

# FROM EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE TO 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

## MODULE 1

### JOHN DONNE

- John Donne was an English poet, satirist, lawyer and a cleric in the Church of England.
- He is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His works are noted for their strong, sensual style and include sonnets, love poetry, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons.
- He wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems. Donne is considered a master of the metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery.
- An example of this is his equation of lovers with saints in "The Canonization". A metaphysical conceit is an extended metaphor that makes an outstretched comparison between a person's spiritual faculties and a physical object in the world.
- Metaphysical poets are John Donne and Andrew Marvell.
- Donne is mentioned in T.S. Eliot's poem 'Whispers of Immortality'. *Biathanatos* (1608), *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), *The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World* (1611), *The Second Anniversary: Of the Progress of the Soul* (1612), *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), *Poems* (1633), *Juvenilia: or Certain Paradoxes and Problems* (1633), *LXXX Sermons* (1640), *Fifty Sermons* (1649), *Essays in Divinity* (1651), *Letters to severall persons of honour* (1651), *XXVI Sermons* (1661) etc.

#### A. Batter my Heart

- 'Batter my Heart' shows the lyrical voice's call upon God to take hold of him, while using deeply spiritual and physical arresting images.

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- The main themes of the poem are love, religion, and violence.
- This poem is an appeal to God and is pleading with Him not for mercy or clemency or benevolent aid but for a violent, almost brutal overmastering; thus, it implores God to perform actions that would usually be considered extremely sinful—from battering the speaker to actually raping him which, he says in the final line, is the only way he will ever be chaste.
- The poem’s metaphors (the speaker’s heart as a captured town, the speaker as a maiden betrothed to God’s enemy) work with its extraordinary series of violent and powerful verbs --batter, overthrow, bend, break, blow, burn, divorce, untie, break, take, imprison, enthrall, ravish--to create the image of God as an overwhelming, violent conqueror.
- The bizarre nature of the speaker’s plea finds its apotheosis in the paradoxical final couplet in which the speaker claims that only if God takes him prisoner can he be free and only if God ravishes him can he be chaste. The speaker begins by asking God to attack his heart as if it were the gates of a fortress town. This poem takes the form of a Petrarchan sonnet. The poem is composed of 14 lines, the three quatrains -groups of four lines-followed by a rhyming couplet -two lines- at the end, and the regular rhyme scheme.

### B. The Canonization

- ‘*The Canonization*’ was first published in 1633 in Donne’s posthumous collection *Songs and Sonnets*.
- It is a five stanza poem.
- It is separated into sets of nine lines. The lines rhyme in the pattern of abbaaabba, alternating as the poet saw fit from stanza to stanza.
- In regards to the meter, Donne was less consistent. There are moments in the text in which he uses iambic pentameter. This means that the lines are divided into five sets of two lines. The first of these is unstressed and the second stressed. There are other times in which Donne uses iambic tetrameter, meaning the lines contain four sets of two beats

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rather than five. Finally, a reader should take note of the last line of every stanza. Here Donne uses iambic trimeter, or a line with three sets of two beats.

- The poem begins with the speaker telling a listener that they need to be quiet and let him “love.” One will soon discover that love is the most important thing to the listener. He values this above all else.
- The speaker goes on to tell the listener to do anything but bother him about his love. This person could make fun of his quirks, get a job, go to school, or meditate on the face of the king. The speaker goes on to describe, in what sounds like a rant, how his love has not hurt anyone. It has not sunk ships, flooded fields, frozen out the spring, or given anyone the plague.
- It is harmless to all except the speaker and his lover for whom it is deeply beneficial. The speaker compares himself and his lover to a phoenix which lives and dies and lives again. They could get through anything and be remade.
- He also tells the listener that if they are unable to live as they want on earth then they’ll happily die. Once they’ve ascended to heaven they’ll become saints of “Love.” Their position might not afford them grand tombs or a place in history but their story will be told in sonnets and love songs.
- They will have the ability to look down on earth and see all the lovers praying to them. The speaker states that he knows they will be unhappy with what they see. The lovers on earth will not love in the correct way. This will enrage the couple.
- Metaphysical poetry has several unique features; unique metaphors, large and cosmic themes, absence of narrative, and philosophical ideas. Donne invented or originated many of these features in his poetry and he was a master of this type. Metaphysical poetry may be lyrical in its tone, but its driving force is not necessarily the emotion of the poet.

## 2. JOHN MILTON

- John Milton was born on 9<sup>th</sup> December; 1608. He was an English poet, pamphleteer and historian, considered the most significant English author after William Shakespeare.
- Milton is best known for *Paradise Lost*, widely regarded as the greatest epic poem in English. Together with '*Paradise Regained*' and '*Samson Agonistes*', it confirms Milton's reputation as one of the greatest English poets.

### A. 'Paradise Lost Book 9'

- In 'Paradise Lost Book 9' Eve tells the serpent that God has forbidden Man to eat from that tree, and she chooses to obey God. Satan, using the same sophistic reasoning he has used throughout the story tells Eve that God has tricked her and Adam.
- He has eaten of the tree and is not dead; neither will they die. It recreates the biblical story of the fall of man, starting with the first fall, that of a group of rebel angels in Heaven. Satan was one of God's most cherished and powerful angels, grows angry when God creates the Son and proclaims that Son as leader. It contains the climax of the action. The climax of 'Paradise Lost' is Man's first disobedience or the fall of Adam and Eve.
- Satan's palace is named Pandemonium. It means assembly of all demons. Book 9 opens with Milton's final invocation. The sun sets and night falls as Satan returns to the garden. He's been gone for about a week. The river the Tigris that flows underground and reemerges as a fountain in Paradise; Satan uses this river to get back into the garden. He decides to become a serpent to do something against Adam and Eve. Satan is waiting in the bushes for Eve; he had been hoping to find her alone and lo and behold his wish has come true. Eve addresses the fruit, saying it is quite powerful provided by Satan. She eats the fruit; or rather, she stuffs her face with it until she's full. Nature shudders as Eve eats death. It was forbidden fruit.

- They have sex for a while in some thicket, fall asleep, and then wake up as from unrest. The fruit is bad almost a drug and they're now waking up with a hangover. They spend the rest of the day accusing or blaming each other.

B. Lycidas

- Lycidas is a **pastoral elegy**. It was first appeared in a 1638 collection of elegies in English and Latin entitled *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago*.
- Lycidas serves as Milton's commemoration of his Cambridge college mate, Edward King, who drowned when his ship sank off the coast of Wales in August 1637. These poems have a tradition in which the poet gives the dead person whom they're mourning a name from the works of Virgil, Theocritus or other similar poets.
- It is also known as monody which is in the form of a pastoral elegy written in 1637 to lament the accidental death by drowning of Milton's friend Edward King who was a promising young man of great intelligence.
- The elegy takes its name from the subject matter not its form. The poem is 193 lines in length and is irregularly rhymed.

### 3. JOHN DRYDEN

- John Dryden was born on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1631, Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England—died on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1700, London.
- He is an English poet, dramatist and literary critic who so dominated the literary scene of his day that it came to be known as the Age of Dryden.
- Dryden's longest poem to date, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), was a celebration of two victories by the English fleet over the Dutch and the Londoners' survival of the Great Fire of 1666.
- In 1668 Dryden published *Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay*, a leisurely discussion between four contemporary writers of whom Dryden (as Neander) is one.

A. Mac Flecknoe

- Mac Flecknoe; or A Satyr upon the True-Blew-Protestant Poet, T.S.
- It is an extended verse satire by John Dryden, written in the mid-1670s and published anonymously and apparently without Dryden's authority in 1682.
- It consists of a devastating attack on the Whig playwright Thomas Shadwell.
- The basis of the satire which represents Shadwell as a literary dunce and it is the disagreement between him and Dryden over the quality of Ben Jonson's wit. This comic lampoon was both the first English mock-heroic poem and the immediate ancestor of Alexander Pope's '*The Dunciad*'.
- **Thomas Shadwell was an** English dramatist and poet laureate, known for his broad comedies of manners and as the butt of John Dryden's satire.
- Shadwell's friendship with Dryden ended with the political crisis of 1678–79, when Shadwell espoused the Whig cause, producing *The Lancashire Witches*, which caused offense with its anti-Catholicism. When Dryden was removed from the laureateship and the position of historiographer royal during the Glorious Revolution (1688–89), Shadwell succeeded him. He was a papist propaganda and attacks upon the Anglican clergy.
- The poem illustrates Shadwell as the heir to a kingdom of poetic dullness, represented by his association with Richard Flecknoe, an earlier poet already satirized by Andrew Marvell and disliked by Dryden, although the poet does not use belittling techniques to satirize him. Multiple allusions in the satire to 17th-century literary works, and to classic Greek and Roman literature, demonstrate Dryden's complex approach and his mastery over the mock-heroic style.
- Dryden uses the mock-heroic through his use of the heightened language of the epic to treat the trivial subjects such as poorly written and largely dismissible poetry. The juxtaposition of the lofty style with unexpected nouns such as

'dullness' provides an ironic contrast and makes the satiric point by the obvious disparity. In this, it works at the verbal level, with the language being carried by compelling rhythm and rhyme.

#### 4. THOMAS GRAY

- Thomas Gray was born on 26th December 1716 and died in 1771.
- He was the dominant poetic figure in the mid-18th century and a precursor of the Romantic Movement.
- Gray died at 55 and was buried in the country churchyard at Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, celebrated in his "Elegy".
- By 1752, Gray had begun work on his Pindaric Odes.
- In both "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" the imagery is largely inspired by Gray's early romantic love of wild and rugged landscape, mountains and torrents. On 26th December 1754, aged 38, he sent "The Progress of Poesy" to Thomas Wharton.
- "The Bard" was partly written in the first three months of 1755 and finished in May 1757, when Gray was inspired by a concert given at Cambridge by John Parry, the blind harper.
- At this time, Walpole was setting up his printing-press at Strawberry Hill, and he begged Gray to let him start his press with the two odes. Gray agreed and the two odes were printed in a slim volume at the Strawberry Hill press and published by Dodsley in August 1757. The poems themselves were odes in the strict Pindaric form and Gray hoped that they rather than the celebrated "Elegy" would form his crowning achievement. In "The Progress of Poesy" he set out to glorify the poet's high calling with every adornment of rhetoric and eloquence.
- In "The Bard", he chose the genre of the historical poem to depict a traditional episode during the final conquest of Wales. Unlike the rather private "A Long Story" or even the "Elegy", both these poems were very much intended for a public audience.
- The odes met with a mixed reception, they were praised and much discussed as well as criticized. Goldsmith reviewed them in the *Monthly Review* and Warburton and Garrick were enthusiastic. Gray was rather vexed, however, by the general complaints about their obscurity, although he took very good-naturedly the parodies published in 1760 by Colman and Lloyd called "An Ode to Obscurity" and "An Ode to Oblivion".

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- According to Mason, Gray meant his bard to declare that poets should never be wanting to denounce vice in spite of tyrants. The odes are clear examples of Gray's adherence to a patriotic and Whiggish programme of national freedom and eminence. Unquestionably they are difficult poems and were still more difficult without the aid of the footnotes which Gray refused to provide in the original edition.

### Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

- An elegy is a poem which laments the dead.
- It was first published in 1751. Gray may have begun writing the poem in 1742, shortly after the death of his close friend Richard West.
- Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is noteworthy in that it mourns the death not of great or famous people but of common men.
- The speaker of this poem sees a country churchyard at sunset which impels him to meditate on the nature of human mortality.
- It is also a symbol of death; as nightfall indicates the end of day, death indicates the end of life.
- The poem was written at the end of the Augustan Age and at the beginning of the Romantic period and the poem has characteristics associated with both literary periods.
- On the one hand, it has the ordered, balanced phrasing and rational sentiments of Neoclassical poetry.
- On the other hand, it tends toward the emotionalism and individualism of the Romantic poets; most importantly, it idealizes and elevates the common man.
- Death the over reaching is the main theme in Elegy Written in a country Churchyard, is the inevitable fate of humanity regardless of wealth, power and status.
- Death the overreaching is the main theme in 'Elegy Written in a country Churchyard', is the inevitable fate of humanity regardless of wealth, power and status. Once the poet visited a country Churchyard where he saw the graves of the forefathers of the village seeing their graves, he was moved to sympathy for them and set to writing this poem in their honour. Thus the poem was inspired by the poet's visit to a country Churchyard, so the title is 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard'. Gray's elegy deals with the short and simple annals of the poor.
- In fact it gives a complete picture of the life and history of the poor people living in the villages. They worked hard on their fields all day. When it was evening they walked

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wearily home with their team of Oxen. When their children and wives saw them coming, they cook food for them. But they are dead now and can no longer to enjoy homely joys. They can no longer to enjoy the sweet smell of the morning breeze and they can no longer to enjoy the swallows.

- The house fire no longer to burns for them. And their wives and children no longer to wait for them in the evening. These people were strong study fellows. They could plough the hardest ground. Even the biggest tree fell to the strong stroke of their axes. Some of them were capable of ruling an empire, and some of them were great musicians. But because of their poverty, they did not get the opportunity to prove their work.
- Some of these people were brave and fearless like Hampden. Some of them were well learned like Milton. And some of them were as heroic as Cromwell. But they did not get the opportunity to show their worth. Those who ambitious to become famous shed a lot of blood to rise to power. Because these people had no such ambitions, they were saved from living a life of sinful pleasures.
- They lived away from the madding crowd of corrupt people. They lived a peaceful and contended life. These people are worthy of our respect.

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

- William Shakespeare is widely considered the greatest dramatist of all time as well as the most influential writer in the history of the English language. He originated hundreds of words and phrases that English speaker's use to this day.
- William Shakespeare was a renowned English poet, playwright, and actor born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. His birthday is most commonly celebrated on 23rd April which is also believed to be the date he died in 1616.
- Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564.
- Shakespeare wrote 39 plays.
- Shakespeare's first play was 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona'.
- Shakespeare's last play was 'The Two Noble Kinsmen'.
- Shakespeare's most-produced play is 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.
- .It is a comedy play.
- It is written in between 1600 and 1602, England.  
A.Twelfth Night, or What You Will

- The setting is the mythical land of Illyria -Illyria is a real place, corresponding to the coast of present-day Albania—but Twelfth Night is clearly set in a fictional kingdom rather than a real one.
  - The main protagonist is Viola.
  - Major conflict is Viola is in love with Orsino, who is in love with Olivia, who is in love with Viola's male disguise, Cesario. This love triangle is complicated by the fact that neither Orsino nor Olivia knows that Viola is really a woman.
  - The climax is Sebastian and Viola are reunited, and everyone realizes that Viola is really a woman
  - Falling Action Viola prepares to marry Orsino; Malvolio is freed and vows revenge; everyone else goes off to celebrate
  - Themes are love as a cause of suffering; the uncertainty of gender; the folly of ambition.
  - The main plot is **a fast-paced romantic comedy with several interwoven plots of romance, mistaken identities and practical jokes**. Separated from her twin brother Sebastian in a shipwreck, Viola disguises herself as a boy, calls herself Cesario, and becomes a servant to the Duke Orsino.
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## B. HAMLET

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- *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*- its full title.
  - Genre-Tragedy, revenge tragedy.
  - It is Shakespeare's longest play, with 29,551 words.
  - It was first published in 1603.
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- Hamlet is shocked to find his mother already remarried to his Uncle Claudius, the dead king's brother and Hamlet is even more surprised when his father's ghost appears and declares that he was murdered. Exact dates are unknown, but scholars agree that Shakespeare published *Hamlet* between 1601 and 1603.
  - *Hamlet's* central characters are Hamlet himself, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Horatio. But only Horatio survives when the curtain falls at the end of Shakespeare's play.
  - Another central character, Hamlet's father King Hamlet appears only as a ghost — he has been dead since before the play began.
  - Hamlet's originally acts mad to fool people into think he is harmless while probing his father's death and Claudius's involvement. Early on, the bumbling Polonius says "though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (Act II, Scene II). Polonius's assertion is ironic because he is right and wrong. Polonius

falsely believes Hamlet's madness stems from Hamlet's love of Ophelia. To notice a method behind the crazy talk was impressive of Polonius.

- But as the play progresses, Hamlet's behavior become more erratic. His acting mad seems to cause Hamlet to lose his grip on reality. The circumstances he has to manage emotionally are difficult, to say the least. Succumbing to physical violence when under extreme stress shows that Hamlet has deeper-set issues than merely acting mad.
- The presence of only two named female characters says something about the role of women within Hamlet. The death of both women also indicates a social commentary.
- Hamlet is at his most agitated state when talking to either female character. Although he cares for both, he's suspicious, as well. In the case of his mother, Gertrude, Hamlet feels she remarried too quickly and that her remarriage means she didn't love her first husband all that much. The idea freaks Hamlet out.
- Then there's Ophelia. From the way the characters talk, we know Hamlet has been wooing Ophelia for some time. But after Hamlet starts to act mad, it doesn't take long for him to assume that Ophelia is in cahoots with Gertrude, Claudius, and Polonius. In reality, Ophelia obeyed her father and her monarch.
- In both cases, Hamlet feels as if each woman has let him down, respectively. He's critical and quick to point out flaws though puns and backhanded comments. Ophelia is usually viewed as a true victim, while Gertrude's role is interpreted with more flexibility. In case, the role and treatment of women in Hamlet is essential to discuss with an open mind.