Herbert; for Milton, God “hath no need/ Of man’s works or his own gifts” (‘On his Blindness’). This remoteness was increased for rational Anglicans by the Puritan enthusiasm of the 1640s. Herbert, formerly Public Orator of Cambridge University, spoke fluent Latin. His is the studied simplicity of the parables: “Lovely enchanting language, sugarcane,/Honey of roses, whither wilt thou fly?” (‘The Forerunners’). He could, when he wished, astonish. ‘Prayer’ is an arc of metaphors, ending: “The milky way, the bird of paradise,/Church bells beyond the stars heard, the soul’s blood,/The land of spices, something understood.”The verses are often complaints like ‘The Collar’, which ends:

Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more
Till he became
Most poor:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory;
For, if I imp³ my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

“But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
And I replied, *My Lord.*”

The title is both the clerical collar and *choler*, a fit of temper. *The Temple* leads up to ‘Love (III)’, a eucharistic prayer. Herbert likens taking Communion to a visit to a tavern. It begins, “Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back” and ends, “Youshall sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:/So I did sit and eat.” It also contains pattern poems like ‘The Altar’, and ‘Easter Wings’.

Herbert’s disciple **Henry Vaughan (1621-1695)**’s Christianity was Platonic: “My soul, there is a country/Far beyond the stars”. The subtitle of Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* (1650, enlarged 1655), ‘Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations’, is an exact echo of that of *The Temple*, and the Preface, dated 1654, refers to ‘the blessed man, Mr *George Herbert*, whose holy *life* and *verse* gained many pious *converts*’ (amongst whom Vaughan counted himself. Above all, one of the most Herbertian poems in the collection, ‘The Match’, represents a personal submission, artistically to a model poet and spiritually to that poet’s God. Vaughan most differs from Herbert, however, in his consistent rather than incidental use of natural imagery and in his steady exploration of the revelation of God in his creation. As a loyal royalist and Anglican writing at the time of the triumph of republican arms and the imposition of an alien church order, he retired to rural seclusion in Wales. That this retirement was sympathetic to him is suggested by his translations from the Latin of the stoic meditations on the flux of worldly affairs of Boethius and the Polish Jesuit, Casimir Sarbiewski (published in *Olor Iscanus*, ‘the Swan of Usk’, in 1651). Vaughan’s finest devotional poetry, contained in the two volumes of *Silex Scintillans*, does, however, suggest a quite individual vision of a pastoral paradise which had been glimpsed in childhood, but which once lost to the adult could be regained only through contemplation and revelation.

Mystical vision is stronger in the work of **Thomas Traherne (1637-1674)**, whose wonderful poems and *Centuries*, prose meditations, were printed only in 1908. Vaughan and Traherne, like Herbert, were devotional poets who wrote no secular verse. These Anglican pietists lack Herbert’s stamina and syntax; Vaughan’s second couplet (quoted above) falters. From this date the educated wrote less about heaven. **Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720)**, wrote that the soul ‘Joys in the inferior world’ of natural scenes. In the light of sense and reason, vision glimmered and decayed.

3.7.4 Poetry of Andrew Marvell and John Milton

Generically, **Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)** is a writer of metaphysical poetry but he is also a satirist and a politician who saved the epic poet, John Milton's life. His response to religious divisiveness, his commitment to the republican cause of Oliver Cromwell and his association with royalist circles still abound in controversies. Although Marvell's earliest published poems suggest an association with royalist literary circles, his support for the new Republic is plain enough in 'An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland' of May 1650. There is also poetry of praise to his patron: 'Upon Appleton House: To My Lord Fairfax', is an adaptation of the mode established by Ben Jonson in his 'To Penshurst' fitted to new times. But where the narrator of Jonson's poem is confident, that of Marvell's is uneasy: "Its lord a while, but not remain." Wit and grace are found in Marvell's lyric poems. There is a delight in rediscovering Eden in 'The Garden', a poem which opens with a flamboyant display of erudite wit; gardens, we are told, sustain the rewards of all ambition in that they are the source of the symbolic crowns once awarded to saints, soldiers, athletes, and poets. 'To His Coy Mistress' talks of "vegetable love" associated with the principle of generation and corruption. The 20th century modernist poet T.S. Eliot identifies this wit as 'a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric *grace*'. Marvell's lyric poems are haunted by time and a tantalizing and sometimes disorienting sense of human failure. Like explicatory poems from an emblem book, 'On a Drop of Dew' and 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body' contrast pictures of the 'restless' and 'insecure' soul, longing for heaven, with those of the enclosing and complaining prison of the body.

John Milton (1608-1674) is an important artist of the Interregnum in 'To the Lord General Cromwell', but transcended its political boundaries. If Milton's career as a public apologist for the English Revolution effectively ended with the extinction of the Republic and the restoration of Charles II in May 1660, his career as a poet took on a new significance. His first collected volume of verse, the *Poems of Mr John Milton, both English and Latin, Compos'd at Several Times* (1645), had been the fruit of some fifteen years of experiment with English and Latin metres. It was published when the poet himself had written little new verse for five years and when he was aware, at the age of 36 that he was going blind. 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', is **devotional poetry** parallel to Crashaw's 'A Hymne of the Nativity', but where Crashaw allows his wondering shepherds to observe the incarnate Word as a weeping infant, Milton concentrates on a wondrous divine sovereign whose birth extinguishes the power of the pagan gods and silences their oracles. As **antithetical poems**, 'L'Allegro' ('the happy man') and 'Il Penseroso' ('the melancholy man') are shaped as representations of opposed states of mind. Milton also wrote a

monody *Lycidas*, where he laments the death of the pious scholar, Edward King, in 1637. Like Ben Jonson, classical influences abound like that of Greek bucolic poet, Theocritus. His later epic works comment on humanity in a grand style (*Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*) and tragic form (*Samson Agonistes*). The debates between the ambitions of the royalty and the increasing dictatorship of the Cromwell in the Interregnum still find their echoes in these works.

3.7.5 Caroline Poetry

The Caroline period saw the flourishing of the **cavalier poets** (including Thomas Carew, Richard Lovelace, and John Suckling) and **later metaphysical poets** (including George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and Katherine Philips). **Cavalier poets** were English gentlemen poets, called Cavaliers because of their loyalty to Charles I (1625–49) during the English Civil Wars, as opposed to Roundheads, who supported Parliament. When **Thomas Carew's** *Poems* appeared in print in 1640 they were on the whole elegantly turned, witty, gentlemanlike love-lyrics. Some, such as the epitaphs to Lady Mary Wentworth and to Lady Mary Villiers, develop conceits appropriate to a meditation on untimely death; others, such as 'To my Friend G.N. from Wrest' and 'To Saxham', celebrate country-house hospitality in the manner of Jonson's 'To Penshurst', but the real substance of the volume lies in its variety of amorous addresses to, and reflections on, a fictional mistress known as Celia. With the Civil War, high Anglican devotion became private. **Robert Herrick** wrote on the theme of 'carpe diem' (seize the day) in "Gather ye rose-buds while ye may". He was a well-educated parish priest from rural Devonshire who was ejected from his living in 1647 as a man assertively loyal to the old order in Church and State. Although, as far as we know, he had neither sought nor been offered the opportunity of serving his King as either a courtier or a soldier, his verse proves him to be the most expressively 'cavalier' of the seventeenth-century love-poets. His 'A Thanksgiving to God, for his House' gratefully lists the simple comforts and rural blessings of a retired life, but it never attempts, as Herbert might have done, to move from the everyday to the theological. The Cavaliers sometimes wrote of war, honour, and

Caroline and Cavalier poets

Aurelian Townshend (c.1583-c.1651)
 Henry Drummond of
 Hawthornden (1585-1649)
 Lady Mary Wroth (1586-1652)
 Robert Herrick (1591-1674)
 Thomas Carew (1594-1640)
 Thomas Randolph (1605-35)
 Edmund Waller (1606-1687)
 Sir John Suckling (1609-42)
 Sir John Denham (1615-1669)
 Sir Richard Lovelace (1618-58)
 Margaret Cavendish, Duchess
 of Newcastle (1623-73)

their duty to the king. Sometimes they deftly combined all these themes as in Richard Lovelace's well-known poem 'To Lucasta, Going to the Wars'. Carew's younger acquaintances - fellow-courtiers and fellow-poets, **Sir John Suckling** and **Richard Lovelace**-were drawn to the King's party by ties of old loyalty and by a patrician relish for military adventure. Both men's verse exhibits the gentlemanly lightness of touch and the equally lax morality typical of 'Cavalier' poetry. Their politics (sexual as much as national) render both equally representative of the easy, confident, flirtatious, essentially artificial world of courtly manners. Suckling's poetry, collected posthumously with his plays and letters as *Fragmenta Aurea* (1646), suggests an almost cynical impatience with ideals. 'Loving and Beloved', for example, even dares to equate kings with lovers, not for their glory, but because 'their chief art in reign dissembling is'. Richard Lovelace's lyrics, the majority of which were published in 1649 as *Lucasta; Epodes, Odes, Sonnets, Songs etc.*, convey a similar impression of smug male assurance in dallying with love and the emotions of women, but through them there echoes the alternative, but also exclusively male, martial urgency of the 1640s. Imprisoned by Parliament for presenting a petition from Kentish royalists demanding the restoration of the army to Charles I, Lovelace casts himself as a caged linnnet singing of "glories of my KING" in 'To Althea from Prison'. **Abraham Cowley's** love poems collected as *The Mistress* in 1647 suggest less of a pursuit of a particular beloved than a series of general attempts to amuse disconsolate lovers or to excuse unrequited or absent love. 'The Spring', which in many ways seems to prefigure wittily Andrew Marvell's preference for trees over human fellowship in 'The Garden', in fact steadily insists on the emptiness of nature without a loving companion to share in its pleasures. 'The Change', too, meditates on an exclusion of love which can be remedied only by the radical shift exemplified by a literal exchange of hearts. John Dryden praised Waller's poetry for its model 'Excellence and Dignity'. **Edmund Waller** wrote both in support of the monarchy like 'To the King on his Navy', and 'Upon his Majesty's repairing of St Paul's', and after an official pardon on Cromwell namely 'A Panegyrick to my Lord Protector' in which Cromwell is praised for his political wisdom and for his military prowess and the new Commonwealth hailed as a pattern for Europe.

3.7.6 Restoration Poetry of John Dryden (1631-1700) and Samuel Butler (1612-1680)

The beginning of Restoration poetry continued the major features of post-Shakespearean poetry. Classical tradition in literary criticism developed more fully than ever. The separation between wit and judgement made by the English philosopher, John Locke and accepted by **John Dryden (1631-1700)**, provides an important clue

to the difference between Renaissance and the new poetry of the 17th century. ‘Good Sense’, ‘Reason’ and ‘Nature’ are terms associated with this poetry. Along with Sir John Denham and Edmund Waller, John Dryden perfected a poetic style eloquent and flexible, strictly ordered and conversational. His prologues and epilogues like ‘Prologue to Mistakes, or the False Report’ and ‘Prologue and Epilogue to King Arthur, or the British Worthy’ are like social poetry where he is ironical, critical, humorous and sympathetic. ‘Absalom and Achitophel’, directed against the parliamentary leader Shaftesbury was a debate on public affairs in the form of verse satire which demonstrated the power of his satirical and argumentative verse and a more incisive attack was ‘The Medal’. It was answered by Thomas Shadwell’s ‘Medal of John Bayes’, which in turn Dryden countered through ‘MacFlecknoe’. Samuel Butler’s ‘Hudibras’ is a great poetic satire. Like Jacobean poetry it is full of wit and humour of its mock-heroic action. A verse satirist, **Samuel Butler (1612-1680)** earned fame through his ‘Hudibras’ which remains perhaps the first great poetic satire in English. This burlesque (a literary parody, derisively imitating traditional matter) romance was delightedly acclaimed at the Court of King Charles II as a brilliant attack on the Puritans. However it was more complex and interesting. Butler’s main attack was directed against the passion and prejudice in religious argument. He also hit out against every kind of extravagance and folly in contemporary thought and society.

3.7.7 Summing Up

Post-Shakespearean poetry thus ranged from a satirical to a metaphysical to a cavalier to a mock-heroic tone. It countered the public nature of Shakespearean poetry on time and love (*Sonnets*), and on beauty and its violation (*The Rape of Lucrece*), with its private epitaphs, eulogies, epigrams and monodies. Yet eventually it returned to poetic deliberations on the progress of humanity in the epic poetry and the verse satire. The remarkable range of post-Shakespearean poetry is indeed a continuation and a challenge.

3.7.8 Comprehension Exercises

Essay-Type

1. Attempt a critical analysis of the new trends in post-Shakespearean poetry.
2. Discuss Ben Jonson as a Jacobean poet.
3. Compare and contrast devotional and cavalier poetry in the post-Shakespearean era.

Mid-length questions

1. Ben Jonson's poetry ranges across a number of genres. Substantiate.
2. Comment on the poetry written during the Interregnum.
3. What is a metaphysical conceit? Discuss any one example at length.
4. Poems of praise to nobility were written by Jacobean and Caroline poets. Elucidate.

Short questions (6 marks)

1. What is a pattern poem? Explain with an example.
2. Who were the 'cavaliers'? Discuss the work of any one poet.
3. What are 'epistles'? Discuss with reference to Ben Jonson's works.
4. How do epigrams contribute to the satirical tone of post-Shakespearean poetry? Explain with examples.

3.7.9 Suggested Reading

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UNIT 8 □ John Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book 1

Structure

- 3.8.0 Introduction**
- 3.8.1 John Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book I: Composition and Publication**
- 3.8.2 Epic Conventions and Invocation**
- 3.8.3 Theme**
- 3.8.4 Satan**
- 3.8.5 Fallen Angels**
- 3.8.6 Style and language**
- 3.8.7 Epic Similes**
- 3.8.8 Summing Up**
- 3.8.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.8.10 Suggested Reading**

3.8.0 Introduction

The present Unit aims to provide students a comprehensive analysis of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book I. It provides an in-depth understanding of the syllabised portion of this epic through an introduction to the background of the text, the use of epic conventions and invocation, theme, presentation of Satan and the fallen angels, style and language, and the use of epic similes. It is hoped that a perusal of the Unit will enable the learner to address the comprehension exercises at the end, and to further studies on the epic as such.

3.8.1 John Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book I: Composition and Publication

Milton's Magnum Opus *Paradise Lost*, the blank-verse epic poem, appeared in a quarto edition in 1667. Initially it consisted of 10 books but later on he published the final version which contained 12 books each headed by a prose 'Argument' which summarizes the contents of each book. Milton has used the Bible's Book of Genesis as his main source. Other than the Bible, he has also used information from the Greco-Roman Mythology, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* as his models. Dante, Tasso, Ariosto, Boiardo have also influenced Milton who is considered

to have a command of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, and Italian. Later he is said to have added Old English to his linguistic repertoire. Milton had the propensity to assimilate what he considered to be permanent and beautiful in classical and foreign literature. Classical myths, for him were allegories of moral truths.

Paradise Lost is timeless and universal in its appeal. It is accepted as an English Protestant epic, born of the political and religious upheavals of the 17th century. It was a time when the political history included the Civil War, regicide and rebellion. Milton was witness to the failure of the English revolution and the Republican enterprise against Charles I, which was followed by the Civil War. It resulted in the trial and execution of Charles I outside the Palace of Whitehall on 30th January 1649. This led to the subsequent creation of Republican Commonwealth and Cromwell's Protectorate. Yet the republican regime broke down and the ultimate triumph of tyranny was re-established when Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660.

The Restoration of monarchy was for Milton, synonymous with ignorance, irrationality and idolatry. When Milton composed *Paradise Lost*, he was in dire financial straits, subject to slander, confined in a world of political, personal and intellectual isolation. It was an ageing and blind Milton who composed his most famous epic poem.

3.8.2 Epic Conventions and Invocation

Milton uses the literary conventions of Greek and Roman epics in *Paradise Lost*. Use of epical invocation to the Muses, grand eloquent language strewn with rhetorical language and epic similes and the use of elevated style are generic marks used in this secondary epic by Milton. The presentation of a protagonist with heroic and epical potentiality can be seen in Milton's portrayal of Satan and in the portrayal of other fallen angels. The use of *media res* (in the middle of an action) can be seen in this epic. The conflict is of grand proportion involving supernatural figures drawn from Biblical sources in *Paradise Lost* Book 1.

One such convention is the use of apostrophe addressed to a god or a muse to seek inspiration and assistance made by the poet in his composition, called invocation. It is an integral feature of traditional and literary epics. Emulating the blind bard Homer, all epic poets sought the blessings of their respective Gods and Muses to grant success to them in their Herculean effort of creating a masterpiece. According to traditional epic conventions, a heroic poem is initiated by an invocation which is addressed to Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry and eloquence. In Milton's *Paradise*

Lost Book I, the invocation can be divided asymmetrically into two parts. At first Milton formally declares the subject of his poem, that is, mankind's first act of disobedience towards God and the consequence that follows it. The beginning and end of humanity is demarcated by the presence of Adam and subsequent restoration of mankind by Jesus. The next ten lines depict God's creativity in cosmic history and it is followed by the implication of those actions in a human context. In the *invocatio*, Milton appeals to the "heavenly Muse" who inspired Moses to help him. In this he differs from Homer and Virgil as well as the traditionally inspired classical poets. Milton mentions Mount Oreb and Sinai and appeals to the Holy Spirit to enlighten him regarding the beginning of the world since the Holy Spirit was an active force in the creation of the universe. Next the poet seeks to surpass the limits of his classical predecessors. He desires to rise above the Aonian Mount which is sacred to the Greek Muse. The invocation shows Milton's attempt to bring a different perspective to his divine literary task and at the same time to work for the qualitative aspect of his creation. This makes Milton's invocation more religiously inclined than his classical predecessors.

3.8.3 Theme

The opening invocation to the "Heav'nly Muse" in *Paradise Lost* Book I can be interpreted as an exposition to the themes embedded in Milton's epic (I. 6). The exposition of the poem's "great argument" then foregrounds the theme as Milton leads his readers to follow the trail of a falling Satan:

With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition (I. 46–7).

The readers are exposed to the horrors of hell where Satan is the grand "new possessor" (I. 252). The theme is closely related to the issues of morality and ethical choice. Milton offers two alternatives - whether to identify with Satan or to condemn the entire act of rebellion and seduction of man "to that foul revolt" (I. 33). The narrator of the epic favours an idea of Satan as an evil agent responsible for the fall of man. Satan triumphs as Milton's great anti-hero and draws sympathy from the British Romantics like William Blake, who stated that Milton belonged to the "Devil's party without knowing it." The purpose of the epic, "To vindicate the ways of God to Men" may be regarded as the most fundamental didactic of the central theme of *Paradise Lost*. Milton reveals two paths which can be taken after disobedience: the path of moral degradation taken by Satan and the path of penitence and redemption shown by the saviour of mankind. Critics like C.S. Lewis denounce all the readers who are sympathetic to Satan. The theme of atheism is marked in this valorisation

of Satan's hatred of God. The admirers of Satan find in Milton's epic a rebel against the Christian God. The readers are surprised by the glorification of sin in a work that proposes to vindicate the ways of God to men, as Stanley E. Fish, in *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967) has pointed out. According to Fish, Milton's poem is aimed at surprising the unsuspecting Christian readers with an encounter with their own sense of sin and Fall. The readers are initially made to sympathise with Satan on a face value. They are then offered counter-narratives to confront the cardinal sin of disobedience. The inevitability of damnation of Satan transforms Satan into a figure of primordial evil and pride. Although the readers are struck by the overriding personality of Satan, the epic formulates the central theme of divine justice through a glorification of the ways of God. The transformation of Satan into a tragic character is a part of this thematic design.

3.8.4 Satan

C.S. Lewis in his book *A Preface to Paradise Lost* observes "...Milton's Satan is a magnificent character.... Milton's presentation of him is a magnificent poetical achievement which engages the attention and excites the admiration of the readers." (94). Yet Satan is a symbol of pride, revenge, deceit and jealousy. "The infernal serpent" is gigantic in size, comparable to the Titans who waged war against gods. He is huge like the mythological sea monster, Leviathan (I, 34). His immense physical stature is highlighted by comparing his shield to the celestial orb, the moon and his spear makes the tallest pine tree found on the Norwegian hills, look like a mere stick.

Milton, while delineating the character of Satan in his epic *Paradise Lost*, presents two distinct roles: one the archangel Lucifer or "bringer of light" before the revolt and then the rebellious leader, Satan. After losing his divinity Satan turns to the utter destruction of God and His favourite creation Man. After a prolonged invocation in Book I, Satan is introduced as he is "Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky" to "bottomless perdition" (I, 45, 47). He is vanquished forever from the land of eternal bliss. The reason for his damnation is his unconquerable will and obdurate pride. Boiling in the fiery gulf, Satan is accompanied by his rebel crew. He awakens in the dreary pit, tied in adamant chains. He is physically distorted, morally defeated. The brightest angel of Paradise is transformed into a hideous creature. He is tormented by the thought of his "lost happiness and lasting pain" (I, 55). He casts his sorrowful eyes around and sees the burning lake of fire on which all his miserable followers lie vanquished. It is a dismal and disheartening sight since the fire emits no light. Hell is a place where there is darkness, chaos and

hopelessness. Yet Satan does not show his dejection as he speaks to his trusted lieutenant, Beelzebub. Satan is aware of the defeat and continuous suffering that he and his followers will have to face till eternity.

Romantic critics like Blake, Shelley, Byron and also Hazlitt were inclined to admire Satan whereas Coleridge reacted against this and related Satan's self confidence to Napoleonic pride. Critical response to the character of Satan has excited debates between the so called Satanists and anti-Satanists. As John Carey in his essay "Milton's Satan" points out "...his inner debate and self-criticism reveal him as a creature of dynamic tensions..." (Danielson 134). Satan gains depth since he is shown to have an inner consciousness and varied emotions. Initially when he retains consciousness and sees his companions lying around in an afflicted state, he undergoes mental agony. Though he is dismayed by the sight, he does not repent. His feeling is "Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate" (I, 58). His pride is hurt due to his defeat at the hands of God. He diplomatically gives a speech which inspires his Fallen Angels. He is aware of their physical defeat but he declares:

All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield: (I, 106-8)

This presents the psychology of Satan in a nutshell. Satan shows resilience in accepting the circumstances. His immediate task is to boost the morale of the defeated angels and reorganise his army. Like a true leader, he instils hope in them and persuades them to think of victory. His language and resolution ignites renewed determination to challenge the authority of God.

Satan is an epitome of the over-achiever, an over-ambitious person like Faustus, Macbeth and Icarus. His indomitable spirit is in reality a manifestation of his obdurate pride. His misconception that he is the master of his own destiny arises from this self confidence. Yet the irony is that he is free to do what God permits him to do. The only action of his own choice is in fact the rebellion "that foul revolt" which transports him from Paradise to the infernal pit of damnation (I, 33). Satan's initial trauma after his defeat does not prevent him from expressing his defiance against God.

Satan shows no repentance in his first speech and mentions that though he is "changed in outward lustre" yet he retains the determination to wage eternal war against his omnipotent foe (I, 97). He expresses his contempt for God. Here Satan is presented as an ideal, charismatic leader. He is optimistic as he declares "All is not lost;" and mentions that this "unconquerable will" will help them to retaliate

and give them the “courage never to submit or yield” (I, 106, 108). Satan decides that they will never accept God’s dominance. He explains in his second speech that “to be weak is miserable” (I, 157). When Beelzebub expresses his doubts, Satan immediately responds with boldness and removes any scope of remorse or misery from the mind of Beelzebub. He provokes Beelzebub by representing God as a cruel and domineering tyrant. Satan is resourceful and prevents any feeling of pessimism to demoralize his fallen companions. In his third speech, Satan asserts that though physically they have been deformed and changed but their mind will remain unchanged. The importance of freedom is emphasized as he convinces them that liberty in Hell is better than slavery in Heaven, “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven” (I, 263). Like a true leader, he instils hope in his army of fallen angels and makes them aware of their power and potentiality. In his fourth speech, he admonishes the fallen angels caustically and incites them. His sharp words compel them to spring back recharged, desirous of revenge against the inmates of Heaven. Thus Milton’s presentation of Satan as a successful and able leader elicited a response from William Blake that “Milton was of the devil’s party without knowing it” yet it is established that Milton concludes that Satan is an evil character who is full of deceit and envy with no remorse. He neither fails to understand the benevolent God nor does accept His grace. Satan’s pride and inability to be penitent result in his eternal damnation.

3.8.5 Fallen Angels

The fallen angels were heavenly creatures who resided with Satan in Paradise and accepted Satan as their leader. They revolted against the omnipotent ruler of Heaven. They fell to the dark horrible dungeon on the river of fire “as far removed from God and light of heaven / As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole” (I, 73-4) These fallen angels are deformed and physically transformed when they fall into the dark pit called Hell. Yet they retain their god-like shapes and immortality without their former splendour. Inspired and incited by their leader Satan they spring up from their abject distraught state to reassemble. They are innumerable yet they stand before their leaders in separate files according to the division of squadrons. After the creation of earth, they spread far and wide on earth and deceive men to be worshipped like Gods.

Moloch, who is described as “horrid king” has a brutish image. His image is smeared with blood of children who are sacrificed to appease him. The sound of the drums and timbrels drown the cries of parents and their children who have to pass through the ritualistic fire. On earth, his empire extended from Rabba to Argob and Basan. The wise king Solomon in his old age was influenced by his wife to worship

pagan Gods and built a temple on the Mount of Olives. Moloch was worshipped in parts of Jordan and Jerusalem.

Chemos also known as Peor was worshipped by the Moabites in the regions extending from Aroar to Nebo and Abarim in the south to Hesebon and Horonaim. He also was worshipped in the kingdom of Seon to the Asphaltic Pool. He incited the Israelite to worship him with extravagant and lustful ceremonies. He was also worshipped on the Mount of Olives. He is the god of lust.

Next come Baalim and Ashtaroth. They can assume both male and female forms respectively since they are spirits who are made of ethereal essence and have the freedom to transform into any form they desire. They are not burdened by cumbrous flesh nor are they restricted by joints and bones. They are at liberty to take any shape or size, to be huge or short, bright or hazy. They are bright airy spirits who can execute actions of love or hate. The Israelites worshipped them in place of the true God.

Astoreth or as the Phoenicians call her Astarte, the Queen of Heaven, is represented by the crescent shaped moon. The Phoenician virgins worshipped her during moonlit nights with offerings and love songs. Her temple was built in Sion by King Solomon who was a generous king but he was deceived by his mistress. So he built the temple on Mount of Olives for the heathen idol of the false gods.

Thammuz is worshipped in Lebanon by the Syrian maidens who sing love songs on summer days. It is said that the Lebanese river, Adonis turns red in summer and it is attributed to the blood of Thammuz, a beautiful youth, who was fatally injured by a boar. The young Syrian maids are fascinated by the story of Thammuz and excite an outburst of passion. The frenzy of passion among the Israelite damsels with which they worship the idol separate them from God.

Dagon is a sea monster. He has the upper half of man and the lower part of body is that of fish. He is a monster worshipped by the people of Azotus, Gath, Palestine, Ascalon, Accaron and Gaza. His bestial image was maimed when the Ark of God, which was captured by the Philistines, fell on him in his own temple.

Rimmon was worshipped in Damascus and the fertile regions of Abbana and Pharphar. He too revolted against God. A leper Naman was once his follower, but Naman was cured by Elisha and he turned away from Rimmon. Yet Ahaz, stopped the worship of God and this foolish king offered his prayers to Rimmon and the other false gods whom he had once vanquished.

Orisis, Isri, Orus and their followers engaged in monstrous trails and magical rituals which impressed the Egyptians. They were more brute than human in

appearance. The Israelites who had escaped from the slavery of the Egyptians in the wilderness, moulded all their gold and created a calf in Horeb. The king Jeroboam had two such golden calves made and established in the city of Bethel and that of Dan. But these brutish gods were swept away when Jehovah's wrath struck Egypt.

Belial is the embodiment of Satan himself. He is depraved and lustful. No temples were built for him, nor altars worshipped. His presence was felt in the temples and altars where the priests started losing faith in the true God, as Eli's sons, who were priests at Shilon, did. Belial's supreme authority could be felt not only in temples but in courts and palaces, which were filled with violence and lust. Citizens could hear the sound of orgies, revelry and lechery from the highest towers and were subject to humiliation and dishonour. At night the followers of Belial would roam in the cities, intoxicated with wine and insolence. In the dark streets of Gibeah, a matron would be handed to the wicked mob to outrage and insult so that the inmates of the house remain safe.

Mammon, "the least erected spirit," fell from heaven after the rebellion. Even when in heaven, he would always be looking down at the rich golden pavements of heaven; rather than enjoy the blessed vision of the divine. He taught men to plunder the resources of the earth for their personal benefit, leaving the treasures of mother earth exposed. He is the epitome of greed.

Mulciber is the architect of Pandemonium and much respected in ancient Greece and Italy. He was thrown from heaven by angry Jove and he landed like a shooting star on the island of Lemres in the Aegean Sea. He had built high towers in Heaven but that hardly helped him as he fell with his crew, headlong to Hell.

3.8.6 Language

To suit the sublimity of the subject Milton adopted the highly stylized ancient Latin language structure to elucidate his theme in *Paradise Lost*. Commenting on the Latinized use of Milton's English, Jonathan Richardson observes that Milton's Language is English, but it is Milton's English which is a mixture of Latin and Greek. Lee M. Johnson in the essay "Milton's epic style: the invocations in *Paradise Lost*," has observed the "Milton's secondary language is often far removed from common speech and does not so much talk as sing" and his "language and style seem unusual" (Danielson 67-68). Milton uses an ornate and artificial style and these artifices and mannerisms contribute to the epical grandeur of the work. There are in particular the Latinisms – the Latin idioms, syntax, word order and the use of words in their Latin senses. The effect is to produce an archaic Latin style in English

in close imitation of Virgil. Milton's language is original and not idiosyncratic or even and perpetual distortion of current idiom. There is a juxtaposition of two types of language: Satan's language is complicated, rhetorical, complex and often self-contradictory; God's language has harmony, clarity, balance and theological abstraction. Milton's mastery over Latin gives more clarity and force to the theological discourse as against the more modern rhetorical language of Satan.

Like his predecessors, Milton adopts a more generalised style specially when he describes a particular place or even a person. In such descriptions he does not prompt the imagination by selected detail to realise an individual figure or scene; he concentrates rather than on the general impression itself. The reason is that the figure and scenes in these parts of the poem are themselves of representative rather than of singular interest; to individualise them would be to destroy the effect aimed at. For example, in his description of Belial, Milton's style of generalisation gets revealed:

In Courte and Palaces he also Reigns
And in luxurious Cities, where the noise
Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,
And injury and outrage: and when Night
Darkens the Streets, then wander forth the Sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine. (Book I, 497-502)

Most of the key words here are general or abstract nouns. The picture presented here is distinct and forcible, and it is probable that the poet was recording his personal experiences of Restoration London. Through this kind of usage Milton attains an effect of immeasurable grandeur, diffuses a sense of the infinite through a finite form. The use of an adjective for a noun is a similar device, describing physical appearance by qualities, in phrases such as "the palpable obscure" or "the vast abrupt." There is one chief reason why Milton was able to avail himself of the grandeur of abstract words without his style becoming grandiose; he has a scholar's eyes of the substance, the concrete imagery and wealth of associated meanings stored in these words. Latinisms abound in the work. One is the joining of a concrete descriptive epithet to an abstract noun, as in "fleecy care." Such expressions in *Paradise Lost* as "Anglical and Human kind," or, "brutal kind" for beasts, do not fall into this category, since they lack the picturesque detail and a normal form of speech. The diction is deliberately archaic and neoclassical. Another characteristic of Milton's language is the use of technical terms – military, nautical, sports, architectural, mineralogical, metallurgical – involving a knowledge of all the arts and science which an educated man was expected to be familiar.

3.8.7 Epic Similes

Paradise Lost is one of the greatest epic poems ever written in the English language and in the wider European tradition. One of the remarkable features of Milton's epic style is the use of epic similes. Milton's similes are elaborate comparisons, conveying information regarding the situation. The similes may be prophetic, as they prefigure the events that are yet to come. They are both ornamental and illustrative and a part of the classical epic conventions. With help from your counsellor, try to define epic simile, and understand for yourselves how it differs from the usual simile as a figure of speech. It is also important to understand what function these epic similes serve in *Paradise Lost*.

- **Leviathan simile** : Milton emphasizes the gigantic size of Satan by comparing him to the huge sea monster, the Leviathan. The huge physical stature of Satan is vividly represented in this simile. The huge Leviathan is mistaken for an island by the sailors who anchor on his scaly body. Thus not only the monstrous size but also Satan's ability to deceive is highlighted here. Satan is also compared with other mythological figures: Titan (born of Earth and Heaven who fought against the Greek gods), Briareos (a giant with hundred arms in Greek mythology), and Typhon (a giant with hundred heads).
- **Vallombrosa simile** : Just as Homer, Virgil, and Dante had used the imagery of the fallen leaves to suggest the innumerable dead, so does Milton. The Valley of Vallombrosa near Florence is covered with the fallen autumnal leaves. The comparison of the fallen angels to the decaying fallen leaves, establishes the countless numbers as well as their disfigured, indisposed state. This simile is extended to the image of the broken chariot wheels of the Egyptian soldiers and their corpses floating on the Nile. This is further compared to the scattered sedge floating on the Red Sea.
- **Bee simile** : When the sun shines in spring, the air is buzz with the bees that become extremely busy as they fly to and fro among the fresh flowers. These swarms of bees found on planes are comparable to the innumerable fallen angels entering the Pandaeonium. The comparison is further elaborated upon when they enter the gigantic hall. These gigantic fallen angels reduce in size and look like the smallest dwarfs or the race of Pygmies dwelling beyond the Himalayas or the Elves, who are spied upon by a belated peasant returning on a moonlit night.

Pandaeonium, "the high capital / Of Satan and his peers," (I, 756-7) was built under the guidance of Mammon who instructed the fallen angels to

extract the bright metallic gold from the depths of the hill. Thus gold is associated with greed and under Mammon's guidance and the labour of the fallen angels, the huge structure of Pandaemonium is built with circular columns and pillars resembling the Doric style of architecture. Golden beams hold the pillars together and the roof is carved with gold that neither Babylonian nor Egyptian structures could compete in a show of pomp and luxury. Huge doors covered with brassy leaves open out to large spaces and from the roof bright lamps and fire baskets are suspended like "light / As from a sky" (I, 730). The architect of this magnificent structure is Mulciber.

3.8.8 Summing Up

In this Unit, it has only been possible to give you a preliminary idea of *Paradise Lost* as a secondary epic in English. Please remember dear learner that this is not a substitute but only an aid that should prompt you to read the full text. While reading you are to focus special attention on Milton's grand style and how it differentiates the text from other poetry you have read so far in your syllabus. You are also to take note of the fact that Milton writes at two levels – first as a Christian epic, and then (equally importantly) as a literary text as well. To comprehend this binocular vision, you are to differentiate between the ethical and ontological perspectives in your approach to *Paradise Lost*. This makes the figure of Satan as presented by Milton, one of the most complex creations in English literature.

3.8.9 Comprehension Exercises

➤ **Long Questions**

1. Write a short note on the composition and publication of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
2. Analyse Milton's use of epic conventions with special reference to the Invocation in *Paradise Lost* Book 1.
3. Write an essay on Milton's presentation of Satan in *Paradise Lost* Book 1.
4. Would you subscribe to the view of William Blake that "Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it"? Justify with reference to *Paradise Lost* Book 1.
5. Comment on Milton's style and use of language with reference to *Paradise Lost* Book 1.

➤ **Medium Length Questions:**

1. Name the fallen angels and describe them with reference to *Paradise Lost* Book 1.

2. Define Epic simile. Identify four instances of epic similes in *Paradise Lost* Book 1 and explain these.
3. Critically evaluate the central theme of *Paradise Lost* Book 1.

➤ **Short Length Questions:**

1. Write a note on the description of Hell in *Paradise Lost* Book 1.
2. Write a note on Pandaemonium in *Paradise Lost* Book 1.
3. Give a brief description of Moloch as he appears in Book 1 of Milton's epic.
4. Write a note on Vallombrosa simile.

3.8.10 Suggested Reading

Primary Text: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667).

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UNIT 9 □ Anne Kingsmill Finch : ‘The Introduction’

Aphra Behn: Song – ‘Love Armed’

Structure

3.9.0 Introduction

3.9.1 Women’s writing of the Age: An Overview

3.9.2 Works of Anne Kingsmill Finch, Countess of Winchilsea

3.9.3 Text of ‘The Introduction’

3.9.4 Notes and Glossary

3.9.5 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis

3.9.6 Comprehension Exercises on ‘The Introduction’

3.9.7 Works of Aphra Behn

3.9.8 Text of Song – ‘Love Armed’

3.9.9 Notes and Glossary

3.9.10 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis

3.9.11 Summing Up - Subsequent and Contemporary Reception

3.9.12 Comprehension Exercises on ‘Love Armed’

3.9.13 Suggested Reading

3.9.0 Introduction

In Module 1 of this Paper, you have had a vivid idea of the manifold complexities, both socio-political and cultural, inherent in the period of the history of literature that is called ‘The Restoration’. Coming as it does after the ushering in of new learning in the Renaissance, this was the period when the impact of classical thought and learning on the one hand and the influence of new social stratifications on the other began to exert their influences on literature. In between, this Unit, which deals with two women poets, is an interesting section that explores a new and important strand – that of female articulation in literature. This section has been specially designed to give you a glimpse of how women start carving a space for themselves in the literary canon, and it is expected that at the end of it, you will be in a position to explore subsequent developments in this area.

3.9.1 Women's Writing of the Age : An Overview

You have already read that it was during the Restoration that we first see actresses on the stage; this will give you some idea of the emergent position of women in contemporary society. Political and religious developments as well as changes in the circumstances of literary authorship led increasing numbers of women to write in many different genres and forms during the seventeenth century. However, cultural prejudices still attempted to limit women's creative achievements. For instance, when Lady Mary Wroth, an accomplished poet, dramatist, and prose writer published her monumental romance *Urania*, she received an insulting poem that instructed her to 'Work, Lady, Work. Let writing books alone. For Surely wiser woman never wrote one'. It may well be examined that the women writers' responses to this context were guided by their passions as a means to engage with literary discourse. Another question may as well be addressed: what is the role of the passions — love, envy, hatred, pride, anger — in literary creativity? What are the specific constraints and conditions of authorship for women in the seventeenth century? Is there a tradition of early modern women's writing and what are the advantages — and disadvantages — of defining such a tradition?

As you read along this Unit, you should be able to formulate your own responses to these issues.

3.9.2 Works of Anne Kingsmill Finch, Countess of Winchilsea

Although she has always enjoyed some fame as a poet, Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, has only recently received greater praise and renewed attention. Her diverse and considerable body of work records her private thoughts and personal struggles but also illustrates her awareness of the social and political climate of her era. Not only do Finch's poems reveal a sensitive mind and a religious soul, they also exhibit great generic range and demonstrate her fluent use of Augustan diction and forms.

Descended from an ancient Hampshire family, Finch was born in April 1661, the third and youngest child of Anne Haselwood and Sir William Kingsmill. At the age of twenty-one, Finch was appointed one of six maids of honor to Mary of Modena, wife of the Duke of York, in the court of Charles II. Her interest in verse writing began during this period and was probably encouraged by her friendships with Sarah Churchill and Anne Killigrew, also maids of honor and women of literary interests. It was during her residence in the court of Charles II that she met Colonel Heneage Finch, uncle of

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

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

Love without Poetry's refining Aid
Is a dull Bargain, and but coarsely made;
Nor e'er cou'd Poetry successful prove,
Or touch the Soul, but when the Sense was Love.
Oh! Cou'd they both in Absence now impart
Skill to my Hand, but to describe my Heart;

Finch's early poems to her husband demonstrate her awareness of the guiding poetic conventions of the day, yet also point to the problems such conventions pose to the expression of intimate thought.

In addition to celebrating her love, Finch's earliest verse also records her own frustration and sense of loss following her departure from court in 1689. She and her husband remained loyal to the Catholic Stuarts, a tenuous stance to assume given the popularity of the Protestant William and Mary in Britain in the 1690s. Finch's most explicit recognition of the problem of succession and of the difficulty of her relationship to the Stuarts appears in her first published poem, an elegy for James II anonymously published in 1701 and titled *Upon the Death of King James*

the Second. The poem ends with an appeal to Britain's "Maternal Bosome"—an attack on William and possibly on the currently reigning queen as well—to honor "Rightful Kings" and "All who shall intend thy Good."

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

However, Finch's more serious poems have received greater critical attention than her fables. "A Nocturnal Reverie," for instance, is clearly Augustan in its perspective and technique, although many admirers have tended to praise the poem as pre-Romantic. Finch's poem opens with classical references and proceeds through characteristically Augustan descriptions of the foxglove, the cowslip, the glowworm, and the moon. Finch imitates Augustan preferences for decorum and balance in her use of heroic couplets and the medial caesura in setting the peaceful, nocturnal atmosphere of the poem:

Or from some Tree, fam'd for the *Owl's* delight,
She, hollowing clear, directs the Wand'rer right:
In such a *Night*, when passing Clouds give place,
Or thinly veil the Heav'ns mysterious Face;
When Odours, which declin'd repelling Day,
Thro temp'rate Air uninterrupted stray;

While Finch's verse occasionally displays slight antitheses of idea and some structural balances of line and phrase, she never attains the epigrammatic couplet form that Alexander Pope perfected in the early eighteenth century. Her admission in "A Nocturnal Reverie" that her verse attempts "Something, too high for Syllables to speak" might be linked to the Romantic recognition of the discrepancy between human aspiration and achievement. But ultimately she retreats to God and solitude

and displays a more properly Augustan attitude in the acceptance of her human limitations. At times her descriptions of natural detail bear some likeness to poets such as James Thomson, but Finch's expression is more immediate and simple, and her versification ultimately exhibits an Augustan rather than a pre-Romantic sensibility.

Another form Finch appropriates is the Pindaric ode. Between 1694 and 1703 she wrote three such odes in the form introduced in England by Abraham Cowley in the 1650s, following his preference for complex and irregular stanzaic structures and rhyme schemes. These poems—"All is Vanity," *The Spleen* (1709), and "On the Hurricane"—all depict metaphysical entities working against humanity to test its strength and faith in God. *The Spleen*, possibly Finch's most well-known poem, was first published anonymously in 1709. The ode was immediately popular and received much attention for its accurate description of the symptoms of melancholia—the disease often associated with the spleen—which Finch suffered from throughout her life.

In "Ardelia to Melancholy" Finch similarly presents a struggle against melancholy and depression, casting the disease as an "inveterate foe" and "Tyrant pow'r" from which "heav'n alone" can set her "free." The poem shifts from the first to the third person, generalizing Ardelia's particular experience to encompass all those who suffer from melancholia: "All, that cou'd ere thy ill got rule, invade, / Their uselesse arms, before thy feet have laid; / The Fort is thine, now ruin'd, all within, / Whilst by decays without, thy Conquest too, is seen." The imperial language of the poem might also suggest a more abstract relation between her submission to the spleen and her status as a political exile.

Finch circulated two manuscripts of her work before she published *Miscellany Poems*, and several of her poems were published individually in broadsheets and smaller collections. Finch experienced some additional, though limited, recognition after the publication of her *Miscellany Poems*. Richard Steele, for instance, published several of her poems in his *Miscellanies* of 1714. She was personally acquainted with both Swift and Pope, though the full extent of her relationships with them is unknown. Finch is mentioned in several compilations, memoirs, and literary dictionaries during the 18th century, and to a lesser extent, in the 19th century, but has received sustained attention only recently. The first modern edition of her work, though incomplete, appeared in 1903.

Much of the recent interest in Finch arises from current academic efforts to recover the work of previously neglected women writers, exploring how those writers depict themselves as poetic subjects and examining the ways in which they adopt and alter the poetic standards of a particular period. In addition to her representations of melancholy and the spleen—an affliction common to women—Finch also called

attention to the need for the education of women and recorded the isolation and solitude that marked women's lives. In "The Bird and the Arras," for instance, a female bird enclosed in a room mistakes the arras for a real scene and flies happily into it. But she is soon trapped, "Flutt'ring in endless circles of dismay" until she finally escapes to "ample space," the "only Heav'n of Birds." Such images of entrapment and frustration are echoed in Finch's description of the limitations of women's social roles in England at the turn of the 18th century. In "The Unequal Fetters," the speaker notes her fear of fading youth, but later refuses to be a "pris'ner" in marriage. Finch admits that marriage does "slightly tye Men," yet insists that women remain "close Pris'ners" in the union, while men can continue to function "At the full length of all their chain." For the most part, however, Finch's message is subtle in its persistent decorum and final resignation and consolation in God. Although she was certainly aware of the problems many of her countrywomen faced, and particularly of the difficulties confronting women writers, Finch offers a playful yet firm protest rather than an outspoken condemnation of the social position of women. And although she endured a loss of affluence with James's deposition, there is little evidence that she abhorred her twenty-five-year retirement in Eastwell, which afforded her the leisure in which to pursue her creative interests.

Finch died quietly on 5 August 1720 after several years of increasingly ill health. Following her funeral, Heneage Finch praised her Christian virtues and persistent loyalty to her friends and family, noting as well her talents as a writer: "To draw her...just character requires a masterly pen like her own. We shall only presume to say she was the most faithful servant to her Royall Mistresse, the best wife to her noble Lord, and in every other relation public and private so illustrious an example of all moral and divine virtues." Much of the immediate appeal of Finch's verse to a post-Romantic modern audience lies in the sincerity with which she expressed the Christian values her husband recalls in his eulogy. But clearly Anne Finch belongs to her age and merits greater appreciation for her poetic experimentation and her fluent use of Augustan diction and forms. Her voice is clear and self-assured, evidence of the controlled and confident poise of an aristocratic poet.

3.9.3 'The Introduction'

Did I, my lines intend for publick view, How many censures, wou'd their faults persue, Some wou'd, because such words they do affect, Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect. And many, have attain'd, dull and untaught The name of Witt, only by finding fault.

True judges, might condemn their want of witt,
And all might say, they're by a Woman writt.
Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,
The fault, can by no vertue be redeem'd.
They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;
Good breeding, fassion, dancing, dressing, play
Are the accomplishments we shou'd desire;
To write, or read, or think, or to enquire
Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time;
And interrupt the Conquests of our prime;
Whilst the dull mannage, of a servile house
Is held by some, our outmost art, and use.
Sure 'twas not ever thus, nor are we told
Fables, of Women that excell'd of old;
To whom, by the diffusive hand of Heaven
Some share of witt, and poetry was given.
On that glad day, on which the Ark return'd,
The holy pledge, for which the Land had mourn'd,
The joyfull Tribes, attend itt on the way,
The Levites do the sacred Charge convey,
Whilst various Instruments, before itt play;
Here, holy Virgins in the Concert joyn,
The louder notes, to soften, and refine,
And with alternate verse, compleat the Hymn Devine.
Loe! the yong Poet, after Gods own heart,
By Him inspired, and taught the Muses Art,
Return'd from Conquest, a bright Chorus meets,
That sing his slayn ten thousand in the streets.
In such loud numbers they his acts declare,
Proclaim the wonders, of his early war,
That Saul upon the vast applause does frown,
And feels, itt's mighty thunder shake the Crown.
What, can the threat'n'd Judgment now prolong?
Half of the Kingdom is already gone;
The fairest half, whose influence guides the rest,
Have David's Empire, o're their hearts confess't.
A Woman here, leads fainting Israel on,

She fights, she wins, she triumphs with a song,
 Devout, Majestick, for the subject fitt,
 And far above her arms, exalts her witt,
 Then, to the peacefull, shady Palm withdraws,
 And rules the rescu'd Nation with her Laws.
 How are we fal'n, fal'n by mistaken rules?
 And Education's, more than Nature's fools,
 Debarr'd from all improve-ments of the mind,
 And to be dull, expected and designed;
 And if some one, would Soar above the rest,
 With warmer fancy, and ambition press't,
 So strong, th' opposing faction still appears,
 The hopes to thrive, can ne're outweigh the fears,
 Be caution'd then my Muse, and still retir'd;
 Nor be dispis'd, aiming to be admir'd;
 Conscious of wants, still with contracted wing,
 To some few freinds, and to thy sorrows sing;
 For groves of Lawrell, thou wert never meant;
 Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there content.

3.9.4 Notes and Glossary

1. 1 Chronicles 15.
2. 1 Samuel 17-18.
3. Judges 4-5. The judge Deborah.
4. Lawrell: Laurel crowns were awarded as honours to famous poets.

3.9.5 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis

The picture of a woman poet frustrated by the restrictions imposed by society on her is seen clearly in “The Introduction”. The poet begins by anticipating what critics would say about her lines: “And all might say, they’re by a Woman writt.” A woman writer is viewed as “an intruder on the rights of men” and a “presumptuous Creature” who should desire woman’s proper accomplishments, namely, “Good breeding, fassion, dancing, dressing, play.” In fact, the public would feel that “To write, or read, or think, or to enquire / Wou’d cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time, / And interrupt the Conquests of our prime.” This early feminist rejects the idea that “the dull mannage, of a servile house” is woman’s “outmost art, and use”.

To support her idea that women can accomplish more than the public's limited view of the female role, the poet looks to ancient Israel for examples of women who excelled and includes them in "The Introduction." To the Biblical account of the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Israel, she adds "holy Virgins" to the crowds of people who sang joyfully and speaks of these virgins' completing "the Hymn Devine" with their soft notes. When victorious David returned from battle, the women greeted him with songs and with applause which made King Saul feel "itts mighty thunder shake the Crown." Saul's time on the throne is limited because "Half of the Kingdom is already gone; / The fairest half, whose influence guides the rest, / Have David's Empire o're their hearts confess't." The poet's last example from ancient Israel, the famous Deborah also had a song to sing, again one of victory. He describes her as follows: "A Woman here, leads fainting Israel on, / She fights, she wins, she tryumphs with a song." After the victory has been won, Deborah the judge "rules the rescu'd Nation, with her laws." Mallinson speaks of this "appeal to antique precedent" as "lengthy, substantial, and vigorous", and Rogers notes that Biblical examples "seemed called for in an age when the Bible was constantly used to keep woman in her place."

Unfortunately, women in Finch's society are not expected to lead as these earlier women had done but instead have been hampered by poor education and by opposition from others if they desire to "Soar above the rest, / With warmer fancy, and ambition press't." Women are "Debarr'd from all improvements of the mind / And to be dull, expected and ddesign'd". Because of these negative conditions, this woman poet cautions her Muse to be content with just a small audience of friends. Mallinson interprets the phrase "with contracted wing" as including "a narrow range of song".

A poet of the early eighteenth century, Anne Finch composed in a variety of contemporary forms, including the verse epistle, the Pindaric ode, the fable, and occasional poetry, exploring issues of authorship, love, friendship, and nature. Her nature poetry celebrates the beauty of the country, especially in contrast to the superficial frivolity of London society, while her love poetry praises married life rather than the attentions of a lover. Finch defended the appropriateness of women writing and often adapted the conventions of male Augustan writers to female experiences and themes. Though rarely adopting the satirical tone of Alexander Pope or Jonathan Swift, Finch was nonetheless encouraged in her craft by these literary figures.

The majority of her poems are characterized by such themes as gender and politics. Marginalised through politics and her desire to write, Finch recognized the difficulties of an eighteenth-century woman assuming the public voice of a poet, while insisting that intellectual pursuits were not the prerogative of men. She

commemorated the beauty of nature in “Nocturnal Reverie,” “The Tree,” “The Bird,” and “Petition for an Absolute Retreat,” the latter poem also suggesting her escape from political turmoil. In a similar vein, “Ardelia’s Answer to Ephelia” lauds the value of rural retirement while criticizing the pretentiousness of London society and female vanity. In “The Introduction,” “Circuit of Apollo,” “Ardelia’s Answer to Ephelia,” and “To the Nightingale,” she asserted the validity of women writing. In taking up the pen to write love poetry, she countered the tradition of arranged marriages and male infidelity by celebrating conjugal love in poems to her husband, though she criticised mercenary marriages in other poems. Her greatest eighteenth-century success, “The Spleen,” examines both a generalized public understanding of the condition and treatment of melancholy and her private suffering.

“The Introduction” to her *Miscellany Poems* (1713) never was published with them, probably due to its direct challenge to the male-dominated literary scene of her time. Her self-censorship in fear of public condemnation became a casebook example for feminist critics of the ‘sixties and ‘seventies who sought to explain why women weren’t published more often. Those women were in fact writing, but they knew their work could be condemned or ignored (worse yet!) merely for being “by a woman writ”, perhaps her most famous single phrase. The chilling spectacle of a competent, perhaps even great poet thinking seriously about turning her back on publication and the chance to shape the English language reaches its peak in lines 59-64 in which she directly echoes Milton while rejecting the great poetic gesture for a deliberately lesser effect.

3.9.6 Comprehension Exercises on ‘The Introduction’

1. Write an essay on the women writers of the seventeenth century with special reference to Anne Finch.
2. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem ‘The Introduction’.
3. Explain with reference to the context:

Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem’d,
The fault, can by no vertue be redeem’d.

3.9.7 Works of Aphra Behn

Behn's contemporary reputation as a poet was no less stunning than her 'notoriety' as a dramatist. She was heralded as a successor to Sappho (a Greek lyric poet), inheriting the great gifts of the Greek poet in the best English tradition exemplified by Behn's immediate predecessor, Katherine Philips. Just as Philips was known by her pastoral nom de plume and praised as "The Matchless Orinda," so Behn was apostrophized as "The Incomparable Astrea," an appellation based on the code name she had used when she was Charles's spy.

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

Behn's distinctive poetic voice is characterized by her audacity in writing about contemporary events, frequently with topical references that, despite their allegorical maskings, were immediately recognisable to her sophisticated audience. Although she sometimes addressed her friends by their initials or their familiar names, she might just as easily employ some classical or pastoral disguise that was transparent to the initiated. Behn's poetry, therefore, was less public than her plays or her prose fiction, as it depended, in some cases, on the enlightened audience's recognition of her topics for full comprehension of both the expression and implications of her verse. Such poetic technique involved a skill and craft that earned her the compliments of her cohorts as one who, despite her female form, had a male intelligence and masculine powers of reason.

Behn's response to this admiration was to display even more fully those characteristics which had earned her praise. Frequently her poems are specifically addressed to members of her social community and might employ mild satire as commentary, present events of their lives, and detail or explore the emotional states of their frequently complex relationships, especially those of love and sex. Less commonly Behn might use a translation or adaptation of another author's verse to discuss these issues in her own style. In these cases the poems are frequently redrawn

to reveal Behn's own emphases and display more her artistic perspective than that of the original author.

Whatever the source of the texts, whether her plays, a political or personal occasion, an adaptation or translation, or an emotional or psychological exploration, Behn's verse style is particular and identifiable, with a very distinctive voice. The speaker is usually identified as a character or as "Astrea," Behn's poetic self, and there is usually a specific audience. There may be dialogue within a poem, but, unlike the dialogue in her plays, in the poetry the voices are joined in lyrical rather than dramatic expression. In fact, the musicality of Behn's verse is another identifying characteristic. Whereas many of Behn's predecessors and contemporaries, including Philips, to whom Behn was frequently compared, are known for the Metaphysical aspects of their verse, Behn's poems are more classical, in the tradition of Ben Jonson rather than John Donne. As such they rely more on the heritage of sixteenth-century ornate lyricism as practiced by Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare, along with the epigrammatic tradition of light Juvenalian satire in Jonson and Robert Herrick, than the Marvellian wit and Miltonic grandeur of later seventeenth-century verse. Behn shares with John Dryden a preference for the couplet, but she also uses a modified ballad stanza and more varied verse forms if the content permits. The decorum of her verse is based in a very traditional relationship between structure and meaning, so that her discourse has a sense of immediacy and directness despite the conventionality of her literary forms. Perhaps it is because her use of vocabulary and form is so traditional that Behn, who was in her lifetime criticised as outrageous for the content of her works, was able, nevertheless, to thrive as a successful author.

The breaking of boundaries in poetry, as in her life, caused Behn to be criticized as well as admired publicly. Her best-known poem, "The Disappointment," finely illustrates Behn's ability to portray scandalous material in an acceptable form. The poem was sent to Hoyle with a letter asking him to deny allegations of ill conduct circulating about his activities. Both the letter and the poem were reprinted in early miscellaneous collections. "The Disappointment" has been traditionally interpreted to be about impotence. But it is also about rape, another kind of potency test, and presents a woman's point of view cloaked in the customary language of male physical license and sexual access to females. The woman's perspective in this poem provides the double vision that plays the conventional against the experiential.

One of her best-known verses, happily juxtaposed to "The Disappointment," is "Song: The Willing Mistriss." This poem describes how the female speaker becomes so aroused by the excellent courtship of her lover that she is "willing to receive / That which I dare not name." After three verses describing their lovemaking, she concludes with the coy suggestion, "Ah who can guess the rest?" The poem is a

good example of Behn's treatment of conventional courtly and pastoral modes, as is the "Song. Love Arm'd," which describes Cupid's power to enamour.

3.9.8 Text of Song – 'Love Armed'

LOVE in fantastic triumph sat,
Whilst bleeding hearts around him flowed,
For whom fresh pains he did create,
And strange tyrannic power he showed,
From thy bright eyes he took his fire,
Which round about, in sport he hurled;
But 'twas from mine, he took desire,
Enough to undo the amorous world.

From me he took his sighs and tears,
From thee his pride and cruelty;
From me his languishments and fears,
And every killing dart from thee;
Thus thou and I, the god have armed,
And set him up a deity;
But my poor heart alone is harmed,
Whilst thine the victor is, and free.

[‘Love Armed’ first appeared as ‘Love in fantastic triumph sat’ in *Abdelazer* (1677). It was reprinted in *Poems on Several Occasions* in 1684.]

3.9.9 Notes and Glossary

bleeding heart: rejected in love,
amorous world: lustful people,
deity: idol, god.

3.9.10 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis

The poem is an epitome of the love-lover relationship where love stands alone surrounded by the bleeding hearts of the lovers. It depicts how the lovers fall prey to the almighty in order to make the love perfect in the truest possible sense. It is a poem about the greatness of the love itself which is nothing but a form of aesthetic, that

aesthetics which is very much part and parcel of that abstract, designated as the almighty. Both the male and the female lovers donate something precious in order to make the love reach its highest esteem. Thus the ‘poor heart alone is harmed’. Finally it is that almighty gets the victory through the victory of the purest form of emotion. Thus there is in the poem a passage from the human subject to the supra-human, love being the vehicle for it.

Janet Todd, the biographer of Aphra Behn once wrote; “Behn has a lethal combination of obscurity and secrecy which makes her uneasy fit for any narrative, speculative or factual”. So when a woman like her writes a poem of love, the theme certainly turns a little confusing and a shade controversial too. At a very first reading specially of the first stanza, it seems as if the poet as a devotee of love goes on adoring the Love itself and describing the story of the lover’s sacrifice for the sake of love. The first two lines stand for the aesthetic rather eternal value of love. As the purest form of emotion, love can only be relished for the cost of sufferings it bequeaths on the lovers. As the poet bows her head down to that almighty she says how that omnipotent creates so many obstacles on the way and takes away all those shields one after another, preventing the harm, to attain that love in its purest form. But as the poem develops, a certain question crops up. Is it simply an idealisation of love? No, not at all.

Shortly after her supposed return to England from Surinam in 1664, Behn may have married John Behn, who may have been a merchant from Hamburg. He died, or the couple separated soon after 1664. So in her personal life Behn was already very much offended and hurt by the failure in her love. May be in order to overcome her grief, she surpasses all those materialistic shortcomings and sees that entire event as a failure in the lovers’ meeting. But as the poem develops, it no more stands as this mere binary but the gender issue adds a little extra icing to the cake. Aphra, who had a Catholic upbringing and announced herself as ‘designed for a nun’ may have had a different outlook to love, which denies the common binary of men dominating the love affair. It might also be that to her a successful love stands as a juxtaposition of some truest holy emotions. After all she belonged to the age just after that of the Elizabethan, when love got its highest esteem through the concept of metaphysical love- a love beyond the very physical virtues.

In one of her famous poems ‘The Disappointment ‘ (referred to earlier) she depicts the story of a sexual encounter told from a woman’s point of view that may be interpreted as a work about male impotence. Lysander, the male lover is shown here to be torn between his sexual desire and immense control. The battle between the mere physical urge and a sublime form of it is the primary motif of the poem. But later it turns out into some different issue altogether.

The question now is why she chose such a pessimistic title? Was she really disappointed in this theme of love? She may have tried her best to overcome her grief and got no better way than to hope for something aesthetic and eternal beyond these mundane realities. In her work 'The Unfortunate Happy Lady' she claims success in love as a combination of forgiveness, intense passion and endangered but inviolate virtue. The woman voice here is repeatedly seen to speak for herself in the latter part of the poem. All those polite, lovely forms of emotion like 'sighs and tears', 'languishments and fears' are taken away from the lady lover. While those chauvinistic virtues like pride and cruelty have been a part of the male soul throwing all those sharp darts towards the pure female heart, making it deserted, harmed. So when the poet writes in the last line "Whilst thine the victor is...", does she refer to the male lover here? Or is it a victory of that almighty or love itself as an emotion as its purest form which always lies in its unrequited form? Afterall, the female virtue wins the battle in terms of human feelings and ethics here.

3.9.11 Summing Up-Subsequent and Contemporary Reception

The two poems discussed above belong to the seventeenth century when the women did not enjoy much prominence. Subsequently, their works, too, were treated to be minor among the prolific careers of the male writers, and soon went into oblivion. Later, the awareness of the unique poignancy of women writing made critics look into these works as some of the early specimens of women writing in English literature. The poems jointly confront the problematic situation of the women writers at that point of time, and discuss their views and aspirations at length. In the twentieth century, when the global literary scenario is often getting flooded by feminist waves, these poems serve their purpose, though as period pieces, properly.

3.9.12 Comprehension Exercises on 'Love Armed'

1. Discuss Aphra Behn's career as a poet, with special reference to her 'Love Armed'.
2. What do you consider to be the major theme in 'Love Armed'? Discuss.
3. Explain with reference to the context:
But 'twas from mine, he took desire,
Enough to undo the amorous world.

MODULE 4
Restoration Drama

UNIT 10 □ Restoration Drama

Structure

4.10.0 Introduction

4.10.1 The Restoration and Drama

4.10.2 Salient Features of Restoration Drama

4.10.3 Restoration Comedy – An Overview

4.10.4 Writers of Restoration Comedy

4.10.5 Restoration Tragedy

4.10.6 Some other types of Contemporary Drama

4.10.7 Summing Up

4.10.8 Comprehension Exercises

4.10.9 Suggested Reading List

4.10.0 Introduction

The study of drama in any period provides a vital index as regards the prevalent culture of the age. The assumption is based on the fact that drama being a vibrant medium, it provides a clue as regards the kind of audiences frequenting the theatres, the kind of plays being enacted and the responses of the ruling class and the audiences to it. You have already seen how Elizabethan drama virtually became a national theatre, drawing royalty and groundlings alike. You have also read how after Shakespeare and the likes of Ben Jonson, dramaturgy took a downward slide till finally theatres came to be closed down under Puritan injunctions in 1642. The Restoration, which marked the Neo-Classical Age, was, as you have already understood, an era of diminished personal glory and a far cry from the days of Renaissance Humanism. After the re-opening of theatres, what emerged was largely a ‘class drama’ (David Daiches) that was by and large a cultivation of upper class ethos that had no much links with the common man. In this Unit, we shall see the different forms that contemporary drama began to take, and how in a large way, it became a reflection of social mores.

4.10.1 The Restoration and Drama

You have already read about the handful of theatres that were somehow operative in a rather clandestine manner even during the closure years. Things began to change

drastically after the Restoration on all fronts, and the revival of drama too got its share of such dues. John Rhodes, a theatrical figure of the early and mid 17th century was permitted to form a dramatic company. He was connected with the King's Men during the final phase of the development of Renaissance drama, and might have been the 'keeper' of the Cockpit Theatre (you have read about this earlier) during the ban years. In the intervening period between the death of Cromwell and the return of Charles II, when General Monck was in charge, Rhodes obtained a license to open a theatre. He leased and refurbished the old Cockpit Theatre, gathered a troupe of young actors, and began to stage plays. His 1660 production of Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* was the first Shakespearean revival of the new era.

On assuming the throne, King Charles II issued patents to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, granting them the monopoly right to form two London theatre companies to perform "serious" drama. The letters patent were reissued in 1662 with revisions allowing actresses to perform for the first time. Killigrew established his company, the King's Company at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1663; Davenant established his company, the Duke's Company, in Lisle's Tennis Court in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1661, later moving to Dorset Garden in 1671. Killigrew was a privileged servant in the royal household. The plays written were *The Parson's Wedding, Selindra, Pandora, The Siege of Urbin* etc. All of these were however, acted. Davenant had many of his plays staged, like *Love and Honour, The Wits, The Platonick Lovers*. Some older dramas were also refashioned, *Macbeth* for example was altered, *Measure for Measure* was renamed *The Law Against Lovers*. And *Romeo and Juliet* was made into a comedy. Samuel Pepys records how old dramas were revived. He saw the dramas of Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, Shirley staged before 1663. A taste for heroic in drama was evident in *The Siege of Rhodes*. Liking for tragic - comedy was evident in *Love and Honour*. As Puritans could no longer exert any grip on the stage, the writers could now extol monarchy. And lampooning of the Cromwellian regime and his personal life became the trend in many dramatists. For example, in a play like *The Rump*, Tatham boldly lampoons Lambert, Fleetwood, Hewson and other notable personages of the moment.

As the Puritans had almost made theatre-going a taboo, the post-Restoration period naturally saw the court hating the Puritans. The people were already weary with the restrictions imposed by the Cromwellian rule. They thought of it as a "nasty, gloomy, sullen, fanatical government." The Restoration was able to generate a feeling of deliverance from an intolerable religious and moral tyranny. People naturally began to throng the theatre halls once again for pleasure, and the drama of wish-fulfillment (rather than that of a dream world) engendered by the attitude of the Court Wits catered to audience tastes well enough. Interestingly, this drama

continued well into the 18th century, by which time both the French polished court wits and their ideals of social behaviour had by and large disappeared from the social scene.

But the paradox of the beginnings of Restoration Drama lies in the discovery of the citizens that the stage had eventually become a fashionable pastime of courtiers. They saw how there was no restraint in presenting the profligacy and licentiousness on the stage. The theatre was in fact run by ‘gentlemen for gentlemen’. The gallants were crowding the halls more to see the actresses than the plays proper. The Puritan restrictions at least had been conducive to putting a rein on such profligacy of attitudes and attractions. That way, insipid reactions to the prevalent mode of class drama were always there; which later culminated in the rise of the Sentimental Drama. But we shall come to that at a later time.

The position of the playwrights was all the more precarious. They had to write according to the demands of the courtiers and the so-called gentlemen, and present everything to please their patrons. At the same time they also had to show the obligatory commitment to society at large. If the Puritan rule of Cromwell threw the writers out of their profession, the Restoration restricted their freedom of expression, for they had to write according to the demands of the patrons and the fashionable class. In the ultimate analysis therefore, it was the demands of art that were being compromised anywhichways.

The Puritan rulers had once sought decency and discipline in society by keeping the people off the ‘evil’ influence of the stage. In their residual form, they (playwrights) were trying to do the same thing now through the stage. They presented the real situation of the society and made a mild criticism of the same in a satiric tone. They were no Puritans as such, but, paradoxically, the desire for restoring order and good sense to the society was persistently present in them. What the Puritans wanted to do by dispensing with the stage, most of the Restoration writers wanted to attempt through the mechanism of the stage. The undercurrent of the spirit of Puritanism was thus evident in the writers even when the Puritans were dislodged from power at Restoration. If the writers had to face the authority of Puritan rulers, now they searched for the authority of Classical tales to combat the general enthusiasm for sensual and coarse joy. If the Puritans had thought return to Roman catastrophe, the Restoration writers went to French, Greek and Roman Literature to avoid social, moral and intellectual catastrophe. The “liberty of tender conscience” was present among the Puritans and among the Restoration writers as well. If the Puritans made the *Bible* their rule of faith and conduct, the classics held the same position for the writers. And their tendency is more markedly present in Augustan literature of the following age.

In terms of dramatic influence, Ben Jonson was widely accepted, not for the morality component of his plays but for the comic tone and manner. Restoration theatre being a 'half-way' between Elizabethan drama and 19th century theatre, contemporary playwrights took up the aerated and dandified treatment of Jonson's plays that were started by the likes of Beaumont and Fletcher earlier on. The same was being done with plays by the French Moliere and the Spanish Calderone – the morality element and generosity of spirits edited and the humour component worked up to excess.

4.10.2 Salient Features of Restoration Drama

If eighteenth century literature has its greatest literary activity in novel and satire, the Restoration has undoubtedly had it in theatre. We have already discussed how the Puritans had closed the theatres by an Ordinance in 1642. For fourteen years there was no regular performance. Actually the Puritans banned all pleasure, and the Restoration quickly re-initiated it, which, however, suffered the charge of degenerating into licentiousness equally fast. Public festivals were re-established, popular entertainments got royal consent and the theatres were reopened. Coarse voluptuousness and utilitarianism replaced emotional exuberance and enthusiasm. Drama in this period has widely been perceived as the mirror of the society, the national temperament. On the one hand there was the attempt to please the patrons of drama (the courtiers and the aristocrats) by presenting what they expected; on the other, the search for discipline, rationality, and knowledge continued in somewhat subverted forms.

Charles II came from France and the restoration of monarchy and Catholicism took place. Naturally the influence of France on the Restoration theatre has been a much discussed issue. The influence of France on English theatre was quite inevitable for several reasons. First of all, since the fourth decade of the seventeenth century the English and the French coasts had frequent interactions. Many persons were banished to France after the civil war. They saw the essence of monarchical culture there, and on returning to England, they attempted to restore the prestige of French Monarchy to England with the restoration of the Stuart dynasty.

Secondly, many writers of Charles II's reign were exiled to France. They saw and imitated many manners of the French and trends of French Literature, particularly drama. The French influence, after the Restoration, was perceptible in the court, the fashionable circles of the capital and provinces, in fashions and manners of life, in modes of feeling and thinking, in language. Even aesthetic criterion and tastes of the Englishmen were determined by the French examples. So the exiled writers like

Davenant, Waller, Denham brought to England the models, images and rhythms of the French. Corneille, Moliere, Scudery or Quinault, Racine were always followed by the dramatists, both in comedy and tragedy, many an influence of the French dramatists can be discerned. The King also wished that the plays should be written in French manner.

It would, however, be wrong to say that Restoration drama had nothing to do with the native tradition. How is it possible to forget the national tradition which saw about one thousand plays in sixty three years before 1642? Drama had its zenith of glory in the Elizabethan age. But it was weakened by an inward exhaustion with the passage of time. Tragi- comedies by Beaumont and Fletcher show this decadence. Now characters seem to have lost the Shakespearean depth and plots have negatively gained in complications. Love for adventure and heroism spread all over Europe and England was not exempted. The King himself was much responsible as a trend- setter of Restoration drama. He put his courtiers, court ladies, the men of fashion, gallants, men of chivalry in great favour. He liked exploits, hyperbolic language, heroism etc. And dramatists tried to fulfill these likings on the stage. The net result was the birth of comedy of manners and heroic tragedy.

The Restoration theatre/drama was more an output of the King's interest and the likings of the selected audience than the taste of the general public. The scope of drama was narrowed down. And it becomes obvious when Restoration Drama is compared with the Elizabethan drama. There is neither that cosmic and general appeal, nor the participation of the milieu of all classes. Nevertheless the birth of modern stage is attributed to the Restoration period. The modern spirit is also first found in its drama. Actresses were first introduced on the stage. Sceneries were employed. There was the change of platform to picture frame stage. For more on restoration drama and the contemporary stage, you may look up the following websites:

http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/restoration_drama_001.html

dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/1703881.pdf

www2.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/intranet/.../DramaTypesofStages01.htm

However, of greater important than the stage was the new set of audience. For the first time a direct relationship of the actors with the audience was created. The actors and the audience knew each other. This close relationship was further enhanced by the elaborate prologues and epilogues to plays. The dramas were more for acting than reading. Naturally the audience and particularly the patrons were arbiters of dramatic aesthetics. It is said:” The drama's laws the drama's patrons give.” As the

courtiers made the theatre the meeting place, their fondness for licentiousness was included in the dramas. But the citizens who still retained some of the Puritan conventions thought of the theatre as no better than a sore plague, and hence avoided its evil contagion.

Restoration drama was actually meant for the courtiers and their satellites. As the King was much given to nepotism, the actors and artists were all nearest to the court. The result was that drama became a toy in the hands of the courtiers. To satisfy them, the sentiment of the court was reflected in drama. Coarseness and immorality were incorporated to set off the Puritan suppression and restrictions. Pleasure was the chief criterion of popularity of a drama. The greater the pleasure, the better the drama, became the prevalent attitude.

A good result even of this bad aspect of the theatre was that the art of acting was given utmost importance. Without a high standard of acting, a drama could not succeed on the stage. Along with the demand for higher histrionic skills, the demand for new plays was always increasing for the audience wanted more and more to satisfy their carnal desires. To cope with the demand the supply of new plays was uninterrupted. To make the stage a place of greater attraction, the Elizabethan traits of music, dance and song were revived.

Restoration drama thus apparently lagged far behind Elizabethan drama. Still the positive points added to the history of English drama were that the dramatists brought grace, wit, elegance, refinement of dialogue. These are the stuff that Restoration drama can boast of. The writers made a nice synthesis of the native and foreign dramaturgy and produced a drama no less interesting than Restoration non-dramatic prose or poetry.

4.10.3 Restoration Comedy – An Overview

David Daiches rightly finds in Restoration Comedy an illustration of ‘the rise and decline of a deliberately induced pseudo-courtly ideal in England, or at least in London’. One sees in Restoration comedy new types of characters, situations and language after going through Shakespearean and Jonsonian plays. The elements of humour in the former and the ‘humours’ of the latter are now replaced by ‘manners’ and what Lamb calls ‘sports of witty fancy’. Restoration comedy is rightly called the ‘Comedy of Manners’. But the manners refer not to the masses but to a class—the elegant class with all its features, dress, morality, speech and what not. This comedy represents only a part not the whole society. And this society demands drama to represent all the ethos they love—licentiousness, elegance of court life,

absence of any standard of sexual morality, pleasure etc. Some features of this new type of comedy can be discussed for a proper understanding of the genre.

- Concerning theatre and drama the most striking difference between the Elizabethan and the Restoration ages is that **the Elizabethan period had fifteen playhouses, but after 1660 (Restoration), there were only two-** Killegrew's Theatre Royal and Davenant's Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre (Duke's House), owned by courtiers.
- Secondly, **some playwrights were themselves courtiers as we find with Etherege and Wycherley.** They were dramatists by fun and courtiers by profession. They tried to represent the sentiment/ likings of the court only. The inevitable result was the narrowing down of interest and vision. Gone is that concern for all classes of people or audience. A partial or parochial vision gripped the writers' attitude to society and the world. They were to serve the interests of a small aristocratic society, for this society was the arbiter of taste in theatre. David Daiches observes it nicely "Charles set the tone for the court wits, and the court wits set the tone, if not for all the literature of the period ... notably dramatic comedy."
- Third, the **plots of Restoration comedy deal with complications that the age was conversant with.** Not only that, the pattern is followed in play after play. The writers harked back to the French dramatist Moliere for that art of plot construction. The Spanish drama also influenced the writers in the presentation of love of intrigue and incident. This element has already been found in Jonsonian Comedy. The difference between Jonsonian and Restoration comedy lies, inter alia, in the fact that Jonsonian comedy is satirical and didactic, but Restoration Comedy is aristocratic, cynical, gay and witty. Plots are meant for witty discussion of manners. Several common devices of disguise, eavesdropping, forging of letters are found.
- Next, the **characters in Restoration Comedies are largely types.** Moliere no doubt was imitated but the influence of Jonson's 'humour' characters is also evident. Sometimes their names speak about their disposition. If we look at the characters in *The Way of the World*, the names denote their character:
 - Fainall- feigns all
 - Mirabell- admirable and also an admirer of female beauty
 - Petulant- peevish, petulant
 - Witwood- aspires to wit
 - Lady Wishfort- One who aspires for something she cannot possess- a

contraction of 'wish for it'

Millamant- she has a thousand lovers

Marwood- one who mars or harms.

- If we cast a look at most plays we see that Elizabethans or eighteenth century or even twentieth century comedies at times deal with the theme of love. In Restoration comedy however, love is straight-forward lust. It is denuded of its spiritual, mystical, emotional significance. Love is now gallantry, a game rather than an experience, not a passion but a fashionable pastime. If a lover wants to woo a girl, he has to possess grace, wit and elegance. Not only that, the comedies show if love is a game, marriage is a bore! Marriage in fine, checks a gallant from chasing a beautiful girl. Gallants want to be in no bondage which marriage officially imposes. Marriage destroys all variety and deprives the gallant of being a gallant. Reversely the wives understand how the husbands are all kill joys. Naturally, seduction of a lady is an object of gallantry. Elizabethan comedy could never think of a scene like the Bargaining (Proviso) scene in the case of love and marriage as in *The Way of the World*.
- Restoration comedy is called **artificial comedy**. It is because people had forgotten to be natural. The only form they followed was that of manners or the observance of social proprieties. In this respect the representation of immorality on the stage was not at all liked by the middle class. They were rather shocked. Comedy thus was for an artificial class. It led Jeremy Collier to publish his famous Puritan attack *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* in 1798.
- Restoration comedy was **confined to London only**. It made literature metropolitan. The plays praise London as the centre of the best of human culture and detest all that is provincial. The country people are ridiculed as they lack in sophistication. The country wives are dazzled by city gentlemen, and the country husbands face resentment (as in *The Country Wife* by Wycherley). Or in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, the supreme test of Dorimants' love for Harriet is his willingness to follow her into the country- as if the villages of England are all prison houses for Londoners. This feature nicely synchronises with another aspect of Restoration theatre- that there was no theatre activity outside London. To draw more audiences of London to the theatre, the dramatists tried to present the Londoners as the epitome of all that is best in culture and civilization. The survival of the Restoration Drama or dramatists depended on the London audience. The dramatists thus tried to please the restored King, the courtiers, anti- Puritans

and above all the London audience. This way they bade adieu to much that was celebrated in Elizabethan theatre. Paradoxically however, the Restoration theatre preserved a projection to the front of the proscenium onto which the actors and actresses could come to achieve a closer intimacy with the audience. And it was a common feature of Elizabethan theatre.

- Some mention is definitely deserved about the **language of Restoration comedy**. Everything is here well- chiselled. Even love here degenerates or regenerates into an intercourse of witty conversation. Dryden made it clear in his preface to *An Evening's Love* (produced in 1668 and published in 1671) that repartee is the very “soul of conversation” and the greatest grace of comedy. As Restoration comedy was meant for the leisured and clever people, the language was to be polished and witty. Wit is obvious in the use of irony, simile, metaphor etc. The rhetorical devices make the audience think and understand and then decide.
- Last of all, it appears that Restoration comedy by trying to please the King, the courtiers, and the London audience, **made drama a cajoling medium**. But the fact is that the age gifted comedy with grace, wit, elegance, refinement of dialogue that, as Allardyce Nicoll observes, their forefathers never knew.

4.10.4 Writers of Restoration Comedy

You have by now understood that it was Restoration comedy that held the key to dramatic representation of the predominant ethos of the period. Among the prominent playwrights of this genre we must mention William Congreve, William Wycherley, John Vanbrugh, George Farquhar, Thomas Shadwell and of course Dryden.

William Congreve (1670- 1729) is, undoubtedly, the greatest of the Restoration comic playwrights. For understanding the true nature of ‘comedy of manners’, we have to go through his plays (except *The Mourning Bride*). His comedies include *The Old Bachelor* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700), the last of these is included in your syllabus. The plays are marked by a faithful reflection of upper class society, the immorality balanced by artificial wit, cynicism, polish and brilliance. An air of artificiality hovers over all his comedies. The plots are carefully contrived but lack the naturalness of Shakespeare. Congreve’s style is inimitable. His language is well adapted to character and situation. This would explain why Foible would not speak the cultured language of Millamant in *The Way of the World*. Every page of Congreve’s plays is full of brilliant conceits, paradoxes, and antitheses that have an abiding appeal to the audience. In many ways, Congreve’s plays are seen to prefigure those of Oscar Wilde.

William Wycherley (1640-1715) wrote *Love in a wood* (1671), *The Gentleman Dancing Master* (1672), *The Country Wife* (1674), and *The Plain Dealer* (1676). His contemporaries called his plays “manly”. It is perhaps because every person in his plays is a fool and every clever man is a rogue. Still he contributes to Restoration comedy by his wit and presentation of the follies of man.

George Etherege (1635- 91), a courtier, wrote his plays: *The Comical Revenge* or *Love in a Tub* (1664), *She Wou’d if She Cou’d* (1668) and *The Man of Mode* (1676). Etherege precedes Congreve. His plots lack the symmetry of Congreve. But he paints upper class with all realism and sincerity.

George Vanbrugh (1664- 1726), wrote such plays as *The Relapse* (1696), *The Provok’d Wife* (1697) , *The Confederacy* (1705). In his personal life he was a soldier, a herald and an architect. His architectonic skill is betrayed in his joy to construct a play of solid workmanship. He is fond of farce and is good at caricature.

George Farquhar (1678- 1707) died at an early age, just twenty nine years. He wrote seven plays, the best of which are his last two- *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (1707). He brought a change to Restoration by (i) taking his material from beyond the upper classes, (ii) making the characters ordinary people who conversed in normal tones (iii) showed a growing respect for moral standards, and (iv) exhibited some traits that look forward to the sentimental comedies by Steele. Hence there is a unique mixture of laughter and tears in his comedies.

Thomas Shadwell (1642- 92) has been immortalized in a passage of *MacFlecknoe* by Dryden. He followed Ben Jonson more than Congreve. He wrote many plays for many years, the important ones are *The Sullen Lovers* (1608), *The Squire of Alcatia* (1688), *Bury Fair* (1689). His plots are well constructed on everyday life. Like Farquhar, he avoids the artificial world. His wit is also real. Like Farquhar, he also prepares the ground for sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century.

As far as Dryden, the versatile talent of the period is concerned, he does not show much brilliance, in comedy. In 1663, *The Wild Gallant* appeared, but proved to be a play of mediocre merit. It showed that Dryden was not at all a promising comic playwright. Even in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, he declared that he was incapable of achieving any much success in the dramatic art himself. Dryden’s plays like *The Spanish Friar* (1681) and *Marriage a- la- Mode* (1673) are basically tragi-comedies. The latter contains double intrigue in contrasting plots, and some of Dryden’s finest songs. *Amphitryon* was produced in 1690. It was adapted from the comedies of Plautus and Moliere on the same subject. It represents the story of

Jupiter's seduction of Alemena in the guise of her husband Amphitryon. *Mr. Limberham* was produced in 1679, but it was banned by royal decree after three performances. It was perhaps because the play attacked the patriarchal mindset of a sexually corrupt royal court and the blind hedonism of the nobility. *Sir Martin Mar All* (1667) was adapted from *Etourdi* of Moliere. *The Assassination* or *Love in a Nunnery* appeared in 1672. Dryden's comedies display a more marked freedom of tone than in his tragedies. He avoids farcical situations. And his dialogue has brilliance and grace.

In conclusion we might say that Restoration Comedy was the predominant theatrical mode no doubt, but many of its traits recur in sentimental comedy, anti-sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century. Even Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde could not avoid its influence.

4.10.5 Restoration Tragedy

The superficiality of the Restoration Age is largely reflected in its comedy, hence it is mostly artificial in tone and metropolitan in manner, as befitted the period. Having read in detail about the Age, you must be convinced that there was no scope as such of any heroic ideals to persist, yet the Tragedy of the period tried to inculcate certain pseudo-heroic traits. The result is that a similar kind of artificiality is present in most of the tragedies of the period.

The age introduces heroic tragedy into English drama. This form was introduced by Davenant and popularised by Dryden who stated that an "heroick play ought to be an imitation of an heroic poem; and consequently that love and honour ought to be the subject of it."

By its very nature the Restoration Age was the most unheroic age. Naturally its conception of heroism was artificial and inflated. The synthesis of heroic poem and tragedy made it a mongrel kind and could please neither their audience nor the modern readers. It was actually far away from social and real life.

Now we might consider some of the influences on the Restoration heroic tragedy to understand the worth of these generalized comments made earlier.

The influence of Beaumont and Fletcher's 'romantic dramas' of which you have read earlier, the tradition of violent deeds seen in the works of Webster, Marston and Ford constitute the native element of the so-called heroic influence.

Like Restoration Comedy, heroic tragedy also owes much to France. French romance and French tragedy of the reign of Louis XIV and particularly the dramaturgy

of Racine made the English writers seek models in them. There were translation, and adaptations galore of the French plays. Along with France the melodramas of Italy also constituted a major foreign influence. In the French romances an unreal world is shown to be at the heart of the web of intrigues. The heroes are drawn in a grand scale and the tone is rather high. Davenant, Dryden and Orrey- the three founders of heroic tragedy took materials of the plots from these romances.

Some of the prominent features of heroic tragedy can now be summed up on the following lines:

- **Love and honour** constitute the mainspring of heroic tragedy. It is an idealistic love, removed from reality. And the **heroism of heroic tragedy lacks grandeur**. The heroes fail to arouse our wonder and admiration. Moreover all the heroes seem to be made up of the same stuff, a fatal resemblance among them, leading to some monotony.
- There is an **extravagance of action**. And Dryden defends it in his *Essay on Heroic Plays* in the Preface to *Conquest of Granada*: “an heroic poet is not tied to bare representation of what is true, or ... probable; ... but he might let himself loose to visionary objects, and to the representation of such things ... may give him a freer scope for imagination.”
- **In characterization there is lack of variety**. The writers try to hood this failure by incidents, plot and material devices- exoticism, staging, machines etc.
- The **sentiment and style attain a height beyond the mediocrity of human life**. And naturally there is much rant and bombast.
- **Rhyme is the chosen medium**. In the period 1664-67 about fifty three rhymed heroic plays were written in sonorous style and rhetorical abundance. You can pretty well imagine how painstaking such a huge number of similar pieces of monotony would have been!

We might now mention some of the notable writers of heroic tragedy.

Dryden wrote *Indian Queen* (staged 1663), *Indian Emperor* (1665), *Tyrannick Love* (1669), *The Conquest of Granada*, *Aurangzebe* (1675). The plays are marked by intricate plot, heroic sensations bordering on the absurd numerous scenes of battle and murder and all of it in rhymed couplets. The lyrics in the plays, it must however be mentioned, did have charm and variety.

Roger Boyle, first Earl of Orrey (1621- 79) wrote *Henry V*, *The General*, *The Black Prince Mustapha*, *Typhon*, *Herod the Great* and the unpublished *Zeroastres*. Of these *Henry V* and *The Black Prince* are in the tradition of the

native chronicle play. The other plays have an unreal romantic world. The influence of Corneille is evident in many characters and scenes. On the whole, Boyle is remembered for his presentation of conflicts and a language which is refined.

Thomas Otway (1651- 85) wrote *Alcibiades* (1675), *Don Carlos* (1676), *The Orphan* (1680), *Venice Preserved* (1682). *The Orphan* is a pathetic tragedy. *Venice Preserved* is not actually a heroic tragedy. It is a real tragic work in so far as its construction, characterisation and blank verse are concerned.

Nathaniel Lee (1653- 92) wrote *The Rival Queens* (1677), *Nero* (1674) and other plays. He has less artistic control and his rant often reaches a frenzied climax. But it must be admitted that he has a command over pathos.

Elkanah Settle (1648- 1724) wrote *Cambyses; King of Persia and Emperor of Morocco* (1673) to mention his most notable works. Dryden along with Crowne and Shadwell wrote a pamphlet of criticism of the last play. *Cambyses* has prison scenes, scenes of horror, supernatural elements, outlandish countries depicted and catalogue of names.

John Crowne (1640- 73) wrote the heroic plays *Caligula* (1698), *The History of Charles the Eighth of France*, or, *The Invasion of Naples by the French*, and *The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titas Vespasion*. The plays are mostly artificial and dull.

We should also mention the names of Nicholas Rowe, Mrs. Aphra Benn, D'Urfey, Pordage etc in this connection. Whoever might be the writer, the general impression about heroic tragedy is that here everything is preposterous. Naturally it had a very short longevity, dying a natural death in about 1677. Not only that, we see how the heroic drama's superhuman love and honour came to be satirised in James Buckingham's (1786- 1855) *Rehearsal* (1872 printed). He attacks both Davenant and Dryden in this farcical comedy. Later on Fielding also satirizes it in *Tom Thumb* (1730). It was a farce that ridiculed the bombastic greatness of heroic tragedies. In 1731 it was published in a different version under the title of *The Tragedy of Tragedies*.

4.10.6 Some other Types of Contemporary Drama

There were also some other types of drama besides 'comedy of manners' and 'heroic tragedy'. **Otway's** *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserved* have already been mentioned. The most important of such plays is **Dryden's** *All for Love* or *The World Well Lost* (1678). It is a blank verse tragedy, an imitation of Shakespeare's

Antony and Cleopatra. It is Dryden's most performed and best known play. It is an exemplary neo-classical tragedy which is notable for an elaborate formal presentation of character, action and theme. **Thomas Southern** (1659- 1746) wrote ***The Fatal Marriage*** (1694) and ***Oroonoko*** (1695), both founded on novels by Aphra Behn (1640 -89). **Mrs Behn** also wrote some plays as ***Forced Marriage*** (1670), followed by some fourteen others. There were also some serious plays like ***The Villain*** by Thomas Porter, ***The Fatal Jealousie*** by Nevil Payne, tragi-comedies like Mrs. Behn's ***The Dutch Lover*** or Sir William Killigrew's ***Selindra***.

4.10.7 Summing Up

We can safely conclude that neither Restoration Comedy nor Heroic Tragedy of the age went without criticism. None of the two could come close to the expectation levels of an audience that had a history of Elizabethan drama. But then, it must also be remembered that to equal the preceding era was not the avowed purpose of dramaturgy in the Restoration at all. Excess of polish and wit in comedy, rapacious grandeur and bombast in tragedy made both genres something alien to the native temperament. Still the Restoration of Charles II was also, historically speaking, the restoration of drama. And the dramatists, in this respect, deserve due recognition. Out of the excesses of contemporary drama would emerge much refinement in the ages to come. In that sense, Restoration Drama might as well be seen as an interregnum (virtual) in the history of British drama.

4.10.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Types

1. Write a brief essay on the impact of Puritanism on the seventeenth century drama.
2. How did the Restoration stage become a reflection of the Age? Analyse in retrospect the Puritan ban on the theatre.
3. Bring out the salient features of Restoration Comedy by referring in particular to the works of any two major dramatists.

Medium Length Answers

1. Why would you consider Heroic Tragedy no less an artificial picture of the Age than Restoration Comedy?
2. Assess the contributions of Dryden and Congreve in their respective spheres

of Restoration drama.

3. What in your opinion are the salient features of Restoration drama? Would you consider it a truly national theatre?

Short Answer Types (6 marks)

1. Why do you think was the position of Restoration playwrights precarious? How did they try to strike a balance?
2. Mention in detail some of the continental influences that affected Restoration drama.
3. Write a brief note on other types of contemporary drama in Restoration England.

4.10.9 Suggested Reading List

- Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*.
Cruttwell, Patrick. *The Shakespearean Moment*
Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*
Dobree, Bonamy. *Restoration Comedy*
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UNIT 11 □ Puritanism and the English Stage

Structure

4.11.0 Introduction

4.11.1 Understanding Puritanism

4.11.2 Puritan View of Culture

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4.11.0 Introduction

You have seen for yourselves in the previous Units that the period we are studying was a complex one from the perspectives of politics and society and its resultant implications on culture. In understanding the convoluted polity of the period you have also understood by now that the role of religion has always been an important factor. In this Unit, we shall introduce you to Puritanism, a religious reform movement that arose in the late 16th and early 17th centuries and has had a varying degree of influence on manifestations in culture in general and literature in particular. We had earlier kept apart our discussion on drama that will also be studied here in the light of the influence of Puritanism and the contemporary socio-cultural scene.

4.11.1 Understanding Puritanism

The terms ‘Puritan’ and ‘Puritanism’ have their origin in the 1560s. At its simplest, Puritanism was a religious reform movement in the late 16th and 17th centuries that sought to “purify” the Church of England of remnants of the Roman Catholic “popery” (disparagingly used to refer to the over-arching role of the Pope in Catholic Christianity) that the Puritans claimed had been retained after the religious settlement reached early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Puritans became noted in the 17th century for a spirit of moral and religious earnestness that informed their whole way of life, and they sought through church reform to make their lifestyle the

pattern for the whole nation. Their efforts to transform the nation contributed both to civil war in England and to the founding of colonies in America as working models of the Puritan way of life.

Needless to say, they were a group of people who were on unhappy terms in the religious and social spheres in contemporary England, which however had by then embraced Protestantism and the Anglican Church (Church of England) had been founded. In that sense, Puritanism could be seen as a more radical movement that was felt necessary after the **Reformation**. Puritanism in this sense was founded by John Calvin from the clergy shortly after the accession of Elizabeth I of England in 1558, as an activist movement within the Church of England. The Puritans, as stated earlier, were a group who had started a movement within English Protestantism in both the British Isles and the colonial America. Some even date it back to the activities of William Tyndale (1495- 1536).

The major impact of the movement was felt in the period between 1558 – 1658, that is, from the reign of Queen Elizabeth to the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. The Puritans were insistent on ‘purity’ of doctrine and ritual. In practice it meant purity from the corruption of both Canterbury and Rome. Their basic efforts were aimed at purging out Catholic elements (in spirit) of the Anglican Church, rather than to set up a rival church. An even more intense and astute Reformation was their sole object, though they had no independent identity. They thought of themselves as alien to their non- Puritan brothers. The Puritan theology comprised of righteousness and sovereignty of God. They thought that they were the chosen people to create the New Jerusalem and bring around the millennium.

Puritanism may be defined primarily by the intensity of the religious experience that it fostered. Puritans believed that it was necessary to be in a covenant (a formal and serious agreement or promise) relationship with God in order to redeem one from one’s sinful condition. They further held that God had chosen to reveal salvation through preaching, and that the Holy Spirit was the energising instrument of salvation. Calvinist theology and polity proved to be major influences in the formation of Puritan teachings. This naturally led to the rejection of much that was characteristic of Anglican ritual at the time, these being viewed as “popish idolatry.” In its place the Puritans emphasized preaching that drew on images from scripture and from everyday experience. Still, because of the importance of preaching, the Puritans placed a premium on a **learned ministry**. The moral and religious earnestness that was characteristic of Puritans was combined with the doctrine of predestination inherited from Calvinism to produce a “covenant theology,” a sense of themselves as elect spirits chosen by God to live godly lives both as individuals and as a community.

You will definitely get a hint from this that such radical views about religion were bound to have implications on politics. We take you a little back in time to the Elizabethan period to understand the root of this.

King Henry VIII you know, had separated the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534, and the cause of Protestantism advanced rapidly under Edward VI (reigned 1547–53). During the reign of Queen Mary (1553–58), however, England returned to Roman Catholicism, and many Protestants were forced into exile. Many of the exiles found their way to Geneva, where John Calvin’s church provided a working model of a disciplined church. Out of this experience also came the two most popular books of Elizabethan England—the Geneva Bible and John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*—which provided justification to English Protestants to view England as an elect nation chosen by God to complete the work of the Reformation. Thus, Elizabeth’s accession in 1558 was enthusiastically welcomed by these Protestants; but her early actions while reestablishing Protestantism disappointed those who sought extensive reform, and this faction was unable to achieve its objectives in the Convocation, the primary governing body of the Church.

Many of these Puritans—as they came to be known during a controversy over vestments (the Vesterian Controversy dealt with the question of whether clerical vestments—declared to be “popish” by some—were theologically important) in the 1560s and ‘70’s — sought parliamentary support for an effort to institute a Presbyterian (Calvinist theory of church governance whereby Christ is the only head and all members are equal under him) form of polity for the Church of England. This naturally caused resentment amongst the ranks of the clergy. Other Puritans, concerned with the long delay in reform, decided upon a “reformation without tarrying for any.” These “Separatists” repudiated the state church and formed voluntary congregations based on a covenant with God and among themselves. Both groups, but especially the Separatists, were repressed by the establishment. Denied the opportunity to reform the established church, English Puritanism turned to preaching, pamphlets, and a variety of experiments in religious expression and in social behaviour and organisation. Its successful growth also owed much to patrons among the nobility and in Parliament and its control of colleges and professorships at Oxford and Cambridge.

Puritan hopes were again raised when the Calvinist James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth as James I of England in 1603, thereby ushering in what is known as the Jacobean period. But at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 he dismissed the Puritans’ grievances with the phrase “**no bishop, no king**”. To James I Puritans were a sect rather than a religion. They were the people, as Trevelyan writes, “who wished either to purify the usage of property, or to worship separately

by forms to be ‘purified.’” The Puritans thus remained under pressure. Some were deprived of their positions; others got by with minimal conformity; and still others, who could not accept compromise, fled England.

The pressure for conformity increased under Charles I (1625–49) and his archbishop, William Laud. Nevertheless, the Puritan spirit continued to spread, and when civil war broke out between Parliament and Charles I in the 1640s, Puritans seized the opportunity to urge Parliament and the nation to renew its covenant with God. Parliament called together a body of clergy to advise it on the government of the church. But this body—the Westminster Assembly - was so badly divided that it failed to achieve reform of church government and discipline. Meanwhile, the New Model Army, which had defeated the royalist forces, feared that the Assembly and Parliament would reach a compromise with King Charles that would destroy their gains for Puritanism, so it seized power and turned it over to its hero, Oliver Cromwell. The religious settlement under Cromwell’s Commonwealth allowed for a limited pluralism that favoured the Puritans. A number of radical Puritan groups appeared, including the Levelers, the Diggers, the Fifth Monarchy Men, and the Quakers (the only one of lasting significance).

After Cromwell’s death in 1658, conservative Puritans supported the restoration of King Charles II and a modified episcopal (relating to a bishop or to bishops as a group) polity. However, they were outdone by those who reinstated Laud’s strict episcopal pattern. Thus, English Puritanism entered a period known as the Great Persecution. English Puritans made a final unsuccessful attempt to secure their ideal of a comprehensive church during the Glorious Revolution, but England’s religious solution was defined in 1689 by the Toleration Act, which continued the established church as episcopal but also tolerated dissenting groups.

The Puritan ideal of realizing the Holy Commonwealth by the establishment of a covenanted community was carried to the American colony of Virginia by Thomas Dale, but the greatest opportunity came in New England. The original pattern of church organization in the Massachusetts Bay colony was a “middle way” between Presbyterianism and Separatism, yet in 1648 four New England Puritan colonies jointly adopted the Cambridge Platform, establishing a congregational form of church government. The hounded-out Puritans from England who migrated there, came to have a firm control on socio-cultural ethos. They rejected all that was associated with the Church of Rome. They discarded all that were adjuncts to the Catholic and the Anglican faiths, like music, incense, rich vestments, etc. Faith, Reason and Logic replaced the sensuous appeals of worship. All that was detrimental to concentration was rejected. Hence sensuous imageries in literary compositions were an anathema.

The Bible to them was the highest form of literature. Naturally, by accepting the Bible as the guide and guardian, the writers were least concerned with the literary tradition which had so far made an alchemy of religious and secular aspects of culture and civilization. It was thus an insularity of approach to literature and life. Individual freedom of thought and expression was affected to the worst. Religion/Puritanism controlled law also, as shown by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*, which, in fact, is a satire on Puritanism. While this was the situation in America, mainland England however, could never again become the preserve of Puritanism. Yet, the Puritan influence during the Commonwealth became a factor to reckon with, both in politics and culture, as we shall now see.

4.11.2 Puritan View of Culture

As with our understanding of the Puritan movement that began in England and gradually petered out to America, any attempt at understanding the cultural milieu they brought in should factor a historical perspective. We need to remember that these Bible believing Christians and their Evangelical spiritual movement dates back to the time when the English Bible was being smuggled into England, thereby giving rise to Biblical Christianity and the English Reformation! With time however and with the coming of new mores, their position did decline, so much so that in his *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, John Dryden calls the Puritans a “**barbarous race of men**”.

The question before us is, how and in what ways did the Puritan view of culture affect the course of English literature?

For one, the Puritans were a people who caused others sit up and listen. They were bound and determined to make an impact in their generation. Their dreams and their goals were both individual and national. They were quite vociferous in the way they engaged with the challenges of their time. The Puritans were inclined to express their opinion quite forcefully, even to the point of straining the social constraints of a rigid monarchical English society. This would cause them, and the mother country, some significant pains of travail. In their time, the Puritans were considered a formidable force in the socio- cultural sphere. They condemned not the drink, but the drunkard, they condemned not the sex but extramarital sex. They told about a unique life style. Hence there was a strong opposition to all the Italianate influences that were pervasive in England; just as their condemnation of the theatre as a place that fostered vice was very strong. It must be understood that more than the plays themselves, they were against the ways in which play-houses had turned into places of depravity and licentiousness. We shall learn more about this in the next sub-section. In all, the humanist spirit that pervaded the Elizabethan Age was

randomly curbed under Puritan influence. The scenario however changed dramatically once the Puritans went out of favour with the Restoration in 1660.

Was Puritanism pervasive in contemporary English Culture?

Even as you read the history of Puritan England, here is some food for thought that you may like to discuss as students of Literature:

The two great poets of Puritanism in England – Milton and Marvell could neither totally adhere to, nor ignore the existing literary tradition. In *Paradise Lost* Milton mingles religious and secular aspects though his motto of ‘justify(ing) the ways of God to men’. His adventure lies in treating a Biblical theme in a pagan genre, and subtly incorporating contemporary politics. Thus Satan becomes Cromwell whose Latin Secretary Milton himself was. And his style too smacks of both religious and secular aspects. The base is the Bible but the superstructure is Pagan/Classical. Milton’s Renaissance humanism thus gets the better of his Puritan upbringing, failing which *Paradise Lost* would suffer the fate of a book of liturgy.

Andrew Marvell, another Puritan poet, also, Like Milton, could not disregard the national tradition of poetry and classical/Latin poetry as well. Marvell’s *The Garden* in a Puritan’s appeal to all to love nature which is the manifestation of God and also a most congenial place for meditation. But many lines show a Spenserian sensuousness and symbolic connotation which a Puritan would not ratify. He re-interprets *The Bible* as to how Eve destroyed Adam’s perfect freedom and heavenly bliss. The purification of the soul thus happens not through *The Bible*, nor Puritanism, but by association with the garden. Here he deviates from Puritanism.

Even Bunyan was castigated by many for using an allegorical fictional style in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

With help from your counselor, try to analyse these contra-indicatory trends in contemporary literature and how these reflected upon the culture of the period.

4.11.3 Puritanism and The English Stage

The English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the worst enemies of English drama. The logic of the Puritans was both religious and social. The causes of the Puritan enmity the drama/stage can be enumerated thus:

- ✓ First of all, in *The Book of Deuteronomy*, Moses spoke to the Israelites,

“The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.” (*The Old Testament*).

And the Puritans saw how the English stage was encouraging and cheering the male actors dressed up as women, and women as dressed up as men. It was sharp violation of the Biblical injunction, and they looked upon this cross-dressing as inimical both to religion and the moral code..

- ✓ Secondly, the dramas were full of bawdy and blasphemy. Both pre marital and post marital love were given dramatic representation and the audience relished both, without any qualms. Here again, the Bible is the guide of the Puritans, and they did not take such violation kindly:

“If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman...”

- ✓ Thirdly, the theatres attracted lewd women and apprentices. They increased the danger of plague and lessened the scope of profit and salvation.

In his *History of England*, Macaulay gives a picture of the Puritans of early 17th Century, which corroborates with the cause of general apathy and angst of the Puritans in relation to the stage:

“It was sin...to drink a friend’s health, to hawk, to hunt a stag, to play at chess...to read the Fairy Queen...the fine arts were all proscribed.”

- ✓ Fourth, Henri Fluchere wrote in *Shakespeare and the Elizabethans*, “...Puritans had a horror of beauty, sensuousness and sensuality. The stage appeared to them a school of corruption and lies, a vast industry of debauchery, an ever- increasingly degenerate activity...”
- ✓ Fifth, many plays were staged on Sundays. And the playhouses drew away people from Sermons. It was a grave threat to the existence of religion, and the stage was doing all that was beyond religion.
- ✓ Last of all, the players were hated by the Puritans for another reason. The actors were regarded as superfluous sort of men. In their view, an actor might be a vagabond or a rogue, but evading legal hassles he was growing rich at the cost of the simple poor. He flaunted to be a gentleman with dresses costly and extravagant. Neither public nor the puritan eye could take these pleasure- seeking sections patronisingly.

For a long time the pulpit and the stage were looked upon as rivals. The Puritan preacher would brook no much rivalry. A play cannot be a match for a sermon, nor could it be allowed to create any trouble in matters sermonic – that was the viewpoint. It was rather taught by the preachers that the players on the stage would incur God’s wrath. It was even argued that the annual plague in London was the effect of sin, and the causes of the sin were players. It therefore stood to reason that the cause of the plagues were players. The Puritans continued this belief and expected the people to follow them. They, however, had about hundred and seventy sects. It must be noted that not all of them were equally averse to pleasure and amusement.

4.11.4 Brief History Of Puritan Condemnation Of Drama/Stage

The ordinance of September 2, 1642 is generally held to be the culmination of a protracted effort of the Puritans to ban drama. Or, rather reversely, dramatists/players after a prolonged struggle for survival finally gave in to the Puritans. The history of the efforts to stop performances of the dramas had started much earlier to 1642.

Roger Ascham was no Puritan. But he made his vehement outbursts against the popular Romances of the day. The tone of his invectives is akin to that of the Crusaders against plays which were dramatised versions of these romances. Then there was Witham Alley, Bishop of Exeter, who condemned the “Wanton Books” in *The Poore Man’s Librarie* (1565). He was the first man in England to write against the stage. He cited the case of the City of Marseilles that did not allow any player to live within its territory for the sake of gravity. The contention was that plays are killers of soberness and sanctity of a place and a people. The writers of London harped on this example to bring home their point of condemnation of the stage. The third writer was Lewis Wager. In his Prologue to *Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene* (1566), he defended his case as a dramatist. Efforts were there to suppress plays by bishop, preacher and mayor. London thus became an arena of the struggle between Puritan and player.

But the likes of Lodge and Heywood tried their best to defend plays. Lodge’s *A Defence of Stage Plays* (1579-80) was against Gosson’s *Schoole of Abuse* (1579). Heywood must have studied Lodge’s tract before writing *An Apology for Actors* (1612). Heywood argues that The *New Testament* has no such passage to show that drama is a profane art. Moreover he was of the opinion that drama can well serve

as a moral tonic and work decisively on a guilty conscience. He attempts to challenge the Puritans by referring to the *Bible*. In 1615 John Greene upheld the Puritan stand through *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* and answers all the defensive points of Heywood. Overbury's *Characters* (1614) contains this Puritan- player controversy of the time. In 1616 the writer of *The Rich Cabnit furnished with a varietie of exquisite Discriptions* shows the excellent qualities an actor has to possess - dancing, song, elocution, wit etc. Nathaniel Field, actor and playwright, defended stage acting against the Puritan attacks. By a careful study of the *Bible* he learnt that no trade of life except "conjurers, sorcerers, and witches, ipso facts, are damned". He wrote the quoted words to a certain "Mr. Sutton, preacher att St Mary Overs." In 1625 an anonymous Puritan wrote a petition to the Parliament, entitling it *A Short Treatise Against Stage Players*. It was an attempt to show how drama was the monster of vice and all sensuality.

William Prynne (1600-69) the pamphleteer and the writer of *Histrionomastix* (1632) deserves special mention in connection with the Puritan attack on the stage. It is a book of eleven hundred pages, summing up, as it were, the Puritan stand against drama as a whole. He went to the extreme by calling some French actresses "notorious whores", who were all Queen's persons. The result was that he was condemned to stand in the pillory, pay penalty, lose both ears, and get perpetually imprisoned. He was also to lose his Oxford degree and was expelled from Lincoln's Inn. His life sentence was afterwards cancelled by parliament. Prynne's objective was to suppress stage acting, though the royalty of his time was favouring drama. The fact is that drama before suppression in 1642 was in a prosperous condition, and it is evident from a tract named *The Stage- Players Complaint* (1641), which is an anonymous work.

The 1642 Ordinance was for full suppression of Stage plays. It brought to a close the glorious tradition and triumph of drama in the reign of Elizabeth and her two successors. Despite a long struggle for existence against the Puritans for three quarters of a century, the players and writers made themselves a laughing- stock as it was to the puritans that victory finally fell. By this ordinance the demolition of all play houses was decreed. All actors were seized and whipped. Every audience attending a drama was liable to a fine of five shillings. The two straight ordinances of the parliament in 1647 and 1648 created a fear psychosis among the writers, actors and audience. These ordinances, however, saw some protests in the form of two tracts: *The Actors Remonstrance* (1643), and *The Players Petition to the Parliament* (a piece of satirical verse). There was another book *Mr William Prynne, his Defence of stage- players* (1649).

The Puritan attack on the stage was not for reforming the theatre, but for abolishing it. To the puritans the stage served no ethical or moral function. It was rather posing a threat to all that was salubrious to mental, moral and spiritual health. Dramatists like Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nashe and John Heywood- on the other hand- regarded drama as an engine for moral instruction. They advocated for a synthesis of art and ethics. But their advocacy frittered away before the power of the Commonwealth and the tensions of the Civil War.

Did drama then die in full during Oliver Cromwell's rule?

So far as Foucault's theory of power is concerned, every power has its resistant power, otherwise autocracy or fascism would never change. During Cromwell's rule, drama pulsed in noblemen's houses, "Drolls" or farces or humorous scenes adapted from plays and stages were enacted, e.g. '**Merry conceits of Bottom the Weaver**' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; '**The Grave Diggers' Colloquy**' from *Hamlet*; '**Falstaff, the Bouncing Knight**' from *Henry IV* and so on.

Rules banning the stage were however beginning to be relaxed towards the close of Cromwell's rule. William Davenant was allowed to stage his *Siege of Rhodes*. Part 1 of *The Siege of Rhodes* was first performed in a small private theatre constructed at Davenant's home Rutland House in 1656. Special permission had to be obtained from the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell by calling the production "recitative music", music being still permissible within the law. When it was published in 1656, it was under the equivocating title *The siege of Rhodes made a representation by the art of perspective in scenes, and the story sung in recitative musick, at the back part of Rutland-House in the upper end of Aldersgate-Street, London*. The 1659 reprinting gives the location at the Cockpit in Drury Lane, a well-known theatre frequented by Samuel Pepys after the Restoration (1660). The Rutland House production also included England's first professional actress, Mrs. Coleman. Davenant went on to open the Cockpit theatre in Drury Lane, and produced two similar operas *The Cruelty of a Spaniard in Peru* and *The History of Francis Drake*.

4.11.5 From The Puritan Ban On Playhouses To The Resurgence Of Drama

You have by now formed a fair idea of the cross-currents that pervaded the cultural scene in general and the theatre in particular under Puritan influence. It would be interesting to cast a look at the events that surrounded the closure of

playhouses in 1642, what followed, and how the resurgence of drama came about with the Restoration of monarchy.

In 1622 there were but four principal companies—the King’s, which acted at the Blackfriars and the Globe; the Prince’s, at the Curtain; the Palgrave’s, at the Fortune; the Queen of Bohemia’s, at the Cockpit. The year 1629 was significant in dramatic history; it being the first year in which a female performer was seen in the English theater. The innovation was introduced by a French company, but the women were hissed and booed off the stage. This was at the new theater just opened in Salisbury Court. Three weeks afterwards they made a second attempt, but the audience would not tolerate them. King Charles and his Queen had a great love for dramatic entertainments; the latter frequently took part in the Court Masques, which brought down upon her the brutal language of that canting fellow Prynne. Yet in 1635 Sir Henry Herbert, the Master of the Revels, under whose jurisdiction all theatrical affairs were then placed, mentions only the King’s company under Lowin and Taylor at Blackfriars, the Queens under Beeston at the Cockpit, the Prince’s under Moore and Kane at the Fortune; in the next year he adds a fourth, doubtless Salisbury Court, to the list, which house was probably closed on the previous date.

On the 6th of September, 1642, the theaters were closed by ordinance, it being considered not seemly to indulge in any kind of diversions or amusements in such troubled times as the political turbulence indicated. In 1647 another and more imperative order was issued, in consequence of certain infractions of the previous one, threatening to imprison and punish as rogues all who broke its enactments. Close upon the heels of this second came a third, which declared all players to be rogues and vagabonds, and authorized the justices of the peace to demolish all stage galleries and seats; any actor discovered in the exercise of his vocation should for the first offense be whipped, for the second be treated as an incorrigible rogue, and every person found witnessing the performance of a stage play should be fined five shillings, as has been mentioned earlier. Verily, the reign of Praise-God Barebones had commenced. But not even these stringent regulations were found sufficient, and in the next year a Provost-Marshal was appointed, whose duty it was to seize all ballad singers and suppress all stage-plays. It is mentioned in *Whitelocke’s Memorials*, that on the 20th of December, 1649, some stage players were seized by troopers at the Red Bull, their clothes taken away, and they were carried off to prison.

As you have read earlier, towards the end of Cromwell’s period in 1658, this paranoia began to wane and with Davenant, theatrical acting began to resurface. Two years later came the Restoration, and a new order of things dramatic. Theaters began to revive, and plays were openly performed at the Red Bull, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, and the theater in Salisbury Court. The flamboyant Charles II was a huge patron of theatre and helped breathe new life into British drama. A **patent** was

even issued for two new theatre companies, and these were allowed to organise ‘serious’ drama. Led by William Davenant, **The Duke’s Men** was for younger performers, while older, more experienced actors were in **The King’s Company**, led by Thomas Killigrew. While the two companies created new opportunities theatrically, their monopoly on performances hampered the growth of British theatre. Soon further letters patent were granted to theatres in other English towns and cities, including the Theatre Royal, Bath in 1768, the Theatre Royal, Liverpool in 1772, and the Theatre Royal, Bristol in 1778. The theatres that were not patented had to be satisfied with showing only comedy, pantomime and melodrama. These monopolies on the performance of “serious” plays were eventually revoked by the Theatres Act 1843, but censorship of the content of plays by the Lord Chamberlain under Robert Walpole’s Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 continued until 1968.

Many scenic innovations developed during the Restoration. One of the most innovative and influential designers of the 18th century was Philip Jacques de Louthembourg. He was the first designer to break up floor space with pieces of scenery, giving more depth and dimension to the stage. Other designers experimented with lighting by using candles and large chandeliers which hung over the floor of the stage. Actors began to get paid on how popular they were, and they usually played the same type of roles; for instance, tragic actors always played tragic roles. The female was known as the ingenue and the male came to be known as the juvenile. Playwrights got the proceeds from the third night’s performance and also the sixth night’s performance, but only for the original run of the show. Pantomimes would also be performed before and after a play.

On the thematic front Restoration theatre became a way to celebrate the end of Puritan rule, with its strict moral codes. To celebrate the opening of the theatres Restoration plays were lavish, often immoral by Puritan standards, and poked fun at both royalists and roundheads. The lightheartedness of the plays reflected a society recovering from years of division and unrest. Although the audience enjoyed tragedies, comedies were the hallmark of Restoration plays. Classics such as Romeo and Juliet were rewritten and given a happy ending! The theatre that re-emerged was however no longer national in character; there was the pervasive presence of French playwrights like Corneille, Racine and Moliere, and also Spanish tales and plays as were already popular on the continent. The age was not one of heroism, and this was naturally reflected in the parody of heroic drama that was produced. As corollary to this, comedy that inculcated the manners of restoration England became the widespread mode. You will learn more about this revived dramaturgy in Module 4 Unit 1. Though for thematic reasons, drama after the Puritan period has been put into a separate Unit, it is advisable that you read it as continuity.

4.11.6 Summing Up

In this Unit which is thematically a continuation of Module 1 Unit 2, you have learnt of

- Puritanism as a religious movement that came to assume widespread socio-cultural dimensions, though it has always enjoyed varying fortunes in England.
- The impact of Puritan strictures on culture in general and on drama in particular, leading finally to the closure of playhouses.
- Drama as subversive activity during the period of the ban from 1642b to 1660.
- The revival of dramaturgy in a changed form in Restoration England.

4.11.7 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Types

1. How did the Puritan movement mark a significant break from the humanist influence that pervaded Elizabethan England?
2. Write a brief essay on the impact of Puritanism on 17th century drama.
3. Show how the Restoration brought about a revival of drama after the Puritan ban. How was this drama different from earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre?

Medium length Answers

1. Write a brief note on the conditions that led to the Civil Wars in England.
2. Why were the Puritans strongly against the theatre? Write about some of the tracts written to substantiate their views.
3. From the cultural perspective do you feel Puritan rule was a cross between the Jacobean and Restoration periods? Give a reasoned analysis.

Short Answer Types

1. What do you know about the Long Parliament?
2. Write short notes on (a) *Histriomastix* (b) *Seige of Rhodes*
3. What is Patent Theatre? Write about the resurgence of theatres under Charles II.

UNIT 12 □ JOHN DRYDEN *ALL FOR LOVE*

Structure

4.12.0 Introduction

4.12.1 Heroic Tragedy and John Dryden

4.12.2 Dryden's 'Preface', 'Prologue' and Shakespearean Adaptation

4.12.3 The Sub-Title of *All for Love*

4.12.4 Synopsis and Act-wise Summary

4.12.5 Glossary (Aid to the full text)

4.12.6 Dryden's Treatment of Themes

4.12.7 The Tragic Protagonists: Antony and Cleopatra

4.12.8 Conflict between Reason and Passion

4.12.9 Sample Passage (From Ending) Analysed

4.12.10 Summing Up

4.12.11 Comprehension Exercises

4.12.12 Suggested Reading

4.12.0 Introduction

You have already come across John Dryden as a verse-satirist and a literary theorist of the Restoration Period in England. The very fact that you are now studying a full-length play by him will give you a fair idea of Dryden's multi-faceted genius. The Restoration, you must have realised by now, was not an age where heroism could be looked upon in the same vein that you could do in earlier periods. Hence it is natural that the tragic plays of the period, which were popularly known as Heroic Tragedies, would not be on the same wavelength as tragedies of the Renaissance or the Elizabethan period. The strain of artificiality is pervasive in this genre. You need to know in this regard that in Dryden's own conception, a heroic play ought to be 'an imitation of an heroic poem; and consequently that love and honour ought to be the subject of it'.

This Unit introduces you to Dryden's *All for Love*, which is sub-titled 'The World Well Lost'. To begin with, it is a heroic drama that first appeared in 1677. It is written in a free adaptation of Shakespeare and modeled upon the design of classical tragedy. It is considered to be an approved imitation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In fact, re-workings of Shakespeare's plays have been a common

feature in subsequent ages, till our own times. In terms of thought and content, Shakespeare is so rich that he has always lent himself to adaptations in subsequent periods, albeit story lines have changed in keeping with temporal spatial frameworks. In course of this Unit therefore, you will come to know how Dryden appropriates the Shakespearean text in a way that suits his milieu, which, as we have stated at the outset, was very different from Shakespeare's. As additional activity, it is suggested that with help from your counselor, you acquaint yourself with Shakespeare's immortal tragedy that combines love, polity and statecraft – *Antony and Cleopatra*.

4.12.1 Heroic Tragedy and John Dryden

If you look back at the sub-section on 'Restoration Tragedy', you will remember that as a type, this form of drama had a rather short life span. Given the artificiality of the age and the kind of elements that such drama tried to depict, this was perhaps pre-destined. Yet, within this brief period, there were quite a handful of playwrights, just as there were a number of plays written; though not all attained equal popular acclaim. To repeat certain facts that you already know but would do good to recollect, heroic drama dealt with exalted spectacles and almost superhuman attributes and activities of a hero, and was modelled on the themes of heroism, courage, love and honour. This genre was primarily modelled after the French Neo-Classical tragedy and was normally written in rhyming pentameter couplets. Chronologically, Dryden's *All for Love* is a Heroic Drama written in the final phases of the existence of this mode and with his genius, he naturally produced one that stands above most of the rest. This is however not to say that this play manages to completely elude the inherent limitations of the genre. One interesting variation in Dryden's work is that he does not use the rhyming couplets, but writes in **blank verse** as Shakespeare did.

Dryden however rigorously follows Aristotle's idea of Unity of Action, mentioned in *Poetics*. According to Aristotle, a tragedy must have a single course of action without any subsidiary plot. Dryden strictly adheres to this, and the unity of place is also maintained as the scene of action never shifts from Alexandria. This is unlike Shakespeare who takes us across the world from Rome to Egypt in his play! In case of the unity of time, there exists in the play a case of illusion of reality. The acts do not have any scene division, and the unity of unbroken time is maintained by such an illusion separately in every act. Dryden's play may thus be seen as having certain interesting experimentations by way of re-doing Shakespeare with classical precepts in mind.

So what exactly does Dryden do to make *All for Love* approximate the genre of the heroic tragedy?

The play deviates from his early practices as a writer of heroic tragedies on two seminal points. Firstly, Dryden eliminates the compulsory heroic couplet, and utilizes blank verse introduced by Shakespeare as a successful form of dramatic dialogue. Secondly, the strong political grandiose element as an inseparable element of heroic drama is neutralized by a more delicate handling of the central emotion of love and passion between Cleopatra and Antony. Dryden deals chiefly with the theme of love, and following a neo-Aristotelian appropriation available in French readings of *Poetics* strictly adheres to the unities of time, place, and action and concentrates on the activities and fates of the lovers on the last day of their life. The heroic element of dealing with celebrated historical figures is achieved in the play, and the treatment of the central issue of love and passion is not done without drawing a thorough portrait of the political affairs involving the bond between the lovers. The play evidently portrays the grandeur of passion and love, while not banishing the grandeur of grand political affairs in the bombastic display of episodes of sublime stage action like Antony's falling on the sword in the Roman fashion, and Cleopatra's queenly embracing of death with asp-bites. Thus, Dryden's heroic tragedy in *All for Love* is definitely an evident departure from the characteristics of Dryden's early heroic tragedies. However, the same has revolutionized the realm of heroic drama by a successful handling of the blank verse in imitation of Shakespeare.

4.12.2 Dryden's 'Preface', 'Prologue' and Shakespearean Adaptation

- **Preface:** Dryden's *All for Love* has a Preface that tries to introduce the audience with the intentions that the author had in imitating Shakespeare's drama. He also says that in portraying the hero and the heroine he has not described them too moral (since it will be unjust to make them suffer). At the same time the lovers are not projected as unscrupulous villains as then they shall not be able to arouse the desired sympathy from the audience. He mentions that in the construction of the plot he has adhered to the Classical unities, and the story does not deal with any subplot outside the realm of the main action of the play. He also mentions that introducing Octavia is an error, since the character takes away a considerable amount of audience's sympathy. He thinks that by imitating 'divine' Shakespeare he has transcended his earlier achievements. He also mentions that as practitioner of art he does not consider it morally right to arouse too much of sympathy for the lovers who are engaged in illicit and improper love.

- **Prologue:** In the Prologue to *All for Love* Dryden wittily states that he is expecting adverse comments from the critics, and later on he also states what kind of heroes and heroines the audience should see and search for in dramas. However, finally Dryden submits himself and humbly says that the audience should not expect great mastery from him in the portrayal of the heroes and heroines since he is lower in standard when compared to great writers.
- **Dryden's Handling of Materials from Shakespeare, and other Historical Sources:**

Dryden writes in the 'Preface':

In my style, I have professed to imitate the divine Shakespeare; which that I might perform more freely... I have not copied my author servilely'.

Such an introduction to the text by the dramatist himself clearly establishes the fact that Dryden was not a blind imitator, and he utilizes the materials drawn from Shakespeare and other historical sources freely in order to achieve an effective mode of dramatizing the passions and love of Antony and Cleopatra. In fact, being an imaginative creative artist and a scholar, Dryden manages to centralize the theme of love and mutual passion existing between Antony and Cleopatra and therefore he does not give much dramatic space to various political affairs involving Antony, Octavius, Pompey, and Rome and Egypt in general. While in Shakespeare, there is ample room provided to Octavius Caesar, in Dryden's play he is mostly treated as a back-stage or off-stage phenomenon of threat surrounding the future of Egypt. Dryden drops the Antony-Pompey episode, and other political paraphernalia. Cleopatra appears to be more 'womanly' and 'feminine' rather than the strong politician role portrayed in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Moreover, Dryden himself points out that:

The hero of the poem ought not to be a character of perfect virtue, for then he could not without injustice, be made unhappy; nor yet altogether wicked, because he could not then be pitied. I have therefore steered the middle course; and have drawn the character of Antony as favourable as Plutarch, Appian, and Dion Cassius would give me leave.

Thus, Dryden's handling of the age-old tale of love, passion, betrayal, conflict between duty and love, in case of Antony and Cleopatra seems to be a blend of a free creative imitation of various source materials. Dryden freely alters, recasts, imitates, and recreates history and literary handling of historical facts before him, and the same stands as a representative of his creative genius and unique artistic temperament.

4.12.3 The Sub-Title of *All for Love*

All for Love has a subtitle — ‘The World Well Lost’ — which makes it clear that the play does not deal with the high moral assumptions where heroism and honour depend primarily on virtue and responsible action on the part of the heroes and heroines by sacrificing their personal peace and pleasures. The subtitle rather shows that Dryden here is not interested to portray the illicit love between Antony and Cleopatra as wrong and immoral. Though the outcome of such a love affair is bound to be tragic, Dryden does not dismiss the same, and appears to celebrate how Antony and Cleopatra lost everything that they possessed for the sake of their love. However, this very approach appears contradictory to the high moral claims made by Dryden in the Preface. This can also be seen as a deliberate way of ignoring morality on the part of the dramatist.

4.12.4 Synopsis and Act-wise Summary

➤ Synopsis

The play is set in Alexandria in Egypt, and deals with the last hours of Antony and Cleopatra. The play opens with Serapion describing mysterious happenings like storms and supernatural scenes which are omens for the future doom of Egypt. Alexas, Cleopatra’s eunuch, dismisses the claims and seems critical of Cleopatra’s affection towards Antony who is secretly hated by the Egyptians. Ventidius appears and knowing from another gentleman regarding Antony’s despondent state, blames Cleopatra for such a downfall. On the other hand he prepares to help Antony and manages to pull out Antony from his despondency when Antony appears first on stage. By the end of the first act Antony regains his warlike spirits and decides to leave Cleopatra.

In the second act, Cleopatra appears mourning. Charmion, Cleopatra’s waiting woman, tries to arrange a meeting between Antony and Cleopatra in vain. Cleopatra tries to win back the love of Antony by gifts and jewels, including a bracelet. Alexas suggests that the Egyptian queen should tie the bracelet in Antony’s wrist herself. In a meeting between Antony and Cleopatra, Ventidius reappears to proclaim that Cleopatra is not the right partner of Antony as she can use guile and is going to abandon Antony to find her own safety. Cleopatra proves this argument wrong by showing a letter from the Roman authorities asking her to surrender Antony to them as a prisoner of war and lets Antony know that in spite of such an invitation she did not betray Antony. Antony is overjoyed and proclaims his love for Cleopatra.

In the third act, Antony is seen returning from battle overwhelmed with love for Cleopatra. Ventidius appears to speak with Antony, who attempts to flee unsuccessfully. Antony shows signs of having no desire to resume the war but doesn't know how to stop it. He believes Dolabella can assist him and Ventidius brings Dolabella out. Dolabella, Antony's friend, appears after Antony succeeds in the battle. Dolabella was earlier banished since he loved Cleopatra, but he returns to a warm welcome from Antony. Dolabella appears with a solution by which Antony must reunite with his rightful wife Octavia (Octavius Caesar's sister) by which there will be an end in the villainy shared between Antony and Octavius. Cleopatra learns how this turn of event has defeated her, and appears to be defeated by the political scenario. Alexas advises Cleopatra to ignore the presence of Octavia. Cleopatra, however, faces Octavia in an argument as a rival in Antony's love where it becomes clear that though Antony does not wholeheartedly love Octavia, it is she and not Cleopatra to whom Antony rightfully belongs.

In act four, Antony appears to be convinced by Octavia's persuasion that his rightful place is in Rome with his children. Even then Antony does not find the emotional courage to tell Cleopatra himself. Antony asks Dolabella to inform her. Ventidius overhears that Dolabella will be going to Cleopatra to bid her farewell. He also sees her working out a strategy with Alexas to make Antony jealous by way of Dolabella. Ventidius and Octavia see Dolabella taking Cleopatra's hand, but when the time comes to make a move romantically, both of them fall apart from the guilt of their betrayal. Ventidius tells Antony that Dolabella and Cleopatra have turned lovers and with this piece of information Antony turns infuriated. This makes Octavia leave Antony permanently since she is not believed by Antony. However, Antony even refuses to believe Cleopatra and Dolabella when they try to explain the actual strategy.

In the final act, Antony is seen taking Cleopatra's fleet and going to Caesar by whom he is greeted graciously. Then they come back to Alexandria. When Cleopatra is informed this, Alexas advises her to flee and assures her that he will attempt to make amends with Caesar. Cleopatra considers this as a way in which he will look like a traitor and he must not go to Caesar. Cleopatra escapes and Alexas is left behind. Antony and Ventidius get together and prepare to fight. Alexas informs Antony that Cleopatra is dead. Antony turns grief-stricken and tells Ventidius to end his life, but Ventidius refuses and kills himself. With Ventidius dead, Antony tries and fails to commit suicide. Cleopatra appears to see Antony living on the verge of death. Cleopatra commits suicide. Serapion conveys their tribute.

➤ **Chief Historical Figures Mentioned in *All for Love*:**

- ✓ **Mark Antony** : Marcus Antonius, commonly known in English as Mark Antony, was a Roman politician and general who formed an official alliance between himself, Octavian, and Lepidus, which broke up in 33 BC. Antony was defeated by Octavian in the Battle of Actium (31 BC), and committed suicide with his beloved Cleopatra shortly after the defeat.
- ✓ **Cleopatra** : Cleopatra was the last pharaoh of Ancient Egypt. After the defeat of Antony whom she supported against the legal heir of Caesar, Octavian, she committed suicide by means of an asp bite on August 12, 30 BC and thereafter Egypt became part of the Roman Empire.
- ✓ **Octavius** : More popularly known as Augustus, Octavius (Octavian) was the founder of the Roman Empire and its first Emperor, ruling from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD.

➤ **Detailed Act-Wise Critical Summary:**

Act I

The first act of Dryden's play serves the expository function of identifying the ominous situation involving Egypt with Serapion, the priest of Isis describing unnatural events in the world of Egypt's nature. River Nile has flooded suddenly, ebbing abruptly leaving various creatures trapped on the land. The tombs of ancient kings are routed by a sudden whirlwind. Such references to the calamities in nature parallel the threat looming large in the political existence of Egypt with Octavius Caesar's army surrounding Egypt. The section provides choric commentary on the Egyptian state of affairs and throws light on the protagonists, Antony and Cleopatra. Alexas, serving the choric function narrates the precarious condition of Egypt. As narrated by Alexas, Antony has now withdrawn himself from Cleopatra and lives in Isis's temple. While Serapion thinks that Antony's defeat at the hand of Octavius will lead Egypt to turn into a province of Roman Empire, Alexas is in favour of a conflict where all the tyrants are going to be destroyed. Serapion also provides information regarding the current mood of the Egyptians who would want Antony to loose, and Alexas laments over the fact that Cleopatra has shown lack of political maturity in not wanting to surrender Antony to Octavius. Ventidius, the Roman general and Antony's friend arrives and to him Cleopatra is the actual reason behind Antony's state of despondency. While memory of the defeat in the battle of Actium continues to provide Antony enough injury, Ventidius tries to cheer him up by providing counsel and military support. However, his disparaging remarks regarding Cleopatra makes Antony irritated. Finally, Antony, under the guidance of Ventidius decides to leave Cleopatra and concentrate on the military affairs.

Act II

Act II opens with Cleopatra in a grief-stricken mood, and the same is caused by Antony's absence. As the queen she is fully aware of the threats available, and understands the political implications of being caught by the Roman army. However, she is more saddened by Antony's decision of leaving her. She is consoled by Alexas who suggests that Cleopatra should leave so that Alexas can work upon Antony's mind. On the other hand Antony and Ventidius arrive talking about military plans to defeat Octavius. In Antony's words Octavius is shrewd and coward, who has only become emperor by chance. Ventidius reminds how Antony foolishly helped Octavius to win Philippi, and urges Antony to move out of Alexandria to fight Octavius. In the mean time, Alexas comes and offers Antony and Roman generals gifts, and in order to arouse sympathy in Antony Alexas says that Cleopatra has chosen not to restrict Antony from going away from Alexandria since she has lost her beauty and youth that were influential on Antony in the past. Alexas informs that Cleopatra is saddened, and presents Antony with a bracelet from her. Ventidius is certainly aware of the dangers of any meeting taking place between Antony and Cleopatra, since that would be detrimental to the military cause. However, Antony decides to meet Cleopatra only to bid farewell. Under the influence of Ventidius, Antony blames Cleopatra for his downfall. Cleopatra on the other hand shows her love for Antony as a constant phenomenon. She later shows evidence of her innocence and loyalty. She places Octavius's letter that offered Cleopatra suzerainty if she chose to submit Antony. She acted against such temptations, and while she is blamed as the reason behind Antony's downfall, his defeat in the battle of Actium, Cleopatra finally manages to portray that she is not treacherous. Antony is finally moved and decides to stay in Alexandria, and is reunited with Cleopatra. Antony decides to wage a surprise attack, and yet is again inclined to have pleasures with Cleopatra.

Act III

Act III opens with Antony intending to engage in sensual pleasures with Cleopatra after the successful completion of the surprise attack. Antony claims that it was his urge to quickly get reunited with Cleopatra that has prompted such a quick victory. When Ventidius appears Alexas taunts him, while Antony remains grateful towards his old companion. Ventidius suggests that a peace treaty with Octavius by taking an advantage of the recent victory is politically necessary, since with a grave shortage of Egyptian army a victory over Octavius seems unachievable. According to him, Antony must look for mutual friends of Octavius and himself to solve the issue, and while Antony is reminded of his old trusted friend Dolabella, Dolabella surprisingly appears and he and Ventidius help Antony to regain his spirits. Since a truce with Octavius is politically necessary, they both advocate in favour of

a peaceful reconciliation, and to do the same they produce Octavia, Antony's wife. At her approach, Antony refuses initially to identify her as a loyal company, and states that her only identity in his eyes is that of the sister of Octavius. However, Octavia ensures that her priority as a wife is safeguard Antony, finally under the guidance of both Dolabella and Ventidius Antony is reconciled with Octavia. Cleopatra, having learnt about the current state of affairs faces Octavia. They both insult each other. Both stand their ground. Cleopatra is in Octavia's eyes the robber, while Cleopatra says that she is actually the victim since she does not have the status of a wife, but only that of a mistress. However, after Octavia's exit, we find Cleopatra gradually breaking down, and her distress only breeds suicidal tendencies.

Act IV

The act opens in the middle of a conversation between Dolabella and Antony, where Antony asks Dolabella to inform Cleopatra that he is leaving Alexandria. On the other hand Dolabella in a soliloquy unravels his secret desire for Cleopatra, and Ventidius, having overheard his statements made in the soliloquy and having had introspection regarding the same concludes that there is not much disturbance created if Cleopatra, already rejected by Antony, is taken by Dolabella. On the other hand, under the guidance of Alexas, Cleopatra makes pretentious amorous advances before Dolabella, and later Dolabella, who is gulled by Cleopatra, lies to the extent of saying that Antony has said a lot of unkind words regarding Cleopatra, only to put his claim stronger. Cleopatra is deeply hurt and faints, and later tells Dolabella that she has been pretending love towards Antony and wishes now to have a final meeting with Antony. Ventidius has overheard only a part of this conversation and thinks that Cleopatra has already chosen her next lover. Ventidius reports the conclusions he has drawn before Antony, and the same so deeply enrages him that Octavia, deeply moved by Antony's passion for Cleopatra even after his leaving her, decides to leave Antony. Dolabella appears before Antony, and being heavily enraged, Antony banishes both Dolabella and Cleopatra for their disloyalty. Cleopatra tries her best to convince Antony that she only feigned love to Dolabella, but remains a failure, since Antony is not ready to believe her since the charges against them were confirmed by Alexas. Cleopatra goes away dejected, only further adding that in spite of the distrust and unkind words, she continues to love Cleopatra.

Act V

Cleopatra is in acute despair and blames Alexas for misguiding her. In the meantime, Serapion brings the fateful news of Antony's defeat which was caused by the Egyptian galleys joining Roman navy against Antony. Serapion further informs that Antony smells this as Cleopatra's conspiracy and wishes to kill her. Alexas

prescribes a plan according to which Cleopatra must hide herself in the monument temporarily, and Serapion too consels in the same manner, stating that Alexas must face Antony since he is the cause of the confusion and conflict. After Cleopatra's departure Alexas exposes his cowardice. Antony and Ventidius appear and decide to fight till their death. Alexas lies before Antony and presents concocted news of Cleopatra's suicidal death caused by Antony's suspicion. In an aside it is revealed that Alexas has only done this to save his own life and to test whether Antony still loves Cleopatra. However, this seems to be a death blow to Antony who is so guilt-stricken that he asks Ventidius to kill him. Ventidius commits a suicidal death, and Antony follows, and at his hour of death Cleopatra and Antony are reunited. After having seen her lover die, Cleopatra decides to die, and though counselled by Iras to appeal before Octavius, Cleopatra only decides to die in honourable terms and reunite herself with her lover. She and her maids apply asp-bites and they die. Cleopatra leaves in like a queen who refused to live like a slave of Octavius and to be paraded through Roman streets as prisoner. Serapion, with whom the play started, only has finally praise for the dead lovers and states that no other lovers have died for each other in the manner that Antony and Cleopatra have died.

4.12.5 Glossary (Aid to the full text)

Glossary :

- Portends : Omens.
- Prodigies : Strange uncanny happenings.
- Sea horses : Hippopotami
- Long race of Ptolemies : The Greek Kings from Alexander's times to Cleopatra's son are known in history as Ptolemy.
- Maecenas and Agrippa : Roman generals.
- Isis' Temple : The Goddess of Moon, worshipped in Egypt.
- Parthia : Ancient Persia.
- Cilicia: A district in Asia-minor.
- Progeny : Descendant.
- Perdition : Ruin.
- Egyptian timbrels : One faced drum played with hand.
- Roman trumpets : A wind instrument of powerful tone which was used by Roman army for signalling.
- Glutton: An over-eater.

- Octavia : Octavius Caesar's sister whom Antony married.
- Sylvan : Something from the woods, or the woodlands.
- Mistletoe : A parasitic plant used in Christmas for decoration.
- Tully : Marcus Tullius Cicero.
- Lictors : Officers who attend magistrates bearing fasces.
- Minion : subordinate, favourite.
- Hercules : An exclamation.
- Posterity : oncoming generation.
- Blasphemer : One who engages in profane talk.
- Gewgaw : showy and valueless.
- Fasces : the bundle of rods carried in front of a Roman Magistrate
- Minion : a favourite
- Mouldering : breaking to dust
- Sap : vital juice
- Dotage : unchecked passion or love
- Hollowing : shouting/ screaming
- Lucrece : a Roman lady, raped by Sextus. Now symbolised as a personification of chastity.
- Coxcomb : a dandy.

4.12.6 Dryden's Treatment of Themes

In the 'Preface' to *All for Love*, Dryden clearly states that the love between Antony and Cleopatra is 'illegal love' caused by 'vice' and based on strict moral grounds any glorification of the kind of love that the two share for each other must remain unacceptable. The love between Antony and Cleopatra is unjust, unfair, and illicit on various grounds. Firstly, both of them have neglected their political vow as rulers to safeguard the citizen and have evidently violated the norms of state. Their passion stands in unacceptable binary opposition to the national commitment. As queen, Cleopatra must have heard the voice of the people who were not ready to acknowledge the love between Antony and Cleopatra as legitimate. As a Roman general, Antony's duty was to spread the empire and do justice to his national commitments. Both of them have transgressed. They have taken their political commitments and liabilities lightly. On the other hand, judging from the perspective of social norms, Antony has violated the duties as a father and a husband, having abandoned Octavius and his children in order to live a life of pleasure-seeking and

sensuality. Cleopatra has participated in Antony's crime and sin. Quite evidently, judged by high moral standards that are placed by Dryden himself, these activities of Antony and Cleopatra are unpardonable offences. If retributive justice has to prevail and order has to be reinforced into the polluted system of state and familial affairs, then the transgressors like Antony and Cleopatra must be punished adequately. Their downfall and tragedy is not caused by fate or any external agencies other than their free will. They have been adequately counselled against their violations by characters like Ventidius, Alexas, and Iras, severally, but the path that they have taken has only pushed them towards their inevitable doom. Unnatural deeds have indeed brought unnatural troubles.

However, Dryden, though has provided ample dramatic space for the elocution on the sins of Antony and Cleopatra, he has maintained a thematic centrality in the portrayal of mutual passion between the two. The disorder that illicit love has unleashed is highlighted right from the beginning of the play with Serapion opening the drama with omens and delineation of the natural disorders and disasters that have taken place. While leaving Cleopatra and Alexandria has remained the best option for Antony, Antony has continually neglected the political rationale put forward by Ventidius. He does not wish to hear anything critical about his bonds with Cleopatra. On the other hand, caught in the middle of a military emergency, when her state and people are threatened by Octavius' approach, Cleopatra does not wish to surrender Antony to Octavius. These are offences and cannot be approved within the moral realm. And yet in Dryden's play there is glorification of the immortal bond between Antony and Cleopatra. They happen to be celebrated as cult figures personifying love. They are glorified as manifestations of pure love, self-sacrifice, and honourable bond, while the nature of their bond is never socially acceptable.

Dryden's play centralizes the passion and love of the protagonists. It also highlights the conflict between morality and passion, political duty and personal loyalty.

4.12.7 The Tragic Protagonists: Antony and Cleopatra

Antony and Cleopatra serve as the tragic hero and heroine respectively in *All for Love*. Antony adequately fits in as the proper tragic hero following Aristotelian norms. He is noble, born high, and of a great social stature, and is not absolutely bad or absolutely good, and has a grand sense of personal loyalty as his chief virtue, and a reckless and voluntary disloyalty towards his political and familial commitments. After all, Antony is a blend of military supremacy and moral weakness. He is a great warrior and yet adequately vulnerable. He is passionate, and yet often

dejected due to his political misfortune. He is often self-critical, and yet he cannot accept any criticism against Cleopatra. In his indomitable passion for Cleopatra, which is illicit and politically unjust, lies his hubris, while his hamartia occurs in his disability to leave Cleopatra in spite of good counsel and absolute understanding of the precarious condition he is in.

While Aristotle does not mention anything about tragic heroines, and while women according to Aristotles cannot be granted the position of tragic protagonists, like Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Dryden's *All for Love* provides enough space for Cleopatra as a tragic heroine. She too, like Antony, is of a higher social stature, and above the ordinary, and has vices and virtues blended brilliantly in her portrait. She too has her hubris lying in excessive passion, and has her hamartia in not surrendering Antony for her and her state's benefit. Cleopatra is often dejected when declined by Antony, often confused regarding her duties, jealous towards Octavia, and zealous to hold on to Antony knowing well that the same can only lead her and her state to dust.

It is their choice that scripts their tragedies and nemesis. Their downfall is not caused by any blind inscrutable agency like Fate as in many Greek tragedies. They sketch their own chaos and in the process drown. However, they have both managed to arouse the chief emotions of pity and fear as highlighted by Aristotle by their mutual love, self-sacrificial love, loyalty, and commitment.

4.12.8 Conflict between Reason and Passion

In *All for Love* Dryden intended to put moral order as the central celebrated motif. However, though he might have had appeared to have glorified 'illicit love' and 'vice' by celebrating the self-sacrificial love and commitment of the lovers, it would be thoroughly unjust to state that Dryden advocates in favour of illicit passion. In *All for Love* the conflict between reason and passion is a central motif. Cleopatra and Antony are personifications of unjust uncontrollable and unchecked passion. Their downfall, though evocative of pity and fear, is the justice they meet for transgression. On the other hand, characters like Ventidius stand as epitomes of wisdom and rationality, while in *Dolabella* we find a fine and often uncanny blend of reason and passion. In *Alexas* there is reason, and occasionally a streak of opportunism. In *Serapion and Iras*, political wisdom and rationality find suitable abode. Dryden places various shades of passion and reason, and it would not be just to state that he is in favour of passion over reason, though at the same time the dynamics of passion that Antony and Cleopatra display becomes the chief treasure of *All for Love*.

4.12.9 Sample Passage (From Ending) Analysed

See how the lovers sit in state together,
 As they were giving laws to half mankind!
 The impression of a smile, left in her face,
 Shows she died pleased with him for whom she lived,
 And went to charm him in another world.
 Caesar's just entering: grief has now no leisure.
 Secure that villain, as our pledge of safety,
 To grace the imperial triumph.—Sleep, blest pair,
 Secure from human chance, long ages out,
 While all the storms of fate fly o'er your tomb;
 And fame to late posterity shall tell,
 No lovers lived so great, or died so well.

This section occurring at the end of *All for Love* is part of Serapion's commentary on the death of Antony and Cleopatra. Serapion witnesses the sad end of Cleopatra and learns how she died in full queenly dignity and honour, living and dying loyal to her lover who sacrificed his own life being committed to Cleopatra. The uncertainties of war and chaotic political life can no longer touch the lovers, and in their death they lie glorious in harmony. The lines truly celebrate their mutual passion and glorify their bond. The celebration of their 'illicit' love might turn out to be an advocacy in favour of immorality and lack of propriety. However, the celebrated story of Antony and Cleopatra told and retold in classics and popular culture is deified by Serapion's assessment of the 'blest pair'. The lines heighten the pity and admiration for the lovers, and provide a sense of catharsis as desirable in tragedy with the note of calm of mind and all passions spent.

4.12.10 Summing Up

In this Unit, you have been introduced to one of the best specimens of Heroic Tragedy, which has been an important step in the long evolution of English drama. The links with Shakespearean dramaturgy have been carefully explored, so as to explain this evolutionary trend. Notice that in his appropriation both of the historicity of the characters and the fabular elements, Dryden almost foreshadows modernist dramatic techniques. All the same, you have also been acquainted with the contemporary milieu and how the playwright suits the text in that context.

4.12.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. What features of the Heroic Tragedy do you find in *All for Love*?
2. Analyse Dryden's treatment of historical figures in *All for Love*.
3. How does *All for Love* problematise the themes of love, morality and duty?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. What is the relevance of the sub-title of Dryden's *All for Love*?
2. Analyse Dryden's Antony and Cleopatra as tragic protagonists.
3. What is significant about Dryden's handling of his source materials in *All for Love*?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. How does Dryden handle the idea of retributive justice in *All for Love*?
2. Comment on Ventidius as an epitome of wisdom and rationality.
3. What is the significance of the 'Preface' to Dryden's *All for Love*?

4.12.12. Suggested Reading

Bruce King: *Dryden's Major Plays*.

Bruce King (Ed.): *Twentieth Century Interpretations of All for Love*.

Richard Garnett: *The Age of Dryden*.

James Anderson Winn: *John Dryden and His World*.

UNIT 13 □ William Congreve : *The Way Of The World*

Structure

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4.13.0 Introduction

You are by now well aware of the fact that the Restoration, as a period, takes its name from the Restoration of the monarchy, with Charles II assuming the throne in 1660. On a more specific note, Module-4, Unit-10 has also made you aware of the seminal importance of Restoration drama, which to many cultural historians, virtually epitomises the era. This was basically because, with the reopening of Theatres in 1662, play-going became a very significant part of the reaction against the Puritanism of the previous decades. In a variety of forms that included adaptations of Shakespeare and also new drama, the entire culture seemed to see itself as a kind of play on community life, as commentators repeatedly emphasized the ways everyone seemed to be playing roles as they negotiated new mores and social conditions. This Unit will acquaint you with William Congreve's *The Way of the World*, a play that exemplifies many of the key features of what became popular as the **Restoration Comedy of Manners**. The major feature to look out for in this and such other plays are the complex, multi-faceted characters who combine urbanity and wit in treating love and wealth as a game they play through concealment, artifice, and plotting.

This Unit will also show how unlike some of the plays from the first decade of the Restoration, Congreve's play does not end up embracing all out cynicism. Instead, you will see that true love, devoid of sentimentality, even wins out and lives with wealth. Congreve's intent was not on writing the sentimental comedies that were later to become so popular on the eighteenth century stage. His works stood unique as it showcased the subtle balance that he achieved between the cool disenchantment of the Restoration and the emotional warmth of the 18th century. His characters have their moral failings and they more than handle themselves in a world of false appearances, banter, and sexual double-dealings, but they are redeemed in the end. As you go along with this Unit, you are therefore advised to look upon Congreve's play as a bridge between earlier Shakespearean drama and evolutions in dramaturgy that follow him.

4.13.1 The Restoration Comedy of Manners

On this, let us just take the threads of what you have already learnt on Restoration Comedy, and stretch that a bit further and try understanding the basic features of what came to be known as the **Restoration Comedy of Manners**. We shall then try reading Congreve's play in that light.

- Comedy : Very broadly a light and humorous drama with a happy ending.
- From your reading of Shakespearean comedy, you already know that the genre also provides an ample view of contemporary life and times by way of motivations and actions of characters.
- The Comedy of Manners, in the same vein satirises the manners and affectations of a social class, often represented by stock characters. The plot of the comedy, often concerned with an illicit love affair or some other scandal, is generally less important than its witty and often bawdy dialogue. You will realize that this can be related to the volatile socio-cultural formations of the times. And the stage for one, in any era, is a dynamic representation of social life.
- Restoration Comedy is a kind of English comedy, usually in the form of the comedy of manners that flourished during the restoration period in England (i.e. from 1660 to about 1700), when actresses were first employed on the London stage. Appealing to a fairly narrow audience of aristocrats in the recently reopened theatres, Restoration comedy relied upon sophisticated repartee and knowledge of the exclusive code of manners in high society. Plots were based on the complex intrigues of the marriage market. The frequently cynical approach to marriage and sexual infidelity

in Restoration comedy invited accusations of immorality. Significant examples are George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700).

4.13.2 William Congreve : A Short Bio-note

“Heaven has no rage, like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorned...
Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast”
The Mourning Bride

William Congreve was born in 1670 in the village of Bardsey, in Yorkshire. When his father was commissioned a garrison four years later, the family moved to Ireland, and Congreve went to school at Kilkenny College, and then, at the age of 16, to Trinity College, Dublin. Congreve was lucky enough to have Jonathan Swift as schoolmate.

The family returned to England in 1688, and in 1691 Congreve began to study law at Middle Temple in London, although he employed much of his time writing. While writing poetry and working on translations of Latin Poetry, he became known to other writers in London. He published an essay, *Incognita* under the pseudonym “Cleophil” in 1692. He wrote *The Old Bachelour*, his first play during an illness. It was performed in 1693. Although the play was derivative, with no characters or plots, it was witty, the dialogue was clever and the play was widely acceptable by the audience. Dryden, the venerable playwright and poet, commented it to be the best first play he had ever seen, and Congreve became a celebrity overnight.

We can see with this first play the seeds of Congreve's later work: The Cambridge History of English and American Literature writes, “Congreve is playing supremely well the tune of the time.”

Congreve wrote four more plays between 1693 and 1700 :

- The comedy, *The Double Dealer*, which earned the approval of the queen. Influential 17th century man of letters John Dryden compared Congreve to Shakespeare;
- The comedy, *Love for Love*, which triumphantly opened Betterton's new theatre, only the third in London, in Lincoln's Inn Field in 1695;
- The poetic tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, which was a historical curiosity to us, but in 1697 it was hailed as a masterpiece and appeared on the stage for many years;

- And the comedy, *The Way of the World*, which appears in 1700, and was considered his masterpiece, although it was a critical failure at the time,

The poor reception given to *The Way of the World* may be the reason that Congreve stopped writing plays. He maintained his connection with the stage managing Lincoln's Inn Fields and collaborating in writing *Squire Trelooby* in 1704. He studied music, and won a prize for the libretto he wrote for *The Judgement of Paris*. He wrote the opera *Semele*, about a woman in love with Jupiter.

Congreve belonged to the Kit Cat Club whose members are amongst the most illustrious men of the age. They include eight Dukes, Earl, famous soldiers like Marlborough, and fellow writers, Sir John Vanbrugh and Richard Steele. William Congreve was interred in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, near the grave of Aphra Behn (the famous Restoration woman writer).

4.13.3 Historical Context of the play

In 1700, the world of London theatre-going had changed significantly from the days of, for example, *The Country Wife*. Charles II was no longer on the throne, and the jubilant court that revelled in its licentiousness and opulence had been replaced by the far dourer and utilitarian Dutch-inspired court of William of Orange. His wife, Mary II, was, long before her death, a retiring person who did not appear much in public. William himself was a military king who was reported to be hostile to drama. The political instabilities that had been beneath the surface of many Restoration comedies were still present, but with a different side seeming victorious.

One of the features of a Restoration comedy is the opposition of the witty and courtly (and Cavalier) rake and the dull-witted man of business or the country bumpkin, who is understood to be not only unsophisticated but often (as, for instance, in the very popular plays of Aphra Behn in the 1670s) either Puritan or another form of dissenter. In 1685, the courtly and Cavalier side was in power, and Restoration comedies belittled the bland and foolish losers of the Restoration. However, by 1700, the other side was ascendant. Therefore, *The Way of the World's* recreation of the older Restoration comedy's patterns is only one of the things that made the play unusual.

The 1688 revolution concerning the overthrow of James II created a new set of social codes primarily amongst the bourgeoisie. The new capitalist system meant an increasing emphasis on property and property law. Thus, the play is packed with legal jargon and financial and marital contracts. These new legal aspects allow characters like Mrs. Fainall to secure her freedom through an equitable trust and for Mirabell and Millamant's marriage to be equal through a prenuptial agreement.

This shift in social perspectives is perhaps best shown in the characters of Fainall and Mirabell, who represent respectively the old form and new form of marital relations: sexual power at first and then developing into material power.

4.13.4 Synopsis of the Play

A ribald tangle of deceit among upper-class English households is revealed as Mirabell, a philanderer, cynically comforts Mrs. Fainall, his mistress. Mrs. Fainall is complaining that she completely detests her husband, and asks why Mirabell compelled her to marry him.

Observing that it is well to “have just so much disgust for your husband as may be sufficient to relish your lover,” Mirabell reminds her: “If the familiarities of our loves had proved that consequence of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father’s name with credit but on a husband?” As for his choice of Fainall, he says: “A better person ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered the purpose.”

Mrs. Fainall’s passion for Mirabell, nevertheless, leads her to help him in his next scheme, even though it involves her own mother, Lady Wishfort, also infatuated with Mirabell. Mirabell wants to marry the beautiful and wealthy Millamant, niece of Lady Wishfort, but her aunt—who is also her guardian—is jealously withholding her consent. With Mrs. Fainall’s connivance, Mirabell arranges to have his servant, Waitwell, in the guise of an uncle called Sir Rowland, pay court to Lady Wishfort. Then, since he already has accomplished a secret marriage between Waitwell and Lady Wishfort’s maid, Foible, he proposes to expose the scandal. His prize for silence is to be Millamant and her fortune.

The scheme perfected, Foible tells Lady Wishfort that Sir Rowland has seen her picture and is infatuated by her loveliness. A meeting is arranged, but the plot is overheard by a woman named Marwood, another of Mirabell’s conquests and herself no mean schemer. Desiring Mirabell for herself, she promptly influences Lady Wishfort to agree that Millamant shall be married to Sir Wilfull, a rich and amiable dunce. Then Marwood, to make sure of success, enlists the help of Fainall who is infatuated with her and jealous of Mirabell. Fainall is a willing tool, complaining: “My wife is an errant wife, and I am a cuckold....’Sdeath! To be out-witted, out-jilted, out-matrimoney’d!... ’Tis scurvy wedlock!”

Deceived by her caresses and angered by her reminder that Mirabell, his foe, may otherwise get Millamant’s fortune, Fainall agrees to Marwood’s plan: she will write a letter to be delivered to Lady Wishfort when Waitwell, as Sir Rowland, is

with her. The letter will expose the fraud and Mirabell, she says, will be ruined. Marwood in the while, neglects to tell Fainall of her scheme to save Mirabell for herself.

Lady Wishfort is all gaga as she awaits the bogus Sir Rowland. She is informed by Foible that candles are ready, that the footmen are lined up in the hall in their best liveries, and that the coachman and postilion, well perfumed, are on hand for a good showing. Assured by Foible that she looks “most killing well,” Lady Wishfort ponders on how best to appear before her beaux.

Sir Rowland arrives. He and Lady Wishfort get along famously at once, and Sir Rowland begs for an early marriage, declaring that his nephew, Mirabell, will poison him for his money if he learns of the romance. The jealous Lady Wishfort promptly agrees, suggesting that Sir Rowland starve Mirabell “gradually, inch by inch.” Then Mrs. Marwood’s letter, denouncing Sir Rowland as Waitwell, arrives, but Sir Rowland deftly declares the letter to be the work of his nephew, and he hies himself off “to fight him a duel.”

Lady Wishfort learns of the deception that is being practiced, and turns on Foible: “Out of my house! To marry me to a serving-man! To make me the laughing-stock of the whole town! I’ll have you locked up in Bridewell Jail, that’s what I’ll do!”

The frightened Foible confesses that it is Mirabell who has conceived the whole plot, and Lady Wishfort is planning a dire revenge when more trouble comes: Fainall, her son-in-law, demands that his wife turn over her whole fortune to him, else he and Mrs. Marwood will reveal to the world that Mrs. Fainall was Mirabell’s mistress before her marriage and that she still is. Lady Wishfort is dazedly reflecting upon this new humiliation when Mirabell comes to her with another plan.

“If,” he says, “a deep sense of the many injuries I have offered to so good a lady, with a sincere remorse and a hearty contrition, can but obtain the least glance of compassion, I am too happy.... Consider, madam, in reality it was an innocent device, though I confess it had a face of guiltiness. It was at most an artifice which love contrived—and errors which love produces have ever been accounted pardonable.”

The susceptible Lady Wishfort offers to forgive Mirabell if he will renounce his idea of marrying Mrs. Millamant. Mirabell offers a compromise: if she will permit her niece to marry him, he will contrive to save Mrs. Fainall’s reputation and fortune. If he can do this, Lady Wishfort agrees, she will forgive anything and consent to anything. Mirabell then tells her: “Well, then, as regards your daughter’s reputation, she has nothing to fear from Fainall. For his own reputation is at stake. He and Mrs.

Marwood—we have proof of it—have been and still are lovers.... And as regards your daughter’s fortune, she need have no fear on that score, either: acting upon my advice, and relying upon my honesty, she has made me the trustee of her entire estate.

In a closing observation to the audience, he adds:

“From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed,
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed;
For each deceiver to his cost may find,
That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind.”

4.13.5 Major Characters in the Play

Mirabell : A young man-about-town, in love with Millamant.

Millamant : A young, very charming lady, in love with, and loved by, Mirabell. She is the ward of Lady Wishfort because she is the niece of Lady Wishfort’s long-dead husband. She is a first cousin of Mrs. Fainall.

Fainall : A man-about-town. He and Mirabell know each other well. Fainall married his wife for her money.

Mrs. Fainall : Wife of Fainall and daughter of Lady Wishfort. She is Millamant’s cousin and was Mirabell’s mistress, presumably after her first husband died.

Mrs. Marwood : Fainall’s mistress. It does appear, however, that she was, and perhaps still is, in love with Mirabell. This love is not returned.

Young Witwoud : A fop. He courts Millamant, but not seriously; she is merely the fashionable belle of the moment.

Petulant : A young fop, a friend of Witwoud’s. His name is indicative of his character.

Lady Wishfort : A vain woman, the mother of Mrs. Fainall and the guardian of Millamant. She is herself in love with Mirabell.

Sir Wilfull Witwoud: The elder brother of Young Witwoud. He is Lady Wishfort’s nephew, a distant, non-blood relative of Millamant’s, and Lady Wishfort’s choice as a suitor for Millamant’s hand.

Waitwell: Mirabell’s valet. At the beginning of the play, he has just been married to Foible, Lady Wishfort’s maid.

Foible Lady Wishfort's maid, married to Waitwell.

The following list describes the characters by their type, since members of the same type often are either allies or opponents in the plot.

- **Rakes:** Fainall (the antagonist, now married to Mirabell's ex-mistress, though Fainall doesn't know it); Mirabell (the co-protagonist [with Millamant], now scheming with his ex-mistress to wed Millamant). Though their manners usually conceal it, they are both dangerous men, and like all competent non-servant males, armed with rapiers with which they can "demand satisfaction" for insults, real or imagined.
- **Would-be Rakes and Wits:** Witwoud and Petulant are nearly rendered asexual by drink and affectation, they live for wit—neither of the rakes can really be insulted by them though Petulant comes close). Their faulty manners give them away as not being real contenders for the role of "rake," but they do set themselves up to be "wits." As Witwoud's name suggests, he's a pretender to the title (compare "Sir Politic Would-Be" in *Volpone*, the play to which this play openly alludes in Act II). Petulant's name sums up his entire stock and trade, though he's a wonderfully useful "flat character" who satirizes any normal social convention he tries to imitate.
- **Country Aristocrat :** Sir Wilfull Witwoud (an elderly outsider), who talks about people's pasts and money and other things "one doesn't mention" while remaining both astoundingly shy around Millamant and yet courageous in a crisis—a bit of "old England" from the provinces among these "new men" of the Town. His one failing, apart from his country manners, is a complete lack of literary, musical, or artistic learning. In short, he is no "courtier," but he has deep roots in the *comedia del arte* tradition with origins in Greek and Roman type-character comedy as a fusion of the "*miles gloriosus*" (braggart warrior) and "*senex*" ("out-of-it" old man).
- **Established (older & more powerful) City Woman :** Lady Wishfort is an old rich woman who controls the wealth of her young, rich, widowed daughter-in-law, Millamant. Before the play's action commences, she had discovered that Mirabell had only been pretending to love her in order to get closer to Millamant—she hates him fiercely for it. Nevertheless, she secretly believes that with the right make-up, dress, and seductive behavior, she can still compete with the younger women for sexual attractiveness.
- **Younger (marriagable or seducible) City Women:** Millamant's name means "loved by thousands." Congreve has made her well-educated, unlike Mrs. Fainall, but also so proud of her wit she nearly cannot accept any

man's love lest he diminish her attractiveness. Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's mistress, but also a double agent torn between loyalty to Fainall and her secret love for Mirabell, the sadest creature in the play because she has no money of her own and must live on Fainall's ability to fleece heiresses who are her friends. Mrs. Fainall, a widowed heiress who became Mirabelle's mistress before having to marry Fainall, is torn between her mother's power [Lady Wishfort], her past association with Mirabell, and her loveless marriage to Fainall. She tries to help Millamant escape a fate like her own but risks humiliating divorce if her scheming with Mirabell becomes public knowledge in court.

- **Servants** : Foible is Mrs. Wishfort's chief maid, but secretly an ally of Mirabell who offers her a chance to escape the tyrannically Lady Wishfort's household by marrying his servant, Waitwell, in return for helping Mirabell's scheme against Fainall and Wishfort. Peg, Mrs. Wishfort's underservant, subordinate to Foible, is an innocent foil to reveal Wishfort's vanity. Mincing, Millamant's maid, supports her mistress's vanity and helps her fend off suitors. Waitwell, Mirabell's servant and ally against Fainall and Wishfort, plays the part of "Sir Rowland," Mirabell's "uncle who hates him" in hopes that he will be rewarded by Mirabell with a farm and thereby escape being servant for the rest of his life. He is Mirabell's "Mosca" in the play's allusive relationship to Jonson's inheritance plot. Both Foible and Waitwell have deep roots in the *comedia del arte* tradition that arose from Greek and Roman type-character comedy as "the wily servant." Betty is a servant in the chocolate house, a good-hearted gal who keeps the boys happy, later a familiar type in the *film noir* tradition.

4.13.6 Act-wise Summaries

Act I

- Mirabell is not very happy to leave the company of Millamant.
- If Millamant marries against the will of her aunt she will lose half her fortune.
- Lady Wishfort plans to get Millamant married with Mirabell's uncle to avenge Mirabell's pretentious love affair with her.

Act 2

- Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall are trying to show false hatred for Mirabell.
- The embittered relationship between Mr and Mrs. Fainall is revealed.

- A strange situation advances as we see Mrs. Marwood coming to know about the intimate conversation between Foible and Mirabell.

Act 3

- Mrs. Marwood tells Lady Wishfort about the intimate conversation between Foible and Mirabell.
- Millamant expresses her anguish over Witwoud and Petulant because she doesn't like their company.
- Marwood talks about some strategy with her lover Mrs Fainall in order to acquire half of the fortune of Millamant.

Act 4

- Lady Wishfort looks well prepared to receive her so called admirer and suitor Sir Rowland (Dramatic irony when the reader knows the actual identity of Sir Rowland).
- Conversation between Mirabell and Millamant deals with conditions in marriage.
- Mr. Fainall threatens to divorce his wife Mrs. Fainall on the basis of infidelity.
- Mr. Fainall puts condition in his relation with Lady Wishfort that her entire fortune will go to Mr. Fainall.

Act 5

- Last act of the play opening with an unpleasant scene – Lady Wishfort is aware of the identity of Sir Rowland, thanks to Mrs Marwood.
- Foible informs Mrs Fainall about the love affair of Mrs Marwood and Mr Fainall.
- Mr Fainall informs Lady Wishfort that he is thinking of a divorce from his wife.
- Mirabell emerges as the real hero – protects Lady Wishfort, saves the property of Millamant and foils the evil attempt of Mr Fainall and Mrs Marwood.
- Lady Wishfort forgives and allows the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant.

4.13.7 Discussion and Analysis of Significant Sections

➤ The Dedication

Congreve dedicates his play, *The Way of the World*, to Ralph, Earl of Montague,

whose company and conversation have made it possible for Congreve to write this comedy. The dedication also constitutes a statement of purpose. Congreve writes that he is aware that the world may charge him with vanity for dedicating his play to the Earl. However, he is certain that the world cannot think “meanly” of a play that is meant for the earl’s perusal. Conversely, if the play is attributed “too much sufficiency,” it would be an extravagant claim, and merit the test of the earl’s judgment. Congreve humbly states that the earl’s favourable reception of the play will more than compensate for the play’s deficiencies, and he praises the earl lavishly for his patronage.

Congreve does not expect the play to succeed on the stage, since he is aware that he is not catering to the current tastes of Restoration society. Congreve states his dissatisfaction with the kind of comedies being written. He points out that the characters meant to be ridiculed in these comedies are largely “gross fools” who can only disturb an audience, rather than stimulate their reflective judgment. Congreve asserts that instead of moving the audience to laughter, comic characters should excite compassion.

Congreve’s dissatisfaction with the contemporary comic mode has led him to design comic characters who will do more than merely appear ridiculous. The “affected wit” of his characters shall be exposed and held up for the audience’s ridicule. Congreve defines this as “a wit, which at the same time that it is affected, is also false.” Congreve is aware of the difficulty involved in the creation of such complex characters. He is also aware that his play may not succeed on stage because many people come to the theatre prepared to criticize a play without understanding its purpose. Congreve then apologizes for his digression and entrusts his play to the earl’s protection, claiming that only his patronage and the approval of like-minded people will provide recognition to writers of merit.

Congreve holds Terence, an ancient Roman author of comedies, as his model. He states that Terence benefited from the encouragement of Scipio and Lelius. Congreve laments that the majority of Terence’s audience was incapable of appreciating the purity of his style, his delicacy of plot construction, and the aptness of his characters. Congreve then sketches a brief history of classical comedy in which he mentions Terence’s models and traces the source of his inspiration back to Aristotle. Congreve emphasizes the importance of patronage and claims that contact with such superior people is the only means of attaining perfection in dialogue.

Congreve proceeds to attribute all that is best in his style to the society of Ralph, Earl of Montague. He further praises the earl by stating that if this play suffers from any deficiency, it is his (Congreve’s) fault, since he could not rise to

the stature of Terence even though the earl was his patron. Congreve then mentions that although poetry is “the eldest sister of all arts and parent of most,” the earl has never before given a poet his patronage. Poetry addresses itself to the good and great. This relationship is reciprocal: it is the privilege of poetry to address them, and it is their right alone to grant it patronage.

Many writers dedicate their works to the good and the great. But Congreve pleads that his address may be exempt from all the trappings of a typical dedication. He states that he is dedicating his play to the earl because he considers him to be the most deserving and is aware of his “extreme worthiness and humanity.”

➤ **Prologue**

In the Prologue, or the introduction to the play, Congreve categorizes poets as those who fare the worst among Nature’s fools, for Fortune first grants them fame and then “forsakes” them. Congreve laments this unfair treatment meted out to the poets, who are Fortune’s own offspring. Poets have to risk the fame earned from their previous work when they write a new work. If his new endeavour fails, the poet must lose his seat in Parnassus. (Parnassus was a mountain near Delphi in Greece, sacred to Apollo and the Muses. Apollo was the sun-god and patron of the arts, while the Muses were the nine goddesses of the arts. Parnassus was regarded as the seat of learning, poetry and the arts.)

Congreve states that although he has worked hard to write this play, if the audience does not like it, they should not spare him for his trouble but damn him all the more. He tells the audience not to pity him for his stupidity. He promises that he will blame the audience if they heckle any scene. He proceeds to state that his play has “some plot,” “some new thought,” “some humor” — but “no farce.” This is regarded as a fault by some. He comments wryly that the audience should not expect satire since they have nothing for which to be reproached. Nobody can dare to correct them. His sole aim has been to “please” and not to “instruct,” since this might offend the audience. He takes the role of a passive poet who has left everything to the judgment of the audience. He bids the audience to “save or damn” him according to their own discretion.

➤ **Exposition**

The title establishes the theme of the play straightaway and Congreve makes it clear that his play is concerned with the problem of social living. Act 1 gives us the exposition. It introduces practically all the male characters, informs us with others and supplies us with necessary background information. The opening scene between Fainall and Mirabellis echoed and paralleled by a similar duel of words between

Mrs Fainall and Mrs Marwood at the beginning of Act II. With the progress of the play we get to know the love of Mirabell for Millamant. We then hear the practical obstacle to their marriage. Half of Mirabell's fortune is controlled by her aunt, Lady Wishfort whose prior consent to marriage is necessary if the money is to be claimed. This constitutes the main problem of the play and against this background the story begins.

➤ Proviso Scene

In the Proviso Scene of the play *The Way of the World*, we find Mirabell and Millamant meeting together to arrange an agreement for their marriage. The scene is a pure comedy with brilliant display of wit by both of them, but, above all, provides instructions which have serious dimensions in the context of the society. Here, Congreve seems to come to realise the importance for providing an ideal pair of man and woman, ideal in the sense that the pair could be taken for models in the life-style of the period.

However, the Proviso Scene is one of the most remarkable aspects of Congreve's *The Way of the World* and this scene has been widely and simultaneously admired by the critics and the readers. In fact, it serves as an excellent medium through which Congreve conveys his message to his readers.

The most noteworthy aspect of the Proviso Scene is Millamant's witty style in which she puts her condition before her lover Mirabell. According to her first condition, she wants equal amount of love and affection on the part of her would husband throughout her life. Behind her above mentioned condition we notice the pitiable condition of a wife after marriage. Just before marriage when men and women are lovers they declare full support and love for each other but things take a turn when they marry each other. So Millamant appears anxious because of this reason and that is why she puts this condition. Again, Millamant says that she hates those lovers who do not take proper care of their beloved. She further wants that her husband must be a loyal and good natured man.

She says to Mirabell that she wants her liberty after her marriage; she informs Mirabell that she can't forgo her independence, she says, "My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you adieu?... My morning, thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye douceurs,... Adieu — I can't do it, 'tis more than impossible." She also adds that "I will lie a bed in a morning as long as I please"

Millamant on her part makes it clear that a lover's (Mirabell's) appeals and entreaties should not stop with the marriage ceremony. Therefore, she would like to

be 'solicited' even after marriage. She next puts that "My dear liberty" should be preserved:

"I'll lye abed in a morning as long as I please..." she wants that she will have liberty "to say and receive visits to and from who I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or Wry faces on your part ; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste.....come to dinner who I please, find in my dressing room who I'm out of humour, without giving reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly whenever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in."

Millamant then informs that she would not like to be addressed by such names as "wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart; and the rest of that nauseous can, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar." Moreover, they will continue to present a decorous appearance in public, and she will have free communication with others. In other words, after marriage they maintain certain distance and reserve between them.

Mirabell listens to all the conditions of Millamant with patience. Although he was not very happy with some of the conditions, he did not raise any objection. Now he informs Millamant about some of his own conditions. When we go through his conditions we observe that it is a witty satire on the affectations of women in that society. Mirabell wants that after their marriage Millamant should follow some guidelines. Millamant should not be in company of any woman who has a notorious background or who indulges in scandalous activities. He says that " you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of your own sex; no she friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy-duck to wheedle you a FOP-SCRAMBLING to the play in a mask."

The next condition is that she should not use the artificial things to cover her real appearance. If says that "I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled skins and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat."

Mirabell's conditions are quite different: they are frankly sexual in content, directed to his not being cuckolded or to her bedroom manners. "Just as Millamant's are developed femininely" as Norman N. Holland points out, "Mirabell's are developed in a typically masculine way." Each of Mirabell's provisos begin with its item: first, the general principle, "that your Acquaintance be general", then specific instructions, "no she-friend to screen her affairs", no fop to take her to the theatre

secretly, and an illustration of the forbidden behaviour, “to wheedle you a fop-scrambling to the play in a mask”. Nevertheless, Mirabell denounces the use of tight dresses during pregnancy by women, and he forbids the use of alcoholic drinks. The conditions are stated by both parties in a spirit of fun and gaiety, but the fact remained that both are striving to arrive at some kind of mutual understanding.

Through this scene appears very funny but it is a serious comment on the degradation of conjugal relations. The conditions as set down by the two lovers, confirm the sincerity of their motives and their wish to live a married life which was different from others. Both of them accept each other’s conditions. It is a guideline or memorandum of understanding between a husband and a wife, which would enable them to spend a happy married life. After following these guidelines there will have no possibility of misunderstanding. Thus Congreve throws light on the vital aspects of married life. This is a parody on the social expectations of men and women upon becoming husband and wife. The requirements make the union far from romantic. Instead, the parties involved are expected to comply with formalities that continuously remind them that their union is one based on networking and convenience, rather than love.

Another important significance is that they both discover each other’s penchants with this behavior pact, and wonder about each other. Again, this is satirical. Millamant says that she wants to be free, and allowed basically to do as she pleases. Mirabell takes this sourly and says that his future bride better not be scandalous nor a “fashion victim”. In turn, Millamant takes that personal and cannot believe he would think her to be that way. Even funnier is the fact that all this weird transaction has to be rushed as another character, Fainall, enters the scene.

Yet, it is possible that one of the most important parts of the bargaining scene is the underlying shallowness of the pact. Mirabell says that, upon marriage, he would be exalted to the rank of husband. Contrastingly, Millamant says that she will be demoted to the rank of wife. This is a clear indicator that Millamant is not marriage material, and that Mirabell may not be the dream husband that we assume he wants to be. Hence, the significance here is that Mirabell and Millamant are rushing through the very complex process of pre-nuptial planning with very little evidence of what they really want out of their marriage.

➤ **Ending**

We see in the fifth and the final act the climax of the drama. Lady Wishfort turns Foible out of the house. Fainall and Mrs Marwood are now totally in ascendant and they bear down upon Lady Wishfort’s demanding, with threat and blackmail,

the fortunes of both Millamant and Mrs Fainall. Mirabell has not however been idle, and the first hint of recovery appears in the person of Sir Willfull. He and Millamant appear before Lady Wishfort, and consent to her wish that they should marry. Millamant's share of money is thus retrieved. The play ends with these lines:

From hence let those be warn'd, who mean to wed;
Lest mutual Falsehood stain the Bridal Bed:
For each Deceiver to his cost may find,
That Marriage Frauds too oft are paid in kind.

This conclusion echoes the lines from Horace which Congreve quoted on the title page of the play – “Audire est Operae pretium... Metuat doti deprensa,” through which Congreve expects his audience to remember that disasters wait on adulterers and that they are hampered on all sides.

➤ Epilogue

The Epilogue is spoken by Mrs Bracegirdle, an actress of great repute of that day. Congreve has created the role of Millamant for her. She speaks with the spectators expressing her concern about how the essential insufficiency of critics who criticise plays without knowledge, and how the present audience will criticise this play without showing any mercy.

4.13.8 Central Theme(s) and Key Issues in the Play

✓ Themes

- **Social Convention**

Congreve's “comedy of manners” takes the fashionable or conventional social behaviour of the time as the principal subject of satire. Conflicts that arise between and among characters are prompted by affected and artificial social mores, especially with respect to relationships between the sexes. Social pretences and plot complications abound in *The Way of the World*. Women are compelled to act coyly and to dissemble in courtship, couples deceive one another in marriage, friends are double-dealing, and conquests have more to do with dowries and convenience than love. All moral principle is risked for the sake of reputation and money. However, what makes the action comic is the subterfuge. What one says is hardly ever what one really thinks or means. To judge by appearances, for example, no one could be happier in his marriage than Fainall, who in reality disdains his wife and is carrying on an adulterous affair with his wife's close friend. Congreve intimates that, in

fashionable society at the turn of the eighteenth century, it is crucial to preserve the outer trappings of beauty, wit, and sophistication no matter how egregious one's actions and words might prove.

- **Dowry, Marriage, and Adultery**

In the male-dominated, patriarchal society of Congreve's time, a woman was little more than property in a marriage transaction. Her dowry (money, property, and estate) was relinquished to her husband at marriage and she became, by law, his chattel. In the upper classes, women had little voice in their own fate, and marriages were usually arranged according to social status, size of fortune, and family name. In the play, Millamant's dowry is at the centre of the struggle that pits Mirabell, her true lover, against Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, the two adulterers plotting to gain control of Millamant's fortune as well as Fainall's wife's. Cunningly, Mrs. Fainall has had a large part of her estate signed over in trust before her marriage to prevent her husband from acquiring it.

While marriages are important economic contracts, they are also convenient vehicles for protecting social reputations. Mrs. Fainall has made such a marriage, which is socially acceptable and even expected, as long as the pretense of civility is maintained. However, getting caught in an adulterous relationship puts both reputation and fortune at risk. Hence when the relationship between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood is discovered, the two become social outcasts. Fainall has staked his reputation on a plot to disinherit his wife. As punishment, he will have to bear the humiliating exposure, continuing to live with his wife and depend on her for his livelihood. Mrs. Marwood's reputation is ruined, her future hopes destroyed. Congreve's intent is to reflect the way of the world in all its manifest greed. The lesson is that those who cheat get their just desserts in the end.

- **Marriage**

After Charles II revived theatre in 1660, a new kind of comedy, the comedy of manners exploded onto the English drama scene and remained the preferred style of theatre for the rest of the century. The aim of these plays was to mock society, or rather to hold it up for scrutiny by those very people whose social world was being characterized on stage. *The Way of the World* reflects Congreve's personal view of Restoration society and city life, full of its artificiality, rigidity, and formality. As is typical of Restoration Theatre, this play's main themes are centred on that of marriage and the game of love. However, unlike the relationships depicted in earlier works, the couple at the heart of the play - Mirabell and Millamant, have the potential to become a true partnership even by modern standards. The love and trust shared between two intelligent and independent characters, set against the tableau of

falsehoods, greed, and jealousy that was exemplified by the social world around them, was revolutionary for Restoration comedy. By comparing and contrasting Mirabell and Millamant with the characters and relationships surrounding them, Congreve reveals his view of the true meaning of marriage and how it should be seen by Restoration society.

The strength of character of our two protagonists is crucial to their status as an almost ideal couple. The stark contrasts set up between them and the secondary characters, especially the contrast between Fainall and Mirabell, allow Mirabell and Millamant's individual characters and the ensuing relationship to hold that much more merit in the eyes of the audience. At first glance, Fainall and Mirabell appear to be similar, but even as their first conversation progresses at the beginning of Act I, their distinct personalities emerge. Both are witty and rakish. It is only by the gradual revelation of their inner natures that one is able to distinguish between our hero and the villain. Fainall's cynicism is contrasted with Mirabell's role as commentator on the society of which he is also a part. If Mirabell is to be seen as our representative as the ideal Restoration gentleman, Fainall is that of the antagonist and compilation of all that is wrong with the social scene at present. As the action progresses, he reveals himself to be only a manipulator and a fortune hunter. Throughout the play, his character is unredeemed by a single act of humanity. His cynicism is revealed in his very first remark to Mirabell, "I'd no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation". His attitude towards marriage is equally negative. He recommends marriage as a remedy for love, "be half as well acquainted with her charms as you are with her defects and my life on that, you are your own man again". Fainall is a backstabbing, money-grubbing man who admits to having married his wife for her fortune, and is eager to get his hands on funds intended for other characters within the play. Love doesn't exist for him, except for that of himself and money.

Fainall provides a perfect contrast for the chief male protagonist. At first glance, Mirabell appears to be the typical Restoration beau, envied by the other characters for his wit and attractiveness. But Mirabell is far from perfect, and is much more real and human than that description would imply. He has had his share of debauchery and indulgence, as seen with his affair with Mrs. Fainall. He is also a manipulator, controlling events to his advantage, often resorting to being devious or amoral. In spite of his weaknesses, Mirabell follows a gentleman's code of honor, never losing control of his emotions. He also balances his desires with consideration for the needs of others. When the play opens, the audience learns that Mirabell has already failed in his first attempt to obtain Millamant. His "sham addresses" to Lady Wishfort

have earned him the matron's hatred. His vivid portrait of his courtship of Lady Wishfort seems to go against the very values that he apparently cherishes. He declares that he "proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her" and that "an old woman" cannot be "flattered further, unless a man should endeavor downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me". His wooing of Lady Wishfort clearly shows the shady side of Mirabell. Although Mirabell is not a saint, he shows himself to be a completely decent fellow at the end of the play, when he gives Mrs. Fainall back her money. He is aware of his own failings and has the ability to laugh at himself, which makes a more human and humane character.

Mirabell definitely loves Millamant, but his love for her is not that of the sentimental kind portrayed in many Restoration comedies. Instead of praising Millamant's virtues, he engages in an analysis of her faults. He tells Fainall that once, when he was angry with Millamant, he "took her to pieces, sifted and separated her failings; I studied 'em, and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hope one day or other to hate her heartily". He, therefore, is realistic about his true love, but loves her in spite of her faults, that her flaws make her even more appealing in the end. Mirabell claims, "her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her". At times, Millamant's weaknesses test his patience, and he comes close to losing his control; but Mirabell always reigns himself in, even when Millamant's wit outshines his own. It can be safely said that Mirabell's feelings for Millamant are more motivated by true love than by considerations of money, unlike any of the other relationships within the context of the play.

Mirabell's love interest, the formidable Millamant is the ideal comic heroine, ideal for both her time period and today. She has beauty, wit, intelligence, and vivaciousness, and is a perfect match for Mirabell. At first glance she appears to be a very coquettish woman, who plays the role of the belle effortlessly. But beneath the mask of the coquette, Millamant possesses a deep understanding of the seriousness of life and a depth of character that distinguishes her from her contemporaries both within this play and others. She dislikes superficiality and realizes that she needs both emotional and physical companionship in marriage; however, at the same time, she values her freedom and independence. It is evident that Millamant enjoys the power she has over Mirabell. She knows he loves her, she asks him what he would give that he "could help loving" her. During the battle of wits in the park, she laughs at his moralized tone and asserts her independence, declaring that she will not "endure to be reprimanded nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told one's faults - I can't bear it". It's of no wonder that Mirabell is so taken with her. An intelligent woman, Millamant insists on choosing her own marriage partner instead of simply marrying whoever is chosen by her

aunt, Lady Wishfort. Since she is capable of whole-hearted love, she wants to find the perfect match who can love her for who she is and allow her to retain her individualism after marriage. She believes Mirabell is such a man.

Both Millamant and Mirabell take marriage very seriously, rejecting the sentimental kind of union normally depicted in Restoration comedy. The infamous “proviso” scene characterizes their relationship. They love each other very dearly; however, fortunately, the lovers temper their romance with realism and rise above the typical sentimentality of plays of this time period. Mirabell does not propose to Millamant before discussing the conditions under which they will be able to live together. Millamant insists that she will not be “called names . . . as wife, spouse, my dear, jewel, love”. She also requests that they shall not be “familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks”. After Millamant has stated her conditions, Mirabell lays down some of his own. They decide in a business-like manner to retain their independence after marriage. But this entire scene is conducted in a witty, flirtatious tone, and Mirabell rounds it off by telling Millamant that “when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband” (p.367), relaying that he hopes he can grow to be a husband that matches the wife she will be to him. The two characters are presented as equals, and see themselves as such. They both enjoy the power they have over the other, particularly Millamant, and live for the flirtatious battle-of-the-wits banter that characterizes their conversation. Mirabell and Millamant seem to be an ideal match for each other.

In of itself the relationship between Millamant and Mirabell seems to be idyllic. They love each other, they respect each other, and they treat each other as equals. When placed in the context of the play, their relationship represents more than just a happy couple; it speaks to the progress of the view of marriage from being merely a contract, a way of gaining money or of saving one’s honor, to a more modern conception. Now, in present times, marriage is seen as an affirmation of the mutual love and respect between two people. This is what the leading couple in *The Way of the World* seems to be aiming at, and what Congreve would claim should be a model for Restoration society. Though Mirabell and Millamant’s relationship is not completely devoid of negative influence, for Millamant’s six thousand pound fortune is repeatedly an issue, they are still honourable in contrast to the relationships surrounding them. Marriage is depicted as entirely centered around greed for money, and protection of honor. Debauchery, greed, and deceit permeate this social world and all its interactions. It is exactly this “way of the world” that Congreve believes should be improved.

Congreve offers a critique of this whittled down and desensitized view of

marriage by using the secondary characters to flesh out the negative aspects of society. He contrasts the situation those characters find themselves in at the conclusion of the play with that of Mirabell and Millamant. All of the characters who married with false intentions, or who stood in the way of the marriage of the two protagonists ended up unhappy or dissatisfied upon the closing of the play. In particular, the key antagonist of the play, Mr Fainall characterizes this obsession with money and as previously mentioned, he provides great contrast to Mirabell. Furthermore, all of his relationships are full of falsehood and deceit. He admits to never having loved his wife “wherefore did I marry but to make a lawful prize of a rich widow’s wealth”, and he has already squandered the wealth of his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. His jealousy and greed drive him to ruthlessly blackmail Mrs. Wishfort who only wants to protect the reputation of her daughter. However, his debauchery comes full circle in the end, when he finds his reputation preceded him in marrying his wife. Not only did he lose all moral standing with his social world, but lost all chances at acquiring any money from any of the women in his life and is finally left to fend for himself. The parasite finally got his due. Similarly all those who married under false pretenses, such as Mrs. Fainall, or who was an obstacle to the model couple, such as Mrs. Marwood, were punished in the end. Mrs. Fainall, even though she recovered her fortune from Mirabell, is left with an ambiguous and not entirely joyful future. She has officially lost the one love of her life. It is also unknown whether she will try to fix her disintegrating marriage or even if she wants to. This punishment is due to her marrying Fainall not because she loved him, but because she needed to cover up her affair with Mirabell, in case she was with child. Her receiving the money in the end is justified by her having benevolently supported Mirabell in his quest to win Millamant, even though she still loves him. Mrs. Marwood, on the other hand, never redeems herself, and has backstabbed all of her friends, and was a leading figure in the counter-plot to prevent the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant. She is rewarded for her efforts at the end of the play, when Foible and Mincing reveal her adulterous affair with Fainall. She loses her sole possession of value, her flawless reputation.

In contrast to their compatriots, Mirabell and Millamant, exemplifying the loving, realistic, and modern couple, are allowed happiness and each other. By allowing them to end up together, Congreve is claiming that this type of union should be favored and sought after by members of Restoration society. Rather than being boiled down to the mere desire for wealth, or looked at as a cover for some dishonorable affair, marriage should require the mutual love, respect, and appreciation that exist between Mirabell and Millamant. In addition, he seems to be claiming that this union can only take place between those who are equally matched in wit and appearance, and who are human in that they each have flaws of their own. Both

lovers are just such characters, and each accept and love the other, complete with their faults. Mirabell elucidates Congreve's claim about marriage in the final four lines of the play,

“From hence let those be warned who mean to wed, Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed; For each deceiver to his cost may find That marriage-fraud too oft are paid in kind...”

- **Decorum and Wit**

Congreve invents several characters who, as fops, dandies, and fools, provide fitting foils to the romantic hero and heroine. He pits these purported “wits” against Mirabell and Millamant to comment on the social decline of manners. Since the play is a comedy, audiences are to take it both as serious social satire and also as an amusing romp. No one, of course, escapes Congreve's satirical pen entirely. All people are sometimes fools, Congreve suggests, or sometimes too earnest or too busy inventing counterfeit personas in order to hide their own moral turpitude. Petulant and Witwoud make good fools for they epitomize the shallowness and silliness of fashionable society, but they both also are capable of voicing through their wit the real motivations behind people's actions. They mistake fashionable behaviour for decorum and good manners, but they are basically harmless. The comic hero, Mirabell, unscrupulously uses blackmail and trickery to promote his own interests, yet he also represents what is wise and decent in society, and he protects and thoughtfully provides for his friends. Millamant, while she acts capriciously and spends time with fops, is inherently thoughtful and able to distinguish between fashion and principles. Lady Wishfort is perhaps the most sympathetically comic character in that, for all her desperate attempts to preserve decorum and for all the power she wields as the wealthy matriarch of the family, she is at heart a lonely widow who will do anything for a husband.

4.13.9 *The Way of The World* and Restoration Drama

The Restoration, as a period, takes its name from the Restoration of the monarchy, with Charles II assuming the throne in 1660. The Restoration of the monarchy meant the end of the Puritan Parliament's rule, but it also meant the return of the theatre. Because of the theatre's long-standing connection with royalty and aristocracy and because of the Puritans' view of the theatre as licentious and blasphemous, theatrical performances were banned during parliament's rule. In 1662, the theatres re-opened, and play-going became an important part of the reaction against the Puritanism of the previous decades. Restoration theatre, for many cultural

historians, epitomizes the era. While many plays from the Shakespearean era were reproduced, new plays commenting on the renewed monarchy and a new culture of performance, wealth, and more open sexuality flourished. In a variety of forms, the entire culture seemed to see itself as a kind of play, as commentators repeatedly emphasized the ways everyone seemed to be playing roles as they negotiated new mores and social conditions.

While the theatre of the Restoration era attempted to return to its earlier form, it innovated on the theatre of the first part of the 17th century in many ways. First, it became accessible and respectable, as the theatres themselves moved into better parts of London and started to attract a broader array of patrons. At the same time, playhouses opened up professionally for women, as they began to appear on stage in large numbers for the first time and several women, most famously, perhaps, Aphra Behn, became successful playwrights. The presence of women on the stage and in larger numbers in the audiences directly contributed to the intensive exploration of sexual themes in the theatre of the period. Actresses were often seen as little more than prostitutes, and many famous actresses were well-known consorts of the king and other nobles. Their performances on stage often played with their supposed sexual availability, while women in the audiences often similarly were seen or displayed themselves as performers as they traded witty conversation laced with double entendre with men about town. In many accounts, the flirtations in the audience mirrored or rivalled the performances on stage.

The Restoration comedy of manners reflected and commented on this culture of performance. These plays often featured rakes—men on the prowl for sexual conquest—who elaborated complicated schemes for bedding as many women as possible. Over the course of the play, their attempts were often forwarded, rebuffed, and foiled by various women whose sexual knowledge and wit frequently equalled their male counterparts. These comedies usually featured incredibly complex plots and counterplots—emphasizing their characters’ ability to manipulate others through their self-display, control of language, and psychological calculations as they attempted to win both sexual favours and wealth. Yet, even as the plays displayed the power of performance that their very audiences indulged in, they often critiqued that culture for its duplicity and depravity. With the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the return to power of parliament, a reaction against the excesses of the Restoration set in, with much of the focus on the theatre and the culture of performance and display and, in particular, its sexual licentiousness.

Appearing in 1700, Congreve’s play represents a late version of the Restoration comedy of manners, one that consolidates many of the features of earlier plays even as it responds to increasing critique of the theatre (the play mentions one of the

most famous critiques in Act 3. Implicitly describing the way of the world as one of cynical self-interest, the play follows the reformed rake Mirabell as he attempts to win the hand of Millamant, the woman he actually loves. Before the play begins, Mirabell, we later learn, has had an affair with Mrs. Fainall, whose husband married her only for her wealth and is having an affair with Mrs. Marwood; we only learn most of this in the second act. Millamant is the niece and ward of Lady Wishfort, who is Mrs. Fainall's mother, and stands to inherit a great deal of money, but only if Lady Wishfort approves of her suitor. Mirabell has offended Lady Wishfort, so he needs not only to win Millamant's hand but also to win over Lady Wishfort. As with most Restoration comedies, Mirabell creates a complicated scheme involving impersonation and artifice to get both wealth and love. He has his valet, Waitwell, pretend to be his uncle and woo Lady Wishfort. His plan is to then rescue Lady Wishfort from being seduced by a servant and thus gain her approval. While Millamant knows of the plot and does love Mirabell, she takes pleasure in teasing him about the uncertainty of their eventual union.

However, things go awry for Mirabell when Mrs. Marwood learns of the plot and of Mirabell's former affair with Mrs. Fainall. Mrs. Marwood informs Mr. Fainall, and they begin a plot against Mirabell. Millamant has accepted Mirabell's proposal, turning down Sir Witful Witwoud (Lady Wishfort's choice). Fainall uncovers the plot to Lady Wishfort and attempts to blackmail her by threatening to reveal her daughter's (Mrs. Fainall's) adultery. He wants all of Millamant's fortune as well as complete control of Mrs. Fainall's potential inheritance. Millamant then decides she will marry Sir Witwoud in order to save her fortune, and Mirabell appears with two servants to prove Mr. Fainall's adultery with Mrs. Marwood. Fainall, however, is not cowed and continues to threaten Mrs. Fainall's reputation. Then, Mirabell plays his last card. Before she married Mr. Fainall, Mrs. Fainall, out of fear of Mr. Fainall's character, had made Mirabell the trustee of her fortune. Without control of that money, Mr. Fainall is left without any resources, and the play ends with Mirabell and Millamant engaged.

The Way of the World exemplifies many of the key features of the Restoration comedy of manners— complex, multi-faceted characters who combine urbanity and wit in treating love and wealth as a game they play through concealment, artifice, and plotting. Unlike some of the plays from the first decade of the Restoration, however, Congreve's play does not end up embracing the cynicism of some of its characters; instead, true love—while far from sentimentalized—wins out and leaves with wealth. His characters have their moral failings and they more than handle themselves in a world of false appearances, banter, and sexual double-dealings, but they are redeemed in the end.

4.13.10 Summing Up

So as we reach to the end of the play we learn quite much about William Congreve's *The Way of the World*, a play that exemplifies many of the key features of what became popular as the **Restoration Comedy of Manners**.

- Congreve's intent was not on writing the sentimental comedies that were later to become so popular on the eighteenth century stage. His works stood unique as it showcased the subtle balance that he achieved between the cool disenchantment of the Restoration and the emotional warmth of the 18th century.
- The representations of the old form and new form of marital relations we see sexual power at first and then developing into material power.
- Congreve's "comedy of manners" takes the fashionable or conventional social behavior of the time as the principle subject of satire.
- While marriages are important economic contracts, they are also convenient vehicles for protecting social reputations.
- Congreve invents several characters who, as fops, dandies, and fools, provide fitting foils to the romantic hero and heroine.

4.13.11 Activity For The Learner

Make an extensive reading of the text and try to answer the following multiple choice questions:

- Act I Scene I of the play *The Way of the World* takes place in –
 1. St. James Park
 2. A Chocolate House
 3. A Room in Lady Wishfort's House
 4. In a tavern
- The dedicatory preface to the first edition of *The Way of the World* is a –
 1. Letter to Oliver Goldsmith
 2. Letter to Jacob Tonson
 3. Letter to the Earl of Montagu
 4. Letter to Dryden

- The Restoration form owes much to the brilliant dramas of the French writer

1. Jean Racine
2. Moliere
3. Oliver Goldsmith
4. Sheridan

The Way of the World exemplifies many of the key features of the Restoration comedy of manners— complex, multi-faceted characters who combine urbanity and wit in treating love and wealth as a game they play through concealment, artifice, and plotting.

4.13.12 Comprehension Exercises

Long – answer type :

1. How would you apply the main features of ‘Comedies of Manners to *The Way of the World*?
2. ‘The Proviso scene between Millamant and Mirabell is a significant event which strengthens the plot of the play’. Illustrate.
3. Highlight the vices and follies of contemporary society that Congreve hints at through his play *The Way of the World*.

Mid – length questions :

1. Comment on the minor characters of the play, bringing out the significance of any two of them.
2. Give a comparison between Comedy of Manners and Comedy of Humours.
3. Show how verbal wit contributes to the overall humorous intent in *The Way of the World*.

Short answer type questions :

1. Comment on the character of Lady Wishfort.
2. Comment on the Dowry, Marriage and Adultery as a theme in *The Way of the World*.
3. Bring out the significance of the Prologue of the play.

MODULE 5

The Augustan Age

UNIT 14 □ The Augustan Age : Characteristics

Structure

5.14.0 Introduction

5.14.1 Why The Term ‘Augustan’?

5.14.2 Neoclassicism – Links with the Restoration

5.14.3 Imitation as a Predominant Literary Mode

5.14.4 Augustan Literary Terms

5.14.5 The Appeal to Reason and Good Sense

5.14.6 Wit in Literature

5.14.7 Summing Up

5.14.8 Comprehension Exercises

5.14.9 Reading List

5.14.0 Introduction

In this Unit you will be introduced to the culture, literature and politics of England after the Restoration. Evidently, Neo-Classicism as a cult was deeply rooted in literature by this time, but the long standing effects of the restoration of monarchy that you have learnt about in the earlier Module, and some of its counter impacts begin to make themselves felt in the post-Restoration period. The essence of the age lies in an understanding of the term ‘Augustan’, and the other allied nomenclatures like the ‘Age of Prose and Reason’. Literary developments like the rise of the novel as a genre, or the predominance of political and social satire were influenced by several extra-literary factors like the philosophy of John Locke, the inroads of capitalism, the growth of the cult of sensibility and of course the early beginnings of Romanticism in the return to Nature and reflective modes of thought. These factors taken together make this era one of deep literary complexity. This Unit should be seen as a preliminary overview of multiple literary trends, shifts and transitions that link the age to the past and are a prelude to the nineteenth century.

5.14.1 Why The Term ‘Augustan’?

In the earlier Units, you have read about the Restoration of monarchy and the complicated series of events of succession following the succession of Charles II. In

the context of the history of English literature, the Augustan Age refers to the post-Restoration (1660) period, roughly speaking from 1688 and the Glorious Revolution, to the death of literary stalwarts like Alexander Pope (1744). It could in fact be stretched further to cover the death of Samuel Johnson (1784) that also marked the beginnings of Romanticism. In a true sense therefore, the Augustan period provides the vital bridge between the Restoration and Romanticism, two important phases of English literature which, but for the initial alphabet in common between them, are all chalk and cheese for the rest!

The Augustan age comprises the reigns of three English monarchs — William of Orange and Mary, Queen Anne and King George I. You must by now be wondering what the reasons could be for this nomenclature ‘Augustan’. The term Augustan takes us back in time to the Roman period and the rule of Emperor Octavian Augustus Caesar (63 BCE -14CE). His reign brought to Roman civilization a period of peace and stability that ended the Civil Wars which was also celebrated by victory in the Battle of Actium. It was a time when literature and the arts flourished as poets like Virgil and Horace, Ovid, Propertius and Livy contributed substantially to the growth of Latin writing.

What then do you find in common between this classical period of history and the contemporary one in England?

The English Augustan Age brought in new modes of thought, changes in society and everyday life, modern approaches to knowledge that were expressed through new fashions in writing. Two very important treatises of the period that made a cutting edge difference to perspectives of life and thought were Isaac Newton’s *Principia* (published in 1687) and John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (in 1690). The intellectual milieu was marked by a more rationalistic attitude and various genres of prose writing emerged while the styles of writing poetry were refashioned. Augustan literature was therefore shaped as much by the contemporary social, political and intellectual milieu as by a direct veneration for the writings of the Ancients. In fact, throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the debate *On Ancient and Modern Learning* inaugurated by Sir William Temple, continued unabated. Jonathan Swift revisited this discussion in his satire *A Tale of a Tub*, published in 1704.

Activity for the Learner

As a project based activity with help from your counselor, you could make interesting charts of how expressions in literature gradually begin to get what we today call inter-disciplinary! With the help of the Timelines chart at the end of this SLM, you can trace the influences of emerging Sciences, Philosophy and Social History in giving rise to new literary phenomenon.

5.14.2 Neoclassicism– Links With The Restoration

Literature in the English Augustan age became self-consciously imitative of original classical writers, both Greek and Roman, but mostly of those belonging to the Latin Augustan era. This is the reason that the age is also called the Neoclassical Age or the ‘new’ classical period. This classicist trend began with John Dryden who is the link between Restoration and Augustan literature. Interestingly, his plays belonged to the popular theatrical trends of the time, but his verse satires, though topical, were steeped in the neoclassical spirit of Varro and Juvenal. It is in the poetry of Alexander Pope that neoclassicism as an aesthetic principle became clearly evident. These principles formed the foundations of classical art and literature—harmony and precision, balance and symmetry, form and urbanity.

5.14.3 Imitation as a Predominant Literary Mode

Imitation of classical models including Homer and Cicero, Virgil and Horace, Aristotle and Longinus was a much preferred method of literary composition. The concept of originality did not exist as the pleasure derived from a composition lay in recognizing parallels and transformations and the witty adaptation of a traditional structure to a more topical subject. Addison in the *Spectator* stated very clearly the eighteenth century view on originality when he wrote:

Wit and fine writing doth not consist so much in advancing things that are new, as in giving things that are known an agreeable turn. It is impossible for us, who live in the latter ages of the world to make observations in criticism, morality, or in any art or science which have not been touched upon by others.

So according to Addison, originality could be shown in the treatment of the material. The mock-heroic or mock-epic (you will read more on this in Module 2 Unit 1) for instance, worked on this principle of imitating and parodying at the same time by using a particular form or structure. The mismatch between the theme or subject-matter and style/form was a source of wit and humour. The incongruity between the two was the satiric tool that a writer or poet manipulated. This meant that the poet/writer was as conversant with classical models as the audience. The response to literature that was anticipated was intellectual rather than emotional.

The idea of Imitation also involved the representation of the general rather than the particular. Samuel Johnson remarked that “Great thoughts are always general” which corroborates the views of neo-classic critics following Aristotle, who brought

the idea of *mimesis*. The artist did not therefore ‘copy’ what lay before him, but presented an idealised, often a more universal/general picture of life. Shaftesbury, a philosopher/critic of the period argues that there is an astonishing variety in nature and every good poet and artist is aware of peculiarity and singularity. But if they were to reproduce these aspects of nature, their ‘images or characters [would] appear capricious and fantastical’. So from the knowledge of the particular, a conception of the universal and ideal has to be derived.

5.14.4 Augustan Literary Terms

During the eighteenth century poetry was regarded as a conscious art rather than an imaginative experience and a poem was a thing that was **made** rather than an organic form. So critics could prescribe ways of writing verse which is evident from what John Dennis had to say:

In short, poetry is either an art, or whimsy and fanaticism. If it is an art, it follows that it must propose an end to itself, and afterwards lay down proper means for attaining that end: for this is undeniable, that there are proper means for the attaining of every end and those proper means in poetry we call the rules.

Throughout the Augustan period genres and forms of writing were borrowed from classical models and a strict hierarchy was maintained. The ‘**Kinds**’ of poetry or writing had their own specific ‘**Rules**’ of composition that followed a set ‘**decorum**’ even with a prescribed choice of **diction**. You must notice the abundance of terms associated with classical poetics that abound the rules of literary composition in this period. A balance among the components of writing produced the best mimetic representation of Nature. The charge of ‘artificiality’ was refuted by suggesting that even art refined the crude and vulgar and upheld universal ‘**Nature**’ and the ‘natural’. On the one hand this is also an amplification of the ideas of Philip Sidney that you have read of in paper II.

This ‘nature’ of the Augustans, was thus not the spiritual or wild nature that romantic poets like Wordsworth or Shelley would later idealise, but nature as derived from classical theory: a rational and comprehensible moral order in the universe, demonstrating God’s providential design. The literary circle that obviously centered around Pope considered Homer foremost among ancient poets in his descriptions of nature, and therefore held that the writer who ‘imitates’ Homer is also describing nature. Thus Pope himself famously put it in his *Essay on Criticism*, the following lines that have kind of become the buzz-words of poetic thought of this age:

**Those *Rules* of old discover'd, not devis'd,
Are nature still, but nature methodiz'd;**

Notice for yourselves the tremendous restraint in form in the above lines that he exerts to communicate an equally restrained treatment of the content that he is talking about!

So an eighteenth century writer would set out to write by composing a poem that belonged to one of the recognized 'Kinds'. The poet was expected to know the achievement of predecessors within that Kind, the type of treatment required and the possible ends that could be expected. This gets as close as it can to the '**Impersonal theory of Poetry**' that T.S Eliot talks of in the 20th century in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. It is important for you as students of literature to realise that this break from subjective content in literature remains one of the key features of literature in this era – a significant break from both the preceding and following epochs.

The language of writing and the diction of poetry expectedly became basic concerns in this age. There was a categorical difference espoused in the diction used in various Kinds of writing, and writers could even draw on a common pool of words and phrases. The distinct criteria followed for including or excluding words were identifying words and phrases as 'poetical' or categorising several to be too colloquial, 'low' and prosaic to be suited to literary works. There was a fear in Augustan minds about any form of vulgarity in art just as there was an apprehension about the 'uncivilised' in the context of society and community living. This should remind one of the strict principles of **Decorum** that Horace had spoken of much earlier. All the same, much of this is challenged when one comes to Dr Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare, where as critic, Samuel Johnson upholds the ingenuity of Shakespeare. Johnson's own creative literature is however a different turf altogether.

The eighteenth century in England considered progress in terms of being civilized, refined and elegant and the writing moved towards these goals. Paradoxically trends of social and political realism penetrated into writing through various forms of satire where a lofty, normative exterior maintained the semblance of order and restraint. The criterion of '**taste**' was as important as the exercise of '**judgement**' in the composition and appreciation of art.

One of the characteristics of Augustan literature was that it was not expressive of personal emotions but more often '**occasional**' or '**objective**'. It was a response to society or public life, individuals, or institutions, religion or politics and therefore satire, both verse satire and narrative satire, became more popular during the age.

Irony and sarcasm were used as literary devices in such writing rather than lyricism or subjective passion.

5.14.5 The Appeal to Reason and Good Sense

The Enlightenment privileging of Reason made good sense the test for a literary work and Pope sums it up succinctly in a heroic couplet (iambic pentameter couplet) which was the most preferred form of verse as it was considered to be stately and dignified.

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

Since reason was given a new position of prestige, other kinds of mental activity that were not strictly rational were naturally suspect. Thomas Hobbes almost equated imagination with madness and it was important that any form of writing should have a purpose and move in a steady direction. So fancy and imagination were seen as typical forms of mind-wandering.

Much of Augustan writing is concerned with issues that affect humankind and this broad interest in human progress and development made literature distinctly didactic. The heroic couplet was also suited to the aphoristic style that marked the poetry. In prose, the periodical essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele and their periodicals *The Tatler* (1709-11), and *The Spectator* (1711-12) were interested in improving the condition of the English middle-classes. Addison was an admirer of Locke and he used the periodical to glory to disseminate Locke's explanations about the working of the human mind. Apparently light-hearted debates were initiated in the periodical papers that seriously questioned popular beliefs in witchcraft and demonology, superstitions and dreams. Secular moralising thus came to be spread through the periodical essays, and this channel soon replaced formal religion and institutional sermons. Their express purpose was as Steele remarked "to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality."

5.14.6 Wit In Literature

Though the word 'Wit' is difficult to define, it was a predominant characteristic of the literature of the period which prided itself on its intellectual content and ratiocinative approach. As Dryden wrote in the Preface to his poem *Annus Mirabilis*, "The Composition of all Poems is or ought to be of wit; and wit in the Poet, or wit writing (if you will give me leave to use a School distinction), is no other than the

faculty of imagination in the Writer; which, like a nimble Spaniel, beats over and ranges through the field of Memory, till it springs the Quarry it hunted after; or, without metaphor, which searches over all the Memory for the Species or Ideas of those things which it designs to represent.”

In 1704, Alexander Pope spoke of ‘True-Wit’ as ‘a justness of Thought, and a Facility of Expression’. Significantly the word refers to the various powers of the mind – Understanding and Memory, Imagination and Judgement. The balance between nature and art, imagination and reason is what the term connotes.

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
 What oft was Thought, but ne’er so well Express,
 Something, whose Truth convinc’d at Sight we find,
 That gives us back the Image of our Mind.

There was a distinct distrust of a spontaneous association of individual ideas and a preference for conforming to universal truths. It is important to understand that Augustan literature has to be approached from a perspective that is wholly different from the way in which literature of any other period is read. Understanding the tenets followed by writers, the expectations of an audience from literature and the way in which literature reflected the urbane and civilisational influences of the age will help you to identify the characteristics of Augustan verse and prose.

5.14.7 Summing Up

This Unit, as you must have gauged, is logically a continuation of what you have read in the previous one. The purpose has been to analyse the predominant literary trends in contiguity with the socio-cultural milieu and provide you a framework wherewith to approach the literary texts in this Paper. The literary trends already apparent in the Restoration that you have read about in the earlier Modules of this Course become more entrenched in this period. The key issues that should be noted in the context of handling texts in this Unit are:

- Literature has moved out of the royal court into the coffee houses and public domain and is therefore more engaged with the common people
- The rising middle classes reshaped the character of writing and made literature more accessible
- With the growth of print culture, literature became a commodity especially because the patronage system was coming to an end

- Secular interests, politics and mundane everyday concerns were incorporated as themes in writing
- New understandings and adaptations of neoclassical concepts of imitation, originality and nature are noticed
- Literature became a conscious art that moved towards exploring universal laws about Nature and Man
- The insistence on objectivity and control defined writing in this age
- Reason and Good Sense were emphasized for maintaining order and discipline in life and literature

It is hoped that with help from your counselor, you will be able to use these focal points as critical tools to understand and analyse the several literary types dealt with in this Paper.

5.14.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions :

1. Discuss the salient literary features of eighteenth century poetry and writing. Try to illustrate your points with illustrations from texts that you have read.
2. What do you understand by the concept of Imitation? How was it used in the literature of the age?
3. Why is this period called the neo-classical age?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions :

1. In what ways did the English eighteenth century resemble the original Roman Augustan Age?
2. What were the views of eighteenth century writers on originality?
3. How does 'wit' become the defining characteristic of the literature of the period?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Define what is meant by poetic diction. Give two examples from poems that you have read.
2. What do you understand by the term 'Kinds'? Give one example of how this functions from any text in your course.
3. Are 'Rules' important in neo-classical writing? Give reasons for your answer.

UNIT 15 □ Features of the Enlightenment

Structure

5.15.0 Introduction

5.15.1 Background of the Enlightenment

5.15.2 Understanding the Enlightenment Principle(s)

5.15.3 Leading Figures of the Enlightenment – Their Influence

5.15.4 Political Thought of the Enlightenment

5.15.5 Religion, Scientific Thought and the Enlightenment

5.15.6 Controversies Regarding the Enlightenment

5.15.7 Enlightenment and the Mercantile Class

5.15.8 Summing Up

5.15.9 Comprehension Exercises

5.15.10 Suggested Reading List

5.15.0 Introduction

After the Renaissance and the Restoration, here you will read about the period from the late 17th century to the mid 1780's which, as you know from the previous Unit, has been variously called the **Age of Enlightenment**, or simply the **Enlightenment** or even the **Age of Reason**. This Unit will attempt to give you a fair idea of how and why these coinages came to exist, how the Enlightenment may be seen as a logical development of the preceding era that culminated in the Romantic Revolution, and of course how culture and literature came to be influenced by the phenomena in a mighty way. You can in fact look upon this Unit as a key to open up your understanding of the entire 18th century.

5.15.1 Background of the Enlightenment

If you look up the meaning of the word 'Enlightenment' in a dictionary, the following would be some of the meanings that it would give:

- the state of having knowledge or understanding : the act of giving someone knowledge or understanding
- the Enlightenment : a movement of the 18th century that stressed the belief that science and logic give people more knowledge and understanding than tradition and religion (www.merriam-webster.com)

While the first is a generalised meaning, the second is more specific and obviously relates to the context that we are talking of. But it is interesting to notice that the second follows as it were, from the first. What we therefore need to understand in this sub-section is the phenomena that gave to Europe in general and England in particular this ‘state’ of ‘knowledge or understanding’ via an enhanced appreciation of science and logic.

On the face of it, we may regard ‘The Enlightenment’ as a pan-European progressive cultural and intellectual movement that swept across the continent from approximately the 1650s to the 1780s. Notwithstanding regional variations of impact and epistemological bias, Enlightenment thinkers all over Europe would perhaps accept the German philosopher **Immanuel Kant**’s (1724-1804) definition of the Enlightenment as **mankind’s decision to come out of its self imposed immaturity**.

You definitely understand that such a ‘decision’ does not come overnight, nor does it fall from the skies like Manna in the Holy land of Biblical fame! By immaturity he meant dependence on external authoritative control for one’s beliefs, actions and judgement. This implies that Enlightenment thinkers encouraged a spirit of enquiry even regarding the most fundamental assumptions of life. The end of the Enlightenment was marked by the onset of the French Revolution in 1789. We would do good to remind ourselves in passing that individualism and defiance of authoritative control, a trend of the Enlightenment, was also a characteristic feature of the Romantic revival which marked the end of the dominance of Reason and re-instated Imagination and Inspiration as the prime inspirer for all creative work.

We therefore need to address the vital question(s) as to how and why something like the Enlightenment came about in Europe.

Before we go on this fact finding mission, rewind your memory to the previous Papers and recall how the Renaissance/Reformation and thereafter the Restoration brought about a sea-change in literature and literary modes of articulation. The stranglehold of medieval Christianity was gone, literature was secularised and the old genres began to take on new forms in the wake of the Renaissance. The Restoration, while largely being the era of elitist and coterie literature, revived the age of the classics in myriad forms; while the politico-religious dissents of the period shaped its literary output like never before.

There are several ways of looking at the Enlightenment, and many of these views are not necessarily in agreement with each other. Given that the preceding eras had on the one hand unleashed avenues of new knowledge, and were on the other hand quite happening periods themselves, we might as well look at it this way

that the period of relative stability in the 18th century gave space to rationalise and concentrate on provoking thought. The coming up of urban coffee houses and literary salons that became the popular haunts of philosophers and social thinkers; the widespread circulation of newspapers and periodicals; the formation of secret societies of the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians and the Bavarian Illuminati - were all interesting happenings round this time. These became the channels of brewing full-fledged challenges to the authority of institutions that were deeply rooted in society: especially the Catholic Church; as also all the talk of ways to reform society with tolerance, science and thereby rationality; not to forget scepticism.

As suggested earlier, there are differences of opinion over the evolution of the term 'Enlightenment' or even its exact nomenclature and scope; chronology and geographical expanse. For our purpose, it makes sense to go with Jonathan Israel's seminal work *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*. (Princeton, 2010) where he focuses on the history of ideas in the period from 1650 to the end of the 18th century, and claims that it were the ideas themselves that caused the change that eventually led to the revolutions of the latter half of the 18th century and the early 19th century. Israel argues that until the 1650s Western civilization "was based on a largely shared core of faith, tradition and authority". Till this time most intellectual debates revolved around "confessional" – that is, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist), or Anglican issues, and the main aim of these debates was to establish which block of faith ought to have the "monopoly of truth and a God-given title to authority". After this, everything that was rooted in tradition began to be questioned, and often replaced by new concepts in the light of philosophical reason. After the second half of the 17th century and during the 18th century a "general process of rationalisation and secularisation set in, which rapidly overthrew theology's age-old hegemony in the world of study", and thus confessional disputes were reduced to a secondary status in favor of the increasing tussle between faith and incredulity".

This view almost echoes that of the 20th century philosopher Bertrand Russell who looked upon the Enlightenment as a phase in progressive development that actually began in antiquity. He also held that reason and challenges to the established order were constant ideals throughout that period of the formation of modern societies in Europe. Russell argues that the **Enlightenment** as a specific happening as we demarcate in history, was ultimately born out of the Protestant reaction against the Catholic counter-reformation, when the philosophical views of the past two centuries crystallised into a coherent world view. He was of the opinion that many of the philosophical views, such as affinity for democracy against monarchy, originated among Protestants in the early 16th century to justify their desire to break away

from the Pope and the Catholic Church. Though many of these philosophical ideals were picked up by Catholics, Russell held that by the 18th century the

Enlightenment was the principal manifestation of the schism that began with Martin Luther.

Activity for the Learner

The preceding sub-section tries to trace historical continuities with what you have studied in earlier Papers, and place your understanding of the Enlightenment in perspective.

With help from your counselor, try to draw a chart of how and where old ideas were being overturned as a result of these progressive movements. Try to place the literary, philosophical and scientific texts against the proper backdrop of these developments. This will give you an expansive idea of History of Literature, far more than any conventional text book!

5.15.2 Understanding the Enlightenment Principle(s)

❖ Dating the Enlightenment

◆ The Early Enlightenment: 1685-1730

The Enlightenment's important 17th-century precursors, as you will see in a later sub-section, included the Englishmen Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, the Frenchman Renee Descartes and the key natural philosophers of the Scientific Revolution, including Galileo, Kepler and Leibniz. Its roots are usually traced to 1680s England, where Isaac Newton published his *Principia Mathematica* (1686) and John Locke his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1689)—two works that provided the scientific, mathematical and philosophical praxis for the Enlightenment's

major advances. We therefore date the Enlightenment as *beginning* with the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The rise of the new science surely and increasingly undermined not only the ancient geocentric conception of

D'Alembert, a leading figure of the French Enlightenment, characterizes the eighteenth century as "the century of philosophy *par excellence*", because of the tremendous intellectual progress of the age, the advance of the sciences, and the enthusiasm for that progress, but also because of the characteristic expectation of the age that philosophy (in this broad sense) would dramatically improve human life.

the cosmos, but, with it, the entire set of presuppositions that had served to constrain and guide philosophical inquiry. This obviously meant a blow anew to the Church, coming as it did after the religious reformist basis of the Reformation, and emboldened by the discoveries of Galileo. The dramatic success of the new science in explaining the natural world, in accounting for a wide variety of phenomena by appeal to a relatively small number of elegant mathematical formulae, raised philosophy (in the broad sense of the time, which included natural science) from a handmaiden of theology to an independent force with the power and authority to challenge the old and construct the new, both in theory and practice. In this vein, the Enlightenment brought on the same platform John Locke and Isaac Newton! While the former argued that human nature was mutable and that knowledge was gained through accumulated experience rather than by accessing some sort of outside truth; the latter's calculus and optical theories provided the powerful Enlightenment metaphors for precisely measured change and illumination.

◆ **The High Enlightenment: 1730-1780**

With the appearance of French philosophers like Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Buffon and Diderot, the High phase of the Enlightenment was truly ushered in. As stated earlier, there was indeed no single, unified Enlightenment. It is rather both possible and plausible to speak of the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment and the English, German, Swiss or American Enlightenment. Individual Enlightenment thinkers often had very different approaches. Locke differed from Hume, Rousseau from Voltaire, Thomas Jefferson from Frederick the Great. Their differences and disagreements, though, emerged out of the common Enlightenment themes of rational questioning and belief in progress through dialogue. Foremost among these was the notion that everything in the universe could be rationally demystified and catalogued. The significant publication of the period was Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751-77), which brought together leading authors to produce an ambitious compilation of human knowledge. See for yourself how the trend of publications now began to equally veer into the producing and assimilating of knowledge.

The impact of such reasoned learning also impacted in positive ways the ruling class who began to meet with intellectuals and try to apply their reforms, such as allowing for toleration, or accepting multiple religions, in what became known as **enlightened absolutism**. It was thus an age when enlightened despots like Frederick the Great (1712 – 1786) came to unify, rationalise and attempt to modernise Prussia in between brutal multi-year wars with Austria. The period also saw and would-be revolutionaries like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, whose “Declaration of Independence” (1776) framed the American Revolution in terms taken from John

Locke's essays. You thus see how fast the principles of the Enlightenment began to spread from continent to continent. The same flood also began to be felt in religion, that took on a rational approach and forwarded the belief that divine intervention was not the ultimate in the goings on of the universe. You might relate this to the use of the divine machinery in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* for instance, to see how divinity came to be undermined and subverted.

◆ **The Late Enlightenment and Beyond: Into the 19th Century**

The culminating act of the phases of Enlightenment is generally held as being reflected in the French Revolution of 1789. In principle, it sought to remake society along rational lines. It did begin with such an ideal before degenerating into bloody terror (known in history as the **Reign of Terror**) and led, a decade later, to the rise of Napoleon. The subsequent failure does not however rule out the early goal of egalitarianism, that attracted the admiration of the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and inspired much subsequent political-social activity on a global scale. In literature, as you will read in Paper 5, the Romantic Revolution was ushered in.

Thus you see that the Enlightenment was, to go back to Bertrand Russel's words, truly a 'phase' of continuous development or evolution; the roots of which stretch much beyond the 16th century and the offshoots of which have influenced thought ever after. For the purpose of academic study, we shall be concentrating on the 18th century proper. For those of you who would be interested to know more about the Enlightenment, the following web link could provide interesting inputs:

http://history-world.org/age_of_enlightenment.htm

5.15.3 Leading Figures of the Enlightenment – Their Influence

We shall now familiarise you with some of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, and their contribution therein. You have already come across some of these names. Notice, among other things, the wide fields of study that they hailed from – this will give you a fair idea as to why the Enlightenment was truly a multi-disciplinary affair.

- **Francis Bacon** (1561-1626) : Chronologically speaking he was a Renaissance figure but his strong views on empirical knowledge as opposed to the Aristotelian deductive methodology, influenced later thinkers and scientists, particularly Isaac Newton. The emphasis on the inductive embodies the key to the Enlightenment spirit. All knowledge should be acquired

through observation and experimentation. Nothing should be taken for granted. Students of literature are familiar with his terse and epigrammatic essays. Among his other famous scientific works are *The Great Instauration*, *Novum Organum* (New Method) and *Advancement of Learning* (Partition of Sciences).

- **Michel de Montaigne** (1533-1592): This Renaissance philosopher in his *Apology of Raymond Sebond* stated “Unless one thing is found of which we are completely certain we can be certain about nothing”. Scientists and philosophers of the Enlightenment spend their lives observing, calculating and experimenting to arrive at certainties which were provided by religion at earlier ages.
- **Galelio Galilei** (1564-1642): The psychological groundwork for the most towering of Enlightenment personalities Sir Isaac Newton was created in Italy by Galileo. In his *The Starry Messenger* (1610), *A Dialogue Between the Two Great World Systems* (1632) and *The Two Sciences* (1638) Galileo with the help of telescopic observations and experimentations propounded his own view of the universe and the laws of motion which was opposed to the orthodox Christian Geocentric view. Christian clerics refused to accept the view that the Earth revolved around the sun instead of being the centre of creation. Galileo was imprisoned as a heretic and was compelled to recant.
- **Sir Isaac Newton** (1642-1727): Sir Isaac Newton was much luckier than Galileo. He was the president of the Royal Society from 1703 till his death. The Society’s motto, *Nullius in verba*, is Latin for “Take nobody’s word for it”. In his *Principia Mathematica* (1687) he used Mathematical principles to explain the working of the force of gravity in the operation of the solar system. He did not ruffle the feathers of Orthodox Christianity. He was a strongly religious man though he believed in the religion that could be explained in rational terms. According to him a well ordered universe could only be explained in term of an efficient operator. He did not believe in the power of the imagination and regarded poetic activities as a mere waste of time. This however did not detract the tremendous respect he commanded from all sections of educated society all over Europe. Newton epitomized the Enlightenment spirit which was neither about atheism not about revolt but all about taking anything for granted without questioning, observing and examining.
- **René Descartes** (1596-1650): Descartes was disturbed by Montaigne’s assertion “Unless one thing is found of which we are completely certain we can be certain about nothing”. While Newton took his step towards certainties through the discovery of numerous particles that constituted the

universe Descartes arrived at his own with the perception that the only certainty was the thinking self—"I think therefore I am". Both these great thinkers applied different sets of Mathematical reasoning which led them to the conclusion of a Supreme Power or First Cause operating the orderly universe. Many thinkers of the modern world still find the idea acceptable. For instance when a friend had asked Albert Einstein (1879-1955) if he believed in God, he had stated—"Not in the God that supposedly regulates our fates, but in a Spinozian God running an orderly universe". Thus we may conclude that 18th century and 20th century thinkers through divergent methods tried to arrive at a harmonious philosophical outlook.

- **Baruch Spinoza** (1632-1677): Spinoza was a Dutch philosopher. He is generally regarded as one of the foremost rationalists of the 17th-century. Spinoza's works were relatively unknown till many years after his death. He paved the way for 18th-century Enlightenment and modern biblical criticism, through his ideas regarding the self. His most important and well-known work is *Ethics* where he has challenged Descartes's mind-body dualism.
- **David Hume** (1711-1776): David Hume the Scottish philosopher was a very important thinker. He like Descartes only considered individually acquired knowledge as valid. However, he believed that sensory experiences come before the thought process in defining knowledge. He rejected the Cartesian view of the universe and a creator based on back-calculations leading to the First Cause. According to him God is simply beyond perception because all knowledge is based on experience and God cannot be experienced. Hume may thus be regarded as a figure who embodied both the Enlightenment and the Counter Enlightenment. We can see the Counter Enlightenment factor in his refusal to give primacy to thought in favour of sensory experience. However his logical argument about the limitations of human knowledge accords well with the Enlightenment spirit. For instance Locke emphasized the futility of trying to move beyond the scope of Human understanding. Swift, even as an Anglican priest emphatically stated that the function of religion should be limited to the guidance of human ethics and conduct and nothing more.
- **Voltaire (Francois Marie Alouet)** (1694-1798): Voltaire was a prolific French writer. In his *Philosophical Letters* (1734) he praised the liberal atmosphere of freedom in Britain. He used his English experiences as a basis for his attack on traditional French establishments. His dictum "écrasez l'Infame" (crush the evil) became a slogan against superstition, intolerance and unjustified privileges supported by religious institutions.

- **Thomas Hobbes** (1588-1679): The best known of his works is *Leviathan*. The word means a whale or a sea monster. It symbolizes sovereign power. Hobbes believed that human beings are governed by two overwhelming concerns namely Fear and Love of Power. His most important contribution to political theory was the concept that the centre of power should be created on the basis of an agreement of the people. He said that people submit to sovereign power because only a controlling authority could prevent human life from being “Nasty, brutish and short”. This is the beginning of the concept of the Social Contract theory or the evolution of power with the consent of the people. His analysis of the mechanical laws of production, distribution and exchange had a profound influence on British economic philosophy.
- **John Locke** (1632-1704): John Locke was one of the most influential Enlightenment philosophers. He followed Hobbes in his skeptical rationalism. Unlike Hobbes’ pessimism however, he had an optimistic view of human nature. Here we can perhaps trace history acting upon philosophy. Hobbes lived through the decade of the civil war (1642-1652). He was painfully aware of human lust for power and his propensity for violence. Locke’s sympathies identified with the Bloodless Revolution of 1688. It had ushered in greater Parliamentary power and curbs on Monarchy. Hobbes saw the state of nature as a state of war. Locke saw it as a peaceful condition where the Law of Nature and of Reason was spontaneously observed. Hobbes’ idea of sovereignty though created by the people as a social contract had to be single and absolute. For Locke it was a responsibility towards society and the public could remove it at any time. Locke unlike Hobbes condemned state interference in religion. He believed it could incite civil strife.

Locke advocated religious tolerance in his *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689). It was consistent with his skeptical rationalism. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) he showed that the human capacity for knowledge is distinctly limited but the existence of God was a necessary hypothesis to be discovered by Reason. Christianity, therefore, is inherently reasonable and faith by revelation is indispensable because, for the majority of mankind, the use of Reason is unavailable. Locke expresses this view in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). He however emphasized that nothing unreasonable should be assented as a matter of faith. Locke’s *Thoughts on Education* (1693) extols Reason as the expense of Imagination. He advocated education for its practical utility. Locke’s thoughts had great influence on 19th century Utilitarian philosophy. Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government* (1690) influenced liberal thinkers in Britain, the continent and the colonies. Revolutionary

leaders took the cue from the idea of inherent Natural Rights to lead people to fight for their rights.

5.15.4 Political Thought of the Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment, you have definitely understood by now, taught people to look at society they lived in, in a more analytical way. The then accepted idea about the Divine Right of Kings was questioned. This initiated a discourse regarding the nature and origin of society and the extent of the power of authority.

Hobbes and Locke were the most influential political theorists of the 18th century Enlightenment. Hobbes while retaining the idea of absolute single sovereignty asserted that such power was not arbitrary or pre-ordained. People assented to the power to ensure protection for their lives and property. Thus Hobbes initiated the Social Contract theory or power by consent. While Hobbes had a distrust of human nature in isolation, he was also interested in justice. Consequently he advocated the grouping of people to make their voices heard. He went on to coin the phrase “voice of the people.” Could it be an irony of fate that Hobbes the believer in strong central authority also unknowingly planted the germ of future organised protest which could also threaten to become violent!

Locke furthered Hobbes’s view regarding Government by consent. Hobbes believed that without a strong controlling force society would recede into the primitive stage of chaos where human lives would become “...solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” He expressed this in his famous book *Leviathan* (1651). Leviathan means a sea monster and here implies the State.

Locke believed that all human beings were born with equal rights. The duty of the Government was to protect these rights. He believed that any Government going against the interest of the people could be removed. He upheld the principles of Parliamentary Government which was true to the spirit of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Revolutionary leaders took the cue from the idea of inherent Natural Rights to lead people to fight for their rights. Political theory was also influenced by a newly emerging social class. They were the traders, who despite their humble origins could compete with the aristocracy and acquire land, given their monetary prowess. An identifiable powerful growing intelligentsia had to be reckoned with too. Many members of this class were the children of those moneyed traders and land owners who had access to the best education. They created what can be called a public space or civil society which acted as an intermediary between traditional seats of authority and the common people. They were largely responsible for the flourishing of the Print media which exerted immense influence in society.

Locke's advocacy of civil freedom to be protected by law came to be increasingly equated with the right of the freedom to trade. We will discuss this in a different context. We will also discuss the more negative implications in Locke's second Treatise on Government in a later context.

5.15.5 Religion, Scientific Thought and the Enlightenment

All Enlightenment thinkers in Europe were united in their aim of logical pursuit of knowledge. Their concept of knowledge and methodology required to acquire it differed. The Royal Society in England was founded in 1660, at first for the organized and methodical pursuit of all branches of knowledge and later it was modified for the enhancement of science alone. In France Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1717-1783) with the help of other 'philosophes' worked for 21 years (1751-1772) to publish a 28 volume encyclopedia which they dedicated to Sir Isaac Newton. Kant in Germany challenged the limits of human knowledge with the help of what he described as Transcendental Reason. Yet a difference in the attitude to religion separates British thinkers from their continental counterparts. Thinkers and writers such as Voltaire and Diderot launched a vituperative attack on religion, while prominent philosophers and scientists such as Locke and Newton accepted religion as an essential part of their lives. They tried to prove that religion and science need not be mutually exclusive. Locke rationalised religion and asserted that it more a disciplinary rather than a mystical or supernatural force. In his *Letters Concerning Toleration* he categorically denounced any attempt at state intervention in religious matters for it could spark civil violence. However, true to the Enlightenment spirit in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he had stated that nothing contrary to reason should be propagated as a matter of faith. Meanwhile, Newton through his scientific calculations proved how the myriads of particles that constitute our Universe are regulated by a central force. This proved that a supreme power regulated the cosmos.

The extent to which the Enlightenment pervaded and moderated the Church can be seen in the difference meted out to Galileo and Newton. Galileo as a pre-Enlightenment figure was imprisoned by Christian bigots because he went against the Biblically assented concept of a Geo-centric Universe. He was made to recant. Newton by contrast was a universally respected figure. The relationship between technology and religion is more problematic. Technology is science put to practical use. Pre-Enlightenment thinkers solved the dichotomy of technology and religion by harking back to the Christian myth of the Fall. For instance Roger Bacon (1220-

1292) one of the first experimental scientists was also a Franciscan friar. Bacon believed that ultimate knowledge was man's birthright lost through the original sin of Adam. Technology should aim at reaching the original Pre-lapsarian state of perfection. Viewed from this perspective religion could co-exist with science and technology. Enlightenment thinkers did not believe in myths but we have already seen they did not reject the idea of a supreme power. The thrust of many Enlightenment thinkers was not against religion but against the abuse of power by religious institutions and the nurturing of superstition in the guise of mysticism and faith. We may then assume that under an ideal condition, if the thoughts of all Enlightenment thinkers could converge, their collective reason would assert a single truth. The differences in perspective cannot do away with the idea of a creator behind the creation of the Universe. In the 20th Century Einstein, when asked, whether he believed in God, replied-” **Not in the God that supposedly regulates our fates, but in a Spinozian God running an orderly universe**”.

We might justly regard the Renaissance figure, Francis Bacon [1561-1626] with his views on Empirical Science, so ardently practiced by Newton, as the original mover of the Enlightenment spirit. His idea of Knowledge is totally different from that of Descartes' rationalistic view of the universe. What however is most important in this context is the fact that all these thinkers though belonging to opposite ends of a spectrum, questioned and doubted all accepted beliefs and conventions and used their reasoning powers to come to their conclusions. As Joshua Israel an eminent Enlightenment scholar states: After 1650, everything, however fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophical reason’.

We can trace a concrete example of the wide application of the Enlightenment spirit in the establishment of The Royal Society of London for Promoting Natural Knowledge in 1662. It grew out of a philosophical society. *It was composed of diverse worthy persons inquisitive into natural philosophy and other parts of human learning, and particularly what hath been called the New philosophy from different fields of knowledge, or Experimental Philosophy.* In other words the members of the society, who were chosen trying to follow the empirical method advocated by Francis Bacon. The society took the whole field of knowledge for exploration. One of its aims was to achieve intellectual lucidity in writing prose. It was much later that it became a Society solely for promoting the sciences.

The Enlightenment affected various facets of life: Hospitals, schools, prisons and factories were reorganised. Communication became faster. The production of newspapers grew and commercial services improved.

The immense technological progress which followed the scientific discoveries

of the 18th and 19th century have laid the foundations for the modern technological advances; The spinning jenny, invented by James Hargreaves in 1764 followed by the invention of the power loom demonstrate the pragmatic use of scientific discoveries. The harnessing of steam and electrical power The development of modern steel by Benjamin Huntsman and the discovery of rubber in South America in 1736 by Charles Marie de la Condamine also contributed towards the transport and industrial revolution, which for good or bad has led the world to 20th century modernism. Though we are mainly referring to the European continent, the progress was not limited to Europe. The far-flung colonies in America were also affected. For instance Benjamin Franklin, a trader of humble origin, experimented with electrical power far away in the American colonies. He devised the Franklin stove for more efficient house warming. Franklin also stood up for the democratic rights of the colonists. The Enlightenment spirit was percolating at all levels of society to make life more meaningful and comfortable.

5.15.6 Controversies Regarding the Enlightenment

We do find differences of views regarding the source or birth-place of the Enlightenment. Many scholars regard France, with Descartes and his rationalistic individualism, and Spinoza with his materialistic radicalism, as the prime inspirers of the rational spirit. Montesque, too, with his political liberalism expressed in *Spirit of the Laws*[1748], had a very practical impact on the movement, which was catalyzed by Diderot and D'Alembert who worked for twenty-one years[1751-1772] to publish the 28 volume Encyclopedia. Mean while in Germany, Emmanuel Kant [1724-1824] in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) challenged the limits of human knowledge with the help of what he describes as transcendental reason. We will not go into any controversy regarding the degree of impact on the Enlightenment movement caused by various thinkers. We will simply refute one of the prevailing views that the idea of a British Enlightenment is an oxymoron or misnomer, and that Britain cannot boast about Enlightenment. This negative view about Britain has perhaps been encouraged by the absence of any radical intellectual revolution on the island. The civil war of 1642 and later, the so-called Glorious Revolution, were more ambitious and propelled by religious factions. Thus they did not have a strong intellectual bias. It was for the thinkers like Hobbes and Locke, and the professors of Gresham College, and not to say, the great Augustan writers such as Swift, Defoe, Pope, Addison, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne, to stoke up an intellectual ferment. However, Voltaire [1694-1778] a very important French Enlightenment figure, who travelled in Britain

extensively, effusively praised the atmosphere of intellectual freedom in England in his *Philosophical Letters* (1734). This should be more than enough to silence the critics who deny the idea of an English Enlightenment. After all, Enlightenment is not about what philosophers thought in their studies, or what scientists experimented on, and observed in their laboratories. It is about how the spirit of rational reasoning, freedom of speech, and the license to doubt any authoritative source for any kind of knowledge, affected people at large. Defoe and Swift proved that writers had the freedom to be ironical and critical about Christian sectarianism. *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702), *Tale of a Tub* (1704), and *An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity* (1708), perhaps could not have been written at an earlier period of history without the risk of their authors being burnt as heretics.

As we can see scholars will never agree about the respective importance of the thinkers and their works regarding the Enlightenment. Neither will they agree about the extent of its positive impact. Post modernist thinkers have blamed the Enlightenment for such varied evils as consumerism and fascism. They have gone to the extent of denying it the stature of a pan-European movement. They prefer to regard it in pluralistic terms as a series of localized movements with their own prejudices and preoccupations. Two eminent modern enlightenment scholars Joshua Israel and Roy Porter though widely varied in their stance have shown how the enlightenment spirit pervaded the intellectual atmosphere of the whole of Europe before crossing the seas and affecting the colonies of America in their struggle for independence. According to Porter we should understand that ‘the Enlightenment was not a canon of classics’ but ‘a living language, a revolution in mood, a blaze of slogans ,delivering the shock of the now’. England began to apply the principles of the enlightenment before the continent did- the liberty of press, both male and female participation in social and political life, people of different regions living pacifically together, the establishment of free market the pursuit of happiness as the greatest human ideal-were a part and parcel of life in England. Porter goes on to show that England needed no revolution to apply the ideals of the enlightenment. Social interaction was of fundamental importance. Here people agreed to disagree. In this the English could be compared to modern Prometheus “for bringing philosophy down from the heavens’ to sell it to the man of the world, to make it practicable and pleasing .British pragmatism ‘embodied a philosophy of expediency, a dedication to the art, science and the duty of living well Here and Now. Desire became desirable.

Joshua Israel and a few other Enlightenment scholars prefer to estimate the phenomenon in terms of the history of ideas rather than emphasise the historical and social contexts. But can we really ignore the role of history and society in

directing our thinking processes? Can we assert with conviction that Descartes remained unaffected by a religious zealot's assassination of the King of France, Henri of Navarre in 1610 and the resultant thirty years of factional war that devastated central Europe? Can we convince ourselves that Locke's *A Letter Concerning Tolerance* (1689) and the *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) were not influenced by the civil war in England that culminated in the beheading of Charles II in 1649 and the experimentation of Common Wealth, in the short but ruthless rule of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector?

It is extremely difficult in the context of the history of ideas and political and social history, to decide between the prime mover and the catalyst. All that we can say is that often cause and effect intertwine and strengthen each other. For instance the wide use of the printing press after its discovery during the Renaissance helped in the spread of knowledge that helped to spread the enlightenment ideas. Conversely however, the enlightenment helped in creating a larger reading public and a demand for setting up greater number of publishing houses. The English revolution of 1689 ended Absolute Monarchy and established Constitutional Monarchy with its two party system. True to the enlightenment spirit of healthy exchange of different viewpoints, this arrangement encouraged debates and passionate exchange of varied opinions and as an important literary bi-product allowed satire to flourish.

No doubt Locke and other thinkers helped in the democratic process within the conservative frame-work of monarchy, but is it not a possibility that the memory of the civil war earlier in the century encouraged a bloodless revolution instead of a more radical change? Meanwhile the less rigid stance of the House of Lords could well be the result of the prosperity of traders at home and abroad. They created a large prosperous group of leisured people who could read news papers periodicals and novels visit clubs and coffee-houses and also purchase land and become a part of the land owning class and thus overthrow the monopoly of the aristocrats. Moreover, we cannot assert with certainty that Mandeville's *The Fable Of The Bees*, (1714) which scandalised moralists, by the argument that the pursuit of private vices to achieve prosperity could result in collective good, was not influenced by the rich traders who worked for their own selfish gains but in the process added to the wealth of the nation. Adam Smith often regarded as the father of modern economics has demonstrated this in his well known book *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). The idea of free-trade and protectionism remained a hot bed of debates for the Whig and Tory parties. The concept of free-trade is important in our context because it forms a part and parcel of the general Enlightenment idea of the democratic freedom of an individual to pursue his goals without state interference.

5.15.7 Enlightenment and the Mercantile Class

We usually do not associate the money spinning traders with cultural currents but we cannot deny their great contribution to the enlightenment spirit. We have already seen, they created the leisured class of readers who helped to popularize periodicals, journals, travelogues and even novels. Defoe in his journal *The Review* states: A true-bred merchant is a Universal scholar; his learning excels the mere Scholar in Greek and Latin...He understands language without books, Geography without maps, his journals and Trading Voyages delineate the World..."

The increasing prestige of the mercantile class is one of the hall –marks of the English Enlightenment. These merchants were all God -fearing people. This, at least partially, accounts for the acceptance of a more conservative and pragmatic enlightenment project in England. We would however wish that conservatism would not extend to the toleration of religious factionalism in governance. The Test Act, which prevented Roman Catholics from holding government office, was even supported by Swift, who ‘Served Human Liberty’, on the pretext that it was a disciplinary measure to prevent anarchy. A similar conservatism is reflected in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* where benevolent slavery and cultural domination over a weaker individual is accepted. Man Friday is robbed of his name, his language, his god, and is dominated by Crusoe with the help of his gun. This is however, not to deny Crusoe’s extremely humane behaviour. But with our modern sensibilities can we deny the fact that Crusoe repeatedly refers to the captive man as ‘creature’ or ‘savage’? Ironically however this same slave could be viewed as the anticipation of the Rousseau-esque prototype of the Noble Savage. Defoe generously praises his slave, whom he Christians as Man Friday, for his mental and physical agility. Getting back to our context however, let us add that policy matters did not vitiate the general atmosphere of tolerance and intervene at a personal level of relationship. Swift an Anglican priest and Pope a Roman Catholic recluse were best of friends. The Enlightenment spirit of agreeing to disagree created the stimulating, free-spirited discursive atmosphere in the clubs and coffee-houses praised so highly by Voltaire in his letters on England.

- ◆ **Emancipatory Perspectives :** Soon the colonized people woke up to their political rights and demanded Independence. Right thinking liberal people in Europe supported their demands. For instance, Edmund Burke [1729-97] vociferously pleaded for the independence of the American colonies in his *On Conciliation With the Colonies* (1775) With Burke however we already start discerning the end of the Age of Reason and the beginning of the Romantic Revolution when Imagination and Inspiration would take precedence over Reason.

5.15.8 Summing Up

The purpose of this Unit has been to acquaint you with the key features of the 18th century, from the roughly dated end of the Restoration to the beginnings of the 19th century. The period is also called ‘Long’, not just in terms of the span of time covered, but also to allude to the momentous events during this time. The discussion of literature per se has been kept out of the purview of this Unit, which is aimed at providing an all-round understanding of the age. At the end of this, you are expected to be in a position to relate the literature that follows in subsequent Modules with the trends that the Enlightenment ushered in.

5.15.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions:

1. What in your opinion are the major features of the Enlightenment?
2. Comment on the important historical events in the continent and in Britain which might have had a strong impact on the Enlightenment thinkers, particularly Descartes and Locke.
3. How would you identify the successive stages of the Enlightenment?
4. Who were the major figures of the Enlightenment in Europe? Discuss their individual contributions.

Medium Length Questions:

1. How would you support the view in favour of an active British Enlightenment?
2. How are the ideas of Hume and Descartes similar and dissimilar?
3. Write a note on Religion and Scientific Thought of the Enlightenment.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Why do you think Galileo was punished for his discoveries while Newton was universally respected for his?
2. Mention a few important technological inventions which helped in the progress into the modern world ?
3. Whom would you consider to be a pioneering figure of the Enlightenment in Britain? Why?

UNIT 16 □ Alexander Pope : *The Rape of the Lock*

(Cantos 1 – 3)

Structure

5.16.0 Introduction

5.16.1 Alexander Pope – Brief Literary Biography

5.16.2 Composition of *The Rape of the Lock*

5.16.3 The Rationale behind the Mock Heroic Poetic mode

5.16.4 Preview to the Text

5.16.5 The Text of *The Rape of the Lock* – Cantos 1 – 3 (With Annotations)

5.16.6 Satire in *The Rape of the Lock*

5.16.7 Key issues in *The Rape of the Lock*

5.16.8 Summing Up

5.16.9 Comprehension Exercises

5.16.10 Suggested Reading

5.16.0 Introduction

To talk of Augustan literature is to talk of Alexander Pope, whether as poet or as a literary critic. This Unit will acquaint you with one of the abiding poetry texts of Augustan England, that captures in form and content the perfect ethos of the Age. From a trivial social quarrel between the social elites, Pope culls out a long poem that is mock-heroic in nature, forms a dispassionate critique of contemporary society, and yet charms the reader with wit, undeniable female beauty and of course the grace of the heroic couplet. As you read through this Unit, you should be able to apply in practice the Augustan poetic ethos that you have theoretically read about in earlier units. You must also be on the look-out for marks of poetic excellence with rhetorical devices, and the deft blend of a romantic strain amidst all the neo-classical satire.

5.16.1 Alexander Pope - Brief Literary Biography

Alexander Pope was born in 1688 to Catholic parents in London. For the record, he was the son of a linen draper! The contemporary law that banned Catholics from education on pain of perpetual imprisonment also hampered Pope's education. He mostly educated himself by reading the works of classical writers such as the satirists

Horace and Juvenal, the epic poets Homer and Virgil, and the major English authors like Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare and John Dryden. He was also proficient in French, Italian, Latin, and Greek. Pope was closely associated with the London literary society including figures like William Wycherley, William Congreve and Joseph Addison. At an early age Pope was afflicted with Pott's disease (a form of tuberculosis that affects the bone) that deformed his body and stunted his growth, leaving him with a severe hunchback.

In 1709, Pope's *Pastorals* brought him instant fame. This was followed by *An Essay on Criticism*, published in May 1711. Pope was part of the satirical Scriblerus Club with Tory writers John Gay, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell and John Arbuthnot. The aim of the club was to satirise ignorance and pedantry in the form of the fictional scholar Martinus Scriblerus. His poem *The Dunciad* was a ruthless attack on inferior poets in London society. It pilloried a host of other hacks, scribblers and dunces including his rival poet Theobald and Colley Cibber. From your reading of Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* in Paper III, you have already formed an idea of how vitriolic such attacks could get.



Arabella Fermor:1696–1737
Pic. Courtesy Internet

Pope's magnum opus was *The Essay on Man*, a philosophical poem, written in heroic couplets and published between 1732 and 1734. The poem is an attempt to **'vindicate the ways of God to Man,'** a variation on Milton's attempt in *Paradise Lost* to 'justify the ways of God to Man'. Many of the ideas of the Enlightenment here coalesce with the ideas of Christianity.

5.16.2 Composition of *The Rape of The Lock*

In 1712 a curious incident rocked the English Catholic community. Lord Petre (the Baron of the poem) mischievously cut off a lock of hair from Arabella Fermor (Belinda of the text), a young *belle* and a cousin of Pope's friends, the Blount sisters. The Catholic community (marginalised in England) was divided on the issue and Pope's friend John Caryll requested the poet to write a poem that could generate laughter and dissolve the social tension. Pope dedicated the poem to Arabella Fermor with the comment that "the character of Belinda, as it is now manag'd, resembles You in nothing but beauty". While Arabella seems to have been pleased initially with the idea, the ensuing publicity caused a degree of bitterness. The first (two-canto) version of the poem was published on 20th May 1712 in *Lintot's Missellany*.

In 1713, Pope expanded the poem to include the ‘Machinery’ of the sylphs and the game of ombre, thereby giving completeness to the mock-heroic mode that he used in writing this long poem. This revised edition in five cantos that was even accompanied by six engravings was published in March 1714 and proved enormously popular. Never before had a social brawl produced such a comic yet sublime literature.

STOP, THINK THEN READ ON ...

From this brief publication history of *The Rape of the Lock*, you should be able to deliberate on:

1. The coordinates of relation between society and literature.
2. The pervasive virility and triviality that characterised elite English society.
3. Gender relations in Augustan England.
4. The use of neo-classical literary forms to portray social trivia.

5.16.3 The Rationale Behind The Mock Heroic Poetic Mode

As a literary term ‘mock-heroic’ might be new to you. You must also be wondering - why did Pope choose the style of the mock heroic for his text? Pope himself commented that the “use of pompous expression for low actions ... is the perfection of the mock epic”. The typical mock heroic chooses a trivial incident which is then described in epic terms with the use of epic features, metaphors and language. The discrepancy between the subject and style generates laughter and highlights the critical point that the text wants to make. In this case, by deliberately highlighting a minor social brawl in epic terms, Pope was offering a subtle critique of Belinda’s actions and advocating good nature and sense over rage and hysteria.

Activity for the Learner

Before you move on with this unit, try and find, with help from your counselor, instances of the use of the mock-epic mode in earlier literature, starting from the Classical Age. You can also make a comparative chart between Epic and Mock-Epic practices. This will help you to understand the two literary modes for yourself. Notice how the mock-epic does not in essence, diminish the largesse of the epic scale of grandeur, but builds up its theme by contrast, as has been stated earlier. Your counselor might engage you in a discussion on what different forms the epic and mock-epic modes have taken in subsequent literature and why.

You might as well consider the fact that Pope’s predecessor John Dryden also used the mock heroic in *Mac Flecknoe*. While the poets of the age held up the

ancients as a subject of imitation, they raised contemporary social issues as the subject of their satire with the Horatian idea that poetry ‘instructs while pleasing’.

The polite society of urban London demanded a culture of ‘peace’ and ‘moderation’ and Pope’s poem offered reconciliation rather than conflict. But you will notice in course of the poem the

elaborate and intricate use of the heroic parallels – Belinda is Helen of Troy and the theft of the lock is akin to the rape of her body; the elaborate ritual of the toilette is compared to the dressing of epic heroes; the supernatural figures are transformed into sylphs. It is this intricacy that provides such an aesthetic merit to the text. If you look at the ending, the conflict is resolved in the epic apotheosis where the lock is transformed into a star that is then immortalised by the poem! Thus the mock heroic is aestheticised by Pope – it achieves three things – **draws attention to the triviality of the quarrel and argues for good sense,**

Could you now make a list of specific literary techniques and constructions that lend themselves easily to satire because they can contain a measure both of wit and humor, and of the necessary irony or satiric association (Suggestions: exaggeration, distortion, understatement, innuendo, paronomasia, zeugma, ambiguity, simile, metaphor, oxymoron, parable, and allegory)? Does the contradiction between the heroic style and the trivial matter give you an idea of the satire and the humour that the poem seeks to convey? Your counselor will again help you to identify and understand these terms, as also explain their specific usages in the text of *The Rape of the Lock*.

satirises conflict and makes a case for reconciliation and intricately generates both great beauty and laughter. All this is achieved at the base level, by the decision to employ the mock-heroic mode within the epic framework.

Notice for yourselves the stylistic features used by Pope. The epic tone merges with the aesthetic in a sublime hyperbole – “Belinda smil’d and the world was gay”. Readers of Bangla poetry could easily find a parallel to Sunil Gangopadhyay’s adoration of his femme muse:

“*Nirar asukh holey Kolkata boro dukhe thakey*”.

At the same time the triviality in Pope is brought out in the coexistence of the heroic and the feminine in Belinda’s toilette. “Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet doux”. The figure of speech of *bathos* (anticlimax) is recurrently used with irony and zeugma. You might also say that Pope is minutely inflating the female domestic space and feminising the mock heroic.

You will also have noticed the quality of wit and humour in this poem. In a mock heroic satire the basic mood of attack and disapproval needs to be softened to some extent and made more palatable; wit and humor serve this end by making the criticism entertaining, and even attractive. In the words of Swift, ‘As Wit is the noblest and most useful Gift of humane Nature, so Humour is the most agreeable, and where these two enter far into the Composition of any Work, they will render it always acceptable to the World’

5.16.4 Preview to the text

Let us now take you through the first three cantos of the poem. The poem begins with an epic *sententia* or a statement of purpose.

“What dire offence from am’rous Causes springs,
What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things”.

Notice how the *sententia* highlights the mock heroic quality, the dire offence and the amorous causes, the mighty contest and the trivial things. Pope seems to be highlighting that this is the pattern that the poem will follow.

Dedicated to Pope’s friend John Caryll, the poem proceeds to suggest that the entire episode is based on a moment of *amour* (desire) that can be resolved through marriage. There is also however a continuous undercurrent of sexuality – you might have already noticed it in the title! Pope is also arguing that women should not possess ‘mighty Rage’ in their ‘soft bosoms’.

The poem then describes the tender moment of Belinda rising from her ‘downy Pillow’. The fact that she gets up so late in the morning and the rich array of objects that she is surrounded with, suggests a world of aristocratic excess. Read carefully the episode where Belinda is introduced. Pope describes her as a woman with great beauty whose ‘Eyes must eclipse the day’. It is through her beauty then that Pope introduces the heroic and the sublime quality in Belinda. Interestingly Belinda’s morning dream is that of “A Youth more glitt’ring than a Birth-night Beau”. The fact that Belinda is dreaming of the young handsome man is an indicator of the desire that she harbours within her. Yet she is willing only to flirt and not submit herself in marriage. The supernatural machinery is then described through the image of the miniscule sylphs. The sylphs are described as the ‘light militia of the lower sky’ and are former coquettes transformed after their death. They ‘guard the purity of melting maids’ and make them resist masculine advances. Pope later in Canto II describes them as objects of beauty, refracting sunlight through their tiny wings as they guard Belinda in military formation. You might wonder why Pope uses the

machinery here. Firstly the sylphs add to the mock heroic quality – the supernatural is reduced to a minute level. They also add to the aesthetic quality of the text. But more importantly they create a hierarchy of coquettes across time through which Pope can direct his satire against female follies. Thus Belinda is not one single flirtatious woman; she is part of a tradition of women who are vain about their beauty and have flirted across history:

“Think not when Woman’s transient Breath is fled,
That all her vanities at once are dead;
Succeeding vanities she still regards,
And tho’ she plays no more, o’erlooks the cards”.

These lines offer us a glimpse into Pope’s satire against women as shallow and fascinated only with vanity and flattery. There is therefore a deep misogynistic satire embedded within the poem, although the very witty presentation might at first glance obfuscate the sting with the weapon of humour. The sylphs also deflect some of the satire from Belinda. The ‘filigree’ work of creating this magical world however makes *The Pope of the Lock* comic, yet sublime in beauty.

The next major episode is Belinda’s dressing before the mirror. This is compared with the putting on the amour of an epic hero. Pope describes the moment with almost magical elevation with the ‘silver vases laid in mystical order’ and the process as ‘the sacred Rites of Pride’. Belinda’s accessories include India’s gems, African combs, files of pins, Persian perfumes. Notice the delightful hyperbole describing the entire process:

“Now awful beauty puts on all its Arms,
The fair each moment rises in the Charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakn’s ev’ry grace,
And calls forth all the wonder of her Face.”

We shall later discuss the significance of the wealth of details that are described by Pope on Belinda’s dressing table.

Canto II continues to describe the attraction of Belinda’s beauty through the image of the diamond Cross:

“On her white Breast a sparkling Cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.”

This culminates in yet another hyperbole :

“If to her share some female errors fall
Look on her Face, and you’ll forget them all”

The Baron makes his entry at this point as Pope describes his admiration for the 'bright locks' of Belinda. He sets up an altar to make sacrifices. (once again an epic parallel). But the altar is made only with books of romances! The mock heroic dissolves the moment by describing the altar as made with 'twelve vast romances, neatly gilt'! His prayers are to be granted soon.

Belinda makes her way to Hampton Court (the palace) across the Thames in a barge to engage in gossip over tea. The sylphs watch over her with great care and Pope's imagination seems to go into overdrive as he creates their fantastic minute world with their brilliant names – 'Zephyretta, Momentilla, Crispissa and their leader Ariel'.

Canto III begins with the aristocratic world of Hampton Court with its pervasive concern with gossip and a life of leisure.

"Snuff, or the Fan, supply each Pause or Chat
With singing, laughing, ogling and all that."

This is followed by an elaborate game of cards (ombre) that mirrors the epic conflict with the cards resembling the epic heroes battling on the plains of Troy:

"And Particolor'd troops, a shining Train
Draw forth to Combat on the velvet Plain."

Look at the way in which Pope uses the mock heroic mode to transform the violence of the battle into a polite game of cards, bringing to the foreground the life of leisure of the contemporary aristocracy. As Belinda wins this elaborate game, the ceremony of tea follows:

"From silver spouts, the grateful liquors glide
While China's Earth receives the smoking Tyde."

Meanwhile, the Baron is helped by Belinda's maid Clarissa who hands him the 'two' edg'd weapon, the scissor. Pope plays out the suspense as twice Belinda looks back, but finally the Baron cuts off the lock in a moment of a mock heroic climax:

"The meeting Points the sacred Hair dissever
From the fair Head, for ever and for ever!"

The moment is followed by Belinda's epic scream that is dissolved by an anticlimax:

"Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,
When Husbands or when lap-dogs breathe their last"

The third canto ends on this note of the Baron's triumph.

You might also want to read the conflict generated by this action in Cantos IV and V. Canto IV describes Belinda's hysteric melancholia and rage as Pope describes the

“Force of Female lungs,
Sighs, sobs and Passions, and the War of tongues”.

What is interesting is the comic vision of social chaos that such a rage entails:

“Sooner let Earth, Air, Sea, to Chaos fall,
Men, Monkeys, Lap-dog, Parrots perish all!”

Canto V becomes crucial in introducing the voice of female reason through the maid Clarissa who advocates good sense and submission to male desire in marriage rather than hostility. Look at this passage carefully.

“Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,
And she who scorns a Man, must die a Maid.
What then remains, but well our Pow'r to use.
And keep good Humour still what'vr we lose?
And trust me Dear! Good Humour can prevail,
When Airs, and Flights, and Screams and scolding fail
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll
Charms strike the sight, but Men't wins the soul.”

Belinda however discounts her advice and the social brawl begins, with Belinda defended by the pompous Sir Plume. As already mentioned, the poem ends with the epic denouement (the *deus-ex-machina*) through divine intervention by transforming the lock to a star.

5.16.5 The Text of *The Rape of The Lock*

(With Annotations)

(Boldfaced Black Words Are Explained in the Notes)

Canto I

Stanza 1

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,

I sing—This verse to **CARYL, Muse!** is due:
 This, ev'n **Belinda** may vouchsafe to view:
 Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
 If She inspire, and He approve my lays.
 Say what strange motive, Goddess!⁴ could compel
 A well-bred Lord t' assault a gentle Belle?
 O say what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd,
 Could make a gentle Belle reject a Lord? 10
 In tasks so bold, can little men engage,
 And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty Rage?
Sol thro' white **curtains** shot a **tim'rous** ray,
 And **oped** those eyes that **must eclipse the day**:
 Now **lap-dogs** give themselves the rousing shake,
 And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:
 Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock'd the ground,
 And the **press'd watch** return'd a silver sound.
 Belinda still her downy pillow prest,
 Her guardian **Sylph** prolong'd the balmy rest. 20
 'Twas He had summon'd to her silent bed
 The morning-dream that hover'd o'er her head;
 A Youth more glitt'ring than a **Birth-night Beau**,
 (That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow)
 Seem'd to her ear his winning lips to lay,.....
 And thus in whispers said, or seem'd to say.

Notes, Stanza 1

What . . . sing: I am writing (I sing) about a terrible offence resulting from an amorous cause. Clearly a mock-epic mode, but then, the greatest battles have always been fought over women as trophies!

Caryl, Muse: A friend of Pope, John Caryl, whom Pope addresses as the muse. An acquaintance of Caryl, Lord Petre, cut off a lock of hair of a young lady, Arabella Fermor. A quarrel erupted between the families. Caryl suggested that Pope write a poem to point up the silliness of the quarrel. Pope addresses Caryl as if he were a muse. Thus while Milton for instance invokes the Heavenly Muse to aid him in

writing *Paradise Lost*, Pope's muse is a friend who actually commissioned him to write the poem to heal a tiff. Mock epic at its best.

Belinda: Arabella Fermor. Belinda is a poetic name associated with gentleness.

Goddess: Another reference to Caryl as the muse.

Sol: the sun

curtains: the curtains on Belinda's bed

tim'rous: timorous, meaning *shy*, *timid*

oped: opened

must eclipse the day: Belinda's eyes are so bright that they rival the brightness of the sun. Epic inflation on the one hand, and a genuine appreciation of beauty on the other. Repeatedly in this poem, you will find the neo-classic and the romantic aspects coalescing.

lap-dogs: dogs small enough to be held in the lap

press'd watch: a kind of clock. Pressing a button on it caused a bell to sound the current hour or quarter hour.

Sylph: fairy, sprite. The 1714 version of *TROTL* was unique in Pope's addition of the supernatural machinery which is essentially a feature of epic poetry. He derived this from the Rosicrucian doctrine as formulated by Le Comte de Gabalis in Germany in the 17th century. While we shall come to this in more detail in course of the poem, here the reference is to Belinda's guardian sylph Ariel, who controls all her motions, including even what she dreams!

Birth-night : evening celebration of a royal person's birthday

Stanza 2

Fairest of mortals, thou distinguish'd care

Of thousand bright Inhabitants of Air!

If e'er one vision touch'd thy infant thought,

Of all the Nurse and all the Priest have taught; 30

Of airy Elves by moonlight shadows seen,

The **silver token**, and the **circled green**,

Or virgins visited by Angel-pow'rs,

With golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flow'rs;

Hear and believe! thy own importance know,
 Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.
**Some secret truths, from learned pride conceal'd,
 To Maids alone and Children are reveal'd:
 What tho' no credit doubting Wits may give?**
 The Fair and Innocent shall still believe. 40
 Know, then, unnumber'd Spirits round thee fly,
 The light Militia of the lower sky:
 These, tho' unseen, are ever on the wing,
 Hang o'er the **Box**, and hover round the **Ring**.

Notes, Stanza 2

Fairest . . . Air : The youth in her dream (Line 23) addresses Belinda as the fairest mortal, saying she is watched over by a thousand sprites inhabiting the air.

silver token : coin left by a fairy as a gift for a favored mortal

Some . . . give: Certain secrets are revealed only to maidens like Belinda and to children, but not to highly educated people. Sceptics may doubt the truth of these secrets but Belinda and innocent children believe them. You can see in this the influence of nannies and bedtime stories.

Box, Ring: The spirits of the air hover around Belinda while she is in her theatre box or traveling in her carriage on a circular road (ring) in Hyde Park, a large park in the Westminster borough of London. So you see that in Pope's imagined world, a beauty like Belinda is never really 'alone', whether in private or public life.

Stanza 3

**Think what an equipage thou hast in Air,
 And view with scorn two Pages and a Chair.
 As now your own, our beings were of old,
 And once inclos'd in Woman's beauteous mould;
 Thence, by a soft transition, we repair
 From earthly Vehicles to these of air. 50
 Think not, when Woman's transient breath is fled
 That all her vanities at once are dead;
 Succeeding vanities she still regards,**

And tho' she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.
 Her joy in **gilded Chariots**, when alive,
 And love of **Ombre**, after death survive.
 For when the Fair in all their pride expire,
 To their first Elements their Souls retire:
 The **Sprites of fiery Termagants** in Flame
 Mount up, and take a **Salamander's** name. 60
Soft yielding minds to Water glide away,
 And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental Tea.
 The graver Prude sinks downward to a Gnome,
 In search of mischief still on Earth to roam.
 The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,
 And sport and flutter in the fields of Air.

Notes, Stanza 3

Think . . . Chair: You now have an army of sprites to look after you, not just two pages

As . . . air: The sprites were once women with beautiful forms. After death, they became spirits of the air. Notice how Pope uses the supernatural to formulate his cutting satire on feminine follies and vanities. Even the spirits have a hierarchy, just like Milton talks of angelology. The kind of nature one had when alive, and the kind of life one led on earth determines, according to Pope, the category of the supernatural into which a woman qualifies after death!

Think . . . dead: After a woman dies, she retains an interest in amusements. This is a supreme understatement of womanly vanity in terms that are almost Chaucerian, as in The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. Your counselor will point out the obvious similarities between the two poets.

gilded Chariots: splendid carriages to ride in

Ombre: a popular card game for three players in which only 40 of the 52 cards are dealt—the eights, nines, and tens are held back.

Sprites . . . Termagants: The spirits of quarrelsome, overbearing women.

Salamander: in myth, a lizard-like reptile that lived in fire; a spirit in the alchemy of Paracelsus (1493-1541), a Swiss physician

Soft yielding: Beginning here and continuing down to Line 66, the meaning is as follows: Other sprites live in water, keeping company with nymphs (minor goddess inhabiting the sea). Some sprites in the earth as gnomes (dwarflike creatures), and some of them live in the air.

Stanza 4

“Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste
 Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embrac’d:
 For Spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease
 Assume what sexes and what shapes they please. 70
**What guards the purity of melting Maids,
 In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,
 Safe from the treach’rous friend, the daring spark,
 The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,
 When kind occasion prompts their warm desires,
 When music softens, and when dancing fires?
 ’Tis but their Sylph,** the wise Celestials know,
 Tho’ Honour is the word with Men below.
Some nymphs there are, too conscious of their face,
 For life predestin’d to the Gnomes’ embrace. 80
 These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,
 When offers are disdain’d, and love deny’d:
 Then gay Ideas crowd the vacant brain,
 While Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train,
And Garters, Stars, and Coronets appear,
 And in soft sounds, **Your Grace** salutes their ear.
 ’Tis these that early taint the female soul,
 Instruct the eyes of young **Coquettes** to roll,
Teach Infant-cheeks a bidden blush to know,
 And little hearts to flutter at a Beau. 90

Notes, Stanza 4

What . . . Sylph : Sylphs (sprites) guard the purity of maidens from men who would take advantage of them.

daring spark: a bold gentleman; an aggressive beau

Some nymphs: From this phrase down to Line 90, the poem says that some sprites urge young ladies to be proud. In their vanity, these women refuse the offers of gentlemen.

Garters, Stars, and Coronets: the badges and other insignia of persons of high rank.

Your Grace: a member of the nobility. Although the phrase is in second-person point of view, it is to be read in third-person point of view as if it says, “His Grace.”

Coquettes: flirtatious women

Teach . . . blush: Teach young ladies to wear rouge. The artificiality of Belinda’s society is amply brought out by the fact that a blush, rather than being a natural response, can be made out at one’s bidding!

Stanza 5

Oft, when the world imagine women stray,
 The Sylphs thro’ mystic mazes guide their way,
 Thro’ all the giddy circle they pursue,
 And old impertinence expel by new.
 What tender maid but must a victim fall.
 To one man’s treat, but for another’s ball?
 When **Florio** speaks what virgin could withstand,
 If gentle **Damon** did not squeeze her hand?
 With varying vanities, from ev’ry part,
 They shift the moving Toyshop of their heart; 100
Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive,
Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.
This erring mortals Levity may call;
Oh blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it all.
Of these am I, who thy protection claim,
 A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.
 Late, as I **rang’d** the crystal wilds of air,
 In the clear Mirror of thy ruling Star

I saw, alas! some dread event impend,
Ere to the main this morning sun descend, 110
But heav'n reveals not what, or how, or where:
Warn'd by the Sylph, oh pious maid, beware!
This to disclose is all thy guardian can:
Beware of all, but most beware of Man!"

Notes, Stanza 5

Florio, Damon: Names commonly used in poetry in Pope's time the way we use Tom, Dick, and Harry—or John Doe—today. On the face of it, they do not refer to a specific person but to men in general. Of course Pope is talking about elegant fops who would spend their days at cards or coffee tables and in company of flirtatious women, carrying on each others' soft skills at persuasion without yielding!

Where . . . drive: The young gentlemen are vying for the attention of the young ladies.

sword-knots: A sword knot was a loop of fabric or leather attached to the handle of a sword. A swordsman placed the loop around his wrist as a support for maintaining his grip. Some sword knots were intended only as ornaments. Notice the diminution from the scale of epic battles insofar as weapons are concerned.

Beaux: plural of beau

This . . . all: Humans are wrong to think that young women are responsible for their frivolous and flirtatious behavior (levity). The truth is that sprites cause this behavior. There is supreme understatement in this. Logical, rational human beings can hardly comprehend the world of feminine follies and charms....that is Pope's frivolous idea.

Of these: Beginning with this phrase and continuing down to Line 114, Belinda's guardian sprite introduces himself as Ariel, then discloses that a dreadful event is about to happen. He does not know what will occur, or how or where, but warns Belinda to beware.

rang'd: ranged

Stanza 6

He said; when **Shock**, who thought she slept too long,

Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue.
'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,
Thy eyes first open'd on a **Billet-doux**;
Wounds, Charms, and Ardors were no sooner read,
But all the Vision vanish'd from thy head. 120
And now, unveil'd, the **Toilet** stands display'd,
Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.
First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent adores,
With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic pow'rs.
A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.
Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here
The various off'rings of the world appear; 130
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And **decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil**.
This **casket** India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The **Tortoise** here and **Elephant** unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, **Bibles**, Billet-doux.
Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms, 140
Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
The busy Sylphs surround their darling care,
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown:
And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.

Notes, Stanza 6**Shock:** Belinda's dog.**Billet-doux:** love letter. From the French *billet* (*note, letter*) and *doux* (*sweet*). The French pronunciation is be yay DOO; the English pronunciation is BIL ay DOO.**Toilet:** dressing table or dressing room. It is a curious life indeed where a woman wakes up nearly at mid-day to cast her eyes on a 'love' letter!**Th' inferior Priestess:** Servant, maid. Betty by name.**decks . . . spoil:** adorns Belinda with jewels and other ornaments. It is worth remembering that by this time England was emerging as a colonial power with economic interests in Asia and Africa. A careful perusal of the items of Belinda's toilet will reveal that it contains in miniature the best of England's colonial dominions.**casket:** box, case.**Tortoise:** The shell of a tortoise was used in making combs.**Elephant:** Reference to ivory.**Bibles:** Small Bibles were fashionable accessories on ladies' dressing tables. The epic parallel to warfare is nowhere better evident than in this line. All the items in Belinda's dressing box would also be items that could be found in a soldier's kit bag, when on duty in the battle field. Of course, the uses vary for a woman like Belinda and a soldier. Interestingly, pages of the Bible also found good use as curlers for women's hair do!**Now . . . arms:** Here begins an epic convention

, a warrior putting on his armor. In this case, of course, it is a woman putting on her clothes in preparation for vying in the battle of the sexes.

Canto II*Stanza 1***Not with more glories, in th' ethereal plain,**

The Sun first rises o'er the purpled main,

Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams

Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.

Fair Nymphs, and well-drest Youths around her shone.

But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.

On her white breast a sparkling Cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss, and Infidels adore.
 Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
 Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those: 10
 Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
 Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
 Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,
 And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.
 Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
 Might hide her faults, if Belles had faults to hide:
 If to her share some female errors fall,
 Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

Notes, Stanza 1

Not . . . plain: Here begins an epic convention

, the great voyage. In this case, Belinda is traveling in a boat on the Thames River with youths and guardian sprites. They all look so glorious that they rival the sunshine. Pope's enthusiasm in describing the gorgeous beauty of Belinda (there is no denying that she is beautiful, charms or no charms) can find a parallel only in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, where we have Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra on the barge. You need to see the number of times that the sun becomes a metaphor/competitor for Belinda's beauty; and not the moon which is conventionally the parameter of a woman's beauty. Clearly, Pope's idea is that Belinda's beauty has the power to outrival the sun, which is the source of all light and life.

Which . . . kiss: An offensive line that is out of place in an otherwise delightful poem. But then, the dig on religion should not also escape notice.

Stanza 2

This Nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
 Nourish'd two Locks, which graceful hung behind. 20
 In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
 With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,
 And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.

With hairy springes we the birds betray,
Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
 And beauty draws us with a single hair.
 Th' advent'rous Baron the bright locks admir'd;
 He saw, he wish'd, and to the prize aspir'd. 30
 Resolv'd to win, he meditates the way,
 By force to ravish, or by fraud betray;
 For when success a Lover's toil attends,
 Few ask, if fraud or force attain'd his ends.

Notes, Stanza 2

Love . . . detains: Young men fall in love with her glorious curls (labyrinths) of hair, becoming slaves to her beauty. Noticeably, love is trivialized here in being equated with what is really infatuation.

With . . . ensnare: Just as we catch game birds in snares and fish (“finny prey”) in nets, Belinda catches men with her hair.

springes: traps, snares

finny: having fins

Stanza 3

For this, ere **Phoebus** rose, **he** had implor'd.
 Propitious heav'n, and ev'ry pow'r ador'd,
 But chiefly Love—to **Love an Altar built,**
 Of twelve vast French Romances, neatly gilt.
 There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves;
 And all the trophies of his former loves. 40
 With tender Billet-doux he lights the pyre,
 And breathes three am'rous sighs to raise the fire.
 Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes
 Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize:
 The pow'rs gave ear, and granted half his pray'r,
 The rest, the winds dispers'd in empty air.

Notes, Stanza 3

Phoebus: Apollo, the sun god. *Phoebus* means *bright one*. In Greek mythology, Phoebus Apollo became the sun, driving his golden chariot across the sky. Thus, *Phoebus* became a synonym for *sun*.

he: the baron (mentioned in Line 29).

to . . . built: From here down to Line 46, the poem says the baron places mementoes of young ladies of his acquaintance on an altar. Then he burns them in a “funeral” fire (pyre) fueled with love letters; he is offering a sacrifice that the gods may grant his wish to obtain locks of Belinda’s hair.

Stanza 4

But now secure the painted vessel glides,
 The sun-beams trembling on the floating tides:
 While melting music steals upon the sky,
 And soften’d sounds along the waters die; 50
 Smooth flow the waves, the **Zephyrs** gently play,
 Belinda smil’d, and all the world was gay.
 All but the **Sylph**—with careful thoughts opprest,
 Th’ impending woe sat heavy on his breast.
He summons strait his Denizens of air;
The lucid squadrons round the sails repair:
 Soft o’er the **shrouds** aerial whispers breathe,
 That seem’d but Zephyrs to the train beneath.
 Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,
 Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold; 60
 Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
 Their fluid bodies half dissolv’d in light,
 Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,
 Thin glitt’ring textures of the filmy dew,
 Dipt in the richest tincture of the skies,
 Where **light disports in ever-mingling dyes,**
While ev’ry beam new transient colours flings,
 Colours that change whene’er they wave their wings.

Amid the circle, on the gilded mast,
 Superior by the head, was Ariel plac'd; 70
 His purple **pinions** op'ning to the sun,
 He rais'd his azure wand, and thus begun.

Notes, Stanza 4

Zephyrs: west winds or soft breezes.

Sylph: Ariel

He . . . repair: Ariel summons his helpers, and they gather around Belinda.

shrouds: ropes or wires attached to a mast and secured on the sides of a ship.
 They keep the mast steady.

light . . . flings: The light displays a variety of colors.

disports: plays; amuses itself

pinions: wings

Stanza 5

Ye Sylphs and **Sylphids**, to your chief give ear!
 Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Daemons, hear!
Ye know the spheres and various tasks assign'd
 By laws eternal to th' aerial kind.
 Some in the fields of purest Aether play,
 And bask and whiten in the blaze of day.
 Some guide the course of wand'ring orbs on high,
 Or roll the planets thro' the boundless sky. 80
 Some less refin'd, beneath the moon's pale light
 Pursue the stars that shoot athwart the night,
 Or suck the mists in grosser air below,
 Or dip their pinions in the painted bow,
 Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry main,
 Or o'er the **glebe** distil the kindly rain.
 Others on earth o'er human race preside,
 Watch all their ways, and all their actions guide:

Of these the chief the care of Nations own,
And guard with Arms divine the British Throne. 90

Notes, Stanza 5

Sylphids: Female sylphs, female sprites

Ye know: From this phrase down to Line 90, Ariel describes the tasks assigned to the various kinds of sprites. The deliberate trivializing that Pope does with the use of the divine machinery reaches its nadir when we are told that these supernatural creatures are even entrusted with the protection of the British throne! This is indeed social satire at its best.

glebe: earth

Stanza 6

Our humbler province is to tend the Fair,
Not a less pleasing, tho' less glorious care;
To save the powder from too rude a gale,
Nor let th' imprison'd-essences exhale;
To draw fresh colours from the vernal flow'rs;
To steal from rainbows e'er they drop in show'rs
A brighter **wash**; to curl their waving hairs,
Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs;
Nay oft, in dreams, invention we bestow,
To change a **Flounce**, or add a **Furbelow**. 100
This day, black Omens threat the brightest Fair,
That e'er deserv'd a watchful spirit's care;
Some dire disaster, or by force, or slight;
But what, or where, the fates have wrapt in night.
Whether the nymph shall break **Diana's law**,
Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;
Or stain her honour or her new brocade;
Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade;
Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball;
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall. 110

Haste, then, ye spirits! to your charge repair:
 The flutt'ring fan be **Zephyretta's** care;
 The drops to thee, **Brillante**, we consign;
 And, **Momentilla**, let the watch be thine;
 Do thou, **Crispissa**, tend her fav'rite Lock;
 Ariel himself shall be the guard of **Shock**.

Notes, Stanza 6

Our humbler province: From this phrase down to Line 100, Ariel tells his sprites that one of their jobs is to tend to the needs of fair ladies—to keep their powders and perfumes in place, to curl their hair, to put color in their cheeks, etc.

wash: skin lotion

Flounce: frill or ruffle

Furbelow: also a ruffle or any other ornament

Diana's law: the law of Diana (Greek name, *Artemis*), Apollo's twin sister and the virgin goddess of chastity. This law required young women to maintain their chastity. The convoluted scale of values is evident here as nowhere before, through a series of condensed sentences that equate a woman's chastity at par with her make up or even the breaking of a bone china crockery – all of which are preserved by the divine machinery alone.

Zephyretta: Sprite in charge of regulating the wind generated by a fan.

drops: earrings.

Brillante: Sprite in charge of earrings

Momentilla: Sprite in charge of watching the time

Crispissa: Sprite in charge of guarding Belinda's favorite lock of hair.

Shock: Belinda's dog.

Stanza 7

To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,
 We trust th' important charge, the Petticoat:
 Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail,

Tho' stiff with hoops, and arm'd with ribs of whale; 120
 Form a strong line about the silver bound,
 And guard the wide circumference around.
 Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,
 His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,
 Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins,
 Be stopp'd in vials, or transfix'd with pins;
 Or plung'd in lakes of bitter washes lie,
 Or wedg'd whole ages in a bodkin's eye:
 Gums and **Pomatums** shall his flight restrain,
 While clogg'd he beats his silken wings in vain; 130
 Or Alum **styptics** with contracting pow'r
 Shrink his thin essence like a rivell'd flow'r:
 Or, as **Ixion** fix'd, the wretch shall feel
 The giddy motion of the whirling **Mill**,
 In fumes of burning Chocolate shall glow,
 And tremble at the sea that froths below!
 He spoke; the spirits from the sails descend;
 Some, orb in orb, around the nymph extend;
 Some **thrid** the **mazy** ringlets of her hair;
 Some hang upon the pendants of her ear: 140
 With beating hearts the dire event they wait,
 Anxious, and trembling for the birth of Fate.

Notes, Stanza 7

Pomatums: ointments

styptics: preparations that stop bleeding

rivel'ed: shriveled, shrunken

Ixion: In Greek mythology, King of Lapithae, who dared to fall in love with Hera, queen of the gods and wife of Zeus. To punish him, Zeus had him tied in Hades to a wheel that revolved nonstop.

Mill: chocolate mill. Could also topically mean rumour mill.

thrid: threaded

mazy: like a maze

Canto III

Stanza 1

Close by those **meads**, for ever crown'd with flow'rs,
 Where Thames with pride surveys his rising tow'rs,
 There stands a **structure** of majestic frame,
 Which from the neighb'ring Hampton takes its name.
 Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom.
 Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home;
 Here thou, great **Anna! whom three** realms obey.
 Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes Tea.
 Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,
 To taste awhile the pleasures of a Court; 10
 In various talk th' instructive hours they past,
 Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;
 One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
 And one describes a charming Indian screen;
 A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;
At ev'ry word a reputation dies.
 Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,
 With singing, laughing, ogling, and _all that.

Notes, Stanza 1

meads: meadows

structure: the royal palace at Hampton Court

Anna . . . three: Anne (1665-1714), queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1702 to 1714.

At . . . dies: There was much gossip at the court, the infinite range of which can well be gauged from the parameters that Pope here talks of. TROTL is among other things, explicitly a society poem in the Augustan neo-classical vein, and the casual indifference of the foppish gallantry as also the women of 'refined' tastes can well be evidenced here.

Stanza 2

Meanwhile, declining from the noon of day,
 The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray; 20
 The hungry Judges soon the sentence sign,
 And wretches hang that jury-men may dine;
 The merchant from th' Exchange returns in peace,
 And the long labours of the Toilet cease.
 Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,
 Burns to encounter **two advent'rous Knights**,
At Ombre singly to decide their doom;
 And swells her breast with conquests yet to come.
Straight the three bands prepare in arms to join,
Each band the number of the sacred nine. 30
 Soon as she spreads her hand, th' aerial guard
 Descend, and sit on each important card:
 First Ariel perch'd upon a **Matadore**,
 Then each, according to the rank they bore;
 For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient race,
 Are, as when women, wondrous fond of place.
 Behold, four Kings in majesty rever'd,
 With **hoary whiskers** and a forky beard;
 And four fair Queens whose hands sustain a flow'r,
 Th' expressive emblem of their softer pow'r; 40
 Four Knaves in garbs succinct, a trusty band,
 Caps on their heads, and **halberts** in their hand;
 And particolour'd troops, a shining train,
 Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.

Notes, Stanza 2

two . . . Ombre: Ombre requires three players. Here, Belinda will vie with two gentlemen. Interestingly, she is the challenger here. These lines could be a revealing commentary on gender relations in contemporary elite social circles.

Straight . . . join: Here begins an epic convention, the battle.

Each . . . nine: In Greek mythology, the nine muses of Mount Olympus. The cards, dealt in groups, correspond in number to the nine muses in Greek mythology.

Matadore (also Matador): card of the highest value in ombre

hoary whiskers: gray mustaches

halberts (also *halberds* or *halbards*): A halbert was a weapon with a shaft five to six feet long topped by a pike, or spearhead, and below the pike an axe blade. A warrior could thrust with a halbert, as with a spear, or hack, as with a battle-axe.

Stanza 3

The skillful Nymph reviews her force with care:

Let Spades be trumps! she said, and trumps they were.

Now move to war her sable Matadores,

In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors.

Spadillo first, unconquerable Lord!

Led off two captive trumps, and swept the board. 50

As many more **Manillo** forc'd to yield,

And march'd a victor from the verdant field.

Him **Basto** follow'd, but his fate more hard

Gain'd but one trump and one **Plebeian** card.

With his broad sabre next, a chief in years,

The hoary Majesty of Spades appears,

Puts forth one manly leg, to sight reveal'd,

The rest, his many-colour'd robe conceal'd.

The rebel **Knave**, who dares his prince engage,

Proves the just victim of his royal rage. 60

Ev'n mighty Pam, that Kings and Queens o'erthrew

And mow'd down armies in the fights of **Lu**,

Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid,

Falls undistinguish'd by the victor spade!

Thus far both armies to Belinda yield;

Now to the Baron fate inclines the field.

His warlike Amazon her host invades,

Th' imperial consort of the crown of Spades.

The Club's black Tyrant first her victim dy'd,
 Spite of his haughty **mien**, and barb'rous pride: 70
What boots the regal circle on his head,
 His giant limbs, in state unwieldy spread;
 That long behind he trails his pompous robe,
 And, of all monarchs, only grasps the **globe**?

Notes, Stanza 3

Spadillo: ace of spades

Manillo: two of spades, a card of high value

Basto: ace of clubs, card with third-highest value

Plebeian: card of little value

Knave: jack

Pam: jack of clubs

Lu: Loo, a card game in which the jack of clubs had the highest value

mien: manner

What boots the regal circle: what good is the regal circle

globe: golden ball which, along with a scepter, was an emblem of royal power

Stanza 4

The Baron now his Diamonds pours apace;
 Th' embroider'd King who shows but half his face,
 And his refulgent Queen, with pow'rs combin'd
 Of broken troops an easy conquest find.
 Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild disorder seen,
 With throngs promiscuous **strow** the level green. 80
 Thus when dispers'd a routed army runs,
 Of Asia's troops, and Afric's sable sons,
 With like confusion different nations fly,
 Of various habit, and of various dye,

The pierc'd battalions dis-united fall,
 In heaps on heaps; one fate o'erwhelms them all.
 The Knave of Diamonds tries his wily arts,
 And wins (oh shameful chance!) the Queen of Hearts.
 At this, the blood the virgin's cheek forsook,
 A livid paleness spreads o'er all her look. 90
 She sees, and trembles at th' approaching ill,
 Just in the jaws of ruin, and **Codille**.
 And now (as oft in some distemper'd State)
 On one nice Trick depends the gen'ral fate.
 An Ace of Hearts steps forth: The King unseen
 Lurk'd in her hand, and mourn'd his captive Queen:
 He springs to Vengeance with an eager pace,
 And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace.
 The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky;
 The walls, the woods, and **long canals** reply. 100

Notes, Stanza 4

strow: archaic form of *strew*. This and the next line are strikingly redolent of Milton's description of the fallen angels in the lake of molten lava after their defeat in the battle against God in *Paradise Lost*, Bk 1. Also interesting are the images of colour that Pope uses to talk of the fallen cards – the insinuation is directly to England's colonial subjects. From this point of view TROTL could also be studied as a text that shows early traces of postcolonial thought in a metaphoric way. Your counselor will definitely tell you more on this.

Codille: A development in which the challenger failed to win the necessary cards. On the next play, Belinda wins the game. There are also traces of possible feminist historiographical study in the fluctuating fortunes of Belinda in the game of ombre. Here it is a male card that comes to the rescue of the female card, and thereby of Belinda too. The exultant shout she ensues forth however comes for a bit of spat from Pope, as his chastising remarks in the next stanza will show.

long canals: The canals on the grounds of Hampton Court

Stanza 5

Oh thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,
 Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.
 Sudden, these honours shall be snatch'd away,
 And curs'd for ever this victorious day.
 For lo! the board with cups and spoons is crown'd,
 The **berries crackle**, and the mill turns round;
 On shining **Altars of Japan** they raise
 The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze:
 From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,
 While **China's earth receives the smoking tide**: 110
 At once they gratify their scent and taste,
 And frequent cups prolong the rich repast.
 Straight hover round the Fair her airy band;
 Some, as she sipp'd, the fuming liquor fann'd,
 Some o'er her lap their careful plumes display'd,
 Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade.
 Coffee, (which makes the politician wise,
 And see thro' all things with his half-shut eyes)
 Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain
 New Stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain. 120
 Ah cease, rash youth! desist ere't is too late,
 Fear the just Gods, and think of **Scylla's Fate!**
Chang'd to a bird, and sent to flit in air,
She dearly pays for Nisus' injur'd hair!

Notes, Stanza 5

berries crackle: The coffee beans crackle when roasted on the mill.

Altars of Japan: tables coated with varnish made from a substance of a Japanese tree of the cashew family.

China's . . . tide: The china coffee cups receive the steaming coffee.

Scylla's . . . hair: In Greek mythology, Scylla betrayed her father, Nisus, King

of Megara, by cutting off a lock of his hair—a purple lock with magical powers that safeguarded him and his kingdom. Scylla did so because she was in love with her father’s enemy, King Minos of Crete, who was attacking Megara. Nisus died and was changed into a sea eagle. Scylla later drowned and was changed into a sea bird that was chased by the eagle. Pope here evokes the classical parallel as a word of caution for the Baron who has been eyeing Belinda’s lock of hair. In the process, Belinda is once again given added dimensions.

Stanza 6

But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
 How soon they find fit instruments of ill!
 Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
 A two-edg’d **weapon** from her shining case:
 So Ladies in Romance assist their Knight,
 Present the spear, and arm him for the fight. 130
 He takes the gift with rev’rence, and extends
 The little engine on his fingers’ ends;
 This just behind Belinda’s neck he spread,
 As o’er the **fragrant steams** she bends her head.
 Swift to the Lock a thousand Sprites repair,
 A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
 And thrice they twitch’d the diamond in her ear;
 Thrice she look’d back, and thrice the foe drew near.
 Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
 The close recesses of the Virgin’s thought; 140
 As on the **nosegay** in her breast reclin’d,
 He watch’d th’ Ideas rising in her mind,
 Sudden he view’d, in spite of all her art,
 An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
 Amaz’d, confus’d, he found his pow’r expir’d,
 Resign’d to fate, and with a sigh retir’d.

Notes, Stanza 6

fragrant steams: steam from the hot coffee

weapon: scissors. Another instance of the use of hyperboles to achieve the effect of comic deflation. An ordinary pair of scissors becomes a weapon or a little engine, later a glittering forfex! The power of steel will be spoken of later. The obvious association is with the weapons of a deadly battle. Notice the reversal of roles. In the Toilet scene Belinda was arming for 'battle'; now she is about to be 'vanquished'. By locating an earthly lover lurking in her heart, Pope nonetheless gives human dimensions to Belinda – over and above all her artificiality.

nosegay: small bouquet of flowers

Stanza 7

The Peer now spreads the glitt'ring **Forfex** wide,
 T' inclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide.
 Ev'n then, before the fatal engine clos'd,
 A wretched Sylph too fondly interpos'd 150
 Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain,
 (But airy substance soon unites again)
 The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
 From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!
 Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,
 And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.
 Not louder shrieks to pitying heav'n are cast,
 When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last;
 Or when rich China vessels fall'n from high,
 In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie! 160
 Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine
 (The victor cry'd) the glorious Prize is mine!
 While fish in streams, or birds delight in air,
 Or in a coach and six the British Fair,
 As long as **Atalantis** shall be read,
 Or the small pillow grace a Lady's bed,
 While visits shall be paid on solemn days,
 When num'rous wax-lights in bright order blaze,
 While nymphs take treats, or assignations give,
 So long my honour, name, and praise shall live! 170

What Time would spare, from **Steel receives** its date,
 And monuments, like men, submit to fate!
 Steel could the labour of the Gods destroy,
 And **strike to dust th' imperial tow'rs of Troy**;
 Steel could the works of mortal pride confound,
 And hew **triumphal arches** to the ground.
 What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel,
 The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel?

Notes, Stanza 7

The Peer: the baron

Forfex: Latin for *scissors*

Atalantis: Reference to *The New Atlantis*, a popular gossip novel by Mary de la Riviere Manley (1663-1724). It alluded to real-life scandals.

Steel receives: From this phrase down to Line 178, the poem tells of the power of steel to endure, to destroy the work of gods and men, and, of course, to trim a lock of hair.

strike . . . Troy: In the Trojan War, the Greeks—using swords and spears of steel—slaughtered the Trojans and destroyed their city after gaining entry to the city inside a wooden horse.

triumphal arches: arches built to honor and memorialize great men and heroes.

5.16.6 Satire in *The Rape of The Lock*

While the poem is an exquisite work of beauty, Pope raises significant satirical points within it. You have already seen that satire occupied a significant space in eighteenth century poetry. So what are the components of this satire?

- **SATIRE ON WOMEN :** The first major subject of satire is Belinda and through her the 'little unguarded follies' of women. While Belinda's beauty is praised, her narcissistic obsession with her own self is subtly criticised. The way she treats her toilette as a ritual and the way in which she uses her beauty to flirt and attract the attention of several beaux at the same time is strongly ridiculed. Consider the lines that seem to suggest that women have little intelligence:

“Then gay ideas crowd the vacant Brain
 While Peers and Dukes, and all their sweeping Train
 And Granters, Stars and Coronets appear,
 And in soft sounds, Your Grace salutes their ear.”

Belinda’s dressing table is described as a moral muddle where Bibles and *billet doux* coexist. The flirtations nature of Belinda is brilliantly expressed:

“Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
 Quick as her Eyes and a unfix’d as those
 Favours to none, to all she smiles extends,
 Off she rejects, but never once offends.”

Her heart is then categorised as a moving toyshop. Female sexuality and desire are seen as socially chaotic and therefore must be contained through Clarissa’s speech. Also note that Belinda is not alone – through the sylphs Pope suggests that all women are obsessed by looks, beauty and coquettishness. Working deep within this poem is the idea of the *femme fatale* – the fatal woman who circulates desire and causes social destruction. Many critics have thus argued that Pope is subtly satirising the battle of the sexes – the Baron and Belinda represent men and women in society vying in a struggle for power.

- **SATIRE ON ARISTOCRATIC SOCIETY :** Another major target of satire of Pope is the aristocratic society of the contemporary England. Through Belinda and Hampton Court, Pope presents society as characterized by idleness, gossip and a life of leisure, card-games and tea. That a trivial incident might provoke a social brawl is also an indictment. Consider Pope’s description of courtly society:

“Either the heroes and the Nymphs resort,
 To taste awhile the Pleasures of the Court
 In various Talk th’ instructive hours they past
 Who grace the Ball, or paid the visit last
 One speaks the glory of the British queen
 And one describes a charming Indian Screen
 A third interprets Motions, looks and Eyes
 At Ev’ry word a Reputation dies
 Surf or the Fan, supply each Pause of Chat
 With singing, laughing, ogling and all that”

Notice how this idle world is contrasted with the hard working world of the merchant who ‘from the Exchange returns in Peace’ and the unfortunate wretches who “hang so that Jury men may dine.”

The mock heroic becomes critical here – in elevating this idle world and activity to a heroic level, Pope seems to underscore its sterility. Given that Pope was the son of a linen draper, would he have viewed this idle world with scorn? Or do we locate a deep ambiguity here – he is critical of this world, but the brilliance of the language suggests he is half in love with it? Can you notice a similarity with Pope’s treatment of Belinda?

5.16.7 Key Issues in *The Rape of The Lock*

❖ Approaches to Colonialism

While reading the poem you must have been fascinated with the sheer material quality of Pope’s poem. Just consider the number of objects he describes - the ‘watch with the Silver sound’, the ‘heavenly glass’ and so on. These passages seem suggestive. Belinda’s dressing table seems to be a veritable catalogue of the resources that colonial England seemed to have plundered from its various colonies:

“This Casket **India**’s glowing Gems unlocks
And all **Arabia** breathes from Yonder box
The **tortoise** here and the **Elephant** unite.”

Note also the elaborate ceremony of tea drinking – the tables are made of the ‘shining Altars of Japan’ (lacquered tables), the tea is poured from ‘China’s Earth’ (Porcelain) and both tea and coffee were products of rampant colonialism. Through both these ceremonies, the extent of London as a hub of colonial riches is underscored.

If you carefully notice, beneath the brilliant edifice of the poem lies a subtle menace of violence. Is this violence merely about the violation of the ‘black lock of hair’ or the female body? Or is it an allusion to the violence of the colonial powers against the colonies? Take a close look at the fair Belinda as she steps out:

“On her white Breast, a sparkling Cross she wore
Which Jews might kiss and Infidels Adore”

Does Belinda’s white breast signify the Western white (European) power with its Christian overtones overwhelming the colonies of Infidels?

In that case what is Pope's attitude to colonialism? Pope seems to validate the process, celebrating the wealth and power that it brings to England. What is interesting is Pope's celebration of Belinda's world as one of iridescent light while darkness is associated with chaos and gloom. Contrast Pope's attitude with that of Jonathan Swift who ruthlessly criticises the process of colonialism and violence in *Gulliver's Travels*. Stewart Crehan points out:

Perhaps, then, we should focus our attention on those elements in *The Rape of the Lock* that point forwards, rather than those that seem to shore up the social and aesthetic ideology of their historical moment. In showing us how, in the doubly-inverted order of mercantile-capitalist society, people are turned into objects and objects rule people; how metaphor is deconstructed into metonymy, and how female beauty, like any commodity or desirable piece of property, is invested with the reified and ultimately violent and destructive values of bourgeois society.

Laura Brown, while noting that Belinda's world is one "in which objects have taken over all the meaning," indicts Pope for not showing us the "real" Belinda: "Belinda's beauty can only be seen through the commodities that she wears; the question of whether there is a real beauty, or a real Belinda, behind those spoils remains unanswered."

There were dissenting voices like Jonathan Swift who in *Gullivers Travels* bitterly critiqued European colonialism as a savage display of the enormous greed. However, for the majority of the English writers, colonialism was a positive force that brought prosperity and virility to the nation. We have already seen that for Andrew Freeport in Addison's *The Spectator Papers* the sea is the "British common" and Defoe's novels offer a great justification of the colonial project morally reforming potential criminals. Thus Jack in *Colonel Jack* or Moll Flanders, Defoe's eponymous heroines undergo complete transformations through the colonial project.

- ❖ **THE STATUS OF WOMEN** : At the heart of the poem lies Pope's presentation of the status of women in eighteenth century society. Female education was severely restricted and female sexuality was scrutinised with significant anxiety. Pope's text seems to reiterate these anxieties, using the incident of Arabella Fermor as a point of entry. If you look carefully, Pope presents several versions of female subjectivity. Firstly there is the version of Thalestris in Canto IV – the Amazonian woman who provokes violence and aggression and causes social chaos.

"To Arms, to Arms! The Fierce Virago Cries
And swift as lightening to the Combate flies."

The second version is that of the hysterical feminine, marked by bouts of depression (“The nymphet in beauteous grief appears / Her eyes half languishing”) or hysteria (“sighs, sobs and passions”). It is this version that Pope describes in the Cave of Spleen in Canto IV.

The third version that Belinda articulates is that of the coquettish feminine who is willing to circulate her desire and sexuality, but unwilling to surrender herself in marriage. The most serious satire of this poem seems to critique this position. It is merely because of a moral concern of the woman locked in a fantasy of narcissism or is it a larger manifestation of the male anxiety over female power? Ultimately the poem must thus reduce the female subject to control and governance of male authority through the institution of marriage.

It is this position of passive womanhood that the poem seems to argue for and Clarissa’s speech seem to be the voice of Pope. Clarissa reduces beauty to a transitory phase and argues about the validity Good Sense and Good Nature, the binaries of Amazonian or the hysterical womanhood.

“And trust me Dear! Good Humour can prevail,
When Airs, and Flights, and Screams and scolding fail
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll
Charms strike the sight, but Men’t wins the soul.”

It is thus Clarissa has been seen as a surrogate voice of the poet and her speech apparently delivers the moral of the poem. Any such simple hypothesis can however be problematic because Clarissa is a more complex character. After all, it is she who hands over the scissors to the Baron just before she cuts off Belinda’s hair. Why do you think she does this? Is this the hostility between the prude and the coquette? Do we notice an undercurrent in Clarissa, a jealousy about Belinda’s beauty or a hostility fed upon the difference in social class? These questions leave a rich ambiguity about the meaning of the poem.

This wider range of poetic possibilities can be glimpsed in Pope’s “Epitaph. On Mrs. Corbet, Who Dyed of a Cancer in her Breast”. This is a poem you can read when you are reading the text of *The Rape of the Lock*. Note how Pope describes the ‘good’ woman:

Here rests a Woman, good without pretence,
Blest with plain Reason, and with sober Sense:
No Conquests she, but o’er herself desir’d,

No Arts essay'd, but not to be admir'd.
 Passion and Pride were to her soul unknown,
 Convinc'd, that virtue only is our own.
 So unaffected, so compos'd a mind,
 So firm yet soft, so strong yet so refin'd,

Elsewhere in the *Epistle to a Lady*, for example, we find two such epigrammatic paragraphs :

In Men, we various Ruling Passions find,
 In Women, two almost divide the kind;
 Those, only fix'd, they first or last obey,
 The Love of Pleasure, and the Love of Sway.
 (ll. 207-10)

Again and again the conservative and critical attitude of the poet toward women who are obsessed with sexuality is reflected:

Men, some to Bus'ness, some to Pleasure take;
 But ev'ry Woman is at heart a Rake:
 Men, some to Quiet, some to public Strife;
 But ev'ry Lady would be Queen for Life.

In *The Rape of the Lock* then, the question of ideology is the representation of the competing ideologies of female subjectivity. It may be suggested that there are three competing ideologies held up parallelly here. The first that we would like to draw your attention to is that of **aggressive womanhood** – articulated by Thalestris in Canto V. In this scene as Thalestris declares

To Arms, to arms: the fierce virago cries
 And swift as lightning to the Combat flies

Pope creates a universe of chaos

'Heroes and Heroins' shouts confusedly rise
 And base and treble voices strike the shies

leading to a vision of doomsday

“Earth shakes her nodding Tower’s the Ground gives way
And the pale Ghosts start at the flash of day.”

These passages are allied with the sense of the female hysteria that Pope has already evoked in the Cave of spleen

“Sooner let Earth, Air, Sea to Chaos fall
Men, Monkeys, Lap-dogs, Panots perish all.”

The mock-heroic here releases the laughter but the darkening images, the sense of frenzy and the anxiety about social chaos betrays the patriarchal anxiety against what the eighteenth called the hysterical feminine. Aggressive womanhood thus creates a vision of apocalyptic collapse that requires divine intervention through the *deus ex machina*. One of the points that may be raised here is the presence of the martial rhetoric that dominates the game of ombre. This is different because it is part of the culture of the game and tinged within the structure of flirtation – the battle for control in the game of courtship. The fourth and fifth cantos actually draw upon the social brawl that threatens to destabilise society.

An antithesis to this, is of course the patriarchal fantasy of **passive womanhood**. This is articulated in the speech of Clarissa

“How vain are all these glories, all our Pains
Unless good sense preserve what Beauty gains:
That men may say when we the front box grace,
Behold the first in virtue, as in Face
... And trust me Dear, good Human can prevail
When Airs and Flights, and Screams and Scolding fail.”

Notice how this speech directly refers back to the idea of ‘good sense and good Humour’ that Pope had articulated in the dedicatory epistle. Thus the lines move towards a vision of passive womanhood that accepts patriarchal mastery. It is this vision that Samuel Richardson was also to reinvent in the eighteenth century novel *Pamela*.

The justification of this plea for passive womanhood is played out through a series of commentaries about the vacuity of Belinda’s brain. The aesthetic merits of the poem are deceptively cruel here. They show attention to Belinda’s great beauty but lead to a damning critique of her lack of intelligence and her mortal profligacy. Thus Pope can claim immortal beauty for Belinda in a line like

“If to her share some female error fall
 Look on her face and you’ll forget them all.”

or compare her eyes with Sol. But it fixes Belinda as an object of the male gaze and Pope critiques her mental vacuity:

“Then gay ideas crowd the vacant Brain”

This ‘moving toyshop of her heart’ is extended to all womankind through the sylphs who create a lineage of such moral muddled and empty headed giddy train of women engaging in flirtation. Thus this category of womanhood requires patriarchal supervision and control.

What we are suggesting here is that Pope is deeply implicating the poem into the woman question and offering versions of womanhood. In rejecting the subjectivity of aggressive womanhood as leading to social chaos, and by cleverly presenting female fickleness through the aesthetic he seeks to drive home a ‘moral message’ – a patriarchal fantasy of female subjection that was to haunt both the male and the female imagination in the mid eighteenth century until Mary Wollstonecraft raised questions about it. Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* notes how the eighteenth century public sphere successfully banished the woman from the public domain into the domestic sphere and Pope’s poem was an integral agent in this process.

5.16.8 Summing Up

This Unit has definitely revealed to you in a nutshell why Alexander Pope remains the stalwart of 18th century literature. *The Rape of the Lock*, as you have seen, is truly a society poem that brings out almost all aspects of 18th century elite society. The garb of the mock epic, as repeatedly shown in this Unit, makes Pope satire less stinging in intent and more coated with humour. But to round off, you must keep in mind that the liberal doses of satire alone would not have given the text its abiding fame; nor is Pope’s critique of colonialism that anticipates post colonial thought the only strength of the long poem. It is the deft blend of these neo-classical traits with a streak of romanticism in the presentation of Belinda that gives the text a different flavour!

5.16.9 Comprehension Exercises

Broad Questions:

1. How does Pope use the mock heroic elements in *The Rape of the Lock*? How do they add to the beauty of the poem?
2. “Pope’s poem is a satire on eighteenth century aristocratic life”. Do you agree? Justify your response.
3. *The Rape of the Lock* subtly deals with the phenomenon of colonialism”. Discuss.

Medium Length Questions:

1. “Pope’s attitude towards women in *The Rape of the Lock* is deeply conservative”. Do you agree? Justify your response.
2. Comment on the role of the sylphs in *The Rape of the Lock*.
3. Bring out the veiled romantic aspects that you find scattered in *The Rape of the Lock*.

Short Questions:

1. What are the various rhetorical figures used in *The Rape of the Lock* to highlight the mock heroic quality?
2. What is the significance of Belinda’s dressing table in *The Rape of the Lock*?
3. Give an idea of the context in which *The Rape of the Lock* was composed.
4. What is the role of Clarissa in *The Rape of the Lock*?

5.16.10 Suggested Reading

Text

Students may read the entire annotated text using Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* ed. Harriet Raghunathan. New Delhi: Worldview, 2001. Apart from detailed annotations, this volume also contains a number of important essays that deal with the critical approaches to the text.

MODULE 6

Transitional Period in the 18th Century

UNIT 17 □ The Evolving Socio-Cultural Scene in Britain

Structure

- 6.17.0 Introduction
- 6.17.1 Political Situation in Britain
- 6.17.2 American Declaration of Independence
- 6.17.3 The Industrial Revolution
- 6.17.4 The French Revolution
- 6.17.5 Influence of Germany
- 6.17.6 Intellectuals : Godwin, Paine
- 6.17.7 Philosophers
- 6.17.8 Religious Scenario
- 6.17.9 The Birth of British Feminism
- 6.17.10 British Voice against British Slave Trade
- 6.17.11 Study of History
- 6.17.12 Summing up
- 6.17.13 Comprehension Exercises
- 6.17.14 Suggested Reading

6.17.0 Introduction

In the previous Units you have seen how the Augustan Age with all its rigorous emphasis on reason, logic, obedience to classical rules and correctness choked all freedom of imagination. The tone was set by Dryden first and then given a full implication by Pope, Addison, Swift, Johnson and others. In this Module we shall see how a transition is palpably felt in all literary genres. And this transition from the **Age of Prose and Reason** to that of **Return to Nature** makes an interesting study. In this Unit specifically, we shall see how the winds of change were blowing all over Europe, and how Great Britain absorbed those changes. The Socio-cultural changes in fact influence the literature of the period.

In this context, we will see that the nineteenth Century has two broad tendencies : Romantic and Victorian. Previously seventeenth century had romantic and classical tendencies. In the eighteenth century also we see how the age begins with the emphasis

on bourgeois culture, stress on enlightenment, cultivation of correctness in society and literature and metropolis as the setting. But in the second half of the century there is the dawn of sentiment that gradually widens into imagination. Now the emphasis is on **Nature**, and villages replace the city, lyric replaces mock-heroic and satire, song and dance of birds and animals replace the masked dances and balls, Kantian freedom of an individual's mind replaces Lockean reason, and the element of spontaneity is not curbed by the browbeating rules of the classics. The transitional period looks back to the Elizabethan age for inspiration and looks to the present age for revolting against the tyranny of Reason.

6.17.1 Political Situation in Britain

The transition period is covered by the reign of George III (1760-1820), the grandson of George II. He was not a learned monarch – his English was ungrammatical and spellings inaccurate. To this king, Great Britain owes the loss of her American colonies, the failure to pacify Ireland, the delay of parliamentary reform and the long continuance of slave trade. In his reign the Tories were reconciled to the Hanoverian dynasty. But at the king's accession, William Pitt, the great orator and statesman resigned. Pitt held office as Prime Minister from 1757-61 and 1766-67. Then came Bute's ministry (1762-63). This Prime Minister was a corrupted person who depended on bribery for securing power. He was followed by George Grenville (1763-65) who was against the liberty of the press. Lord Rockingham's ministry (1765-66) tried to conciliate the colonies and repealed the Stamp Act. In 1766, George III dismissed Rockingham and called on Pitt to form a ministry. Pitt's gout and eccentricity finally compelled him to resign in 1768. Then came Duke of Grafton whose ministry ran from 1768 to 1770. Lord North's Ministry ran from 1770-82. Then came Rockingham in 1782, Shelburne (1782-83), Fox - North (1783) and then Pitt the Younger.

The important historical happenings of the age were the Seven years war (1756-63), which was fought in Europe, in India and in America. In India Clive attacked Arcot and took it from the French. Madras was given to Britain. Then Clive marched from Madras, attacked Siraj-Ud-Daula and won the Battle of Plassey in 1757. By the treaty of Paris, Britain acquired all Indian territories of the French, apart from Pondichery and Chandannagar. The treaty of 1763 ended the Seven years war, Britain got Canada and all French territory east of Mississippi. In India she kept control of Madras and Bengal; and in Africa she got Senegal.

6.17.2 American Declaration of Independence

An important loss George III had to swallow was the loss of America. It was a political loss, but a gain for the growth of the romantic tendencies in Britain and the spurt for the French Revolution across, the Atlantic. The British Government's Stamp Act forced America to pay contribution for armies. They had to send goods to Great Britain for re-export as they could not trade direct with other countries. The Boston massacre, the Boston Tea Party (1773) ignited the spirit of revolt. The safety and happiness of the colonies of America were at peril, compelling them to voice for equality and right to be free, [... the history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having a direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States... we, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America... do solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are and ought to be, Free and Independent States; that are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown...] On July 4, 1776 came this famous Declaration of Independence in which thirteen colonies broke their allegiance to Great Britain. The most important part of the Declaration, which has had universal significance, and which had a great impact on the British writers was in the second paragraph. It said that we hold these truths to be self-evident : that all men are created equal; that they are endowed, by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness..” This famous passage encapsulates several canons of liberal democracy including the principle of equality, natural rights, government by consent and limited government.

The influence of John Locke (1632 - 1704) on Jefferson (1743 - 1826) who drafted the Declaration was great, particularly on the equal rights of men, developed by Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government*. It is a paradox that the ‘coloniser’ (Locke) prompted the colonised to draft the declaration against the colonisers.

After America, the other trouble for Great Britain came when Holland, France, and Spain declared war on Great Britain, while Russia, Denmark and Sweden held a hostile Armed Neutrality against her.

6.17.3 The Industrial Revolution

The precise start and end of the Industrial Revolution is still debated among historians, as is the pace of economic and social changes. There were two phases of Industrial Revolution. The second Industrial Revolution began around 1850 and the first one in

the eighteenth century, which is our concern. Use of Steel, chemical industries, petroleum, use of electricity etc mark the second phase. In the first Industrial Revolution, a transition is found in the shift from hand production methods to machines, the increasing use of steam power, the development of machine tools and the rise of the mechanised factory system. It all began first in Great Britain and then spread to Japan, America, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium. Riding on the wave of this revolution, by the mid 18th Century Britain was the world's leading commercial nation, controlling a global trading empire with colonies in North America and the Caribbean and with major military and political power in the Indian subcontinent, particularly with the proto - industrialised Mughal Bengal, through the activities of the East India Company. Important technological developments were noticed in textiles, steam power, iron making and invention of machine tools.

The Industrial Revolution that began in England in the eighteenth century was a turning point towards a transition for a new world. The modernisation of the cities in England brought tremendous impact not only at social, economic and political levels but also brought a great influence to the literary works especially in terms of theme and language.

The Industrial Revolution is said to have begun with the invention of steam engine by James Watt in 1760s. Now most of the manual work was replaced by the use of technology. The society changed from the agricultural to the industrial. It marked the transition from traditional world into modern world. It made a rapid economic growth in England, thereby making it play an important role in the world. But E. A. Wrigley holds in his *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* that the Revolution was like a Pandora jar. Once it opened, there came unprecedented problems like pollution from the factory posing a hazard to the environment, the gap of social class, the spread of slum area in cities, increasing rate of criminality, and other social problems caused by rapid urbanization.

Literary writers responded to the Industrial Revolution in their works. Literature during the Revolution flourished in leaps and bounds. It brought a new spirit to the age. A marked change was visible in both theme and language. The seventeenth century literary themes represented by such works as Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* were chiefly moral, political, religious or individual in nature and intent. Now the emergent major themes are social issues, nature, technology and imagination. The writers began to take up the migration of thousands of people from villages to big cities to work in factories. It created a new class in society. The working class. The employers hired women and children and paid low wages. Exploitation and poor conditions of living were their lot. William Blake showed this

evil impact in poems like 'London', 'The Chimney Sweeper'. The writers also saw how industrialisation and urbanisation transformed the environment by polluting land, air and water. The beauty of nature was destroyed by railroad lines, viaducts, canals etc. People longed for the beauty of nature, and showed an urge to go back to nature, all of which are so vigorously presented by poet like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron. Writers also responded to the Revolution by showing the imaginative possibility of the use of science and technology in life. *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley and the *The Time Machine* (1895) by H. G. Wells are some of the works in this direction.

The Industrial Revolution had its influence in the use of the language as spoken by the common people. The emphasis on metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, meter was no more found. The voice of the common people began to flock the works, and the language capable of conveying the emotion of the common people was preferred. Most of the writers became critics of the age which was steadily heading to a crisis in civilization.

6.17.4 The French Revolution

Another important historical event, besides the Declaration of Independence by America, was the French Revolution. This revolution is the first modern revolution because it changed the structure of society, rather than merely replacing the existing ruler or even the political regime, and created new ideology to explain its course when nothing suitable could be obtained from the past. It produced the modern doctrine of nationalism that soon spread throughout Europe. July 14, 1789 eventually became a date symbolising the downfall of absolute monarchy, when the men of Paris took over the Bastille fort. The King of France was executed, and the Queen Marie Antoinette was guillotined. These events profoundly affected every state of Europe and the ideas of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' became popular with people across Europe.

In Great Britain at first the Revolution was regarded with sympathy. To them, it was the symbol of the dawn of an era of happiness and freedom. Revolutionary societies were formed in Britain. The Whigs equated it with their own glorious Revolution of 1688. Poets like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley were greatly influenced by the Revolution, when the French proclaimed that they would give assistance to any nation that rose for liberty, which was equivalent to a declaration of War against the monarchies in Europe. Rousseau and Voltaire became popular, especially Rousseau's *Emile* and *Confessions* exercised great influence on the English Romantics.

Rousseau's call for a return to nature gave a new stimulus to the transitional and

Romantic poets as well. According to Rousseau, original impulses are good, because they are natural. Men have become evil because they left uncontaminated nature and grew luxurious and artificial. To escape from the state of sickness, we must return to the mountains and meadows. In other words, we are to destroy the social structure raised by man during centuries of human history and start afresh. Political institutions make the rich richer and the poor poorer. The tyrants oppress the weak. Force is thus a mischievous element. Only love can create a new world order. These ideas of Rousseau find subtle expression in the transitional poets, and most eloquently in Blake and later on in Wordsworth and Shelley.

The name of Edmund Burke is important in connection with the French Revolution. It is because Burke, the great Whig leader, had always differed from the rest of his party in his attitude to the Revolution. And in October 1791, he gave to the world his reasons for the opposition to it. His book *Reflections on the French Revolution*, produced a profound impression not only in Britain but throughout the continent. Burke's main argument was that unlike the English Revolution of 1688, the French Revolution was a clear break from the previous trend of the nation's political development. So he predicted that the only possible result would be anarchy. He further prophesied that from this state of chaos France would be saved by a military dictator. It was an example of political prescience fulfilled with singular accuracy by the advent of Napoleon. Moreover he called the Revolution "Mother of all evils" But Burke showed the breadth and largeness of his outlook in the speech on 'Conciliation with America' ((1775). Here he makes light of the legal argument in favour of taxing the colonies, taking up his position on the more durable ground of sense and expediency. As Burke said :

"The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not to your interest to make them happy."

In his leadership in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, his speech lasted for four days. In it he brought before his hearers the beauties of the East as well as the horrors and desolation of the Hindoos. The contradictions prevalent in English society regarding the ideals of liberty and democracy can thus be understood from the differing politicians to the French cause and the plight of British colonies in Asia and Africa.

Burke wrote some philosophical books eg *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). But he is chiefly remembered as an orator in connection with his political career. He was a practical politician who applied his clear and forcible intelligence to the problems of his day. At the same time he had the supreme faculty for discerning the eternal principles lying behind the shifting and troubled scenes of his time. Scores of his dicta are relevant even today. All the political ideas of the Conservatives and

the Traditionalists originated in the teaching of Burke. Disraeli's real master was Burke. Loftiness of mind, breadth of outlook, precise and compact expression, shrewdest and deepest views as a statesman, judgement warped by imagination mark him out as a transitional figure in the socio-political sphere. So an eminent historian said, "The time may come when they (Burke's writings) may no longer be read; the time will never come in which men will not grow the wiser by reading them."

6.17.5 Influence of Germany

Just as France was a major force in moulding the sensibility and taste of the English writers of the post-popean literature, Germany too influenced them by its transitional literature. England reacted to the changes in Germany in a positive way. The German writers tried to overcome and eliminate French classicism just as the transitional writers in England tried to do the same by resorting to the native fountains of poetry in the Elizabethan period. By the publication of *Nibelungelied*, Johan Jacob Bodmer and his follower Heinrich Myller stirred the imagination of their countrymen to refashion a national literature and turned their thoughts in the direction of greater freedom, greater spontaneity, a richer play of fancy. In 1788, a paper was read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh by Henry Mackenzie, that said,

the taste which directed the German Composition was of a kind as nearly allied to the English as their language... their factitious narratives, their ballad poetry, and other branches of their literature which are particularly apt to bear the stamp of the extravagant and the supernatural, began also to occupy to attention of the British literati

The Popean, Addisonian and Johnsonian ideas of literature, were, equally given up slowly in England, as a mark of revolt. Moreover, the German literature of the period of the second half of the eighteenth century was one of the awakening of the German national self-consciousness. And it had its counterpart in British writers who harked back to the glorious achievements of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton. It made the transitional period not only a revolt but also a period of revival, which gets further momentum in the great Romantic Poets.

6.17.6 Intellectuals : Godwin, Paine

William Godwin (1756 - 1836) is remembered more as a social thinker than a writer. He was a friend and inspirer of Shelley (also the poet's father-in-law). He was a sincere thinker, with is no trace of self-seeking or self-display. His *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) was a Bible to the young revolutionaries like

Wordsworth. Godwin's book was directly inspired by the French Revolution. Apparently, it might seem anarchic in theory but deep down, it deprecates violence. In his novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), he pursues his favourite ideas, the tyranny of Government and the beneficence of reason. He was against all the traditional props of social conventions. These conventions need to be changed. Each mind should be free from the illusions of feeling and led purely by intelligence. The highest goal of action is common. A society built upon reason will enjoy the full rights of equality and liberty. The existing distribution of wealth, the established forms of Government, the traditional modes of living, even marriage itself, will be revised and re-modelled according to those principles. Law is an evil. All men should unite on the spontaneous harmony of their desires. Government is unreasonable because it cannot exist without coercion. And coercing is unreasonable. His idealization of Reason and the glorification of individual freedom were attractive and novel ideas.

Like Godwin, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was another social thinker of the Transitional Period. He was an English deist and radical, best remembered for his outspoken republicanism, chiefly expressed in *Rights of Man* (1791-92), a vindication of the French Revolution, written in reply to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Paine's anti-monarchical pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) had earned fame in America as it boosted the independence cause there. He fled to France in 1792, following a Royal Proclamation against seditious writings. He was subsequently outlawed *in absentia*. He was a self-educated man, more a propagandist than a philosopher. But he disseminated important ideas like natural rights, equality, majority rule, and a written constitution, in an easily accessible form. *The Age of Reason* was published in 1794-95, which opposed both-Cristianity and atheism. Better than any polemical writer among his contemporaries, he represents the union of a fearless reasoning and critical mind. He has the rare power of appreciating the concrete nature of reality. So he advocated parliamentary reform, old age pensions and a progressive income tax. He summed up historic situations in terms of their dynamic factors, not in terms of silly platitudes. He died in relative obscurity in America. Thomas Jefferson, author of the 'Declaration of American Independence', wrote a fitting epitaph "...it will be your glory to have steadily laboured, and with as much effect as any man living".

6.17.7 Philosophers

In the sphere of philosophical writings, the names of David Hume (1711 - 76) and Adam Smith (1723 - 90) are remembered most. Hume is called the Descartes of England. Whereas Descartes had the vigour of a spiritualist, Hume explained the laws of life in a realistic way. A superior power of logic and intelligence guided him. His major works include *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), *Essays, Moral and*

Political (1741 - 48), *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *Political Discourses* (1752). An absolute scepticism prevails in his writings. He inflicts shock on those who believe, and feel secure, in a divine or natural order. His ethics are wholly empirical and objective. In politics he does not believe in social contract. He believes that necessity has brought mankind together. His economic doctrine reacts against the mercantile system. He remains the philosophical father of the utilitarians and anticipates something in Adam Smith.

Adam Smith is frequently spoken of as the founder of political economy. He is remembered for his two unequal works - *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith defines wealth as the goods which men use or consume. Its source is labour. Thus he makes wealth a subject of science. To him, value depends on labour. Progress of wealth in a society largely means a change from an agricultural age to a commercial era. Division of labour is the first step in industrial progress. The germs of Karl Marx's ideas of socialism are latent in Smith's book. In the history of literature the book is important because it is an example of that spirit of enquiry and research that was abroad at this time, playing havoc with literary convention as well as with many other ideas.

Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832) is another political thinker of the transitional period. His thought is branded as utilitarianism and sometimes as Philosophical Radicalism. In 1776 he published anonymously *A Fragment on Government*. Then came out *Defence of Usury* (1787). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789). In the last mentioned work he gave politics and culture the new endearing term 'international'. His philosophy influenced James Mill (1773 - 1836). so much that the latter formed a party known as Philosophical Radicals. Their demand was for a constitutional reform and administrative improvement. He was against 'Natural Rights' of man. America took it as the foundation of their Government. Rousseau was much influenced by it. Bentham held that rights are enacted by Law. He also opposed Sir William Blackstone's (1723-80) theory of Government by his theory of utility and gifted another adage, "It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong." He is called the father of bureaucracy. He also attempted to reform the system of prison management through his 'Panopticon'. Thus Bentham was influenced by Hume but he influenced James Mill and Sir Robert Malthus (1766 - 1834). If Bentham coined the term international, Malthus coined the phrase 'Struggle for existence' which had great impact on Darwin (1809-82) in his theory of evolution in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Malthus' *An Essay on the Principles of Population* was published in the year 1798 that saw the *Lyrical Ballads* in print. Malthus's theory was that there is an arithmetical progression of food and a geometrical progression of population. Secondly, human existence depends upon a working balance between population and food.

6.17.8 Religious Scenario

In the sphere of religion the eighteenth century saw two schools : the Latitudinarian and the Methodist. The former stood for the spirit of tolerance, reasonableness in the interpretation of religious doctrines. Methodism, on the other hand, renewed self-discipline and the active zeal without which religion loses its power and forgets its purpose. And this new evangelism was allied to an active philanthropy. Like the (“romantic revolt”) in poetry, the Methodist Movement was a protest against formalism. Fervour had gone out of the English church. In its formularies there was life, but the formularies were a dead letter and the life needed re-awakening. The young Oxford students who founded Methodism sought to revive the old devotion. There was no idea of separation.

In the Methodist Movement, the names of John Wesley (1703 - 91) and his brother Charles (1707 -88) come to the forefront. These two brothers and George Whitefield (1714 - 70) were known in Oxford University by the nickname of *Methodists*. John Wesley's own spiritual inspiration came from Jeremy Taylor. John and Charles picked up those young men in Oxford who desired to follow the church rules of fasting, almsgiving and Prayer, and to receive the Holy Communion Weekly. Whitefield among the three, was perhaps the greatest preacher. He preached ten sermons a week to audiences numbering sometimes as many as thirty thousand. John Wesley is said to have delivered forty thousand sermons till his death. Their preachings affected all classes - the miners of Cornwall, the soldiers in the army, the negroes in Georgia, as well as a fashionable society in London.

Wesley actually restored Christianity to its place as a living force in the personal creed of men and in the life of the nation.

6.17.9 The Birth of British Feminism

British feminism is born in the second half of the eighteenth century or the Transition Period with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. Critics generally agree that this book enlarges upon the political tenets expounded in her *The Rights of Men* (1790). The book is also an elaborate treatise of female education. The book urges the need for a national system of teaching, upon love, marriage and family relationship. Some hold it as a political tract, a radical critique of society from broad equalitarian premises. It is also a radical feminist tract. *The Rights of Men* was too exclusively conceived as a vituperative attack on the person and politics of Edmund Burke. In place of Burke's argument in defence

of his political conservatism, Wollstonecraft offered an argument from reason. Her reason was tempered by passion. She rejected Burke's appeal to tradition and the wisdom of antiquity in favour of a spirit of revisionism which embraced freedom as the birthright of all men, equality of all men as the basis of the progress of civilization, and blind submission to authority as debasing.

Mary married Godwin in 1797. Before the end of that year, the birth of a child, the future wife of Shelley, was fatal to her. But Mary and Godwin were gallant rebels of their time. They had the courage to say what they thought just. And *A Vindication* is held to be the first British trumpet in the battle for women's freedom. The book in its theories is almost a century in advance!

6.17.10 British Voice against British Slave Trade

Just as Mary Wollstonecraft raised her voice against women's slavery to men/patriarchal society, Dr. Johnson (1709-84), Horace Walpole (1717-97) and others criticised slave trade by the British. The cotton manufacture of Manchester was closely connected with the British slave trade at Liverpool. In the second half of the eighteenth century as many as fifty thousand slaves were transported. Both Dr. Johnson and Horace Walpole thought it to be immoral. Horace Walpole wrote in a letter against this horrid traffic of selling Negroes, "It has appeared to us that six and forty thousand of these wretches are sold every year, to our plantation alone! It chills one's blood. I would not have to say that I voted in it, for the continent of America. 'The Liverpool' slavers" carried cargoes of finished Lancashire cotton goods to Africa, exchanged them for Negroes, took the slaves across Atlantic and returned with cargoes of raw cotton besides tobacco and sugar. The planters of the West Indian islands and the American mainland bought Lancashire cotton textiles to clothe their slaves and the supply of Negro labour from Africa enabled them to provide the raw material of the great Lancashire industry. The important thing to note is that the heinous British slave trade heard some British voices against it.

6.17.11 Study of History

Eighteenth century is marked, *inter alia* by the advance in knowledge and research into national affairs. It prompted the study of history. Hume's *History of England* (1754-62), and Robertson's (1721-92) *History of Scotland during the Reign of Queen Mary and James VI until his Accession to the crown of England* (1759), *History of Charles V* (1769), *History of America* (1771) and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) are examples of the new socio-cultural interests. Robertson

deserves the fame as the first British historian to attempt a wide general view of history. By far the greatest name in this sphere is Gibbon whose fame rests for ever with one great book mentioned above.

Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire as generally recognised as the finest history ever written. It records the history of the Roman Empire from the end of the golden age to its final political and physical disintegration twelve centuries later : from the reign of Emperor Trojan to the Fall of the West, from the age of Justinian to that of Charlemagne. It is history at its magnificent and panoramic best - an authentic and recognizable masterpiece. Gibbon mastered the languages Latin, French and Greek for writing such a monumental work of research. He shook off an orthodox christian attitude in favour of a detached and historical view of the rise and growth of Christianity in Rome. His argumentative statements, however, were appreciated by the enlightened people. The book has remained as the greatest historical work in English language. His success inspired William Mitford (1744 - 1827) to write *History of Greece* (1784 - 1810) in ten volumes.

William Robertson (1721 - 93) was successful as a historian, as evident from his *History of America* (1771). Boswell's (1740 - 95). *The life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) is a biography, but it is a history of the eighteenth century literary scenario.

6.17.12 Summing Up

In this Unit we have had a brief discussion on the changing socio-cultural scenario in the second half of the eighteenth century. The transition in taste and sensibility is obvious when we make a comparison between Pope and Blake. But this transition is accountable for the change in the social religions, political, economics, philosophical and intellectual changes. The role of the two major events viz American Independence and the French Revolution triggered the urge for freedom from the classical rules. The causes of the transition actually give much scope for the application of New Historicism to the study of literature of the period. Moreover the tendencies in literature emanating from the socio-cultural changes expedite the arrival of the Romantic Movement in English literature.

6.17.13 Comprehension Exercises

A. Long Questions :

1. Write an essay on the impact of the Industrial Revolution on English literature of the eighteenth century.
2. Write briefly on the impact of the French Revolution on the eighteenth

century literature.

3. Discuss the role of Germany in bringing a change in English literature in the eighteenth century.
4. Write a short essay on the philosophers of the Transitional period.

B. Medium length Questions :

1. Write briefly on American Declaration of Independence.
2. Discuss the religious scenario in the Transitional period.
3. Comment on the birth of British Feminism in the Transitional period.

C. Short Questions :

1. Write on the position of Burke in English literature.
2. Write briefly on Gibbon.
3. Discuss the importance of Thomas Paine as a social thinker.
4. Briefly discuss the interest in history in the Transitional period.

6.17.14 Suggested Reading

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|--------------------------------------|--|
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| 2. Legouis, E. & Cazamian, L. | – A History of English Literature J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960 (Revised) |
| 3. Crompton - Rickett | – A History of English Literature Nelson, 1966 (Reprint) |
| 4. Warner G. T Martin C H K Munr, E. | – The New Ground Work of British History Blackie & Sons demited 1952 (Reprint) |
| 5. Stephen, L. | – English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century 1904 |
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UNIT 18 □ The Precursors of Romantic Poetry

Structure

6.18.0 Introduction

6.18.1 The Precursors: An Age of Transition (1760 – 1798)

6.18.2 Changing Concept of the Poet

6.18.3 The Location of Literature in the Age of Transition

6.18.4 Characters in the Poetry of the Pre-Romantics

6.18.5 Revival of Medievalism

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6.18.0 Introduction

As part of the study of British poetry of the 17th and 18th centuries, you have traversed the Restoration and Augustan periods with focus on specific texts. In this Unit, we will acquaint you with the next major strand of poetry that emerged during this period, and almost as an off-shoot of the prevalent trends and amidst newer turns. We are here talking about the earliest beginnings of the Romantic strain in English poetry. There are two things you need to understand very clearly in this regard. First, Romanticism denotes a very wide area of literary exegesis and it is not to be confused either with terms like romance/romantic that are used casually in common parlance; nor is it used in the rather constricted sense that we have seen in the Middle English Metrical Romances that followed strict codes of social behaviour. Of course, some elements of the Metrical Romances are present in Romantic Poetry that flowered in the 19th century, but that is not all about it. The second important thing you will see in this Unit is that it is not as if the neoclassical or Augustan modes certainly vanished from literary parlance and the Romantic strain took over; the shift has been very gradual and at times as in *The Rape of the Lock*, we notice overlapping trends as well. These subtleties of literary expression have led to the use of the term ‘transition’; while poets of this period are commonly known as Precursors of the Romantic Movement. You will also gradually learn how Romanticism as a trend proper came to hold sway at the beginning of the 19th century.

6.18.1 The Precursors: An Age of Transition (1760-1798)

HISTORICAL EVENTS DURING THE AGE OF TRANSITION

Under the reign of George III the main events were

- ❖ The loss of the American colonies
- ❖ The French Revolution
- ❖ The Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions

The precursors of the Romantic Age were primarily known as writers of the Age of Transition. It was a change from the mode of Augustan literature towards the more romantic impulses. The Augustan age was primarily an age of the Town and its most important literary form was the satire. Yet from the 1740s two divergent strands became noticeable – continuance of neo-classical literature and the intensification of romantic impulses. For instance, Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad* was published in the same decade as Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy written in a Country Churchyard’ or Thomas Young’s *Night Thoughts*. The neo-classical tradition persisted but its dominance was slowly broken by new sensibilities and inclinations. In the same decade, such distinct works indicated a shift in interest from the public world of Augustan literature to a more private world of Pre-Romantic poetry, from contemporary men and events to universal themes of life and death, as in Gray’s ‘Elegy’ or Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas*.

CHANGES IN THE AGE OF TRANSITION		
	Classical features	Early romantic features
✓	Imitation	Originality, creativity
✓	‘social’ writer	Focus on the individual
✓	Reason	Feelings, emotions
✓	Established rules	Free imagination
✓	Classical Greece and Rome	Interest in the Middle Ages
✓	Routine-life, domestic environment	Exotic places
✓	Nature as an abstract	Nature as a real, living being

6.18.2 Changing concept of the poet

In the age of transition, the conception of the poet changed. The poet as Wit became the poet as Druid – a recluse haunting churchyards and driven strange demons as he goes searching the deep mysteries of life. These changes did not occur suddenly. It was a transitional process originating in the 1740s, in the growing tide of sentimentalism but it was only with William Blake and Robert Burns that it took concrete shape as a reaction against the neo-classical celebration of Reason.

6.18.3 The location of literature in the Age of Transition

While the sites of the practice of literature of the classical tradition had confined itself to the clubs and coffee houses, the writers belonging to the Pre-Romantic period preferred a **return to nature**. This is not to state that neo-classical poetry did not represent nature. Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* is a significant example in this case. However, later the perception towards nature changed. The delight was not in the regular and pretty design but in the more wild and rugged aspects of nature. This is discernible as early as in the 1730s in James Thomson's *The Seasons* which manifests a new attitude to nature rooted in a meditative contemplation of it. It is a descriptive poem in four sections corresponding to the four seasons. William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) is also an important nature poem between Thomson and the Romantics. His treatment of nature is marked by a placid landscape description, realism in portrayal of country life and regard for nature as a moral teacher similar to William Wordsworth's 'Education of Nature'. This distinctive Romantic feature reaches its culmination in Wordsworth and John Keats' poetry of nature.

6.18.4 Characters in the poetry of the Pre-Romantics

A delight in the primitive nature led to an interest in the sombre rustic life and characters. In the eighteenth century, this primitive tendency of the idealization of the 'noble savage', the child and the peasant finds expression in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. It shows a confidence in the intuitive wisdom of childhood which runs parallel to the exaltation of primitive life, as in Gray's 'Elegy' when he sings, "the short and simple annals of the poor". Cowper also sang in *The Task*:

"My soul is with everyday's report
Of wrong and outrage with which the earth is filled"

The sympathy for the poor and the cry against oppression grew stronger till it culminated in Robert Burns (the ploughman poet) who brought the passions of common man into English verse. He is an authentic voice of the proletariat. As a Romantic poet Burns glorifies a simple, humble life in poems like 'To a Mountain Dairy' and Tam O'Shanter. His poetry also upholds the spirit of democracy, in that it approximates the poetry of the common man as in Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper'. However many poets of this period such as George Crabbe critiqued the sentimental idealization of the village life in Gray's 'Elegy' and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* and still examined every phase of the town life in *The Borough*.

6.18.5 Revival in Medievalism

The attraction of the remote and rustic from social sophistication, the simple primitivism led a growing interest in medieval times. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) is an authentic manifestation of the pre-romantic sensibility. His collection of medieval ballads was a doctored version to suit the taste of the age, which anticipates the supreme Romantic ballad of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Since medieval literature was scarce, there were many fake pieces of supposedly ancient literature by Thomas Chatterton (*Poems Supposed to have been Written at Bristol* by Thomas Bowley and others in the late fifteenth century - 1777), and James Macpherson (*Poems of Ossian*-1773). Such poems manifest the new spirit of imagination and the new desire for lyricism, sentiment and wonder. Ossianism swept entire Europe. Its expression of melancholy yearning for that disquiet past with its gloom, mystery and wildness was irresistible to generations bent on escape from the tyranny, order and reason of classical literature. The surviving symbol of the past was Gothic architecture –preserved in ruins. Ruins as a prop to sensibility was used in the Graveyard poetry like the ivy mantled tower and churchyard setting in Gray's 'Elegy'. Minor poets who contributed to the medieval revival are: Thomas Warton (*The Grave of King Arthur* - 1777) and James Beattie (*The Minstrel* - 1771-74). Interest in remote places led to an interest in supernaturalism. In *The Bard* and *The Descent of Odin*, Gray introduces in English poetry the long absent romantic element of folklore, mythology,

GRAVEYARD POETRY: melancholy, a sombre mood, interest in graves, death, ruins, desert places.

–Thomas Gray: Elegy written in a country churchyard

OSSIANIC POETRY: new sources of inspiration found in Nordic and Celtic culture.

—James Macpherson:
Fragments of Ancient Poetry
Fragments of Celtic poetry
attributed to OSSIAN, a
legendary warrior and bard of
the 3rd century.

primitive mystery, the sense of the savage and spectacular in nature. Such works anticipate Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.

6.18.6 New Understanding of Human 'nature'

The Pre-Romantic poems had an intense human sympathy and a subsequent understanding of the human heart. Pope and Joseph Addison delighted in the critique of polite society. This age gave greater emphasis on the passions and emotions which took the form of extremes of sensibility in the works of the Graveyard poets. They were orthodox Christians who opposed the optimism and rationalism of the deistic neo-classical life with serious meditations on death and immortality. With its church setting, twilight atmosphere and a mood of tender melancholy, Gray's 'Elegy' is an apt example. Thomas Parnell's 'A Night Piece to Death' and 'A Hymn for Evening' are pensively melancholic, filled with symbols of death and gloom. Young's *Night Thoughts*, occasioned by the death of his step-daughter, son-in-law and wife is an intensely personal expression written in a mood of solitary reverie. It is pensive and sentimental, filled with moody contemplations on death. Harvey's *Meditations among the Tombs* (1747) is a morbid and sentimental dwelling on every conceivable terror of death. Robert Blair's *The Grave* contains much of the graveyard ghoulishness. The Graveyard poets haunt graveyards and Gothic ruins to inspire melancholy, to evoke dark reminders of the past, so that they may become aware of earthly transience.

6.18.7 New Philosophy of the Pre-Romantic Age

PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

- * **Sturm und Drang (70s): strongly nationalistic literary movement**
- * **Mme De Staël : De l'Allemagne**
- * **J. J. Rousseau: the theory of the noble savage; importance of childhood and nature**

The intellectual spirit of the Augustan age began to lose its hold on the emerging philosophy of Rousseau which claimed that by nature man is good but becomes corrupted by the bad customs. Thus men should be left to the guidance of his own personality. David Hume's psychology discredited rationalism and gave encouragement to 'those who desired to believe in the truth of the unaccountable and the uncriticised'. This anti-intellectualism is expressed by William Blake when

he pictures Urizen at his “sad and evil task of breaking up the primal unity into rational categories (*The First Book of Urizen*).

Imagination, so long distrusted began to reassert itself as men discovered that there was much more to life than ordinary sense perceptions than Reason could understand. New importance was given to deeper feelings and profounder experiences. Collins’s ‘Ode to Evening’ shows a delicate sense of beauty and perceptive vision. Blake’s *The Poetical Sketches* (1783) was followed by the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* which reveals his powerful imagination. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) also deals with the conflict between reason and imagination. Blake believed that human history is a constant struggle between two contrary forces but he argued here that both are necessary for human progress: “Without contraries there is no progression”. The typical romantic conflicts – pleasure-pain, good-evil, and ideal-reality are influenced by Blake whose themes, images and symbols are structured by contrasts.

Blake’s visionary poems *Vision of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), *A Song of Liberty* (1793), *America* (1793), *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Los* (1795) are a presentation of Blake’s private mythology in which he attempts to explain man’s total psychic problems. His important mythological figures are Urizen (Reason), Los (Imagination), Orc (Energy). Blake and Collins are poets of the imagination who anticipate Keats.

6.18.8 Combination of Styles in the Writings of the Pre-Romantic Age

Though romantic sensibilities grew stronger over the years in the eighteenth century, most of the poems were written in the neo-classical tradition. The diction is often artificial, pompous, figurative and rhetorical. As precursors of romanticism, these poets popularized the verse form that supplanted the heroic couplet – the ballad, the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza and the blank verse. Thomson’s *The Seasons* is neo-classical in style and poetic diction. Gray’s ‘Elegy’ uses the heroic quatrains. Crabbe’s *The Borough* is a series of twenty-four heroic couplet letters. Cowper’s *The Task* is important because of its rejection of poetic diction and use of first hand observation. Burns’ works are in the Scottish dialect with a dramatic quality which has never lost its romantic flavour. His lyricism and intensely personal manner of love poetry like ‘A Red Red Rose’ and ‘A Fond Kiss’ point to the romantics. Blake used the most powerful and simple language in the *Songs of Experience* which use intense mysticism and symbolism.

The old patterns were thus giving place to the new. Nature became the promise of a new freedom of the human personality, a rejuvenescence of the imagination and emotions. However, the expression of these moods of revolutionary romanticism in the English writers were moderate than their contemporaries in France and Germany like Rousseau and Goethe, with the exception of Cowper, Burns and Blake. Their combined effort made possible the more important achievement of the next generation.

6.18.9 The Major Poets

Now we will discuss the works of some individual writers who were precursors of Romanticism. In all their works, we will trace a consistent attitude towards nature, sympathy for the poor, a definite note of melancholy with specific characteristics of style.

❖ THOMAS GRAY (1716-1771)

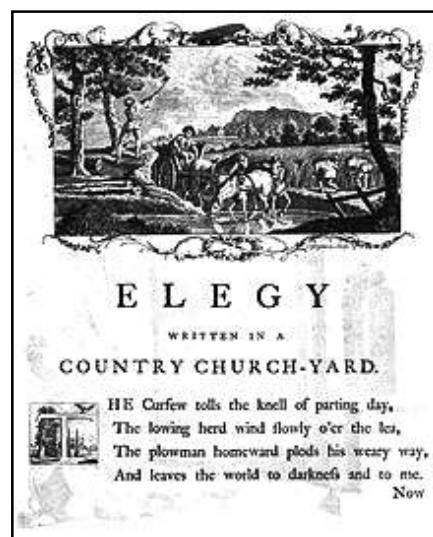
Attitude towards Nature: Gray's conception of nature is rooted in a meditative contemplation of it. The 'Elegy' superficially resembles Warton's 'The Pleasures of Melancholy' in some of the imagery but moves on a much higher level of wholesome reflection on the realities of life:

“The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea
And leaves the world to darkness and to me”.

Gray's letters describing Alpine scenery showed a greater feeling for the sublimity of mountains.

In poems like ode 'To Spring' or 'Hymn to Adversity' he expresses an austere and disillusioned view of the lot of mankind. He is concerned with ordinary emotions in the 'Elegy': "the short and simple annals of the poor". The poem is an elegy for Man, or at least, all "average" and "obscure" men. The poem is classical in its subject matter and universal appeal. Though there is a placid melancholy and rustic setting, the treatment of the common man is almost heroic.

Note of Melancholy: The melancholy note in Gray was not, like Johnson's, a painful disease



but it was restrained and elevated by an ethical spirit not far removed from the Christian humility of Johnson. He imbibed this tender melancholy spirit from Macpherson's *Ossian*, full of descriptions of nature and noble wild imagination. The sense of fatalism is also pervasive. There is a sinister gloom hanging over the carefree boys on the playing fields at Eton:

“Alas, regardless of their doom
The little victims play!” (Ode on ‘A Distant Prospect of Eton College’)

He also adhered to the Ancients in this regard. The gentle note in his elegy is similar to John Milton's *Il Penseroso*.

Interest in the Ancient past and medievalism: In his wide ranging studies, Gray delved into medieval history and legends. He also encountered some Icelandic poetry in Latin translations. Gray published two odes “from the Norse tongue”, - ‘The Fatal Sisters’ and ‘The Descent of Odin’. He also made some translations from the Welsh literature. In his eager interest in such native poetry, the growth of the soil untouched by the foreign traditions of Greco-Roman literary culture, Gray came nearer than in any other way to the characteristic ideas of the romantic period.

Style: He is unable to shake off his neo-classical ornate and figurative style. Most of his odes have the odic splendour of diction but also have an energy and dignity. The Pindaric odes repeat the threefold structure of the strophe, antistrophe, and epode. Extreme consciousness of expression, yet pure perspective and musicality is one of the beauties of lyric poetry that Gray attained. There is a dramatic, imaginative power which he used while describing medieval Welsh and Scandinavian tales.

Though Gray is one of the most classical of the English poets, he changed with his age and became identified with the new literature of sensibility.

❖ OLIVER GOLDSMITH (1730-1774)

Attitude towards Nature: If Goldsmith's play *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) belongs to the eighteenth century anti-sentimental comedy, with features of farce and satire incorporated into it, the works like *The Traveller*; or, a Prospect of Society (1764) as a philosophical poem, deals with his wandering through Europe. It contains descriptive passages of considerable beauty:

“Nature, a mother kind alike to all,
Still grants her bliss at Labour's earnest call:
With food as well the peasant is supplied

On Idra's cliffs as Arno's shelvy side;
 And though the rocky-crested summits frown,
 These rocks by custom turn to beds of down."

In *The Deserted Village* (1770) his natural descriptions have charm and genuine feeling but his remedies for the agricultural depression of Ireland are innocently empty of the slightest practical value.

Sympathy for the simple and poor: *The Traveller* reveals a clear perception of the suffering of the poor where "laws grind the poor, and the rich men make laws." He drew minor characters passionately. We remember the wife who discourses on the history of every dish in *The Vicar of Wakefield* as well as Moses who disposed of the pony for a gross of green spectacles.

Note of Melancholy: The peculiar humour and pathos of Goldsmith are hard to analyze. Both emotions arise from simple situation. Often the humour is so dashed with pathos that the combined effect is attractive:

"In all my wanderings round this world of care,
 In all my griefs – and God has given my share." (*The Deserted Village*)

In *The Hermit*, the tone is that of sentimentalism. His sentimentality is equal to the best in Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, and is cleaner and saner.

Style: Though *The Traveller* is written in heroic couplets, it is melodious and polished. Goldsmith's ability to write a witty poem like 'Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog' could be seen as testimony of the combination of Neo-classical temper in him. That said, one must accept that the genuine charm and feeling found in *The Deserted Village* is unmistakable. Goldsmith's line "When lovely women stoop to folly" from *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a novel, is aptly picked by T. S. Eliot in 'The Fire Sermon' section of *The Waste Land*.

❖ WILLIAM COWPER (1731-1800)

Attitude towards Nature: Cowper describes and reflects about landscape details but seldom philosophizes about the abstraction 'Nature'. In *The Task*, he urges that there can be no law of Nature, apart from God's law. He delineates the quiet backwaters of life, investing the commonplace with tenderness and grace:

"No noise is here, or none that hinders thought,
 The redbreast warbles still, but is content
 With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd

Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray..."

(*The Task*, Book VI, 'The Winter Walk at Noon')

Sympathy for the simple and poor: He took an interest in the public affairs. A passage in Book IV (The Winter Evening) of *The Task*,

"News from all nations lumbering at his back.
True to his charge the close-packed load behind,
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,
And, having dropped the expected bag—pass on."

For him Nature is free from the primal curse, depravity and a consciousness encourages him in his escape from the moral to the natural world. His love of rural life is seen in his attitude to the Sabine farmer.

Note of Melancholy: Cowper's ardent, evangelical Calvinism led to both despair and hope. This is the key and cause of his melancholia. In *The Task*, the walks at morning and at noon are blended with reflection. More pathetically personal is the tragic final lyric, *The Castaway*. This note exists with a vein of whimsical humour and pleasant fancy best shown in his letters and *John Gilpin*.

Style: In the technique of his work, Cowper belongs to the old rather than the new. He does not break away from old metrical norms. According to Arthur Compton-Rickett, 'he is far more of a classical poet than a romantic'. Unlike Thomson and Young, he has a nice sense of the word. The blank verse of *The Task* and *Of Yardley Oak*, which are more relaxed, achieve more individuality than the couplet.

❖ ROBERT BURNS (1759-1796)

Attitude towards Nature: Like Cowper, Robert Burns is a poet of the rural life. He rejoiced in the description of Scottish scenery and customs in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Moreover he focused on men and their interrelationships – their lives, revels, labours, and sorrows. Landscape is incidental. He uses imagery with a deep poignant effect:

"The wan moon sets behind the white wave
And time is setting with me, O" ('The Holy Fair')

Sympathy for the simple and poor: His politics as expressed in 'A Man's a

Man for That' is merely the utterances of a strong and sensitive mind deeply alive to the degradation of the people. In 'Cotter's Saturday Night', Burns pays a spontaneous and beautiful tribute to the piety of the Scottish peasant. While keeping within the limits of the lyric he traverses an immense range of emotions and experiences. The feelings he describes are those of a Scottish peasant, but the genius of the poet makes them germane to every member of the human race. When he makes use of folk superstitions of the local region, he represents them with homeliness and humanity.

Depiction of Emotions and Individual Psychology: He was essentially an inspired egoist. What interested him were the vivid and quickening descriptions in nature. He thought of reviving Scottish drama. His narrative gift in *Tam O'Shanter* becomes fused with lyrical emotion (in this case that of drunken jollity):

“A rambling, blustering, drunken boaster,
That from November until October,
Each market day you were not sober;
During each milling period with the miller,”

Thomas Carlyle in his essay on Burns says that this text is not so much a poem but a piece of sparkling rhetoric.

Note of Melancholy: His humour and pathos are as copious and varied as his subject matter. Though he was capable of wit which he demonstrated in *The Jolly Beggars*, he could also express that extreme emotion and be graceful and sentimental as in 'Afton Water' and 'O My Love's like a Red, Red Rose'. His pathos ranges from the piercing cry of 'Ae Fond Kiss', through the pensive pessimism of 'Ye Banks and Braes', to the tempered melancholy of 'My Hearts' in the Highlands'.

Style: The style of Burns' poetry has a curious double tendency typical of the transition. There is a paltry classicism and metrical scrupulousness as represented in 'Address to Edinburgh'. However his best work is lyrical in tone and motive like Shelley. He has a matchless gift of catching traditional airs and wedding them to words of simple and searching beauty. It is impossible to think of 'Auld Lang Syne' or 'Scots Wha hae' or 'Green Grow the Rashes, O', without their receptive melodies being inevitably associated with them.

❖ WILLIAM COLLINS (1721-1759)

Attitude towards Nature: In Collins' 'Ode to Evening' there is a power of portraying landscape in a simple, direct fashion that shows a more delicate art of no

greater imagination than we find in the work of James Thomson. His ‘Ode on the Poetical Character’ is a complex delineation of nature:

“The Band, as Fairy Legends say,
 Was wove on that creating Day,
 When He, who call’d with Thought to Birth
 Yon tented Sky, this laughing Earth,
 And drest with Springs and Forests tall,
 And pour’d the Main engirthing all,
 Long by the lov’d Enthusiast woo’d,
 Himself in some Diviner Mood,
 Retiring, sate with her alone,”

Interest in the Ancient past and medievalism: His earliest published work is *Persian Eclogues* (1742). Collins wrote ‘Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland considered as the subject of Poetry’, which he addressed to John Home, a Scottish dramatist who was on a visit to London in 1749 when Collins met him. Collins had become an established poet of passion and sentiment. According to Emma Clery and Robert Miles, who edited the *Gothic Sourcebook*, when later in life Collins became insane, contemporaries felt that his fervent interest in the supernatural and the terrible must have been a contributing factor. The poem may also be compared to Robert Burns’ ‘Halloween’ (1785) and ‘Tam O’Shanter’ (1790), employing Scottish superstitions to comic effect. The charm of popular superstitions lies in the evocation of picturesque customs and folklore which inspired the poet’s genius for imaginative phrasing. The theory implicit in the poem, that literature should spring from the indigenous culture of the folk mind rather than from some cosmopolitan foreign tradition, was by other writers being woven into that complex pattern of thought and feeling which has been called romanticism.

Style: Like Thomson, there is a combination of an often artificial and pedantic style with a delicate poetic vision. In such pieces as ‘How Sleep the Brave’ he exhibits a gift of rhythmic music combining with clever verse. Perhaps the most technically successful of his poems is ‘Ode to Evening’ an unrhymed lyric where the skillful handling of vowel sounds and rhythmic effects compensates for the lack of rhyme:

“If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
 May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
 Like thy own solemn springs,
 Thy springs, and dying gales,”

● William Blake (1757-1827)

Attitude towards Nature : The phrase “distant deeps and skies” is an apt entry into the world of Blake’s poetry. It also defines in a way what romanticism is all

A PRE-ROMANTIC POET : WILLIAM BLAKE

Blake was born in 1757; he was a revolutionary artist, deeply influenced by the new democratic ideals which were spreading in Europe.

- His poetry was characterized by a use of complex symbols, metaphors and other figures of speech

- He tended to use a plain Anglo-Saxon English (not Latinate), this was in contrast with the poetic diction of the eighteenth century

- He was attracted to the two contrary states of the human soul, which he investigated in “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience”

about. If the poets in the age of Pope were writing about life inside closed rooms, the Pre-Romantics searched for something deeper, profound and universal. One of the symbols of this natural world of innocence is the figure of the child. Blake, in ‘The Lamb’ glorifies childhood and presents it as a reality of ideal existence. Yet this glorification is on a different ground than Wordsworth’s. Blake is actually glorifying Jesus, and God through Jesus. Though the vales seem to be rejoicing in the bleating of the lamb, Blake does not romanticize Nature as a deist or a pantheist. Nor does he find a source of ecstatic delight in the external aspects of Nature like Burns. He goes much further than Wordsworth in his mystical contemplation. He does not detect in Nature a transcendental God but one whose power is manifest in soul and body.

Creation of a pastoral setting and a mythical world is a characteristic Romantic trend.

Sympathy for the simple and poor : Blake’s poetry is always a revolt against a Church which is pro-Establishment in keeping the poor stable in their poverty. ‘The Lamb’ and other poems reveal the harrowing injustices and lack of sensibility of the Authority. ‘London’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ and other poems in *Songs of Experience* bring out the abuse and repression on children. He attacks the morally blind Enlightenment benevolence in a poem like ‘The Chimney Sweeper’:

“Pity would be no more

If we did not make somebody poor.”

Creation of a Private Mythology : The precursors of romanticism were the first to reject the Lockean and Newtonian universe which assumed that the mind was a “lazy looker-on at the external world”. They laid more emphasis on the human self and imagination. Blake’s crisis took place in the spiritual order of things and

‘The Lamb’

- Two stanzas, each containing five rhymed couplets.
- Repetition in the first and last couplet of each stanza makes these lines into a refrain, and helps to give the poem its song-like quality.
- Caesuras and end-stopped punctuations are used in the lines to vary the pace of a poem and to alleviate the “sing-song” effect of poems that utilize end-rhyme. The technique, therefore, reinforces the content or feeling that the poem is trying to communicate.

‘The Tyger’

- The poem consists of six quatrains. (A quatrain is a four-line stanza.) Each quatrain contains two couplets.
- Written in trochaic tetrameter with catalexis at the end of each line.
The pattern results in a primitive “drum beat” that is apt for a tiger in a forest.)

thus, he had to speak of it in symbols. He created a mythological world of his own to tell the story of innocence and experience in symbolic terms. The figure of **Urizen** (derived from “your reason” is symbolised as a cruel, tyrannical God. **Los** is his antithesis, and he stands for imagination. In between is **Orc**, symbolizing man’s natural emotions and feelings or Blake’s ‘energies’. In Blake’s vision of life, the energies are free in the state of innocence, therefore the happiness and spontaneity of childhood. The corrupting process of growing up involves a curbing of the energies. Man’s feelings are chained by Urizen/reason. For progression of the soul, the energies have to be released by listening to one’s imagination. For Blake, imagination is the voice of God. If man listens to his imagination (Los), he may become God-like. In ‘The Tyger’ the winged figure is Los and the tyger is Orc. Orc sets Los free. Blake developed his mythology further in his later works. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake claims that the “tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction” and “the wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God”. His long narrative prophetic books are *Jerusalem*, subtitled *The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804), *The French Revolution* (1791) and *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1797). The cycle of continental prophecies comprises *America a Prophecy* (1793), *Europe a Prophecy* (1794) and *The Song of Los* (1795), which is made up of sections Africa and Asia.

Style: Blake’s technical finesse is markedly eighteenth century in nature. Even lyrics from his early works demonstrate this:

Along with these writers there are a few minor writers who may be considered precursors of romanticism. They are:

- i. George Crabbe
- ii. John Dyer
- iii. Mark Akenside
- iv. Robert Blair
- v. William Shenstone
- vi. Isaac Watts
- vii. Christopher Smart
- viii. Charles Churchill
- ix. James Beattie
- x. Edward Young

Bertrand Bronson notes the varying traits of the precursors of romanticism

Thomson's spaciousness,
Johnson's massiveness,
Collins' incorporeality, the Warton's
bipartisanship, Gray's eclecticism,
Young's commiseration,
Akenside's reasonableness,
Smart's enthusiasm, Shenstone's
placidity, Macpherson's rant,
Churchill's unmannerliness,
Goldsmith's amenity, Chatterton's
atavism, Cowper's humanity,
Burns' pride and passion, Crabbe's
sobriety, Blake's extravagance

6.18.10 Summing Up

As outlined in the Introduction to this Unit, we have discussed the new tendencies in poetry that were marking a paradigm shift towards romanticism in the second half of the 18th century. However, this is also thematically a part of the long 18th century as it is commonly called; hence the focus has been on identifying the transitory phase in literary practice. As additional activity, you would do good to read up about the minor poets discussed here, as also about James Thomson whose work will be taken up in the next Unit.

6.18.11 Comprehension Exercises

Essay-Type

1. Discuss the major characteristics of the 'Pre-Romantic' Age.
2. The Age of Transition brings together the Post-Augustan and the Pre-Romantic mode. Substantiate.
3. How is Blake different from the other writers of the Pre-Romantic age? Discuss with reference to his works and their style.
4. In Robert Burns and Oliver Goldsmith whimsicality and melancholy, humour and pathos intersect. Discuss with reference to their works.

Mid-length questions

1. Consider Thomas Gray as a 'graveyard' poet.
2. Discuss William Collins' interest in the ancient past and medievalism.
3. What was the Pre-Romantics' attitude towards the simple and the poor?
4. Analyze Blake's world of private mythology.

Short questions

1. What is Ossianic Poetry?
2. What are the major philosophical influences on the Pre-Romantic Age?
3. Name the odes by William Collins and discuss how these demonstrate his interest in the ancient past.
4. Name two plays by Oliver Goldsmith and one character from each.
5. Blake's works are set against a major historical event. Name the event and discuss how it shaped the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.
6. Name a few minor Pre-Romantic poets.

6.18.12 Suggested Reading List

Bronson, Bertrand H. 'Pre-Romantic or Post-Augustan Mode.' *ELH*, 20: 1 (Mar., 1953), pp. 15-28. Clery, Emma & Robert Miles. Eds. *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*. Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2000.

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Watson, J.R. (ed.) *Pre-Romanticism in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century: The Poetic Art and Significance of Thomson, Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, Cowper*. Macmillan Education: UK, 1989.

UNIT 19 □ James Thomson : ‘Spring’ from *The Seasons*

Structure

6.19.0 Introduction

6.19.1 James Thomson and the Precursors of Romantic Poetry

6.19.2 About *The Seasons*

6.19.3 Text of ‘Spring’

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6.19.9 Comprehension Exercises

6.19.10 Suggested Reading

6.19.0 Introduction

In nature the passage of time is indicated by the diurnal (day and night) cycle and the annual cycle of the Earth orbiting around the sun. You know that the relative position of the sun and the earth that also rotates on its own tilted axis, brings about the intensity of sunlight as it is experienced by us on earth. This affects the weather or climate and creates seasons. In the British Isles there are four seasons—Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. However, when it is summer in the northern hemisphere, it is winter in the southern hemisphere. You may find it interesting to learn that though you see pictures of Christmas with snow on the trees, icicles hanging from the pinewood, holly and the snowman, in Australia and in New Zealand, Christmas is celebrated during summer time. In India and in Bengal the year is divided into six seasons. Most European countries do not experience monsoon which is a feature in tropical climates.

So, when you are reading James Thomson’s “The Seasons” you need to remember that he is a Scottish poet writing about the four seasons in Britain. Also keep in mind that the legendary Garden of Eden was conceptualised as a place of eternal spring and the seasons did not exist. Seasons are related to the passage of time and are linked to the Fall of Man and the Original Sin in Christian conceptions of the world.

In classical European literature, the Greek and Latin poets referred to a mythical Golden Age when Nature's overflowing bounty was easily enjoyed, without work or labour by the shepherds and shepherdesses in the countryside. It was a time when humankind lived in harmony with the world of nature. Rustic life was conceptualised as an ideal and happy life and country folk were considered innocent and simple in comparison to urban people. This is an idea that you will encounter again in William Wordsworth's poetry. This celebration of nature, landscape, the countryside, the flora and fauna, country life and occupations was called pastoral poetry. The intention of this unit will be to introduce the learner to all these ideas related to pastoral poetry through Thomson's "Spring".

6.19.1 James Thomson and The Precursors of Romantic Poetry

When reading the history of English literature, each period is characterised by certain predominant traits. These often help to identify a work as 'belonging' to a particular period or context. However literary works cannot be homogenised and even within a specific time period, heterogeneous trends become visible. This can make the works of an age interesting and complex, this also makes literature an individual response to experience and the environment.

Though in the earlier module of this course you have learnt about Enlightenment and Augustan characteristics that marked the literature of the eighteenth century, two of the major poets do not conform entirely to the neo-classical tenets of composition.

James Thomson (1700-1748) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) along with other poets like William Cowper (1731-1800), William Collins (1721-1759), James Macpherson (1736-1796), Edward Young (1683-1765), Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) are also called 'Pre-Romantic' poets. If you look at their dates however, it is apparent that on the time-scale, they were very much within the eighteenth century. You have learnt about most of them in the earlier Unit, here we will specifically focus on Thomson, who, being an early 18th century poet to have blended Neo-Classical and Romantic aspects in his work, has been left out earlier for separate treatment in this Unit.

These above-mentioned poets while working largely within eighteenth century principles of composition, often in terms of theme or sentiments expressed, moved away from several eighteenth century norms. Already, romantic reactions to neo-

classical trends like artificial poetic diction, urban-centred writing, objectivity in depicting emotions which were to be specified in *The Preface to The Lyrical Ballads* (1802) by Wordsworth and Coleridge, become visible in the poetry of the eighteenth century 'precursors'. James Sutherland identified certain features that marked eighteenth century poetry - Nature, Good Sense, Correctness and Elegance. He called these 'transitional' poets 'truants and rebels' who broke with these typical eighteenth century norms of composition. These poets approached themes that involved creative and imaginative ways of looking at nature, beauty, art, love and death, to name a few of the concerns. The theme was no longer restricted to the interactions of human beings with one another or the role of politics, religion or other institutions in creating a stable and ordered society. Thomson's celebration of the seasons assimilated contemporary trends of scientific, aesthetic and philosophical thought and he observed natural law and human life more imaginatively than empirically. While he writes within the Latin pastoral tradition and is enthusiastic about Isaac Newton's perceptions and observations on the complexity of light documented in his treatise on *Opticks*, Thomson reshapes Augustan poetry by foregrounding the landscape and displaying his sensitivity to the effects of light (metaphorically, the imagination) on the natural scene.

William Cowper's *The Task* (1784/85) for example is a discursive poem that uses the idea of retirement to the countryside from active, urban preoccupations that also formed the theme of Horace's poetry. Cowper relates each of the six books in the poem to his natural environment and to the cycle of the seasons. Some of the humanitarian issues that became associated with later romantic poetry or the poetry of William Blake occur here— concern for the poor, critique of colonial oppression, corruption of London and commercialised city locales, injustice in all spheres of life.

'Ode to Evening' (1747?) by William Collins is a sensitive nature poem that evokes the landscape through distinct scenes and images. There is a specially cultivated simplicity and quietness that is new. His *Persian Eclogues* (1742) may be an early poetic attempt, but it clearly indicates the romantic preoccupation with the exotic and oriental. James Macpherson's pretence of rediscovering the primitive Scottish Gaelic poetry of Ossian and translating it for his readers anticipated the use of the ballad form in Romantic poetry, Percy's *Reliques* and nostalgia for the past.

Meditations on transience and mortality generated typical Augustan moralising and Christian didactic formulations. However increasingly such orthodoxy was formulated in language and imagery that was reflective, sombre and melancholic. Edward Young's *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742-45) ruminates on life on the edge of death, death itself and on immortality

including resurrection. The most famous and enduring of such poems belonging to the ‘graveyard school’ is Gray’s *Elegy* that you will read in the course.

Interestingly, several of these poets have also broken out of the confines of the heroic couplet to use blank verse. In the use of the Ode, the preferred form became the Pindaric Ode that was irregular and less restrained than the Horatian form. The poetic diction is also simplified in many cases to resemble actual language of communication.

The ‘precursors’ were also called transitional poets who continued certain traditions of poetry and extended its range of theme and style to inaugurate new beginnings.

What is Pastoral Poetry?

The English poets ‘imitated’ the traditions of Greek and Latin pastoralism. The Greek poet Theocritus (third century BCE) wrote his *Idylls* and presented a picture of an idealised Golden Age. He celebrated nature and the rustic life.

The Latin poet Virgil (first century BCE), wrote Latin *Eclogues* (c.40 BCE) and *Georgics* (c. 35 BCE) which was pastoral poetry. He described a natural paradise in his *Eclogues* but also referred to contemporary Roman events. The *Georgics* refer to real agricultural issues and work towards restoring harmony between man and nature. So it is incorrect to think that pastoral poetry evokes a sense of loss and nostalgia.

The Greek farmer-poet Hesiod (eighth century BCE) in *Works and Days* describes the five ages of mankind, the oldest being the Golden Age. Hesiod gave practical advice to the farmer depending on the seasonal cycle and drawing up a veritable farmer’s calendar.

These trends of blending the ideal and the real, the mythical past and the contemporary, the descriptive and the didactic were continued in British pastoral writing. The Renaissance in England encouraged various categories of the literary pastoral in poetry and in prose.

6.19.2 About *The Seasons*

James Thomson was writing the poem, that we are discussing, between the second and third decade of the eighteenth century. Though the poem published in 1730 has four-sections and a concluding hymn, it was composed in different parts

and was revised several times. Thomson's writing career began as an Edinburgh University student in 1715 when he published poems in *The Edinburgh Miscellany* in 1720. When he came to London in 1725 as a private tutor living in his patron's house, he combined fragments that he had written earlier into the "Winter" section of *The Seasons* and published it in 1726. "Summer" appeared in 1727 and "Spring" in 1728. The final poem of the cycle, "Autumn" was included only in the first complete edition in 1730.

The Seasons is a long (5541 lines after final revision in 1746) blank verse poem and the "Spring" section is itself 1082 (in the 1730 edition) lines. Here we are including a few representative lines from the "Spring" section of the poem. Thomson is considered to be a Pre-romantic poet whose passion for Nature anticipates the emotions expressed by the Romantic poets. The Neo-classical age to which Thomson belonged described nature from observation, through the logical and scientific eye. Thomson's own poetry is meticulous in describing the natural world yet is sensitive to emotions of pleasure and reverence aroused by an intuition of a Supreme Being immanent in Nature. In a significant move away from Augustanism, Thomson defied Alexander Pope's dictum that 'The proper study of mankind is Man' and reconstituted the true poetic subject. He found Nature elevating, arousing philosophical reflection and moral sentiment. He asks, "Where can we meet with such variety, such beauty, such magnificence — all that enlarges and transports the soul?"

6.19.3 Text of 'Spring'

➤ The Argument

The subject proposed. Inscribed to the Countess of Hartford. The Season is described as it affects the various parts of nature, ascending from the lower to the higher; and mixed with digressions arising from the subject. Its influence on inanimate matter, on vegetables, on brute animals, and last on Man; concluding with a dissuasive from the wild and irregular passion of Love, opposed to that of a pure and happy kind.

➤ Comment

In the eighteenth century, the form or structure of poetry was important for determining the kind or genre. Accordingly the poet could choose the diction that maintained the decorum of the form. The 'Argument' explains the pattern of the poem. This is typically neo-classical as control and restraint were more important than lyrical digressions.

(Lines 1- 71)

COME, gentle Spring, ethereal mildness, come;
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,
While music wakes around, veiled in a shower
Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.

O Hartford, fitted or to shine in courts
With unaffected grace, or walk the plain
With innocence and meditation joined
In soft assemblage, listen to my song,
Which thy own season paints—when nature all
Is blooming and benevolent, like thee.¹

And see where surly Winter passes off
Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts:
His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
The shattered forest, and the ravaged vale;
While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch,
Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.

As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless; so that scarce
The bittern knows his time with bill engulfed
To shake the sounding marsh; or from the shore
The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
And sing their wild notes to the listening waste.²

At last from Aries rolls the bounteous sun,
And the bright Bull receives him. Then no more

The expansive atmosphere is cramped with cold;
But, full of life and vivifying soul,
Lifts the light clouds sublime, and spreads them thin,
Fleecy, and white o'er all-surrounding heaven³

Forth fly the tepid airs; and unconfined,
Unbinding earth, the moving softness strays.
Joyous the impatient husbandman perceives
Relenting Nature, and his lusty steers
Drives from their stalls to where the well-used plough
Lies in the furrow loosened from the frost.⁴
There, unrefusing, to the harnessed yoke
They lend their shoulder, and begin their toil,
Cheered by the simple song and soaring lark.
Meanwhile incumbent o'er the shining share⁵
The master leans, removes the obstructing clay,
Winds the whole work, and sidelong lays the glebe⁶
White through the neighbouring fields the sower stalks
With measured step, and liberal throws the grain
Into the faithful bosom of the ground:
The harrow follows harsh, and shuts the scene.⁷

Be gracious, Heaven, for now laborious man
Has done his part. Ye fostering breezes, blow;
In luxury and ease, in pomp and pride,
Think these lost themes unworthy of your ear:
Such themes as these the rural Maro sung
To wide-imperial Rome, in the full height
Of elegance and taste, by Greece refined.⁸
In ancient times the sacred plough employed
The kings and awful fathers of mankind;
And some, with whom compared your insect-tribes
Are but the beings of a summer's day,

Have held the scale of empire, ruled the storm
 Of mighty war; then, with victorious hand,
 Disdaining little delicacies, seized
 The plough, and greatly independent scorned
 All the vile stores corruption can bestow.⁹

Ye generous Britons, venerate the plough;
 And o'er your hills and long withdrawing vales
 Let Autumn spread his treasures to the sun,
 Luxuriant and unbounded. As the sea
 Far through his azure turbulent domain
 Your empire owns, and from a thousand shores
 Wafts all the pomp of life into your ports;
 So with superior boon may your rich soil,
 Exuberant, Nature's better blessings pour
 O'er every land, the naked nations clothe,
 And be the exhaustless granary of a world!¹⁰

from The Seasons: Spring (lines 569-761)

As rising from the vegetable World
 My Theme ascends, with equal Wing ascend,
 My panting Muse; and hark, how loud the Woods
 Invite you forth in all your gayest Trim.¹¹
 Lend me your Song, ye Nightingales! oh pour
 The mazy-running Soul of Melody
 Into my varied Verse! while I deduce,
 From the first Note the hollow Cuckoo sings,
 The Symphony of Spring, and touch a Theme
 Unknown to Fame, *the Passion of the Groves*.¹²

When first the Soul of Love is sent abroad,
 Warm thro the vital Air, and on the Heart

Harmonious seizes, the gay Troops begin,
In gallant Thought, to plume the painted Wing;
And try again the long-forgotten Strain,
At first faint-warbled. But no sooner grows
The soft Infusion prevalent, and wide,
Than, all alive, at once their Joy o'erflows
In Musick unconfin'd. Up-springs the Lark,
Shrill-voic'd, and loud, the Messenger of Morn;
Ere yet the Shadows fly, he mounted sings
Amid the dawning Clouds, and from their Haunts
Calls up the tuneful Nations. Every Copse
Deep-tangled, Tree irregular, and Bush
Bending with dewy Moisture, o'er the Heads
Of the coy Quiristers that lodge within,
Are prodigal of harmony. The Thrush
And Wood-lark, o'er the kind contending Throng
Superior heard, run thro' the sweetest Length
Of Notes; when listening *Philomela* deigns
To let them joy, and purposes, in Thought
Elate, to make her Night excel their Day.
The Black-bird whistles from the thorny Brake;
The mellow Bullfinch answers from the Grove:
Nor are the Linnets, o'er the flow'ring Furze
Pour'd out profusely, silent. Join'd to these
Innumerable Songsters, in the freshening Shade
Of new-sprung Leaves, their Modulations mix
Mellifluous. The Jay, the Rook, the Daw,
And each harsh Pipe discordant heard alone,
Aid the full Concert: while the Stock-dove breathes
A melancholy Murmur thro' the whole.¹³

'Tis Love creates their Melody, and all
This Waste of Music is the Voice of Love;¹⁴

That even to Birds, and Beasts, the tender Arts
Of pleasing teaches. Hence the glossy kind
Try every winning way inventive Love
Can dictate, and in Courtship to their Mates
Pour forth their little Souls. First, wide around,
With distant Awe, in airy Rings they rove,
Endeavouring by a thousand Tricks to catch
The cunning, conscious, half-averted Glance
Of their regardless Charmer. Should she seem
Softening the least Approvance to bestow,
Their Colours burnish, and by Hope inspir'd,
They brisk advance; then, on a sudden struck,
Retire disorder'd; then again approach;
In fond rotation spread the spotted Wing,
And shiver every Feather with Desire.

Connubial Leagues agreed, to the deep Woods
They haste away, all as their Fancy leads,
Pleasure, or Food, or secret Safety prompts;
That *Nature's great Command* may be obey'd,
Nor all the sweet Sensations they perceive
Indulg'd in vain. Some to the Holly-Hedge
Nestling repair, and to the Thicket some;
Some to the rude Protection of the Thorn
Commit their feeble Offspring. The cleft Tree
Offers its kind Concealment to a Few,
Their Food its Insects, and its Moss their Nests.
Others apart far in the grassy Dale,
Or roughening Waste, their humble Texture weave.
But most in woodland Solitudes delight,
In unfrequented Glooms, or shaggy Banks,
Steep, and divided by a babbling Brook,
Whose Murmurs soothe them all the live-long Day,

When by kind Duty fix'd. Among the Roots
Of Hazel, pendant o'er the plaintive Stream,
They frame the first Foundation of their Domes;
Dry Sprigs of Trees, in artful Fabrick laid,
And bound with Clay together. Now 'tis nought
But restless Hurry thro the busy Air,
Beat by unnumer'd Wings. The Swallow sweeps
The slimy Pool, to build his hanging House
Intent. And often, from the careless Back
Of Herds and Flocks, a thousand tugging Bills
Pluck Hair and Wool; and oft, when unobserv'd,
Steal from the Barn a Straw: till soft and warm,
Clean, and compleat, their Habitation grows.¹⁵

As thus the patient Dam assiduous sits,
Not to be tempted from her tender Task,
Or by sharp Hunger, or by smooth Delight,
Tho the whole loosen'd Spring around Her blows,
Her sympathizing Lover takes his Stand
High on th' opponent Bank, and ceaseless sings
The tedious Time away; or else supplies
Her place a moment, while she sudden flits
To pick the scanty Meal. Th' appointed Time
With pious Toil fulfill'd, the callow Young,
Warm'd and expanded into perfect Life,
Their brittle Bondage break, and come to Light,
A helpless Family, demanding Food
With constant Clamour. O what Passions then,
What melting Sentiments of kindly Care,
On the new Parents seize! Away they fly
Affectionate, and undesiring bear
The most delicious Morsel to their Young,
Which equally distributed, again

The Search begins. Even so a gentle Pair,
By Fortune sunk, but form'd of generous Mold,
And charm'd with Cares beyond the vulgar Breast,
In some lone Cott amid the distant Woods,
Sustain'd alone by providential *Heaven*,
Oft, as they weeping eye their infant Train,
Check their own Appetites and give them all.¹⁶

Nor Toil alone they scorn: exalting Love,
By the great *Father of the Spring* inspir'd,
Gives instant Courage to the *fearful* Race,
And to the *simple* Art. With stealthy Wing,¹⁷
Should some rude Foot their woody Haunts molest,
Amid a neighbouring Bush they silent drop,
And whirring thence, as if alarm'd, deceive
Th' unfeeling School-Boy. Hence, around the Head
Of wandering Swain, the white-wing'd Plover wheels
Her sounding Flight, and then directly on
In long Excursion skims the level Lawn,
To tempt him from her Nest. The Wild-Duck, hence,
O'er the rough Moss, and o'er the trackless Waste
The Heath-Hen flutters, (pious Fraud!) to lead
The hot pursuing Spaniel far astray.¹⁸

Be not the Muse asham'd, here to bemoan
Her Brothers of the Grove, by tyrant Man
Inhuman caught, and in the narrow Cage
From Liberty confin'd, and boundless Air.
Dull are the pretty Slaves, their Plumage dull,
Ragged, and all its brightening Lustre lost;
Nor is that sprightly Wildness in their Notes,
Which, clear and vigorous, warbles from the Beech.
Oh then, ye Friends of Love and Love-taught Song,

Spare the soft Tribes, this barbarous Art forbear!
If on your Bosom Innocence can win,
Music engage, or Piety persuade.¹⁹

But let not chief the Nightingale lament
Her ruin'd Care, too delicately fram'd
To brook the harsh Confinement of the Cage.
Oft when, returning with her loaded Bill,
Th' astonish'd Mother finds a vacant Nest,
By the hard Hand of unrelenting Clowns
Robb'd, to the Ground the vain Provision falls;
Her Pinions ruffle, and low-drooping scarce
Can bear the Mourner to the poplar Shade;
Where, all abandon'd to Despair, she sings
Her Sorrows thro the Night; and, on the Bough,
Sole-sitting, still at every dying Fall
Takes up again her lamentable Strain
Of winding Woe; till wide around the Woods
Sigh to her Song, and with her Wail resound.²⁰

But now the feather'd Youth their former Bounds,
Ardent, disdain; and, weighing oft their Wings,
Demand the free Possession of the Sky.
This one glad Office more, and then dissolves
Parental Love at once, now needless grown.
Unlavish *Wisdom* never works in vain.
'Tis on some Evening, sunny, grateful, mild,
When nought but Balm is breathing thro the Woods,
With yellow Lustre bright, that the new Tribes
Visit the spacious Heavens, and look abroad
On Nature's Common, far as they can see,
Or wing, their Range, and Pasture. O'er the Boughs
Dancing about, still at the giddy Verge

Their Resolution fails; their Pinions till,
 In loose Libration stretch'd, to trust the Void
 Trembling refuse: till down before them fly
 The Parent-Guides, and chide, exhort, command,
 Or push them off. The surging Air receives
 The Plumy Burden; and their self-taught Wings
 Winnow the waving Element. On Ground
 Alighted, bolder up again they lead,
 Farther and farther on, the lengthening Flight;
 Till vanish'd every Fear, and every Power
 Rouz'd into Life and Action, light in Air
 Th' acquitted Parents see their soaring Race,
 And once rejoicing never know them more.
 [Source: *Poets of the English Language* (Viking Press, 1950)]

6.19.4 Notes And Glossary

- 1 In the opening lines Spring is invoked even as the poet addresses his patroness, the Countess of Hartford. Though literature was moving into the marketplace as a commodity, the culture of aristocratic patronage still continued. The poet draws an analogy between Spring, its beauty and gentleness with that of the Countess. It was a tradition to use the seasons as symbols for the stages in human life. Spring was equivalent to early youth, Summer to later youth, Autumn to maturity and Winter to old age.
- 2 Each season is personified and has a specific character and the illustrations that Thomson used for his poem corroborate this. Winter is 'surly' and the winds are like 'ruffians'. This harshness gives way to the gentler breeze of Spring. The uncertainty of the weather is proverbial. The bittern and plover are water birds which are misled as winter is still withdrawing and springtime is yet to assert itself.
- 3 The poet refers to the signs of the Zodiac – Aries the ram and Taurus the bull. These are two of the constellations in the elliptic path round the sun. The sun is said to enter the first point of Aries on 21st March which marks the transition from winter to spring. It enters Taurus on 20th April.
- 4 When spring arrives, the farmer starts to plough the land using his 'steer' or

young, male bullocks. They appear to be willing to be yoked and labour in the fields. Thomson is influenced by Virgil's *Georgics*.

- 5 The 'share' or plough share is used in agriculture. It is the hardened metal that cuts into the earth and loosens the soil. It shines through use.
- 6 Glebe is an archaic word referring to 'clay' in the land and fields.
- 7 The sower may be carrying the seeds in a white cloth — so it stalks the fields like a ghost.
- 8 Man has put in enough effort to work the land for crops. The rest is left to the grace of heaven. The theme that Thomson has chosen has a long tradition going back to Virgilius Maro writing poems on rural occupations for the people of imperial Rome.
- 9 In early time kings have fought wars and gone back to peace-time occupations like farming. The dignity of labour is the theme in these lines
- 10 The poet appeals to the people of Britain to value working in the fields and in due course feed the world. Thomson is convinced of the mission of imperial Britain to improve life in the so called 'benighted' nations. The conviction here is of the commercial power of Britain and its imperial destiny. This reflects the socio-historical context of the Augustan/Enlightenment age.
- 11 The 'vegetable world' refers to nature that seems to have become active and energetic after winter. The poet's muse is sustained by the reawakening of nature and the activity of birds in spring.
- 12 The poet wants to borrow the voice of the nightingale and the call of the cuckoo to sing of love.
- 13 This entire passage describes various birds and their songs and calls that create an orchestrated and harmonious music. The habitats of the birds are the natural English countryside. Even the harsh calls of certain birds form part of the musical concert.
- 14 The inspiration for song is traced to the emotion of love. Even birds and beasts, like humans, respond to joy in nature, to calls of love and express pleasure through art and artifice.
- 15 This entire verse paragraph has described the nesting of various birds and their instinctive urge to protect their fledglings

- 16 This verse paragraph portrays the bond of love and responsibility that binds the male bird to the female and its young. The concept of nurture and sustenance in the natural world percolates to the world of human beings.
- 17 Spring inspires love in the natural world.
- 18 Each variety of bird tries to defend its nest from attacks by truant school boys, shepherds or dogs.
- 19 The poet tries to dissuade the caging of birds by human beings. He believes that natural freedom enhances their beauty and song.
- 20 The melancholic strain of the nightingale's song may be traced to the bird returning with food for the young and finding an empty, robbed nest.

6.19.5 Neoclassical Aspects in “Spring”

What is Neo-Classicism?

Neo-Classicism means ‘new’ classicism or ‘imitated’ classicism. Classicism is a word associated with the works of ancient authors/art of Greece and Rome. Between 1660 and 1750 in reaction to the exuberance of Renaissance literature, a more restrained, symmetrical and structured form of writing was favoured. The poets and writers attempted to revive the classical spirit and learnt their literary lessons by imitating the forms and patterns of poetry belonging to an ancient age. They had great admiration for literature written in the age of Emperor Augustus of Rome.

When Thomson started writing in 1726, there were several nature or landscape poems that had become quite popular. There were Alexander Pope's “Windsor Forest”, Gay's “Rural Sports,” and Lady Winchilsea's “Nocturnal Reverie”—all published as early as 1713. What is distinctive and interesting about Thomson's observation of the seasons is how he combines the poetic and the scientific. It is not merely empirical experience but his engagement with science and philosophy, human activities and the entire range of natural phenomena — animal and bird behaviour, insects and flora that is reflected in his poem. In form and content *The Seasons* reflected the cultural, philosophical and religious ethos of the eighteenth century.

In form, the poem expanded into an epic survey of Nature in the different seasons. The poet used both microscopic details and general reflection to move towards a comprehensive and universal picture of the human and natural worlds.

This inclination to find in Nature lessons for life or to compare the seasons to the phases of human life by using various forms of analogy and personification suited neo-classical moralising and didacticism. The epic scope of the poem comprises the harmony traced between the divine sphere and the natural and human worlds. The magnitude of the epic is therefore incorporated into the poem.

Another epic characteristic of the poem is the way in which the poet broadens the subject-matter and scope of the poem by expressing a sense of patriotism. A secondary epic is often a carefully structured public address that evokes a sense of national pride by weaving together legend and history, the past and contemporary, myth and reality. This is the way in which the epic as a form reflects the culture of an entire civilization or nation. (Read the last verse paragraph of the first extract cited.)

Addressed to Lady Frances Seymour, Countess of Hartford who acts as patron, Muse and inspirer, the poem begins with what is called an invocation. In the epics this was a device that a poet used to imbibe divine inspiration from the nine Muses of poetry. Here the convention is adapted by Thomson to gracefully repay a social obligation that he owed to his patroness.

Though the four sections of the poem evolved separately, Thomson tried to give it an overarching structural form and consistent theme. For example “Spring,” describes the influence of the season over the whole Chain of Being, starting with the lowest, inanimate matter, and ending with the highest of beings on earth, “Man.” Though the poem uses a range of descriptive techniques, nature is not depicted for its own sake but functions in the context of edifying digressions.

In the first 71 lines extracted here, the poet begins with the change that Spring marks from a cold and dismal winter. He describes the breezes warming the soil that leads to agricultural activities. He praises such labour as useful and dignified as agricultural wealth gives the British Empire the power to feed poorer nations. The lofty perception that Britain had a duty towards ‘uncivilised’ peoples of the world was ironically an Enlightenment concept about the destiny of Europe.

In sections of “Spring” not included here, Thomson describes a rainbow after a spring shower that amazes an ignorant swain though Sir Isaac Newton had explained the refraction of light and the formation of the colour spectrum through his scientific theories. He also digresses into discussions of humanity’s loss of innocence, the virtues in herbs, the concept of reason governing passion and afflictions that followed the Flood.

It is the variety of Nature and the reflective modes of thought induced by the activities of vegetation, flora and fauna that is highlighted by Thomson. So the

verse paragraphs on birds and their activities in Spring (the second extract) forms a large section of the poem.

The poet describes how birds are infused with love from the ultimate ‘Mover’ of the universe. They mate during this season, build nests to lay their eggs and brood over them. They nurture the fledglings, feed them and teach them to fly. This activity of the birds is analogous to the amorous passions aroused in human beings. While Thomson cautions readers about the playfulness of youthful lovers and the happiness that is a result of marriage, he shifts from what is a topographical or landscape poem to didactic verse. This intermingling of pure pictorial description and moralizing is typically neo-classical. It tries to establish that the experience of nature inspires feeling, which in turn inspires reflection which culminates in the praise of God.

WHAT ARE THE RULES OF POETRY?

In *An Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope wrote:

“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.”

The neo-classical poets respected rules and reason more than imagination and fancy. The poetry that they wrote was thus more objective than expressive or lyrical.

In terms of style, neo-classical tenets of following ‘rules’ and observing the ‘decorum’ that was suited to a specific ‘kind’ of poetry is meticulously followed. Though the poem is written in blank verse, the choice of diction is stylized. This meant that a particular kind of language was used for poetry and each kind of writing (epic, pastoral, ode, epistle) had its own register of ‘appropriate’ words and expressions.

Neo-classical poets were convinced that there was a difference between ordinary or everyday language and poetic language which was more aesthetic and elevated. Therefore they used several rhetorical devices to create the effect of distancing of poetry from the mundane and the crude. For example archaisms or old-fashioned and obsolete words and verbs were frequently used in pastoral poems to refer to the idea of a past golden age or in a topographical poem to a paradisaical, innocent world of nature. Words like ‘yon’, ‘oft’, ‘thy’, ‘thee’, ‘nought’ are used alongside poeticisms like ‘dam’, ‘Quiristers’, ‘morn’, ‘pinion’, verbs like ‘deign’, ‘brook’ and others that you can pick out from the extracts.

Another convention of this kind of stylized diction is the use of epithets, an epic device which is usually a compound adjective. Thomson uses these in his poetry that gives his landscape a pictorial dimension. Some examples to which list you can pick out many others from the extracts are: ‘mazy-running Soul of Melody’, ‘long-forgotten Strain’, ‘faint-warbled’, ‘Shrill-voic’d’, ‘half-averted Glance’, ‘white-wing’d Plover’, ‘Love-taught Song’, ‘Copse Deep-tangled’, ‘new-sprung Leaves’.

Aural and visual effects are reinforced by traditional figures of speech like onomatopoeia and alliteration. Consider in this context short expressions and consecutive blank verse lines like the following: ‘brittle Bondage break’, ‘Confinement of the Cage’, ‘weighing oft their Wings’, ‘Of winding Woe; till wide around the Woods/Sigh to her Song, and with her Wail resound’.

Other literary mannerisms peculiar to neo-classicism are the allusions – in this extract to Virgilius Maro, to the classical Muses or to the story of Philomela from Ovid. ‘Plumy Burden’, ‘Soft tribes’, ‘Messenger of Morn’ are indirect ways of referring to an object or here the birds in the passage.

6.19.6 Romantic Transitions in “Spring”

The neo-classic ideals of reason and judgement largely restrained the expression of feeling and emotion. While Thomson’s poetry was sufficiently motivated by Augustan poetics, it was not possible for him to remain entirely objective. This intervention of emotion is an anticipation of Romantic sentiment and this is one of the reasons that Thomson is classed as a pre-romantic poetic figure.

Thomson conceptualised nature and the seasons, the natural world and its activities as part of a meticulously planned system. While Newton had scientific explanations for various phenomena, Thomson observed and experienced nature only to reinforce his faith in the beauty, goodness and truth of the divinely ordained pattern of the universe. His perceptive observations of nature were something more than merely mimetic. As a poet he was able to draw readers to participate in his own inner excitement, sympathy and urgency in

What is the Great Chain of Being

The great chain of being in Latin *scala naturae*, literally “ladder/stair-way of nature”, is a concept derived from classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. It refers to the hierarchical structure of all matter and life, believed to have been divinely ordained. It conceptualised an ordered scheme of things where classification and categorisation were important.

relating to nature in its variety and moods. His initial depiction of nature is fresh and immediate (this is the trait of romanticism) and it is only on reflection that his moral sensibility intervened to transform particular experience into a shared and universal aphoristic comment.

In typical eighteenth century topographical poems like John Denham's Cooper's Hill (1642) or Pope's Windsor-Forest (1713), the idea of nature was fitted together into a schematic pattern where there was order in variety – the theme of *discordia concors*. Thomson was trying to work out more complicated homo-centric points of view. These perspectives did not necessarily merge into one compatible vision. So he communicated a sense of human beings as part of the Chain of Being, hierarchically inhabiting what Pope called the 'isthmus of a middle-state'; this reiterated the superior moral ability of human beings as placed within the experiential scheme of nature; and human readers were able to exercise judgement in viewing creation and nature and human beings in nature. The overarching divine order encompassed human experience even while Thomson was able to identify individual experience as a defining moment of the human condition. So Thomson occupies his position between neoclassical thought and romantic sensibility.

By foregoing the use of the heroic couplet, the characteristic form of neoclassical poetry in favour of blank verse, Thomson was experimenting with an idiom that was more flexible. The corpus of non-dramatic blank-verse poetry in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century included John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671). When Thomson used this form in *Winter*, the first poem written of the larger work, he modified the mimetic-didactic tone of neo-classical verse to incorporate the reflective tone of a soliloquy and the democratic voice of a dialogue with one's natural environment. This prefigured romanticism in Thomson's poetry.

6.19.7 Visual Representations

Samuel Johnson in his *Lives of the British Poets* writes : “The reader of *The Seasons* wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shews him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses.”

Thomson's poem enjoyed great popularity on account of the picturesque landscapes and eco-diversity that it portrayed. The Queen was the most illustrious subscriber along with other distinguished individuals who signed up for the June 1730 quarto edition of *The Seasons*. The edition illustrated by engravings by William Kent, eminent landscape gardener, was also sold through trade. Booksellers competed with each other to bring out unique illustrated copies of texts.

The ‘painterly’ qualities of the text made it a favourite for illustrators. Dr. Johnson noted: “His descriptions of extended scenes and general effects bring before us the whole magnificence of Nature, whether pleasing or dreadful. . . . The poet leads us through the appearances of things as they are successively varied by the vicissitudes of the year, and imparts to us so much of his own enthusiasm, that our thoughts expand with his imagery, and kindle with his sentiments.”

William Kent in the 1730 edition had one plate for each season. This is the plate for “Spring”. It is likely to have been inspired by Lady Hertford’s (to whom Thomson dedicated this section of the poem) landscaped garden and grotto in Marlborough where the poet was invited to be in residence (in Summer 1727) when he wrote parts of the poem.



The verbal and visual texts supplement each other but the illustration clearly appears partly naturalistic and partly allegorical. The harmony of creatures in the Great Chain of Being, the angels, humans and animals; the unity of earth, sky, cloud and air is symbolically fore-grounded by the rainbow. The upper-section of the engraving shows supernatural creatures and the lower section naturalistic scenes. Inclined spatial planes are used to draw in the mountains and the countryside, spring-time occupations and leisure. In a composite manner, Kent attempted to interpret the argument of the poem.

Kent was not the only illustrator of the poem. Through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, several visual representations of the poem have been made. Each of these illustrations were actually a reading and interpretation of the verbal text from a particular historical perspective.

6.19.8 Summing Up

This intention of this unit was to introduce the learner to all these ideas related to pastoral poetry though Thomson’s “Spring”. It also highlighted the tenets of neoclassicism as well as Romanticism which James Thomson’s *The Seasons* in general and ‘Spring’ in particular displayed. Thus what we learn from this unit is:

- In classical European literature, the Greek and Latin poets referred to a mythical Golden Age when Nature's overflowing bounty was easily enjoyed, without work or labour by the shepherds and shepherdesses in the countryside. This celebration of nature, landscape, the countryside, the flora and fauna, country life and occupations was called pastoral poetry.
- The 'Precursors' of the Romantic poets while working largely within eighteenth century principles of composition, often in terms of theme or sentiments expressed, moved away from several eighteenth century norms. Already, romantic reactions to neo-classical trends like artificial poetic diction, urban-centred writing, objectivity in depicting emotions which were to be specified in *The Preface to The Lyrical Ballads* (1802) by Wordsworth and Coleridge, become visible in the poetry of the eighteenth century 'precursors'. James Thomson was one of them.
- Thomson is considered to be a Pre-romantic poet whose passion for Nature anticipates the emotions expressed by the Romantic poets. The Neo-classical age to which Thomson belonged described nature from observation, through the logical and scientific eye. Thomson's own poetry is meticulous in describing the natural world yet is sensitive to emotions of pleasure and reverence aroused by an intuition of a Supreme Being immanent in Nature.
- What is distinctive and interesting about Thomson's observation of the seasons is how he combines the poetic and the scientific. It is not merely empirical experience but his engagement with science and philosophy, human activities and the entire range of natural phenomena — animal and bird behaviour, insects and flora that is reflected in his poem. In form and content *The Seasons* reflected the cultural, philosophical and religious ethos of the eighteenth century.
- Thomson's poem enjoyed great popularity on account of the picturesque landscapes and eco-diversity that it portrayed.

Thus, the unit successfully brings out the gradual transition which occurred in Eighteenth century verse from Neoclassical to Romantic trends.

6.19.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions:

1. What are the features of pastoral poetry that you find in the extracts that you have read?
2. Is Thomson's poem a neo-classical poem? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Why is Thomson called a pre-romantic poet?

Medium Type Questions:

4. Comment on Thomson's concern for the environment.
5. How do the visual and verbal texts complement each other?
6. Comment on the pictorial qualities in the poem.

Short Questions:

7. What is an invocation? Whom does the poet invoke here?
8. What epic characteristics, if any, do you notice in the poem?
9. Name the birds that the poet refers to in the poem.
10. Identify specific neo-classical stylistic features in the poem.

6.19.10 Suggested Reading:

Adams, Percy G. *Graces of Harmony: Alliteration, Assonance, and Consonance in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry*. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1977.

Cohen, Ralph. *The Art of Discrimination: Thomson's "The Seasons" and the Language of Criticism*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1964.

Hagstrum, Jean H. *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. pp. 243-267.

Sambrook, James, ed. *The Seasons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *The Varied God: A Critical Study of Thomson's "The Seasons"*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959.

UNIT 20 □ Thomas Gray : *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*

Structure

6.20.0 Introduction

6.20.1 Early Romanticism and the Genre of the Poem

6.20.2 Thomas Gray – A Bio-brief

6.20.3 Form and Content of the Poem

6.20.4 *Elegy* and the Pastoral Tradition

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6.20.6 Notes and Glossary

6.20.7 Key Issues

6.20.8 Summing Up

6.20.9: Comprehension Exercises

6.20.10 Suggested Reading

6.20.0 Introduction

In the earlier Units, we have hinted at a transition in poetic aesthetics from the neo-classical to the pre-Romantic; and in the previous Unit specifically, your acquaintance with Thomson has already taken you one step ahead in reading the **Precursors of Romantic poetry**. In a stark contrast to both the urbanity of tone and setting of the Augustan poets, Thomas Gray's *Elegy* takes the reader to the pristine countryside where unknown and unsung ordinary men lie buried in the church graveyard. From a general meditation on death to a more particularised utterance, the poem has a movement that is sombre to say the least. This Unit will introduce you to another of the most famous transitional poets through an equally celebrated and much anthologised poem. You will need to look out for the interesting mix of genres, the use of a controlled poetic form to express a profound emotional landscape and of course, a hint of the democratised temperament in poetry that was soon to become one of the corner-stones of the Romantic Movement.

6.20.1 Early Romanticism and The Genre of The Poem

In the previous Unit you have already read about the ‘Precursors of Romantic Poetry’ and so you know how poets like Thomson, Collins, Gray, Cowper and others began to pave the way for the Romantic Revolution in English literature, right from around the second half of the 18th century. In moving from Unit 1 to Unit 2 of this Module, you must also have identified the strong winds of transition that characterise the two broad poetic modes.

With Gray’s poem, we arrive at an even more vivid picture. Notice the poet’s use of the term ‘Elegy’ at the beginning of the title.

❖ *What is an elegy?*

In European classical literature, both Greek and Latin, the elegiac referred to a metre for writing poetry. It was widely practised by Catullus and Propertius. In later modern English literature the term was used in the context of a reflective poem that seriously meditated on death. Often it was verse that lamented a dead person. In that sense, Milton’s *Lycidas*, Shelley’s *Adonais* and Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* are all elegies that lament the death of people near to the poets.

Thomas Gray probably began *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* about 1746. It was originally a somewhat shorter poem than the version he finally published in 1751, and it is strongly felt that the poem was occasioned by the death of his friend Richard West in 1742. By designating his work as an elegy, Gray immediately places it in a long tradition of meditative poems that either focus on the general phenomena of human mortality, or reflect specifically on the death of a single person. By setting his meditation in a typical English churchyard with mounds, gravestones, and yew trees, Gray was also adhering to the trend of some of the most popular poems in the middle of the century that were set in graveyards and meditated on death.

Yet a glance through the text of the poem will reveal that Gray’s *Elegy* is basically different from the tradition of the elegiac, whether in classical or in contemporary English literature. The ‘grave-yard’ school of poetry referred to a genre of 18th-century British poetry that deliberated on death. It is called a ‘school’ simply because several poets were writing on this theme around the middle decades of the century. Several of the poems were imitations of Robert Blair’s popular poem *The Grave* (1743) and of Edward Young’s blank-verse dramatic rhapsody *Night Thoughts* (1742–45). These poems turn on morbid themes — the sorrow and pain of

bereavement, the physical reality of death and the transitoriness of human life. These brooding, melancholic and meditative tendencies of graveyard poetry definitely found an expression in Thomas Gray's text (1751), but there is more to *Elegy* as you will soon see.

Though the poem may have been an elegy to mourn his friend Richard West, in typical eighteenth century manner it becomes a more universal reflection that celebrates the graves of humble and unknown villagers and suggests a moral that the lives of rich and poor alike "lead but to the grave." The graveyard school significantly prefigured the Romantic Movement and Thomas Gray remains an important signpost in this evolution.

6.20.2 Thomas Gray – A Bio-brief

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) was born in Cornhill, London, the fifth child and only survivor of his parents' twelve children. His father was a professional money scrivener while his mother had a modest millinery shop. From 1725-1734 Gray attended Eton College where his literary interests were nurtured in the company of classmates like Horace Walpole, Thomas Wharton and Richard West, the last one a friend whose death at the age of 25 was a devastating blow. At Peterhouse, Cambridge, Gray had an opportunity to pursue his varied interests in architecture, classical literature, natural and medieval history, botany and etymology. Gray left Peterhouse without taking a degree, probably planning to move into studying law. However in 1739 he accompanied Horace Walpole on the Grand Tour of the continent that was in a way a continuation of his education in a non-formal manner. When he came back to London in 1741, he found that he had not actually prepared himself for any specific career.

An '**epitaph**' refers to an inscription on a tombstone. It consists of the dates of birth and death and a few phrases by which the person may be remembered. Often it consists of lines from a poem. What is the function of the epitaph in this poem? Here the epitaph appears after the conclusion of the poem and it seems that Gray has written the inscription for his own grave-stone. It appears that the poet-narrator shares a destiny with the simple rural folk though he is learned and educated. He imagines that like him wandering through the country churchyard, some swain would come across his grave and pause to read the inscription.

In 1742 Gray, inspired by the Buckinghamshire countryside where his mother and aunts had retired, wrote several poems. This was also the year that is attributed to the composition of the elegy that you are going to read. He probably wrote the

poem over several years, revised it and finally published it in 1751. Gray spent his career as a don in Cambridge, shunned publicity but wrote prolifically.

6.20.3 Form and Content of The Poem

Gray's *Elegy* is a long poem of 32 heroic quatrains. Like any neo-classical poem, the form and meter are restrained and symmetrical. So the four iambic pentameter lines or quatrains into which each stanza is cast, have an alternate rhyme-scheme. You can easily see that the first line rhymes with the third, the second with the fourth. In a striking deviation from the heroic couplet, this *abab* pattern, at this time associated with elegiac poetry, gives the poem a staid pace, along which the thought is developed. The last three stanzas are printed in italic type and given the title "The Epitaph."

The regularity of rhythm, the formal diction, the personifications and metaphors all celebrate Gray's theme of honouring the unknown 'heroes' lying in their graves in a country churchyard.

As you must have felt by now, *Elegy* differs from the conventional poetry of this genre in the elaborateness of its natural setting and the tone of universality. The poem takes you visually around a country churchyard at sunset, deliberately evoking a mood of isolation and reflection. Metaphorically, the end of the day also generates philosophical meditations on human mortality. The classical idea of *memento mori*, a Latin phrase that reminds a person that 'one must die', reinforces other corollary lessons that death eases out the difference between the common man and the king or noble, that pride, riches, fame or worldly things cannot be carried across into the 'other' world.

The poem is romantic because it evokes emotions and sentiments of melancholy and sadness. However the poet is able to control the subjectivity of his emotions by reflecting on larger issues that concern the world and humanity in general. This combination of the romantic and the neo-classical indicates that it is a pre-romantic poem.

Where is the Churchyard? Is it a real Churchyard?

The poem was completed when Gray was living near St Giles' parish church at Stoke Poges which is an affluent parish in South Buckinghamshire district of England. Gray himself was buried in this churchyard (1771) and there is a memorial that was erected later to commemorate the churchyard site that was made so famous by his poem. The place described in the poem is very typical of an English countryside and village scene that is dominated by the church and churchyard

6.20.4 *Elegy and The Pastoral Tradition*

An understanding of the poem in the light of the tradition of the pastoral is seminal, because it is in this that the bridge between the neo-classic and the romantic strains is most fittingly struck. Gray's poem does not conform to the classical tradition of the pastoral elegy. The Greek pastoral elegiac tradition was created by the bucolic poets Theocritus (3rd century BCE), Moschus (2nd century BCE) and Bion (1st century BCE). However, no single individual is mourned in Gray's poem as the sense of despair is more universal and comprises the human condition in general. In this sense it may be closer to Matthew Arnold's Victorian elegy "The Scholar Gypsy" that grieves the passing away of a way of life in the Oxford countryside that was represented by the scholar, Glanville. Milton's "Lycidas" or Shelley's "Adonais", elegies that we have referred to earlier, however mourn the loss of particular friends and follow conventions that incorporate an invocation, shepherds who grieve for a friend and an idyllic landscape. If the fact of a personal loss having occasioned Gray's poem (as suggested earlier) be accepted, then we can observe a passage from the individual to the communal in *Elegy*.

In Gray's *Elegy*, he evokes the English countryside, not any stylised setting but a familiar landscape that was linked to his own experience. Techniques of the picturesque and the gothic are used for representing the village churchyard. The poem is an elegy because it is an emotional response to the death of his friend Richard West which makes him conscious of his own mortality. The theme of death is more objectively treated by posing rhetorical questions that enable the poet to think dispassionately about mortality.

The narrator in the poem contemplates issues of obscurity and remembrance that focus on opportunities lost and those that are gained. Thus simple country life is contrasted to ostentatious city life and the waste of talent is set against fame and recognition. The modest tombstones in the churchyard are testimony to the honour and memory of some human soul, unknown and uncelebrated. The narrator/poet moves on to anticipate his own destiny and is partly resigned to it.

6.20.5 *Text of Elegy written in A Country Churchyard*

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,¹

The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,²

The plowman homeward plods his weary way,³

And leaves the world to darkness and to me.⁴

Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such, as wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign. 12

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet⁵ sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,⁶
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed⁷,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed⁸.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share⁹.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe¹⁰ has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke¹¹! 28

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,

Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor.¹²

The boast of heraldry¹³, the pomp of pow'r,¹⁴
 And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
 Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
 The paths of glory lead but to the grave.¹⁵

Nor you, ye proud¹⁶, impute to these the fault,
 If Mem'ry o'er their tomb no trophies raise,¹⁷
 Where thro' the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
 The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.¹⁸

Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
 Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?¹⁹ 44

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire²⁰;
 Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
 Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.²¹

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
 Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
 Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
 And froze the genial current of the soul.²²

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
 The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
 Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.²³

Some village-Hampden²⁴, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton²⁵ here may rest,
Some Cromwell²⁶ guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade²⁷: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.²⁸

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.²⁹ 76

Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.³⁰

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,

That teach the rustic moralist to die.³¹

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
 This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
 Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?³²

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
 Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
 Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.³³ 92

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead
 Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;³⁴
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
 Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,³⁵

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,³⁶
 "Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away
 To meet the sun upon the upland lawn."³⁷

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
 That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
 And pore upon the brook that babbles by."³⁸

"Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
 Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he would rove,
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
 Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love."³⁹

"One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,

Along the heath and near his fav'rite tree;
 Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
 Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;⁴⁰

“The next with dirges due in sad array
 Slow thro' the church-way path we saw him borne.⁴¹
 Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,
 Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.”⁴² 116

THE EPITAPH⁴³

*Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
 A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
 Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
 And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.*

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
 Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:
 He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,
 He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.*

*No farther seek his merits to disclose,
 Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
 (There they alike in trembling hope repose)
 The bosom of his Father and his God. 128*

6.20.6 Notes and Glossary

1. The striking opening of the poem introduces the mood of brooding. ‘Curfew’ marks a specific time-period when the rule of authority persists. Here the words ‘tolls’, ‘knell’ and ‘parting day’ are linked metaphorically, equating evening and death.
2. A typical pastoral scene when the shepherd returns home at dusk across the ‘lea’ or meadow.

3. Alliteratively the poet recreates the weariness of the farmer with 'weary way' being a classic example of a transferred epithet.
4. The 'me', the subject or speaker enters into the poem, signifying a change from Augustan poetics.
5. A tiny town or small village
6. Notice the use of the epithet that is so common in much of Augustan poetry.
7. Epithet that is part of the poetic diction and is also pictorial.
8. Those lying in their 'lowly beds' a euphemism for graves will no longer experience the thrills of the morning breeze or the sounds of the countryside.
9. An idyllic picture of the simple pleasures of domestic life, the hearth and home.
10. The clay—archaism.
11. This stanza refers to the activities of the farmer, the tools of the trade – the sickle, the oxen, the furrows made by the ploughing are mentioned.
12. Ambition and Grandeur are personified. The poet addresses people in the metropolis or those in the midst of riches and plenty to warn them that they should not mock the simple joys and achievements of country folk. The discourse of wealth and class, materialism and commerce, power and position is contrasted to the humble 'annals of the poor'.
13. Coat of arms used by an aristocratic family.
14. Ceremony associated with power. Notice the alliteration.
15. The inevitable truth of all human existence is emphasised.
16. The poet seems to be addressing people who are proud to have compassion for these simple country folk.
17. Trophies or memorials are raised by the rich over the graves of the dead to commemorate their achievements. The people here are too poor to afford such luxuries.
18. It is the remembrance in the village church attended by the community that marks a memorial for them.
19. This is one of the passages that uses figurative language almost in every expression. Note the use of personification and metaphor. The answer to the two rhetorical questions is that commemorating the dead in an elaborate manner cannot make them come live. So memorials for the dead are only expressions of human vanity.
20. The poet is reflecting here on the kind of people who could be buried there. It could be a person who was divinely inspired.
21. It could also be a person fit to rule or create music on the lyre.

22. Yet these people led unassuming lives as their poverty did not give them access to knowledge or opportunities to use their talent. Beautiful and marvellous gems that remain undiscovered and flowers that bloom unnoticed in a lonely desert.
23. The poet cites two examples from the natural world of neglect.
24. The poet conjectures that the unacknowledged dead could be village heroes – historically unknown but fearless or inspired. John Hampden was a Puritan politician who fearlessly opposed the policies of Charles I.
25. John Milton was a celebrated poet and literary figure and a village counterpart could have been silenced by the lack of scope to read and write.
26. The anti-royalist politician Oliver Cromwell came to power for a short time. He was responsible for the Civil wars and the execution of Charles I. Therefore he was guilty of much bloodshed. The poet says that there may have been someone in the village who was as passionate about liberty but his fervour would remain unknown.
27. The destiny of the humble villagers was not to command authority and political power.
28. The poet twines negative qualities that inevitably accompany success and says that in some way the unambitious rustic population had therefore been saved from luxury, pride, shame, untruth.
29. The basic honesty of this sequestered life is praised here. Interestingly the phrase ‘Far from the madding crowd’ became the title of one of Thomas Hardy’s novels.
30. Though the village churchyard does not have ornate tombstones or rich memorials, the simple grave-stones do attract the notice of passers-by like the speaker here.
31. The simple inscriptions are factual rather than poetic. Ironically these seem to have been created by the ‘unletter’d muse’. At least these graves with quotations from the *Bible* communicate the inevitability of death.
32. These are people are likely to be forgotten and therefore are eager to review their lives.
33. The uncelebrated villager needs some loved one to shed tears and mourn for the dead. Even the rustic grave recalls the memory of a living being.
34. Here the poet is speaking of himself (thee) and referring to the remembrance of the ‘unhonoured dead’ in the elegy he was writing.
35. He wonders what would happen if someone inquired into his own fate after his death.

36. From here what the 'swain', a rural shepherd would say (imagined) is recounted.
37. He hopes that the swain would fondly remember him walking across the meadows at dawn to see the sunrise.
38. It is also likely that the swain would remember the poet stretching out at noon under the beech tree, contemplating the brook/river that flowed by.
39. The poet still imagines what the old villager would say about him. The varied moods of the dead man would be remembered.
40. One day the man would be missed in his favourite haunts.
41. Next the missed person is seen carried in a hearse along the church path to the graveyard.
42. The villager exhorts the passerby/reader to move up to the grave and read the epitaph.
43. The imagined epitaph is that of the speaker/poet. Here Thomas Gray is seen to have been inscribing his own tomb stone. The youth here is unknown to pride, fame and wealth because of his humble origins. Yet he is a scholar-poet blessed by knowledge and science. He is melancholy and lonely and wishes only for an understanding and compassionate friend. He finds peace and repose in death.

6.20.7 Key Issues

➤ The Lyrical in the Poem:

The elegy as you know, is a form of the lyric. Therefore the emphasis is on emotions and feelings generated by a subject or theme. The poem does not narrate, nor does it dramatise scenes or events. Rather, it evokes responses of sadness, loss and sorrow that are inevitably associated with death.

Gray's *Elegy* rediscovers the pessimistic roots of the pastoral tradition by emphasizing upon sentiment. Yet the gloom and melancholy that intrudes on the human mind as dusk followed by evening descends in the cemetery is more **Gothic** and eerie than classical. The poet is able to create a mood of brooding that is represented by the landscape and the philosophical insights that he communicates.

➤ Didacticism in the Poem:

Much of classical literature is marked by the manner in which universal truths, broad generalisations and philosophical insights are communicated through poetry that is not essentially subjective. From the tradition of Horace, Gray picks up the

theme of retiring from public life to a simple rural retreat. In Latin this idea of *beatus ille* or 'happy the Man', concentrates on how ambition, desire, fame, ego and wealth create anxieties and tensions in city and public life from which one can escape into the countryside. In some ways the poor and simple country folk are fortunate. The tone adopted by the poet is moralistic and often the verses are aphoristic in style.

Gray appeals to proud and ambitious people not to make fun of the simple life or to detest the poor. Every man has to die one day and glory, wealth and luxuries have to be abandoned on earth. Earthly life is transitory and the boasts of power, wealth and glory are vain and empty.

In this poem the poet prefers the obscure life of a villager and the conclusion of the poem is an epitaph inscribed on the death of such a person who has retired "from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" (73). If you read a poem like Samuel Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes", the poet shows how happiness lies in surrendering one's desires and ambitions and accepting what is destined for a person.

It seems that Gray is uncertain about the ambitions of his literary contemporaries and equally concerned about the erosion in middle class values like modesty and generosity. He views the mercantile morality of the urban middle class with suspicion. Broadly speaking, Gray's *Elegy* mourns for human mortality and the decay of civilizations. While Augustan culture celebrated the progression of society towards perfection, that confidence is undermined by an anxiety that creates a sense of isolation in the poet. From a participative community ethos where the poet speaks to an inclusive audience, we find Augustan pastoralism moving towards isolating the poet from his audience by becoming introspective. This is the change towards the subjective or individual feelings from shared sentiments that formed the crux of romanticism.

➤ **Figures of Speech:**

In the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth talks about the language of poetry resembling the language actually spoken by common people. He criticises the "gaudy and inane phraseology" of poets of the earlier generation. He rejects the poetic diction and "unnatural language" and uses Thomas Gray as an example of what poets should avoid in their writing. In Augustan fashion, Gray depends on rhetoric, several figures of speech to vividly express his musings on death. The imagery is rich and words are used for maximum poetic effect. The poem is extensively used as an example from which one could identify and study the effect of figurative language.

Some of the figures of speech used are:

Personification, Metaphor, Metonymy, Inversion, Syncope, Alliteration, Anaphora

Activity for the Learner

With help from your counsellor, identify some examples of each of these figures of speech. As a project work, write definitions of each of these and explain the significance of the particular rhetorical use in the context of the poem.

You can also scan some significant sections of the poem to understand the prosodic structure.

6.20.8 Summing Up

In this Unit, you have therefore learnt of the ‘Elegy’ as a poetic genre, have seen how it falls in line with the transitional poetry of the period, and have also been initiated to the facts of the evolution of the elegy in English literature. With help from your counsellor, you can plan a project on elegiac poetry as a sub-genre of English literature, starting from the Old English period to the Victorian times. This Unit has also acquainted you to one of the most important poetic texts of the pre-Romantic period.

6.20.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions:

1. Would you call Thomas Gray’s poem an elegy? Give reasons for your answer.
2. What features of Neo-classicism do you notice in the poem?
3. Does Gray’s Elegy anticipate Romanticism? Identify these features

Medium Length Questions:

1. Comment on the narrative voices in the poem.
2. What features of rhetoric give the poem a distinctive character?
3. What lessons does the poet gather from wandering through the country churchyard?

Short Questions:

1. Why does the poet mention (i) Hampden (ii) Milton (iii) Cromwell?

UNIT 21 □ Contemporary British Drama and the Stage

Structure

6.21.0 Introduction

6.21.1 The Status of Dramaturgy

6.21.2 Eighteenth Century Tragedy

6.21.3 The Ballad-Opera and Pantomime

6.21.4 The Development of Sentimental Comedy

6.21.5 The Development of Anti- Sentimental Comedy

6.21.6 Transformation of the Stage

6.21.7 Summing Up

6.21.8 Comprehension Exercises

6.21.9 Suggested Reading

6.21.0 Introduction

In this Unit you will learn about the development of drama and the transformation of stage during the eighteenth century. The Long eighteenth century was basically an age of prose and reason. Enlightenment spawned a culture that prioritised rationality in every sphere. The basic temper of the age was prosaic, and hence not really congenial to the growth of drama. However, the development of drama during this age was not inconsequential. Different kinds of drama emerged during the period - pseudo-classical tragedy, sentimental tragedy, ballad-opera, anti-sentimental tragedy and many more. After going through this Unit, you will be able to grasp the overall drama scene of the eighteenth century. You will also be given insights into the transformation of the stage.

6.21.1 The Status of Dramaturgy

In the light of what we just said in the 'Introduction', one question inevitably crops up here: what are the factors behind the decline of drama during the eighteenth century? Also of interest is the question whether such decline can be paralleled with the slump in Jacobean drama that you've seen in the post-Shakespearean phase.

In the eighteenth century the status of drama gradually declined due to several

causes. Except Sheridan and Goldsmith who made some valuable contribution to theatre, other dramatists of the age failed to keep up the momentum given to it by the Elizabethan and Restoration dramatists. An overview of the social and literary climate of the age will be helpful to establish the causes for the decline of drama in the eighteenth century.

- ✓ **First and foremost**, in this century novel became the dominant genre. The rise of the novel coincided with the rise of the bourgeois. As critics like Ian Watt have argued, novel reflected the life of the rising middle class and was imminently better suited to their tastes.
- ✓ **Secondly**, people of the eighteenth century went to theatre-houses for the draw of actors and actresses who became more important rather than the playwrights or the body of their work. Consequently, the content of the plays became shallow and hollow.
- ✓ **Thirdly**, during this time the theatre- managers were more interested in garish costumes and scenery than in the essential content of the play. The incorporation of French culture generated an ostentatious taste. People flocked to the theatre-houses to watch the display of extravagant fashions.
- ✓ **Fourthly**, comedies written during the age deviated from the ideal and became more sentimental. The liberty that the Restoration dramatists used to enjoy was censored. Jeremy Collier pilloried the Restoration dramatists and canvassed for moral reform in the drama. Apart from Goldsmith and Sheridan, no other playwright in the field of comedy sustained the true ethics of comedy.
- ✓ **Fifthly**, Licensing Act of 1737 further delimited the potentialities of drama putting it under the power of surveillance. Sixthly, Kings and Queens of that period hardly cared for the nourishment of drama. William III or Queen Anne were not interested in theatre. Whereas Elizabeth I or James I provided the patronage to the theatre, the likes of Anne or George simply ignored them. Lack of royal support made it hard for the playwrights to sustain this profession.
- ✓ **Lastly**, the incorporation of classical spirit inspired playwrights on a series of rational tragedies where emotions were balanced. Adherence to rules delimited the free play of emotions and passions.

As an additional activity, you can go back to Core Course 1 and compare these factors with those that led to the decline of drama in the Jacobean Period. It will be interesting to make a comparative study of the nature of plays that were being written and staged in these two periods.

6.21.2 Eighteenth Century Tragedy

Eighteenth century tragedy closely followed the foothills of the French tragedy. The writers of that age were writing under the impact of the classical spirit. As a result, the magnitude and sublimity of Elizabethan dramatists was absent during this time. Drama had a fall from the sublime level it was taken to by the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. George Saintsbury observed, “The fact is that the whole cast of 18th century thought and style was unfavourable and almost fatal to the composition of tragedy that should be at once practicable and poetic”. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of multiple versions of tragedy. Tragedies produced during the period can be divided into three categories:

- **Pseudo-classical tragedy-** As the zeitgeist set great store by classical temper, tragedies modelled on classical themes began to be composed. Joseph Addison composed *Cato* (1713) in a classical format. The play is based on the last weeks of the life of Cato; besieged in Utica by Caesar in 46 BC. Cato has been betrayed by Sempronius, a senator, and the Numidian general, Syphax. Faithful to him is Juba, Prince of Numidia. It scrupulously adhered to classical unities. It was a response to contemporary political scenario of England and brings out the dramatist’s concern with social stability. The play is remarkable for quotable epigrams, the most famous one was Cato’s:

“What a pity is it

That we can die but once to serve our country.”

James Thomson also wrote some pseudo-classical tragedies. He started with *Sophonisba*, followed by *Agamemnon* and *Edward and Eleanora*. Samuel Johnson composed a classical tragedy named *Irene*. The story, from Richard Knolles, deals with Irene, a Greek slave loved by the emperor Mahomet.

- **Romantic tragedy-** Along with pseudo-classical tragedies romantic tragedies were also attempted. Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) was the chief exponent of this genre. Rowe tried to break away from the classical rules and returned to the Elizabethans. Pat Rogers remarked, “In his preference for remote, exotic or historic subjects, he is wholly unoriginal. Nor does the strong element of political allegory in his work make for a departure from existing practice in itself. What is new in Rowe is the content. Where heroic tragedy had underwritten monarchical and absolutist principles, he used the form to express Whig ideas of liberty and the constitution.” His first drama was *The Ambitious Stepmother* (1700) where we find a concentration on pathos, on suffering, and on feminine response. It was not successful. Much better

was *Tamerlane* (1701) that allegorises the virtues of William III through the character of Tamerlane and vices of Louis XIV through the portrayal of the cruel tyrant Bajazet. He achieved success with *Fair-Penitent* (1703), based on Massinger's *The Fatal Dowry*. The heroine Calista, abandoned by Lothario, and eventually committing suicide, drew enormous sympathy from audience. Lothario became Samuel Richardson's model for Lovelace in *Clarissa*. *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714) was, as stated by Rowe on the title page, 'written in imitation of Shakespeare's style.' Jane's story shows the vicissitudes of fortune. From a wealthy position, she is reduced to poverty and destitution due to reversal of fortune. At her lowest ebb, she is rescued by her husband. *The Tragedy of the Lady Jane Gray* (1715) also circles round the pathetic life of a woman. In these tragedies, Rowe introduced the trope of 'she-tragedies' (his own phrase) that focus on the central figure of a suffering woman and depend largely on the pathos for the effect. A. Nicoll opines, "Rowe exhibits undoubted skill in the exploitation of pitifully distressed emotions; his persons come fitfully to life; and he has the gift of writing pleasant if not very powerful blank-verse dialogue. Taken as a whole, his dramas, whatever their weaknesses and defects, are among the best serious plays of their time."

- **Bourgeois tragedy**- The third type of tragedy that developed during this time was bourgeois tragedy. Bourgeois tragedy did not focus on Kings or Queens. The protagonists belonged to middle or lower-class background. Lots of factors contributed to the emergence of bourgeois tragedy. Firstly, lack of royal patronage compelled the dramatists to depend on the public. Neither Queen Anne nor George I was interested in the theatre. The emergent bourgeois class provided patronage to the dramatists. As they were guided by puritanical mindset, they wanted to see the reflection of such ideology in the dramas. The aristocratic families stopped providing patronage to the playwrights as they incurred heavy loss. Tradesmen were the chief sponsors of drama. They were impatient of the classical dictates on tragedy. Resultantly, a new genre of tragedy developed that endorsed middle-class values, catered to the demands of the rising middle class.

George Lillo was the chief exponent of this type of tragedy. His most famous play was *The London Merchant*. Modelled on an ancient ballad, "The Ballad of George Barnwell", Lillo situates the story at the historical era just before the sailing of the Spanish Armada. In the prologue to the play Lillo clarifies his intention of writing a domestic tragedy. It was published in 1731. This drama tracks the downward path of a novice named Barnwell, seduced into evil ways by Millwood, a courtesan. Barnwell becomes her creature and

even robs his employer, the honest merchant Thorowgood, whose moral probity is expressed in his observations to the upright apprentice Trueman. Eventually Millwood persuades Barnwell to murder and rob his uncles and for that crime the two of them are hanged. Lillo wrote this tragedy in prose. Through this drama Lillo preaches a moral lesson. The dramatist shows his disapproval of the conduct of Millwood. Thorowgood is projected as a morally upright person. Lillo holds an important place in the history of English drama. He set in motion powerful forces that pointed towards natural tragedy. He purposefully set aside the dignity of rank and title and the ceremony of verse. He animated domestic drama and paved the way for prose melodrama and tragedy.

After Lillo, other dramatists attempted to compose similar plays. Among them worth mentioning are John Hewitt's *Fatal Falsehood* or *Distressed Innocence* (1734) and Thomas Cooke's *The Mournful Nuptials* or *Love the Core of all Wooes*, but they were prosaic and lacked conflict, the essence of drama. Much more forceful dramatist was Edward Moore. His *The Fatal Curiosity* (1736) was a domestic tragedy. It was based on an old Cornish story of murder. It was set in Jacobean England. The plot circles round an old poor couple whose only son is believed to be lost at sea. A stranger deposits a casket with them and the old man, Wilmot, murders the stranger at the prompting of his wife. The murdered man proves to be their son. Camus used it in *Le Malentendu* (1945).

6.21.3 The Ballad-Opera and Pantomime

Eighteenth century also saw the efflorescence of pantomimes and ballad-operas. It came as a kind of comic relief. The heavy dose of heroic tragedy was too much for the audience to bear with for a longer period of time. They craved for some respite from the heavy dose of heavier tragedy. That is why they found in ballad-operas and pantomimes a perfect medium to indulge in entertainments. Pantomime adapted some of the features of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. It originated in ancient Rome and dealt with religious or warlike episodes performed by actors in masks. It was accompanied by music. In the eighteenth century it was introduced to England. From the Restoration era the demand for dances was felt in theatres. To cater to such a demand many theatrical managers appointed some dancing masters from Paris. By the end of the seventeenth century the demand for such mimic dancing kept on increasing. This sowed the seeds of pantomimes. Along with regular dramatic performances pantomimes were being staged. A typical pantomime had two parts: in the first part, a mythological or historical theme was treated. The

second part circled round the comic pranks of Harlequin. Music and dancing accompanied both parts. The success of pantomimes set the platform for the ballad-opera. Opera had its genesis in Italy at the end of the sixteenth century.

John Gay (1685-1732) invented the ballad-opera. His *The What D'Ye Call It* (1715) is a burlesque on the moral falsity of heroic tragedy. This farce also ridicules the morbid taste for sentimentality in comedy. He is best known for *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) which was the source for Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. It lampoons the London underworld. In it one can discern political attack on the ruling party of Robert Walpole. It offered light entertainment in sharp contrast to the sentimental mode prevalent at that time and dealt with life in the criminal world. The genesis of the opera can be seen in one of the letters of Jonathan Swift addressed to Alexander Pope in 1716, "I believe...the Pastoral Ridicule is not exhausted; and that a Porter, Footman, or Chair-man's pastoral might do well. Or what you think of a Newgate Pastoral?" Gay seemed to have followed the suggestion of Swift but chose the form of opera over pastoral. Polly, the daughter of Peachum, a receiver of stolen goods, falls in love with a highwayman named Macheath. He is held captive by Peachum in Newgate so as to claim reward money. This Newgate is controlled by Lockett, who is a partner of Peachum. The comedy of the play arises when Lockett's daughter Lucy falls in love with Macheath and becomes instrumental in his escape. In Act III, the beggar sums up the nature of the whole play:

"Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained, as I first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral. It would have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich: and that they are punished for them."

Apart from the political and social satire this ballad-opera also launches an attack on the popular dramatic entertainments of Italian opera and sentimental drama. The double ending of the drama is definitely a hit at the conventional happy ending of sentimental drama. He wrote a sequel to this play entitled *Polly*, published in 1729. It was banned by Lord Chamberlain's men for political reasons. It was not so successful as *The Beggar's Opera*. Here we find that Macheath is transported to West Indies. He disguises himself as a pirate chief Morano after he escapes from the plantation. Polly tries to find him and takes on the disguise of a man. She joins the loyal Indian and eventually holds Morano as a prisoner. Ultimately, he discovers the true identity of Morano. However, it was too late to save him. Here the satire becomes more acerbic. An excerpt from one of the songs of Polly is given below to show the dramatist's scathing social criticism:

“In pimps and politicians
 The genius is the same:
 Both raise their own conditions
 On other’s sin and shame;
 With a tongue well-tipped with lies
 Each the want of parts supplies
 And with a heart that’s all disguise
 Keeps his schemes unknown.”

Gay’s contribution to the English drama hinges on his introduction of political satire to drama, employment of ballad-opera as a medium of satire.

Another noteworthy ballad-opera was *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737) by Henry Carey. This opera was full of humour and rollicking fun.

After Gay, **Henry Fielding** was the most formidable figure in the field of ballad-operas and burlesques. Inspired by dizzy heights of success that *The Beggar’s Opera* reached, Fielding penned a tragic burlesque, *Tom Thumb*, later reworked as *The Tragedy of Tragedies*. Written in blank verse, it satirised heroic tragedy. Laughter issues out of the device of placing tiny Tom as hero. Fielding popularised the burlesque form. Many writers of that time tried their hands in burlesques but most of them were average plays. In this connection mention may be made of Sheridan’s *The Critic* or *A Tragedy Rehearsed* (1779).

The popularity of the pantomimes rose to such a level that the Patent Theatres started rivalry with each other. For example, Rich produced *Necromancer* or *The History of Dr. Faustus* to challenge Thurmond’s pantomime entitled *Harlequin, Doctor Faustus*. Arthur Murphy wrote about the popularity of the pantomimes:

“A gothic taste has taken possession of the public. Nature is banished, we give credit to the magician’s wand, and harlequin’s wooden sword. The seasons are confounded together...all climates are presented before us; heaven and hell appear; good angels and evil demons meet; the trap door open; Pluto rises in flame-coloured stockings; and this monstrous chaos makes the supreme delight of an enlightened nation.”

6.21.4 The Development of Sentimental Comedy

The sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century emerged in reaction to the indecency and immorality of the Restoration comedy of manners. Restoration com-

edy of manners ushered in licentiousness in all walks of life. The most excoriating response came from Jeremy Collier who in 1698 launched a diatribe against the vulgarity of the Restoration comedy of manners in his pamphlet entitled *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immortality of the English Stage*. Moreover, the Licensing Act of 1737 limited the production of plays. In sentimental comedies laughter and humour were totally absent. The true spirit of comedy took an exit. The absence of humour paved the way for the emergence of pathos. Pathetic situations started dominating the plays. Dramatists such as Colley Cibber and Steele presented tearful incidents on stage. In their hands comedy ceased to be comedy and became a medium for the presentation of pathetic incidents. These dramatists were primarily moralists. They almost preached sermons on middle class morality under the garb of comedy. Dialogues were prosaic. Their only aim was a moral edification of the readers. In respect of characterisation, sentimental comedies lacked standard. The dramatists failed to portray real men and women on stage. On the other hand, they presented them as they ought to be. That is why characters lacked lifelikeness and tended to be mere abstractions. Moreover, the writers of this school introduced characters from middle class society and banished characters belonging to the lowest strata of society. Therefore, a limited representation of people was seen on stage.

Colley Cibber (1671-1757)- Cibber was a prolific writer of plays. He followed he dictates of Jeremy Collier who criticised the vulgar comedy of manners. In 1696 he wrote his first play *Love's Last Shift*. It is a typical sentimental comedy. Lovelace, who is the hero of the play, goes to England after having abandoned his wife. However, he falls into debt and returns home. His wife Amanda, despite the ill-treatment, remains loyal to him. Disguising herself, she starts seducing Lovelace and then unveils her true identity. Greif-stricken, Lovelace admits his fault and the two are reunited. *The Careless Husband* (1704) was theatrically more successful. Here Cibber also upholds the virtue of tolerance. Some stock-in-trade features of his first play are also incorporated in this play. Here we also find an ill-treated wife who is neglected by her husband Sir Charles Easy. Charles has a secret relationship with her maid Edging. On knowing that his wife is aware of his infidelities, he is moved to reconciliation with his wife. In plays such as *The Double Gallant*, *The Lady's Last Stake*, *The Refusal* we find a series of 'she-comedies'. *The Non-Juror*, Cibber's most successful play, was an adaptation of *Tartuffe*. He worked on Vanbrugh's incomplete drama *The Provoked Husband* and made it complete. Here we find a robust social commentary.

Richard Steele(1672-1729)- Plays of Richard Steel also aimed at moral edification. In his plays we find the fullest development of the sentimental tradition in drama. His belief of domestic happiness and faithful love are faithfully mirrored in

his plays. He started his career by writing *Funeral*. Embarrassment between young lovers is the central theme of the drama. *Lying Lover* gives expression to his hatred of duelling. In *Tender Husband* two plots are nicely mixed: one circles around Captain Clerimont, an intriguing officer and the other moves around his boorish elder brother. Lawyer Pounce sutures these two plots. *The Conscious Lovers* is his best play. It is modelled on Terence's *Andria*. Bevil Junior, the hero of the play, is about to be married to Lucinda, the daughter of Sealand. In the meantime, he has befriended an unknown girl named Indiana and falls in love with her. The problem is ultimately resolved when Indiana is discovered to be the daughter of Sealand. Pat Rogers said, "It is a studied and painfully well-intentioned homily, all about filial duty, benevolence, marriages of convenience and a host of thoroughly undramatic issues. The topics canvassed by Steele in this contrived fable were of very real contemporary concern, and many a pulpit must have rung with comparable utterances to those of the characters."

Susanna Centlivre (1667-1723)- Mrs. Centlivre is famous for her Comedy of Intrigue. In her plays one can discern the picture of the emerging mercantile society. She also exploited the local colour exquisitely in her plays. Her first play was *The Perjured Husband* (1700), a cross between a tragedy and a tragi-comedy. In plays such as *The Gamestar* and *The Basset Table* she attacked the fashionable vices of gambling and card-playing. Her most famous play was *The Busie Body* (1709). The union of Sir George Airy and Miranda is thwarted by Miranda's guardian, Sir Francis Gripe who intends her for himself. Sir Francis's son Charles, who is also George's friend, is in love with Isabinda, whose father is unwilling to accept the match. Marplot, Gripe's ward, tries to help the lovers but because of his simplicity he complicates the actions. Through a series of deceptions Airy and Miranda are ultimately united, and Charles wins Isabinda. It is because of the appeal of Marplot that the play was played simultaneously at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The popularity of the play led Centlivre to compose its sequel *Marplot in Lisbon*. Her *The Wonder: a Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714) is partly modelled in Ravenscroft's *The Wrangling Lovers* (1677). *Bold Stroke for a Wife* is purely original. The main plot of the play circles round the love of Colonel Fainwell and Anne Lovely. Problem arises as Anne has to receive consent from her four guardians who have four different tastes of fashion. Taking up different disguises, he tries to impress each of them.

Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) - Cumberland wrote about 30 plays, most of which were tragedy. His plays are remarkable for the moral tone. His best play is *The West Indian*. Belcour, the hero of the play is an honest but rakish youth who has been brought up in the West Indies. After arriving in London, he falls in love with Louisa whom he mistakes, initially, for a whore. Ultimately, Belcour reforms

himself and is united with her. The play is an archetypal example of sentimental play. He defended the Jews in *The Jew* (1794). He transforms the heartless money-lender into a generous person who is ever ready to extend his helping hands to the distressed.

Thomas Holcroft(1745-1809)- Holcroft introduced continental melodrama into the English stage. His first comedy, *Duplicity*, was staged at Covent Garden in 1781. He rose to the dizzy heights of success with the production of *The Road to Ruin*. The hero of the play, Harry Dornton, is a wild but high-minded young man. His love of gambling brings upon him huge financial loss. However, he reforms himself on learning that due to his follies his father is on the precipice of disaster. He decided to marry an old but ugly widow due to financial loss. However, everything ends happily because of his goodness of heart.

Hugh Kelly(1739-1777)- She is a formidable name among the dramatists of sentimental school. Her famous plays are *A Word to the Wise* and *Married Philosopher*. Her *False Delicacy* was an enormous success.

Evaluating the sentimental comedies, David Daiches says:

Writers of this kind of comedy never achieved a proper kind of stylization...It is only after reading many plays of this kind that one can appreciate the comic iconoclasm of Goldsmith and Sheridan in comedies, which though they may appear sentimental enough to modern eyes, were in fact directed against the sentimental gentility in the drama of the time.

6.21.5 The Development of Anti- Sentimental Comedy

As sentimental plays drove laughter out of theatre, a reaction set in. You must remember that the surfeit of pathos was too much to bear for the people. Most pungent response came from Oliver Goldsmith and R.B. Sheridan who launched an attack against the overdose of sentiments and moral effusions in dramas. They took up the cudgels against the melodramatic plays that occupied the English stage for a long time.

Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) attacked the morbid taste for sentimentality in his essay *The Present State of Polite Learning*. Goldsmith criticised the comedy of sentiment in his *Essay on the Theatre* (1772). Upholding the classical formula that tragedy represents the misfortunes of the great, and comedy the frailties of the humbler people, he elaborated that the sentimental play did not fit into the mould of

neither tragedy nor comedy. Goldsmith objected to it because in lieu of amendment of vices through correction, sentimental drama nurtured tearful episodes. Goldsmith's first attempt was *The Good-Natured Man*. He clarified his stance in the preface to the play, "When I undertook to write a comedy, I confessed I was strongly pre-possessed in favour of the poets of the last age and strove to imitate them." It is a comedy of character. In *The Good-Natured Man* Goldsmith worked within the convention of the sentimental play. This was not a successful play. Protagonist of the play, Young Honeywood, was a combination of sentimentality and cynicism. Honeywood chooses to send ten guineas to a poor gentleman and his children in the Fleet prison instead of repaying the sum to a broker, and is kind-hearted enough to refuse to have a servant hanged for robbing his plate. And the result is that he falls victim to his creditors who send bailiffs to arrest him in his own house. And when he is released through the help of the girl he loves, Miss Richland, he is credulous enough to believe that a government official and an imposer, Lofty, has secured his freedom, and thus he even tries to persuade Miss Richland to grant Lofty's suit of love. Eventually, with the help of Miss Richland and his uncle Sir William Honeywood, the hero realises his own folly and is reunited to Miss Richland.

She Stoops to Conquer (1773) was his *magnum opus*. In the prologue to the play, Garrick called the sentimental comedy 'a mawkish drab of spurious breed' and lamented 'the Comic Muse long sick is now a dying.' Goldsmith is represented as the doctor, curing the patient by his skilful treatment. Partly based on the incident in the author's life, this play explores, through wit and humour, the class tension prevalent at that time. Marlow, the hero, is not at ease with the women of his class. However, he is quite comfortable with lower class women. Comedy arises when Miss Hardcastle, an upper-class lady, takes the disguise of a maidservant in order to woo him. The entire play, with its fun and humour provided by Tony Lumpkin, makes a satiric dig at the sentimental tradition. Young Marlow, the hero, whose match with Miss Hardcastle has already been fixed by his father, goes with his friend Hastings to visit the Hardcastles. They lose the way, and meeting at an alehouse "Three Jolly Beggars" Tony Lumpkin, Mrs. Hardcastle's boorish son by a former marriage, are waggishly directed to the house of the Hardcastles as to an inn. The mistaking of a private residence for an inn becomes the pivotal circumstance which leads to all subsequent comic situations. Although this play is branded by some critics as a farce, it is not a farce but a typical comedy of manners where we get a picture of social follies and manners. The humour of the play is Shakespearean in nature. You will learn more about this play in the subsequent Unit.

The greatest dramatist of the eighteenth century was **R.B. Sheridan** (1751-1816). The attack which was initiated by Goldsmith against sentimental dramas was

continued by Sheridan. But while Goldsmith tried to revive the spirit of Elizabethan comedy, Sheridan attempted to restore the spirit of comedy of manners. He dealt a heavy blow to the surfeit of pathos. His plays eschewed the vulgarity of the comedy of manners.

His fame chiefly rests on his play *The Rivals* (1775). This play is partly autobiographical. Sheridan's own love affairs with Miss Linley and his elopement with her provides the backbone of the love episode of the main plot. Captain Absolute is in love with Lydia Languish, the niece of Mrs. Malaprop. However, Lydia has a typical sentimental disposition. By reading sentimental romances, she has adopted a sentimental taste that makes her prefer a poor half-pay lieutenant to the heir of a baronet. Captain Absolute disguises himself as a half-pay ensign (Beverley) to woo Lydia. His father, Senior Absolute, proposes the match between his son and Lydia to Mrs. Malaprop but Captain Absolute hesitates to disclose the disguise lest Lydia should get offended. Problem complicates when Bob Acres, another rival for the love of Lydia, challenges Beverley to a duel, partly provoked by Sir Lucius O' Trigger. Ultimately all ends happily and Lydia is cured of her sentimentality. The sub-plot of the play dealing with the love affair of Faulkland and Julia carries some elements of sentimentality.

This play is conspicuous for the presentation of the character of Mrs. Malaprop. She thinks herself as a queen of the dictionary. But she does not use right words in right places. The desire to parade her sagacity that ultimately results in absurdity provides humour and fun to the play. A brief specimen of the brilliant malapropism is given below, "If I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs." *The Rivals* throws a flood of light on the fashionable eighteenth-century life. The artificiality of the eighteenth-century Bath society is beautifully brought out by the dramatist. It presents a society where people constantly run after pleasure and mirth avoiding any moral principle. The opening conversation between Fag and the Coachman is instrumental in bringing out the hollowness of the society.

The School for Scandal (1777) is Sheridan's masterpiece. It shows contrast between two brothers: Joseph Surface, a mean-hearted hypocrite and Charles, an open-hearted but reckless. This play, one of the classics in English drama, is a pungent satire on the moral degeneration of the aristocratic bourgeois society, on the vicious scandal-mongering among the idle rich, on the abnormal marital relations between rich and above all on the hypocrisies behind the mask of moral uprightness. This comedy is remarkable for a number of hilarious scenes. Among them mention may be made of scandal-mongering and the famous auction scene in which Charles Surface sells his family portraits.

6.21.6 Transformation of the Stage

In the eighteenth century several theatrical developments took place. Playhouses were no longer reserved for the privileged few. Middle-class spectators were showing interest in theatre. Towards the close of the seventeenth century the old aristocratic set up started crumbling. Many aristocratic families were reeling under financial difficulties. Meanwhile, merchant families were in a well-off position. The tradesmen were keen enough to take part in the fashionable society in which the aristocrats were luxuriating. They were enthusiastic to be a part of the world. As a corollary, the potential playgoing public was enlarged. The increasing size of the audience contributed to the emergence of new playhouses. During the time of Charles II, only two theatre companies were granted licence. By 1732, five playhouses came into existence-

- a. The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, which had maintained the contentious management of Christopher Rich with a management by three proficient actors: Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks and Thomas Doggett.
- b. Lincoln's Inn Fields, which had been managed by Christopher Rich's son John. This was supplanted in 1732 with the sumptuous new Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.
- c. The Queen's Theatre, Haymarket, designed as an opera house by Sir John Vanbrugh in 1705 and also known as the Opera House.
- d. The Little Haymarket Theatre had been built in 1720 by John Potter, who speculated on the growing market with a small, unlicensed house.
- e. Goodman's Fields, also unlicensed, had opened under Thomas Odell in 1729, and continued under Henry Giffard in 1732.

London was the locus of the theatrical activities. However, significant growth of playhouses was seen elsewhere as well. Hitherto touring players did not have their own playhouses. In the eighteenth century they started erecting their own playhouses.

6.21.7 Summing Up

- Eighteenth century tragedy had different varieties. It saw the growth of pseudo-classical tragedies. Addison's *Cato* was the most famous play of this genre. James Thompson also wrote some pseudo-classical tragedies. He started with *Sophonisba*, followed by *Agamemnon* and *Edward and Eleanora*. Along with pseudo-classical tragedies, romantic tragedies were composed by Nicholas Rowe. His 'she-tragedies' such as *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* and *The Tragedy of the Lady Jane Gray* circled round the lives

of suffering women. The third variety of tragedy was the bourgeois tragedy, which focused on middle-class or lower-class characters in lieu of Kings or Queens. The rise of the bourgeois class necessitated this sub-genre of tragedy.

- Ballad-operas and pantomimes came as a kind of comic relief. The heavy dose of heroic tragedy was too much for the audience to bear with for a longer period of time. John Gay invented the ballad-opera. His *The Beggar's Opera* satirised the political party of Robert Walpole. It offered light entertainment in sharp contrast to the sentimental mode prevalent at that time and dealt with life in the criminal world. Its sequel *Polly* failed to maintain the standard of *The Beggar's Opera*.
- Eighteenth century saw the proliferation of sentimental dramas. Sentimental comedies such as Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* and Richard Steele's *Tender Husband* reacted against the immorality of the comedy of manners. The sentimental dramatists were basically moralists and through their dramas they attempted a moral edification.
- Anti-sentimental comedies came as a protest against the overdose of sentiments in dramas. Most pungent response came from Oliver Goldsmith and R.B. Sheridan who took up the cudgels against the morbid taste for sentimentality in comedies. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* launched an attack against the sentimental tradition in comedies. It also explored, through wit and humour, the prevalent class tension of the time. R. B. Sheridan was the greatest dramatist of the eighteenth century. His plays such as *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* revealed his creative genius.
- New playhouses emerged during this time. The newly-emerged merchant class vied with aristocrats to be a part of the fashionable world that they inhabited. As a result, the potential playgoing public only enlarged. During the time of Charles II, only two theatre companies were granted licence. By 1732, five playhouses came into existence

6.21.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type:

1. Give a brief account of the eighteenth-century tragedy.
2. Write an essay on the development of the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century.
3. Who were the pioneers of anti-sentimental comedies? Estimate the importance of their work in the drama of the eighteenth century.

Medium Length Answers:

1. Give a brief account of the pantomime and opera produced during the eighteenth century.
2. What are the causes for the decline of drama during the eighteenth century?
3. Write a note on the transformation of stage during the eighteenth century.

Short Answer Type:

1. Assess the contribution of Oliver Goldsmith as a dramatist
2. Write a note on the significance of *The Beggar's Opera*.
3. Assess the contribution of Richard Steele.

6.21.9 Suggested Reading

Bevis, Richard W. *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century 1660-1789*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Nicoll, Allardyce. *British Drama (An Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time)*. New Delhi: Doaba House, 2005.

Rogers, Pat. *The Augustan Vision*. London: Methuen, 1974.

Styan, J.L. *The English Stage (A History of Drama and Performance)*. Britain: Cambridge University press, 1996.

Willey, Basil. *Eighteenth Century Background*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1940.

UNIT 22 □ Oliver Goldsmith : *She Stoops to Conquer*

Structure

6.22.0 Introduction

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6.22.0 Introduction

The final Unit of this Course intends to bring to the learner the textual analysis of an eighteenth century drama. The excesses of Restoration Comedies, made way for what came to be called “**the Sentimental Comedy**”, with excess of sentimentality, and a fit reaction against it in the form of what came to be called “**the anti-sentimental comedy**”. It is our objective to lead the learner to this gradual transition from Restoration to Sentimental drama and finally discuss in detail the features of Anti-sentimental drama. For this purpose the play which will be used as an illustrative text is Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. It remains to this day a popularly performed anti-sentimental play. When the play was written and performed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it marked a shift from the sentimental dramas of Hugh Kelly, Colley Cibber, Richard Cumberland, Richard Steele, to the anti-sentimental plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan. Even outside this theatrical context (that will be explained below) the play has the features of a delightful and entertaining comedy. While reading the play, please try to identify features of En-

glish country and city life, the position of women and what was expected from them, the function of men in society, the difference in class and position – issues that in some way or another are still relevant in other times and other locations. This Unit will be best understood when read in continuity with the previous one.

6.22.1. Drama in the Eighteenth Century

Let us recapitulate very briefly the major aspects of 18th century drama that have been discussed in detail in Unit 21:

- **Reactions to Restoration:** The rise of Eighteenth Century Drama was directly related to the disintegration of Restoration Comedy of Manners and if the Puritan ethos of the Protectorate was directly responsible for the excesses of the Restoration Comedies, the very excesses also led onto a reaction in the minds of the spectators. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, popular reaction against the amoral/immoral absurdities of the form was voiced from every possible quarter. It was probably Jeremy Collier's 1698 pamphlet "A Short View of the Immorality and the Profaneness of the English Stage" that sealed its fate forever. Also, the middle class audiences, who had previously been the butt of the humour in the comedies with aristocratic rakes as heroes, were on the rise in terms of socio-political position as well as economic prosperity. They no longer enjoyed the plays which had no reflection of their lifestyle or values. This was also a major reason for the wane of restoration drama.
- **Rise of Sentimental Comedy:** It is no wonder then that generally considered to be the finest example of the Restoration Comedy of Manners, William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) is also one of its last. Hereafter, we will only see the conventional mode of the Comedies of Manners disintegrating and breaking apart. The vacuum thus created was filled by what has come to be called "**the Sentimental Comedy**". Sentiments were defined and extolled as one of the highest of human virtues, it had an uncanny ability to enter into and participate in the distresses of others and feel their plights as one's own. The heroes and heroines of such plays were infallibly virtuous, uncomplaining in their sufferings and always sympathetic to others. Oliver Goldsmith, a contemporary of Sheridan, would refer to this kind of play—practiced by the likes of Colley Cibber, Richard Steele, and Hugh Kelley— as "weeping sentimental comedies"!
- **Rise of Anti-Sentimental:** The reaction to the excessive lachrymose comedies resulted in creating a new brand of witty comedy purged of the

sentimental excesses and the obscenities of the Restoration. The anti-sentimental comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan, coming after the vogue of the Restoration Comedy of Manners and the Sentimental Comedies, seem to present a compromise, a golden mean as it were between the two types.

- **Important dramatists—Sheridan and Goldsmith:** Both Goldsmith and Sheridan retained the wit, the sophisticated dialogues, the stock-characters and common motifs like mistaken identity from the Restoration comedies while purging them of their overtly sexual connotations. In Goldsmith's play, largely set in the English countryside, we see how he goes back to Elizabethan indigenous comic traditions to 'cure' English theatre of sentimentalism that had devastated the presence of true comic humour. The comedy is entertaining as it is based on physical entertainment and action than on witty dialogue. In *The Rivals* we see Sheridan affecting an amalgamation of features from both types of comedies—the comedy of Manners and sentimental plays to effect a change.

6.22.2 Oliver Goldsmith : A Literary Biography (1730-1774)

Oliver Goldsmith (10 November 1730 – 4 April 1774) was an Irish writer, poet, and physician known chiefly for his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), his pastoral poem 'The Deserted Village' (1770) (written in memory of his brother), and his plays *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771, first performed in 1773). He also wrote "An History of the Earth and Animated Nature", and he is also thought to have written the classic children's tale, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*, giving the world that familiar phrase. Goldsmith's birth date and year are not known with certainty. According to the Library of Congress authority file, he told a biographer that he was born on 29 November, 1731, or perhaps in 1730. Now the most commonly accepted birth date is 10 November, 1730.

Amongst his literary output in this period are contributions to Tobias Smollett's *Critical Review*, and *An Inquiry to the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759). His writing also appeared in *The Busy Body*, *The British Magazine*, and *The Lady's Magazine*. A year later, his "Chinese letters" were published in the *Public Ledger*; these were fictionalized letters in the style of Voltaire that presumed to be written by a Chinese mandarin visiting England. It was during this time period that Dr. Samuel Johnson, one of England's most famous men of letters, became a great admirer of Goldsmith's work. He invited Goldsmith to join his

exclusive Turk's Head Club, and through Johnson's patronage, Goldsmith began to publish his first master works, including the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*. This novel, along with his masterful comic play *She Stoops to Conquer*, found great success, and remain his best-loved works, which is also the text that this unit will study in full detail. *Vicar* was particularly important since his advance earnings kept him out of a debtor's prison. During this period, Goldsmith also published his letters and *The Life of Richard Nash*. He continued to write throughout the 1760's, overseeing several editions of *The Vicar of Wakefield* during that time. His premature death in 1774 may have been partly due to his own misdiagnosis of his kidney infection. Goldsmith was buried in Temple Church. The inscription reads; "Here lies/Oliver Goldsmith".

6.22.3 *She Stoops to Conquer* – About the Play

She Stoops to Conquer, by Oliver Goldsmith, is often dubbed a "Restoration comedy", by publicists and reviewers, but in fact it opened in 1773—over a hundred years after Restoration of the monarchy in England, which occurred in 1660. The inspiration of the play came from a real incident in Goldsmith's life. At age 17, Goldsmith was travelling in the Irish countryside, and when night descended he asked a passerby to recommend an inn. The passerby, who happened to be the town's joker, directed Goldsmith to the home of a squire. The squire played along with the prank, and only when Goldsmith left special instructions for his breakfast did his host reveal that the house was not an inn, but a private home.

The similarity between *She Stoops to Conquer* and the Restoration comedies is no accident. With *She Stoops to Conquer* (and his essay on sentimental and laughing comedies), Goldsmith was, in fact, attempting to bring back the "laughing comedies" of the Restoration era, which had fallen out of favour as "sentimental comedies" had taken over the stage. Along with Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the author of two later comedies, *The School for Scandal* (1776) and *The Rivals* (1775), Goldsmith led a reaction against sentimentalism on the stage. The sentimental plays had arisen partly in response to the seeming immorality of Restoration comedies, which typically depicted a rakish hero whose vices go unpunished. In contrast, sentimental comedies generally portrayed virtue's final triumph and its world abounds in pity, pathos and moral sentiments. In reacting against the trend of didactic and moralistic sentimental comedies, Goldsmith drew inspiration from his past. Goldsmith and Sheridan drew upon their antecedents (particularly the Restoration comedies), writing comedies which mocked the social mores and behaviour of the upper class. Their comedies emphasized wit, often took a somewhat critical view of romantic

love, and generally prized nimble social skills and adept self-promotion over virtue and honest dealing. Goldsmith's own words articulate in a fairly comprehensible manner the salient features of Sentimental Comedy:

[...] a new species of dramatic composition has been introduced, under the name of 'sentimental' comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece. These comedies have had of late great success, perhaps from their novelty, and also from their flattering every man in his favourite foible [*Essay on the Theatre*].

The above quoted words also reveal the author's anxiety about the future of comedy which, he thinks, has been badly adulterated by the blending of the tragic and the comic, a predicament he mourns in the Prologue to *She Stoops to Conquer*: 'the Comic muse, long sick, is now a-dying.' Therefore in *She Stoops to Conquer* Goldsmith consciously waged a war against the sentimental trend on the comic stage. As exponents of Anti-sentimental Comedy, Goldsmith and Sheridan were basically reviving the spirit of pure comedy and amoral laughter on the stage.

However, with *She Stoops to Conquer*, it is clear that Goldsmith cannot entirely leave sentimental comedy behind. Nevertheless, his play marks a significant departure from the form. Historically, the play, which became very popular when it premiered in 1773, serves as a link between the Restoration's sardonic celebrations of desire and the sentimental comedy that gained popularity in Goldsmith's days. Goldsmith's good friend, the critic Samuel Johnson, opined that he knew of "no comedy for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience, that has answered so much the great end of comedy—making an audience merry."

While the play proves funny and entertaining, it also marks an important step in the development of comic theory. In 1772, Oliver Goldsmith published an essay entitled "An Essay on the Theatre; Or, a Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy." The essay came after the poor reception of his play *A Good-Natured Man* and in anticipation of the much-loved *She Stoops to Conquer*. It is easy to understand this essay as an explicit statement of purpose for the latter comedy, which was in the process of being completed for production at the time of the essay's publication, and as such should be studied in conjunction with it. The Prologue to the play gives us Goldsmith's purpose in writing the play: He projects himself as the doctor and the play as the required medicine to prevent the sick comic muse from dying from the onslaught of sentimental comedy.

To sum up, Goldsmith's 'laughing comedy' celebrated laughter over sentiment

and the simple virtues of the country over the snobbery of the town. Goldsmith derided sentimental comedy as false and boring. He felt that though comedy focuses on social life and attempts to reform social manners and morals, this reform is rarely a moral judgment of the wicked, but usually a social judgment of the absurd instead. In the end, the existing (broken, problematic) society is reformed, typically through reconciling the disjunctive elements.

6.22.4 The Characters in the Play (*Dramatis Personae*):

- **Tony Lumpkin:** Tony Lumpkin is the son of Mrs Hardcastle and stepson to Mr Hardcastle. It is as a result of his practical joking that the comic aspects of the play are set up.
- **Mr. Hardcastle:** Middle-aged gentleman who lives in an old mansion in the countryside about sixty miles from London.
- **Mrs Hardcastle:** Wife to Mr. Hardcastle and mother to Tony, Mrs. Hardcastle is a corrupt and eccentric character. She is an over-protective mother to Tony
- **Miss Kate Hardcastle:** Daughter to Mr. Hardcastle, and the play's stooping-to-conquer heroine. Kate respects her father and dresses plainly in his presence to please him.
- **George Hastings:** Friend of Marlow who loves Constance Neville.
- **Constance Neville:** Comely young lady who loves Hastings but is bedeviled by Mrs. Hardcastle's schemes to match her with Tony.
- **Sir Charles Marlow:** Father of young Charles.

6.22.5 Act-wise Analysis of the play with Comments

Act I. The play opens in its primary setting, a chamber in the “old-fashioned” country house of Mr. Hardcastle. This is an expository scene which introduces all the major characters and prepares us for the complications in the plot.

Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle enter in the midst of a pleasant argument. Mrs. Hardcastle is perturbed at her husband's refusal to take trips into London, while he insists he is not interested in the “vanity and affectation” of the city. Mrs. Hardcastle mocks him for his love of old-fashioned trends, so much that he keeps his house in such a way that it “looks for all the world like an inn.” She wishes to emulate the

fashions of London and downplays her age. As she speaks of her son Tony Lumpkin, Mr. Hardcastle finds his roguish ways grating, and laments how the boy is too given to practical jokes. On the other hand, Mrs. Hardcastle (Tony's natural mother) defends him, and she begs her husband to be easier on Tony.

Two other characters are introduced: Miss Hardcastle (Kate) and her cousin Miss Neville (Constance). Constance is an orphan with a small fortune. Mrs. Hardcastle has an eye on her fortune and wants her to marry the wayward Tony Lumpkin to keep her jewelry within the family. Mr. Hardcastle disapproves of Kate's lavish gown to which she reminds him of their agreement: in the morning she dresses as she likes in order to welcome friends, while in the evening she dresses plainly in order to please his tastes. Mr. Hardcastle then gives her the news that he has invited Mr. Marlow, son of Hardcastle's old friend Charles Marlow, to their house that evening in order to court Kate. Mr. Hardcastle considers Marlow's reticence and reserve a virtue but Kate is convinced that their meeting will be formal and dull. Kate informs Constance of her imminent danger and learns that Marlow is a friend of Hastings, the man whom Constance loves. She learns that Marlow has the strange reputation of being ill-at-ease with aristocratic women but behaves freely with women from lower social rank.

The next scene opens at 'Three Pigeons' where Tony is found to enjoy the company of several drunk men. Tony sings a song to praise liquor as the source of great wisdom and also laughs at the manners of the civilized world. Tony takes us to an anarchic world which debunks civilized norms. The landlord brings news that two gentleman have arrived, and are lost on their way to Mr. Hardcastle's house. Tony intuitively quickly they must be Marlow and Hastings, and since Tony is still angry about Hardcastle's insults, he decides to play a joke on his step-father. He will convince them that Hardcastle's house is in fact an inn and so they would present themselves there not as gracious guests, but as entitled patrons. After receiving instructions from Tony, Marlow and Hastings leave for Hardcastle's home, and so the stage is set for the comedy to take place.

Critical Comments:

- *She Stoops to Conquer* is a "well-made play," in that it is well structured to deliver a complicated plot with recognizable characters. Goldsmith writes a first act that establishes with great economy the plot to come.
- This play will operate very much through the use of dramatic irony, the effect produced when the audience knows something that the characters do not. The irony here is dependent on situations.

- Goldsmith also ably establishes the plot lines we are to follow. The main plot is clearly whether Kate will marry Marlow, while the primary subplot is whether Constance will marry Hastings.
- Tony seems to stand at the centre of the play, considering that it is he who takes initiatives to put the plot in motion, making him what would traditionally be called the protagonist.
- Tony's love of life and disavowal of customary, respectable expectations will prove crucial to Goldsmith's purpose of praising low comedy over sentimental comedy.
- Further, there is an additional subplot of whether the Hardcastles will resolve their differences about old and new ways of life. While this never directly affects the action of the play, it is thematically important.
- Through all these plots, Goldsmith lays the groundwork for his exploration of morality and respectability. The play's ironic subversion of traditional expectation is established in both scenes of Act I.
- Lastly, the parent-child relationships in the play are significant. While the two friends, Mr Hardcastle and Charles Marlow try as guardians to control the lives of their respective offspring, Mrs Hardcastle schemes to keep her niece's wealth within the family. Constance's jewelry is in her custody and her plan to marry her ward off to her son Tony is specifically to control that fortune.

Act II. Hardcastle and several "awkward servants" enter, the former instructing them on how to appear sophisticated for the expected guests. Another servant enters, leading in Marlow and Hastings. The men admire how much the inn seems as though it might have once been a mansion. While discussing inns, Hastings introduces Marlow's particular oddity of character: in front of modest, reputable women, he is "an idiot, such a trembler," while he is eloquent and lively around barmaids and common women.

Hardcastle enters excitedly, asking for Marlow and offering them "hearty reception." Because of Tony's lie, they believe him to be the innkeeper. They ignore Hardcastle and he finds Marlow not only rude, but distinctly out of character from the modesty he had been led to expect. They are amused by Hardcastle's loquaciousness and the way he speaks about politics as though he were a man of repute. They cut off another of his stories to ask for dinner.

Despite their confusion over this seemingly pushy landlord, the men allow Hardcastle to accompany them to their rooms. However, Hastings stays behind, re-

marking to himself on the strangeness of the situation, and Constance enters to find him. They are happily reunited, and Constance quickly surmises the trick Tony played, and corrects the mistake for Hastings. Hastings insists Constance join him in eloping, but she believes her fortune will prove crucial in their lives, and begs time to try and persuade her aunt (Mrs. Hardcastle) to give her the jewelry. Hastings suggests they need not correct Marlow's false assumptions since Marlow's timidity would make him to leave quickly in embarrassment, and this will foil their plan of elopement.

Marlow re-enters, confused over why Hardcastle would want to dine with them. Hastings spins a new lie, telling Marlow that Constance and Kate Hardcastle are themselves staying at the inn that night. Marlow is terrified by the news, and begs that Hastings postpone his meeting until the next day, when he can meet her at the Hardcastle home. Constance will not hear of it, since Kate would see such a refusal to meet as insulting.

Kate enters, and is introduced to Marlow. Things take a turn into one of the play's funniest scenes once Hastings and Constance abruptly leave. Marlow keeps his head down during the entire interview, and stammers pleasantries, while Kate controls the conversation, amusing herself with the man's timidity. He finally finds a way to politely exit, and Kate, now alone, laughs to herself at his ridiculous shyness. She does, however, note both his "good sense" and good looks.

As Kate exits, four others enter: Tony, Constance, Hastings, and Mrs. Hardcastle. Tony, assuming that she is pursuing the marriage desired by Mrs. Hardcastle, continues to ignore her. The focus shifts to the other two, where Mrs. Hardcastle enjoys talking of London with Hastings. She laments being saddled with an "antique" like Hardcastle, but is enlivened to hear that the fashion in London now considers the age of fifty as fashionable. She talks to Hastings of how much Constance loves Tony. Hastings asks the privilege to speak to Tony man-to-man, and so the ladies leave. Alone, Hastings strikes a deal: if Tony can help them to escape, Hastings will "take her off his hands." Moreover, Tony also promises to get Constance's jewels so that the lovers can have them.

Critical Comments:

- Where Act I was primarily concerned with the set-up or exposition, Act II is primarily concerned with establishing the contradictions and complications of the play's characters. On the surface, all of these people are comic types: Tony is the trickster; Marlow and Hastings are the romantic leads; Constance and Kate are the pure maidens to be won; and the Hardcastles are the

bastions of an old world who will work as antagonists to the young, creating the complications of the comic plot.

- The importance of appearance over substance is very much apparent as a theme in this act, and will continue to be so throughout the play.
- Much of this thematic content is apparent in the act's signature scene, the meeting of Kate and Marlow. Many things are happening here. Firstly, it is a wonderful parody of a sentimental dialogue.
- However, the substance of the conversation does touch on the play's theme: the importance of living, rather than observing life.
- Lastly, a word needs to be said about the comic humour in the act. Much of it comes from "low" humour, like the servants, who are slow to learn and bicker ridiculously. Yet the best humour here is again dependent on dramatic irony, as the web of confusion allows us to laugh at people.

Act III. In this act both Mr. Hardcastle and Kate appear confused with Marlow: the former over his impudence, the latter over his modesty. Hardcastle does see they both know enough to reject Marlow, a decision Kate approves unless she finds him to be more pleasing to each of them. Hardcastle grants her licence to attempt to correct his first impression, assuming that Kate has been drawn to the young man because of his good looks.

They leave, and Tony rushes on, holding the casket containing Constance's jewels. Tony reveals to Hastings that he has stolen the jewels. They hear Constance and Mrs Hardcastle approaching and Hastings exits quickly with the casket. Tony pulls his mother aside, and suggests she lies to Constance, claiming the jewels have been stolen so as to put an end to the matter. Mrs. Hardcastle gladly accepts the plan and makes a mock confession of the loss. While she is gone, Tony confesses his plan to Constance. However, Mrs. Hardcastle returns quickly, having discovered the jewels have actually been stolen.

All exit, and Kate enters with a maid, laughing about the joke. Kate sees in Marlow's confusion an opportunity to deceive him, and decides to continue playing the barmaid. Marlow enters, remarking to himself how terrible is his situation. Kate, acting the barmaid, approaches him and asks if she can help. He notices her beauty and grows immediately flirty and open, remarking on the "nectar" of her lips. Overcome with passion, he pulls her close right as Mr. Hardcastle enters. Marlow quickly exits, and Hardcastle confronts Kate, accusing her of lying about Marlow's modesty. Kate asks for more time to reveal his true character.

Critical Comments:

- Act III is primarily concerned with complication of the plot, though the confrontation between Kate and Marlow that ends the Act is central to its primary themes.
- Goldsmith's greatest achievement is the naturalness with which he presents such a contrived and complicated plot.
- This success lies in his superb command of character that, as already noted, uses comic stock characters but complicates them so that their motivations make the contrivances of the plot believable.
- Most of the complications in the act concern the subplot and are great fun because of the dramatic irony.
- The other section of the act is far more substantial, as it explores the questions of appearance and human foibles.
- This theme is most clear in Kate's plan to reveal Marlow's true side. By "stooping" both in terms of class and wealth, she is able to pull out his true nature: a sexually aggressive, rather impetuous young fellow.
- In a way, Kate's plan is also a sly comment on the theatre itself. By acting in a "low" manner, Kate is able to engender truth, a truth that reveals the silliness of human nature. This is very much Goldsmith's purpose in writing a "laughing comedy" that celebrates lowness as a mirror to truth.

Act IV. Hastings and Constance enter, bringing news that Charles Marlow (father of Marlow) is expected to visit the house that evening. To avoid detection Hastings decides to act promptly and send Constance's casket to Marlow. Marlow is confused with the caskets and sends it to Mrs. Hardcastle for safekeeping. Hastings is mortified to learn that the casket has gone back to Mrs. Hardcastle. However, he cannot reveal his anger to Marlow at this moment, and decides that he and Constance will have to go without the jewelry.

Hardcastle enters to find Marlow. Hardcastle asks Marlow to control his servants, who are indisciplined and rowdy. When Marlow refuses to discipline them, Hardcastle demands that Marlow and his servants leave immediately. Marlow is disgusted with the idea of being put out in the middle of the night, but Hardcastle insists until Marlow asks for his bill. In the confusion over why Marlow is requesting a bill, Marlow suddenly realizes that something is grossly wrong.

Kate enters and realizing that she needs to play the situation right, tells Marlow of his mistake. But she does not yet reveal her true identity. She poses now to be a "poor relation" who relies on the Hardcastles for shelter. Marlow is shocked to have

potentially treated her as a lower class woman, and apologizes for having mistaken her behaviour for that of a barmaid. He admits to her that he cannot pursue her since “the difference of our birth...makes an honourable connexion impossible” and so he must not endeavour to ruin her. Kate is impressed with the virtue he shows here. When he leaves, she decides to herself that she will maintain the deceit long enough to show her father his true character.

Tony tells Constance that he cannot steal the casket again from his mother but will have horses prepared for their escape. As Mrs. Hardcastle enters, they pretend to be caught fondling each other, and Mrs. Hardcastle promises she will have them married the next day.

In the meanwhile Hastings’ letter reaches Tony. Constance recognizes the handwriting and realizes that it could ruin them. Before Mrs. Hardcastle can get hold of it, Constance grabs the letter and pretends to read it, making up a nonsense letter on the spot. Tony spoils her attempt by giving it to his mother. She learns that Hastings is waiting for Constance in anticipation of the elopement. Mrs. Hardcastle decides to use the horses prepared by Tony to take Constance away from Hastings.

Constance, now depressed, is joined by Hastings, who accuses Tony of betraying them. Before he can suitably defend himself, Marlow enters, angry at having been duped. Everyone seems to turn on Tony. Tony suddenly develops a plan, and tells everyone to meet him in two hours at the “bottom of the garden” where he’ll prove to all his actual good nature.

Critical Comments:

- This act marks the worsening of the crisis: Marlow turns his back on Kate; Constance and Hastings feel betrayed by Tony; resentment is paramount in all the characters; and everyone turn against Tony Lumpkin.
- The act also presents Goldsmith’s most keen observation on the hypocrisy inherent in the aristocratic worldview.
- When Marlow learns that Kate is not a barmaid but a poor relation of the Hardcastles, he faces an ethical test and refuses to marry below his status. But when Kate posed as the maid he had no moral qualms in treating her as a commodity. He even says that he will pay for robbing her honour.
- Goldsmith does not condemn the reprobate in Marlow, but the social system which sanctions such class hierarchies as legitimate. Marlow’s extreme dualities are produced by the system in which he is trapped. In the hero’s dilemma there is a spark of the tragedy that lies beyond the scope of comedy. It lies in the forces that confound Marlow’s happiness.

- Marlow's double standard exposes the hypocrisies of upper-class social life.
- Lastly, this act shows Tony transcending the stock character of a trickster that he plays. His stupidity is now matched with a genuine desire to help others.
- In a sense, perhaps, Tony himself has a sentimental streak, so long as that sentiment does not praise aristocratic values as its end.

Act V. Hastings is informed by a servant that Mrs. Hardcastle has left with Constance. Hardcastle and Charles Marlow enter, laughing about young Marlow mistaking Hardcastle for an innkeeper. Although Hardcastle thinks that Marlow and Kate like each other, Charles wishes to find that out himself.

Marlow enters to apologize for his impudence. They discuss his daughter, whom Marlow praises but says he did not share any intimacy with her. Hardcastle, who saw Marlow take her hand in Act III, accuses him of lying, while Marlow continues to insist that their meeting was "without emotion."

Kate enters almost right away, and the two elders interrogate her. Kate informs that Marlow has talked to her before more than once and was quite passionate in his manner. Charles, who has confidence in his son's modesty, feels that Kate is lying. The two elderly men decide to watch Kate and Marlow from behind a screen.

The scene shifts now to the back of the garden. Tony tells Hastings that he has played a trick on his mother: he drove the horses around in circles, through difficult areas, until he finally crashed the carriage into a horse-pond nearby. Thinking herself 40 miles from home, Mrs. Hardcastle is in a panic. She fears that she may be robbed on the highway and Tony further terrifies her by pointing to Mr. Hardcastle who was out to take his evening walk. Mrs. Hardcastle now believes that she is about to meet a highwayman.

Hardcastle enters and is surprised to find Tony back so soon. Tony tries to dissuade Hardcastle from further investigation. Hardcastle persists in pushing through, which makes Mrs. Hardcastle throw herself at the mercy of the "bandit" to save her son. A few more passages are spent to sort all confusions. Though everyone is again angry with Tony, Hardcastle sees "morality" in the way he abuses his mother in pursuit of justice. Constance now decides to apply to Mr. Hardcastle for permission to marry the man of her choice.

The scene shifts back to the house. Sir Charles remains confused by Marlow's duplicity. When Marlow meets Kate, he laments his helplessness. Kate accuses him

for his greed for money, but Marlow confesses that he has been drawn to her by her ‘refined simplicity. Through his speech to himself, he resolves to stay with her despite his father’s lack of approval. She refuses him, claiming such a union will surely result in resentment, but he claims otherwise, and gets down on his knee to woo her.

At such a move, Sir Charles and Hardcastle charge from behind the screen and each accuse Marlow of falsehood, though for different reasons. In the attacks they launch on him, the truth of Kate’s identity is revealed.

Mrs. Hardcastle enters announcing that her niece has eloped with Hastings and that she will not ever release the girl’s fortune. Hardcastle accuses her of being “mercenary”, but she tells him that if Tony refuses to marry Constance of his own volition once he is of age, then her fortune goes automatically to her. Besides, even before the action, Tony is already committed to Bet Bouncer and remains loyal to her throughout. As Hastings and Constance arrive to beg forgiveness, Hardcastle reveals that Tony is actually of age. Tony refuses to marry Constance and her fortune goes back to her.

The mistakes of one night make all characters, except Mrs. Hardcastle, learn something from their mistakes.

Critical Comments:

- Interestingly enough, Goldsmith’s ending could easily be criticized as falling into the sentimentality he claims to eschew.
- Both pairs of lovers find happiness, virtue is rewarded and remains the supreme sentiment amongst everyone.
- The play does not transcend the conservatism of contemporary polite, genteel English society by ensuring a happy match of men and women of good breeding and character.
- While Goldsmith is unable to avoid his conservatism, he has the artistic sensibility to critique his flaw. This comes from the dissatisfied Mrs. Hardcastle who describes the end as a “whining end of a modern novel.”
- The fact is, the emotional, happy ending is only engendered by the comic tools of flaunting vice. Marlow is the best example. His baser nature is not reformed, but subsumed by the happy resolution.
- Kate only acquires Marlow as an acceptable husband through classical comic acts of trickery. She must force him to confront his own vice and folly, his own assumptions about behaviour and class, so that he is prepared mentally for a happy marriage.

- But again, the marriage between Marlow and Kate is possible only because Marlow realizes that Kate is the daughter of Mr. Hardcastle.
- The theme of appearance and its fallacious nature remains very strong up to the end of the play.
- Kate then marks herself as the heroine through her moderation. As the character who understands both the simplicity of the country and the sophistication of the town, she understands that life is about contradiction and excitement, and that happiness comes from embracing a bit of both sides.
- Tony appears to be a character, who exercises maximum agency and brings about a happy ending. Tony can be regarded as Goldsmith's mouthpiece. The heroism of this low, tertiary character, and his necessity to the plot, helps to further Goldsmith's defense of "laughing comedy."
- Tony, who indulges in low humour, knows how to combat the baseness that is often hidden behind aristocratic veneer. He thus emerges as the strongest critic of upper-class social hypocrisies.
- Finally, the sentimental ending is not absolute because of the financial pragmatism involved.
- While the ending is sentimental in a way, it does not feel artificial from the plot, but rather an honest expression of the play's themes: human baseness, deluding appearance, hierarchies of class, the importance of humour, the value of moderation, etc.

■ Critical Comments on the Epilogues:

There are two epilogues commonly published with the play. The second, intended to be spoken by Tony Lumpkin, was not written in time of the original production. Here Tony tells the audience that he will now appear in the great world of London and teach the world what good taste is. This epilogue does nothing to further the play's themes. Contrarily, the first epilogue spoken by Miss Kate Hardcastle, sums up the goal Goldsmith sets for himself in his 'Essay on the Theatre'.

WELL, having stooped to conquer with success,
And gained a husband without aid from dress,
Still as a Barmaid, I could wish it too,
As I have conquered him to conquer you:
And let me say, for all your resolution,
That pretty Barmaids have done execution.

Our life is all a play, composed to please,
 “We have our exits and our entrances.”
 The first act shows the simple country maid,
 Harmless and young, of everything afraid;
 Blushes when hired, and with unmeaning action,
I hopes as how to give you satisfaction.
 Her second act displays a livelier scene,—
 Th’ unblushing Barmaid of a country inn.
 Who whisks about the house, at market caters,
 Talks loud, coquets the guests, and scolds the waiters.
 Next the scene shifts to town, and there she soars,
 The chop-house toast of ogling connoisseurs.
 On ‘Squires and Cits she there displays her arts,
 And on the gridiron broils her lovers’ hearts —
 And as she smiles, her triumphs to complete,
 Even Common Councilmen forget to eat.
 The fourth act shows her wedded to the ‘Squire,
 And madam now begins to hold it higher;
 Pretends to taste, at Operas cries *caro*,
 And quits her *Nancy Dawson* for *Che Faro*.
 Doats upon dancing, and in all her pride,
 Swims round the room, the *Heinel* of Cheapside :
 Ogles and leers with artificial skill,
 Till having lost in age the power to kill,
 She sits all night at cards, and ogles at spadille.
 Such, through our lives, the eventful history—
 The fifth and last act still remains for me.
 The Barmaid now for your protection prays,
 Turns female Barrister, and pleads for Bayes.

Kate tells us how she has stooped to conquer and how this plot device has enabled the dramatist to conquer his audience. She proposes that “our life is all a play” and then traces the five act life of a pretty country barmaid. The five acts of the barmaid’s life describe the predicament of English comic theatre: the comic

muse learns to confront her audience and cater to their taste; then having been brought to high society she loses her essential nature and lapses into sentimentality; she then sits docile waiting for a doctor like Goldsmith to revive her liveliness and conquer her spectators again

6.22.6 The Title(s) of the Play

Choosing a title for his play was a tricky problem for Goldsmith. Some suggestions were *The Belle's Stratagem* and *The Old House a New Inn*. However the present title was supposed to have been prompted by John Dryden's line in *The Hind and the Panther*:

“But kneels to conquer and but stoops to rise.”

In fact, Goldsmith's play has two titles: the main title is *She Stoops to Conquer* and the secondary title rather than subtitle is *The Mistakes of a Night*. Both point to elements that constitute the plot. The clues for the two titles of the play are provided within the play's text. The main title is derived from Kate Hardcastle's words ‘I stoop'd to conquer,’ while Mr Hardcastle provides the second title, ‘the Mistakes of the Night shall be crown'd with a merry morning’ The first title points to Kate Hardcastle's strategy of stooping to the level of a barmaid to win Marlow. Kate, who learns that Marlow is awkward with women of high status, decides to disguise herself as the barmaid of the Hardcastle mansion and test her prospective husband.

The subtitle primarily points to the mistakes Marlow commits which trigger comic action. The first mistake is to think that Mr. Hardcastle's house is a country inn. Much of the comic effect emanates from Marlow's insolent behaviour towards Mr. Hardcastle, whom he regards as the interfering inn-keeper. Marlow's second mistake is to think that Kate is the barmaid of the house. The other characters also commit several mistakes which propel the main plot and the subplot towards the denouement.

6.22.7 Comic Elements: Irony, Humour, Farce, Wit

Aristotle probably wrote a treatise on comedy that was lost. Yet in his *Poetics* where the discussion is mainly on Greek tragedy, he makes certain comments about a genre that has been juxtaposed to the tragic form. Comedy he writes is a dramatic picture of the ridiculous and an imitation of men worse than the average. He goes on to define the ridiculous as a mistake or deformity that does not produce pain or harm to others.

Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* focuses on the seemingly inconsequential and often innocent mistakes of distinct human characters. The comic laughter in the play ensues from the humorous representations of the characters who show the follies, foibles, eccentricities and oddities of human beings. The laughter thus generated usually translates into reform, change or insight into human fallibility.

Situations abounding in low comedy can be farcical situations which give rise to physical laughter. Goldsmith introduces entertaining scenes that are exaggerated, extravagant or improbable but carefully integrates the elements of farce into the comic action. Thus the ale-house scene or the back garden scene where Mrs Hardcastle mistakes her own garden for a dangerous location far away from home generate comic humour because of the sheer absurdity of events.

Goldsmith makes use of several elements from the earlier comic techniques to shape his play—manners, artificial aristocratic veneers, humour, farce, wit and irony to revive comic drama. Irony primarily arises from the interplay between appearance and reality which leads to comic incongruity. The play can be described as a comedy of errors as mistakes committed by the characters or kept secret from characters control the action or plot. Goldsmith has portrayed Tony Lumpkin mainly through farce and satire. Tony is commonly characterized as a spoilt, dim-witted verve, who deliberately plays pranks on others. He orchestrates one plot after another, partly to take comic revenge on those who try to ignore him.

Goldsmith's use of comedy manners revolves mostly around Young Marlow, who is the object of this type of humour. An example of this type of humour is where Marlow will not ask for directions on the way for fear of 'an unmannerly answer'. It is also Marlow's 'manners' taken to ludicrous extreme that makes for his total awkwardness and inability to relate to women of social standing. Goldsmith deploys witty language, especially, in the mouth of Kate who teases Marlow, 'Did you call, sir? Did your honour call?'

Verbal wit is often introduced into the repartees of Kate with her father or in exchanges with Marlow who initially mistakes her for the barmaid.

Literary tools for creating an entire range of comic effects are used by Goldsmith in the play.

6.22.8 The Social World of *She Stoops to Conquer*

The plot of Goldsmith's play might appear totally preposterous to a modern reader. However, a brief discussion of contemporary social life will clear some of

the confusions. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British “country home” was at the height of its popularity and importance. Families of the aristocracy possessed both a house in town and a house in the country, and would retire to the latter during weekends in order to relax and hunt. Some of the minor gentry (such as the Hardcastles in *She Stoops to Conquer*) lived permanently in their country houses and did not frequent London. With the improvement of roads in the second half of the eighteenth century, the horse and buggy, became the primary mode of travel. Gentlemen of the Georgian era were required to have a strong interest in horses, which were a constant topic of conversation. The coach eventually came to manifest social standing, and coaches became increasingly showy as the age drew on. As roads, coach quality, and travel conditions improved, so did inns, so that by 1827 some even resembled the homes of noblemen and served exquisite food.

6.22.9 The Politics of Marriage in *She Stoops to Conquer*

The plot of *She Stoops to Conquer* hinges on two marriages: first, between Marlow and Kate; and the other between Hastings and Constance. In the early eighteenth century, most members of the aristocracy and nobility had weddings that closely resemble formal weddings of today. Prior to 1753, all that was necessary for a marriage to be considered legal was the mutual consent of both parties, assuming they were both “of age” (fourteen for boys, twelve for girls). Moreover, a man could promise to marry a woman at a future date, and then if they “consummated” their relationship, the couple could be considered legally bound. This loose definition of marriage led to many scandalous irregular marriages. These led to several societal and legal problems.

To counteract this trend, the Marriage Act of 1753 was passed as an attempt to codify the rules of marriage and create one universal standard. The Act required that witnesses be present, that the ceremony be performed by a legitimate and recognized clergy, and that, if the couple was not twenty-one years of age, they have parental consent. The Act was intended to protect women (and sometimes men) from being deceived by potential suitors into compromising their reputation. Another intention behind the Act was to standardize the marriage records and thus minimize future legal disputes.

However, the Act could also be viewed as an attempt by the nobility to maintain the status quo and preserve their place in society. The new restrictions on marriage meant that an underage noble could not disobey his or her parent’s marriage wishes without legally sacrificing his or her inheritance and/or title. *She Stoops to*

Conquer was written twenty years after the passage of The Marriage Act, and one can see the impact of the new law in the behaviour of the characters in the play. Tony Lumpkin has to wait until he is twenty-one before he can refuse Constance Neville. The only hope for Constance and George Hastings to get married (without parental consent) is to leave England for France. Marlow and Kate Hardcastle are expected to go through an elaborate formal courtship, and Marlow's private comments and vows have no legal standing.

6.22.10 Goldsmith's Characters and the treatment of Social Class

The play features treatment of social class as one of the main themes. Goldsmith's treatment of social class in *She Stoops to Conquer* is not the typical exploration of social snobbery or an explicit discrimination or mistreatment of the lower class by the upper class. Goldsmith merely plays on the double standards when it comes to treating people of lower status. However, Goldsmith does show that it is the perfect norm for people of the upper class to treat the lower class in a certain way and it is also accepted by the lower class themselves. This is shown from the way Marlow and Hastings talk about the barmaids that Marlow flirts with in his hometown.

Mrs. Hardcastle and Mr. Charles Marlow can be seen as the two main characters, who are most class-conscious. Mrs. Hardcastle proposes a match between Tony and Constance so that she can keep Constance's jewels in the family. Her desire to use marriage as a tool for social elevation is clearly seen because jewels represent wealth and it will further heighten her status as a lady to the people around her and to her neighbours. Furthermore, not only do the jewels play a part in exposing her class-consciousness but the fact that she dislikes Tony going to the bar shows her dislike of mingling with the lower class people. She would rather marry off Tony to Constance, who is definitely richer and more refined than the barmaid who Tony is taken with.

However, Tony is one of the characters whom Goldsmith portrays as one who shuns the dictatorship of social class. He prefers to lead a happy life by drinking at the pub with his lowlife friends and prefers Bet Bouncer, the barmaid, to Constance Neville. Also, another character who is shown not to be class-conscious is Mr. Hastings. Even after knowing that the jewels are lost, he decides to elope with Constance. He impresses us as a true lover.

In keeping with his professed goal of lampooning sentimental comedy in favour

of laughing comedy Goldsmith exhibits foolishness in even the most outwardly heroic characters, and heroism in the “lower” characters. First, let us consider the heroes, Hastings and Marlow. While they would be seen as virtuous young men to their audience – especially because of their aristocratic standing and signs of good breeding – we can also see that they are capable of extreme “lowness” and even of meanness. The most explicit example is Marlow’s love of common women. Something that would be considered a vice in moral comedy is here matched in Marlow by a sincere desire to be close to a “modest” woman. Again, both men, when operating under the fallacious assumption that Hardcastle’s home is an inn, are quite dismissive of and cruel to Hardcastle.

Meanwhile, the women are far more interesting than one might expect. Constance is perhaps a little passive, but that fits within the confines of the subplot, which is close to a traditional sentimental storyline. What does make Constance different from most romantic, sentimental heroines is her pragmatic realization that money matters quite a lot. While Hastings asserts that he needs only the woman, not the money, Goldsmith creates a woman to remind us that such a philosophy is only grand and wonderful for rich men. Constance loves Hastings as much as he does her, but she also knows they need cash.

Kate, on the other hand, falls into a literary tradition of strong heroines, a tradition much loved by Shakespeare. Her contradiction is exemplified by the way she dresses plainly for her father and well for her friends, the way she can straddle the line between town and country, sophistication and simplicity. This ability suits her well in confronting Marlow. She is also able to laugh at herself and her situation. She deserves the happiness she will find, because she has the strength to identify it and go after it.

6.22.11 Goldsmith’s use of Verbal Wit and Repartee

The characters in the play are brought alive by the dialogue and the variation in the language registers used so skillfully by the dramatist. The dialogue is easy and natural and therefore sometimes it uses ‘low’ language or what could also be called ‘slang’. The wit and repartees (witty exchange of words) are not as pointed and sharp as those in the plays of William Congreve, but the exchange of words between Kate Hardcastle and her father or the young Marlow are a natural outcome of the action and charactersisation.

Since Goldsmith had been well-versed in country life, the culture of country houses and small-town inns, he is able to portray characters in such environments

with a remarkable degree of accuracy. The individuality of the characters percolate through the dialogue. “It is comparatively simple to indicate a person by giving him some trick of speech or gesture; that is external. It is not so simple to let that speech or gesture be dictated by the inner traits of character, but that is what Goldsmith does.” (Robert Herring, 1962)

If there are some stock characters, they are depicted as life-like figures rather than puppets. For example, Mrs Hardcastle resembles a generation of superannuated matriarchs who seek to control the lives of their wards, who scheme to retain money and influence in society, who try to reinvent themselves as youthful and desirable women. In this case, Mrs Hardcastle likes the affectations of city life as well as its excitements. She detests the boredom of country life and her husband’s retiring life-style. She is obsessed with her son from a previous marriage, something that leads her to find herself in situations that are ridiculous. The dialogue attributed to her in the play catches the cadence of her resentment and disappointment, her anxiety and fondness relating to Tony Lumpkin.

The Alehouse scene is rowdy and noisy with snatches of a popular country song and the drunken boisterousness of “several shabby fellows”. A scene like this and the language spoken here would have been unthinkable in aristocratic Restoration society as represented in the comedy of manners. The sentimental dramatists also would have refined the language and manners of anything that was considered ‘low’. Goldsmith goes back to the earthy language and broad humour that was part of the comic tradition in Elizabethan and Jacobean times.

Yet the two young friends, Marlow and Hastings are toned down versions of the Restoration rake – fashionable in dress and affected in manners, educated and genteel in speech, forming a contrast to Tony, “an awkward booby, reared up and spoiled at his mother’s apron-string.” The juxtaposition of these characters and their speech maintains the difference in language registers.

This difference that also pertains to class and education is the source of humour in the scene where Mr Hardcastle sets about training his four awkward servants in “the table exercise” so that it would seem that his farm and barn hands “have been used to good company, without ever stirring from home.” The language of the servants is spontaneous and natural and sprinkled with country colloquialisms.

While Constance uses the measured and balanced language of a well-bred sentimental heroine, Kate Hardcastle shifts registers depending on the role that she plays. This is the reason that she can convincingly play the coquettish barmaid and the modest and chaste heroine whom her father holds in high esteem for her quick wit.

English prose comedy had moved out of aristocratic and upper-class monotony associated with stylized use of language to the more natural rhythms of speech in the country and the metropolis.

6.22.12 Summing Up

This unit has sought to draw the attention of the learner to the development of eighteenth century drama as an organic growth from restoration drama discussed in paper 3. These important issues have been dealt with in this unit:

- The middle class audiences, who had previously been the butt of the humour in the Restoration comedies, with aristocratic rakes as heroes, were on the rise in terms of socio-political position as well as economic prosperity. They no longer enjoyed the plays which had no reflection of their lifestyle or values. This was also a major reason for the wane of restoration drama and the emphasis on the form which blended virtuosity with wit.
- The excesses of Restoration Comedies, made way for what came to be called “**the Sentimental Comedy**”, with excess of sentimentality, and a fit reaction against it in the form of what came to be called “**the anti-sentimental comedy**”.
- The middle class audiences, who had previously been the butt of the humour in the comedies with aristocratic rakes as heroes, were on the rise in terms of socio-political position as well as economic prosperity. They no longer enjoyed the plays which had no reflection of their lifestyle or values. This was also a major reason for the wane of restoration drama.
- With *She Stoops to Conquer* (and his essay on sentimental and laughing comedies), Goldsmith was, in fact, attempting to bring back the “laughing comedies” of the Restoration era, which had fallen out of favour as “sentimental comedies” had taken over the stage. Along with Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the author of two later comedies, *The School for Scandal* (1776) and *The Rivals* (1775), Goldsmith led a reaction against sentimentalism on the stage.
- *She Stoops to Conquer* hinges on the themes of social class—chiefly the social double standards—and marriage. Goldsmith plays on the double standards when it comes to treating people of lower status. However, Goldsmith does show that it is the perfect norm for people of the upper class to treat the lower class in a certain way and it is also accepted by the lower class themselves. Marriage becomes the trick to raise social standards or hoard wealth.

- Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* focuses on the seemingly inconsequential and often innocent mistakes of distinct human characters. The comic laughter in the play ensues from the humorous representations of the characters who show the follies, foibles, eccentricities and oddities of human beings. The laughter thus generated usually translates into reform, change or insight into human fallibility. The laughter is often produced through witty use of repartees in the fashion of Restoration drama.

This unit thus teaches the learner how English drama is gradually moving towards social consciousness and social inclusiveness, apart from refining the nature of its satire, drawn from human foibles and eccentricities rather than directing its barb at any particular class. It also seeks to become more eclectic in its approach and inclusive in the nature of its audiences, which had been reduced drastically in the times of Restoration drama.

6.22.13 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions:

1. Explain the meaning and significance of the title *She Stoops to Conquer*. How is the title directly related to the action?
2. Comment on the interplay of appearance and reality in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.
3. How far does Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* succeed as an anti-sentimental comedy? Substantiate with close textual references.

Medium Questions:

1. Write a brief note on the depiction of low life in *She Stoops to Conquer*.
2. Comment on the comic ruse planned by Tony in Act V to confuse his mother.
3. Write a note on the epilogue spoken by Kate Hardcastle.

Short Questions:

1. What is the setting of *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith?
2. Why was Mr. Hardcastle angry with Tony Lumpkin?
3. What caused differences between Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle?

6.22.14 Suggested Reading

- Botsford, Jay Barrett. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1924.
- Brander, Michael. *The Georgian Gentleman*. Farnborough: Saxon House, 1973.
- Goldsmith, Oliver.
- *Goldsmith: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. G.S. Rousseau. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.
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- Hume, Robert D. *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800*. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983.
- Kirk, Clara M. *Oliver Goldsmith*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967.
- Kroenberger, Louis. Introduction to *She Stoops to Conquer; or, The Mistakes of a Night*, by Oliver Goldsmith, Heritage, 1964, pp.v-xi.
- Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Quintana, Ricardo. *Oliver Goldsmith: A Georgian Study*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1967.
- *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*. Ed. Kenneth O. Morgan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Williams, E.N. *Life in Georgian England*. Ed. Peter Quennell. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1962.
- "Oliver Goldsmith." http://www.theatredatabase.com/18th_century/oliver_goldsmith_001.html.
- "Oliver Goldsmith." <http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/goldsmith001.html>. Accessed 21 August 2009.
- http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Oliver_Goldsmith
- <http://www.gutenberg.net/etext/18917>

Timeline of Major Events and Texts

Year	Major Events	Year	Major Texts
		1634	Milton, <i>Comus</i> (performed)
		1637	Milton, <i>Lycidas</i>
		1639	Thomas Fuller, <i>The History of the Holy War</i>
1640	Long Parliament summoned		
1642	Start of Civil war between Parliamentarians (Roundheads) and Royalists (Cavaliers); Theatres closed by order of Parliament		
1644	Victory of Parliamentary army		
		1644	John Milton, <i>Areopagitica</i>
		1642	Sir Thomas Browne <i>Religio Medici</i>
1646	Charles surrenders to Scots	1646	Richard Crashaw, <i>Steps to the Temple</i>
1647	Members of the New Model Army take part in the Putney debates to form a new constitution for England	1647	Abraham Cowley, <i>The Mistress</i>
1648	Treaty of Westphalia ends Thirty Years' War	1648	Robert Herrick, <i>Hesperides</i>
1649	Trial and execution of Charles I	1649	To Lucasta, Going to the Warres by Richard Lovelace
1650	Charles II flees to Scotland and is proclaimed King	1650	Marvell, <i>An Horation Ode</i> ; Vaughan, <i>Silex Scintillans</i>
		1651	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>
1653	After his campaigns in England and Scotland, Oliver Cromwell becomes 'Lord Protector'		
		1656	Cowley, <i>Pindarique Odes</i>
1658	Death of Cromwell	1658-67	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i>
1660	Restoration of Charles II to the throne; opening of theatres	1660	Theatres open. Dryden, <i>Astrae Redux</i> Samuel Pepys begins his diary. This keeps a record of all the major historical events of England till 1669.

1665	Plague in London. Plague was a recurrent problem of 17 th century, a result of the poor civic condition of the city.		
1666	City of London is destroyed by the Great Fire. The fire raged for three days, destroying most of the medieval architectures.		
		1667	Dryden, <i>Annus Mirabilis</i> Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i>
		1671	Milton, <i>Paradise Regained</i> and <i>Samson Agonistes</i>
		1675	The well-acclaimed play of Wycherley (1641-1715), <i>The Country Wife</i> , is enacted. His other important play is <i>The Plain Dealer</i> that was presented in the following year.
		1677	Dryden, <i>All for Love</i> , the famous adaptation of a Shakespearean tragedy.
		1678	John Bunyan, <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i>
1681	Lord Shaftesbury or Lord Ashely, a founder of the Whig party is tried for high treason. He was later acquitted.	1681	First part of Dryden's <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i> is published. The second part is published in the next year.
1685	Death of Charles II and accession of James II. James Scott or the First Duke of Monmouth leads a rebellion to oppose the succession of James II. He was defeated and beheaded.		
		1687	Newton's <i>Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica</i>
1688	'Glorious Revolution': James II flees and William III and Mary II succeed. This event is also known as the Bloodless Revolution. Roman Catholicism was permanently rejected and the Parliament was established as the ruling power of England.		

		1690	John Locke, <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>
1694	Death of Mary		
		1700	The most popular play of William Congreve (1670-1729), <i>Way of the World</i> , is enacted. His earlier plays include: <i>The Old Bachelor</i> (1693), <i>The Double Dealer</i> (1693), <i>Love for Love</i> (1695).
1702-1714	Reign of Anne		
		1702	England's first daily newspaper, The Daily Courant, established
		1703	Defoe : Hymn to the Pillory
		1704	The periodical Ladies' Diary established (up to 1840) Defoe: The Review, a periodical (up to 1713)
1705	Newton knighted by Queen Anne for "scientific achievement"		
		1706-1709	The London Gazette, ed. Richard Steele, et al.
1707	Union of England and Scotland		
1709	Copyright Act of 1709 passed which revised the previous copyright act and provided only limited property to publishers in place of earlier right of absolute property. It also introduced the new idea of "public property" which was to come into effect once the copyright period expired. Only published works, entered in the Stationer's Register, would be protected by copyright law.	1709	Defoe: <i>History of the Union of Great Britain</i>
		1709-1711	Richard Steele and Joseph Addison: The Tatler
		1711	Pope: Essay on Criticism (poetry) Swift: Argument against the Abolishing of Christianity

		1711-1712	Addison and Steele : The Spectator (revived in 1714)
		1712	Pope: <i>The Rape of the Locke</i> Woodes Rogers: <i>A Cruising Voyage around the World</i>
1713	Theft by servants made capital offence Britain gets contract to supply African slaves to Spanish colonies in America and henceforward becomes a major force in the slave trade	1713	Steele: The Guardian (periodical)
		1713-1714	Steele: The Englishman (periodical)
1714-1727	Reign of George I		
		1714	Mandeville: Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Value
1715	Jacobite Rising; rioting made a capital offence	1715	Addison: The Freeholder (periodical)
		1716	Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Town Eclogues (published)
		1716-1720	Defoe: Mercurius Politicus (periodical)
1718	Transportation Act: alternative to capital punishment, it transported convicts to colonies in America. Captain Woodes Rogers defeats large number of pirates in the Bahamas.		
1718-1720	England and allies at war against Spain		
		1719	Defoe: <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> and the <i>Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i>
		1719-1720	Eliza Haywood: Love in Excess (a novel)
1720	The South Sea Bubble: collapse of the South Sea Company, a joint-stock company that peaked in 1720 only to collapse under burden of debts. The Bubble Act, forbidding creation of joint		

	stock companies without the Royal Charter, was passed before the collapse to prevent competition and ensure investments for the South Sea Company.		
1722	Penal taxes imposed on Roman Catholics	1722	Daniel Defoe: <i>Journal of the Plague Year</i> Daniel Defoe: <i>Moll Flanders</i> Daniel Defoe: <i>Colonel Jacque</i> Eliza Haywood: <i>The British Recluse</i>
		1723	Eliza Haywood: <i>Idalia: or the Unfortunate Mistress</i>
		1724	Daniel Defoe: <i>General History of the Pirates</i> Daniel Defoe: <i>Roxana</i>
		1724-1726	Daniel Defoe: <i>Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain</i>
		1725	Execution of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker General, a major underworld figure who worked both for and against the law Daniel Defoe: <i>A True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the late Jonathan Wild</i> Daniel Defoe: <i>A New Voyage Round the World</i> Eliza Haywood: <i>Secret Histories, Novels and Poems</i> , 4 vols. Alexander Pope's edition of Shakespeare
		1725-1727	Daniel Defoe: <i>Complete English Tradesman</i>
		1726	Jonathan Swift: <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>
1727-1760	Reign of George II		
		1728	Henry Fielding: <i>Love in Several Masques</i> (drama)

			John Gay: <i>The Beggar's Opera</i> (drama) Elizabeth Singer Row: <i>Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living</i>
		1728-1743	Alexander Pope, <i>The Dunciad</i> (1728; <i>The New Dunciad</i> , 1742; complete, 1743) (poetry)
		1729	Eliza Haywood: <i>The Fair Hebrew</i> Jonathan Swift: <i>A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burden to their Parents or the Country</i>
		1730	Henry Fielding: <i>Tom Thumb</i> (drama), <i>Rape upon Rape</i> (drama), and <i>The Author's Farce</i> (drama) Eliza Haywood: <i>Love Letters on all Occasions</i> James Thomson: <i>The Seasons</i> (poetry)
		1732	Henry Fielding: <i>Covent Garden Tragedy</i> (drama), <i>Modern Husband</i> (drama), and <i>The Mock Doctor</i> (drama) William Hogarth's engraving series, <i>The Harlot's Progress</i> London Magazine established (periodical)
		1733	Alexander Pope: <i>Essay on Man</i> (poetry) Voltaire: <i>Letters Concerning the English Nation</i> (English trans.)
		1734	Henry Fielding: <i>Don Quixote in England</i> (drama)
		1735	Alexander Pope: <i>Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot</i> (poetry)
		1736	Henry Fielding: <i>Historical Register for the Year 1736</i> (drama) Eliza Haywood: <i>Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo</i> (reissued in 1741 as <i>The Unfortunate Princess</i>)

1737	Stage Licensing Act, which required permission from the Lord Chamberlain for any new performance. This was in response to Fielding's political satire, <i>Historical Register for the Year 1736</i>		
		1738	Elizabeth Singer Rowe, <i>Devout Exercises</i>
1739-1748	War between Britain and Spain		
1740	War of the Austrian Succession Food riots	1740	Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>
1740-1744	George Anson's circumnavigation of the globe (account published in 1748)		
		1741	Henry Fielding: <i>Shamela</i> Eliza Haywood: <i>Anti-Pamela</i> John Kelly: <i>Pamela's Conduct in High-Life</i> Samuel Richardson: <i>Pamela</i> , part II Samuel Richardson, <i>Familiar Letters</i>
		1741-1742	David Hume: <i>Essays Moral and Political</i>
		1742	Henry Fielding: <i>Joseph Andrews</i>
		1743	Henry Fielding: <i>Jonathan Wild</i>
		1744	Sarah Fielding: <i>David Simple</i> Samuel Johnson: <i>Life of Richard Savage</i>
		1744-1746	Eliza Haywood: <i>The Female Spectator</i> (periodical)
1745-1746	Jacobite Rebellion led by the Young Pretender defeated	1745-1746	Henry Fielding, <i>The True Patriot</i> (periodical)
		1747	Sarah Fielding: <i>Familiar Letters between the Characters in "David Simple"</i> Samuel Johnson: <i>Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language</i>

		1747-1766	<i>Biographica Britannia</i>
		1747-1748	Henry Fielding: <i>The Jacobites Journal</i> (5 Dec. 1747-5 Nov. 1748) (periodical) Samuel Richardson: <i>Clarissa</i>
1748	Henry Fielding appointed as Westminster magistrate	1748	David Hume: <i>Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding</i> Tobias Smollett: <i>Adventures of Roderick Random</i> Tobias Smollett's trans. of Le Sage's <i>Gil Blas</i> , the picaresque masterpiece
		1749	Henry Fielding: <i>Tom Jones</i> Sarah Fielding: <i>The Governess, or Little Female Academy</i> David Hartley: <i>Observations on Man</i>
		1750-1752	Samuel Johnson: <i>The Rambler</i> (periodical)
		1750-1757	<i>Journal britannique</i> , edited by Matthieu Maty in London, a journal which made English books available to European/French readers.
1751	Robert Clive captures Arcot in India	1751	Thomas Gray: <i>An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard</i> (poetry) David Hume: <i>An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals</i> Tobias Smollett: <i>The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle</i>
1752	Gregorian Calendar replaces the older Julian Calendar	1752	Henry Fielding: <i>Amelia</i> David Hume: <i>Political Discourses</i> Charlotte Lennox: <i>The Female Quixote</i>

1753	Marriage Act passed: this established the legal marriage in England, requiring parental consent and witnesses. British Museum established	1753	Charlotte Lennox: <i>Shakespeare Illustrated</i> Tobias Smollett: <i>Ferdinand Count Fathom</i> Jane Collier: <i>An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting</i> , a satirical conduct book on nagging.
		1753-1754	Samuel Richardson: <i>Sir Charles Grandison</i>
		1754	Jane Collier and Sarah Fielding: <i>The Cry: A new Dramatic Fable</i>
			John Duncombe: <i>The Feminead, or Female Genius</i> David Hume: <i>History of England</i> , vol. 1 1755 Henry Fielding (d. 1754): <i>Voyage to Lisbon</i> Eliza Haywood: <i>The Invisible Spy</i> Samuel Johnson: <i>A Dictionary of the English Language</i> Jean-Jacques Rousseau: <i>Discours sur l'Inégalité</i> Tobias Smollett: translation of Cervantes's <i>Don Quixote</i>
1756-1763	War between Britain and France		
1757	Victory at battle of Plassey consolidated East India Company's status in India	1757	Edmund Burke: <i>A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful</i> Sarah Fielding: <i>The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia</i>
1758	Halley's comet reappears, as predicted by Halley. A milestone in modern astronomy.	1758	Charlotte Lennox: <i>Henrietta</i>
1759	Annus Mirabilis: Year of wonders with a series of victories against the French	1759	Alexander Gerrard, <i>Essay on Taste</i> Oliver Goldsmith, <i>The Present State of Polite Learning in Europe</i> Samuel Johnson, <i>The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia</i>

			Voltaire, <i>Candide</i>
		1759-1767	Laurence Sterne, <i>Tristram Shandy</i>
1760-1820	Reign of George III		
		1762	Charlotte Lennox: <i>Sophia</i>
1763	Britain's colonial possessions had extended substantially in North America, South America and the Caribbean, in Africa and in India by this time	1763	Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (d. 1762): <i>Letters</i>
		1764	Oliver Goldsmith: <i>History of England</i> Jean-Jacques Rousseau: <i>Émile</i> Smollett: <i>The Present State of all Nations</i> Voltaire: <i>Dictionnaire philosophique</i> Horace Walpole : <i>The Castle of Otranto</i>
		1766	Oliver Goldsmith: <i>The Vicar of Wakefield</i> Thomas Pennant: <i>British Zoology</i> Smollett: <i>Travels through France and Italy</i>
		1767	Frances Sheridan: <i>The History of Nourjahad</i>
1768-1771	Captain James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific	1768-1771	First edition of the <i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i>
		1769	Smollett: <i>The Orientalist: A Volume of Tales after the Eastern Taste</i>
		1769-1790	Sir Joshua Reynolds: <i>Discourses</i>
1771	The House of Commons sought to ban the publication of parliamentary debates, but was opposed by Magistrates of the City of London	1771	Henry Mackenzie, <i>The Man of Feeling</i> John Millar, <i>Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks</i>

