The morning star of song who made,

His music heard below,

Don Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath,

Preluded those melodious bursts that fill,

The spacious times of Great Elizabeth,

With sounds that echo still
Geoffrey Chaucer, 1340-1400

Before William Shakespeare, Geoffrey Chaucer was the pre-eminent English poet, and he remains in the top tier of the English canon. He was also the most significant poet to write in Middle English. Chaucer was born in the early 1340s to a fairly rich, well-to-do, though not aristocratic family. His father, John Chaucer, was a vintner and deputy to the king's butler. His family's financial success came from work in the wine and leather businesses, and they had considerable inherited property in London. Little information exists about Chaucer's education, but his writings demonstrate a close familiarity with a number of important books of his contemporaries and of earlier times (such as Boethius's The Consolation of Philosophy). Chaucer likely was fluent in several languages, including French, Italian, and Latin. Sons of wealthy London merchants could receive good educations at this time, and there is reason to believe that, if Chaucer did not attend one of the schools on Thames Street near his boyhood home, then he was at least well-educated at home. Certainly his work showcases a passion for reading a huge range of literature, classical and modern.

Chaucer first appears in public records in 1357 as a member of the house of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster. This was a conventional arrangement in which sons of middle-class households were placed in royal service so that they could obtain a courtly education. Two years later, Chaucer served in the army under Edward III and was captured during an unsuccessful offensive at Reims, although he was later ransomed. Chaucer served under a number of diplomatic missions.

By 1366 Chaucer had married Philippa Pan who had been in service with the Countess of Ulster. Chaucer married well for his position, for Philippa Chaucer received pension from the queen consort of Edward III. Philippa's sister Katherine de Roet was John of Gaunt's mistress for twenty years before becoming the Duke's wife. Through this connection, John of Gaunt was Chaucer's "kinsman." Chaucer himself secured an annuity as yeoman of the king and was listed as one of the king's esquires.

Chaucer's first published work was The Book of the Duchess, a poem of over 1,300 lines, supposed to be an elegy for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, addressed to her widower, the Duke. For this first of his important poems, which was published in 1370, Chaucer used the dream-vision form, a genre made popular by the highly influential 13th-century French poem of courtly love, the Roman de la Rose, which Chaucer translated into English. Throughout the following decade, Chaucer continued with his diplomatic career, traveling to Italy for negotiations to open a Genoa port to Britain as well as military negotiations with Milan. During his missions to Italy, Chaucer encountered the work of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, which were later to have profound influence upon his own writing. In 1374 Chaucer was appointed comptroller of the customs and subsidy of wool, skins, and tanned hides for the Port of London, his first position away from the British court. Chaucer's only major work during this period was House of Fame, a poem of around 2,000 lines in dream-vision form, which ends so abruptly that some scholars consider it unfinished.

In October 1385, Chaucer was appointed a justice of the peace for Kent, and in August 1386 he became knight of the shire for Kent. Around the time of his wife's death in 1387, Chaucer moved to Greenwich and later to Kent. Changing political circumstances
eventually led to Chaucer falling out of favor with the royal court and leaving Parliament, but when Richard II became King of England, Chaucer regained royal favor.

During this period Chaucer used writing primarily as an escape from public life. His works included Parlement of Foules, a poem of 699 lines. This work is a dream-vision for St. Valentine’s Day that makes use of the myth that each year on that day the birds gather before the goddess Nature to choose their mates. This work was heavily influenced by Boccaccio and Dante.

Chaucer's next work was Troilus and Criseyde, which was influenced by The Consolation of Philosophy, which Chaucer himself translated into English. Chaucer took some the plot of Troilus from Boccaccio's Filostrato. This 8,000-line rime-royal poem recounts the love story of Troilus, son of the Trojan king Priam, and Criseyde, widowed daughter of the deserter priest Calkas, against the background of the Trojan War. (Compare Shakespeare's version in Troilus and Cressida.)

The Canterbury Tales secured Chaucer's literary reputation. It is his great literary accomplishment, a compendium of stories by pilgrims traveling to the shrine of Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. Chaucer introduces each of these pilgrims in vivid, brief sketches in the General Prologue and intersperses the twenty-four tales with short dramatic scenes with lively exchanges. Chaucer did not complete the full plan for the tales, and surviving manuscripts leave some doubt as to the exact order of the tales that remain. However, the work is sufficiently complete to be considered a unified book rather than a collection of unfinished fragments. The Canterbury Tales is a lively mix of a variety of genres told by travelers from all aspects of society. Among the genres included are courtly romance, fabliaux, saint's biography, allegorical tale, beast fable, and medieval sermon.

Information concerning Chaucer's descendants is not fully clear. It is likely that he and Philippa had two sons and two daughters. Thomas Chaucer died in 1400; he was a large landowner and political officeholder, and his daughter, Alice, became Duchess of Suffolk. Little is known about Lewis Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer's youngest son. Of Chaucer's two daughters, Elizabeth became a nun, while Agnes was a lady-in-waiting for the coronation of Henry IV in 1399. Public records indicate that Chaucer had no descendants living after the fifteenth century.

**The Age of Chaucer (1340-1400)**

**Introduction:** For a profound and comprehensive study of an author's literary work is required, among other things, a thorough understanding of the age which produced and nurtured him. Without acquaintance with the historical context our evaluation and apprehension of literature is bound to be lop-sided, if not altogether warped and garbled. Every man is a child of his age. He is influenced by it though, if he is a great man, he may influence it also. A great writer like Shakespeare or Chaucer is generally said to be "not of an age, but of all ages." But, in spite of his universal appeal, the fact remains that even he could not have escaped "the spirit of the age" in which he lived and moved and had his being.
So, for understanding him and his works in their fullness it is imperative to familiarize ourselves with the influential currents of thought and feeling and sensibility (not to speak of the socio-politico-economic conditions) obtaining in the times in which he flourished. Probably the reverse of it is also true: we may acquire some understanding of these tendencies and currents, the ethos of the age, through the writer himself. Emphasizing this point, W. H. Hudson says: "Every man belongs to his race and age; no matter how marked his personality, the spirit of his race and age finds expression through him" The same critic expresses the relationship between history and literature. He says, "Ordinary English history is our nation's biography, its literature is its autobiography; in the one we read the story of its actions and practical achievements; in the other the story of its intellectual and moral development." Though Chaucer transcends the limits of his generation and creates something which is of interest to the future generation too, yet he represents much of what his age stands for. And therein lies his greatness.

Chaucer's Age—Both Medieval and Modern: - Chaucer's age-like most historical ages-was an age of transition. This transition implies a shift from the medieval to the modern times, the emergence of the English nation from the "dark ages" to the age of enlightenment. Though some elements associated with modernity were coming into prominence, yet mostly and essentially the age was medieval-unscientific, superstitious, chivalrous, religious-minded, and "backward" in most respects. The fourteenth century, as J. M. Manly puts it in The Cambridge History of English Literature, was "a dark epoch in the history of England". However, the silver lining of modernity did succeed in piercing, here and there, the thick darkness of ignorance and superstition. In fact, the age of Chaucer was not stagnant (stationary): it was inching its way steadily and surely to the dawn of the Renaissance and the Reformation, which were yet a couple of centuries ahead. Robert Dudely French observes: "It was an age of restlessness, amid the ferment (excitement) of new life that Chaucer lived and wrote. Old things and new appear side by side upon his pages, and in his poetry we can study the essential spirit, both of the age that was passing and of the age that was to come." What are these "old things and new:" and what made the age restless? The answer will be provided if we discuss the chief events and features of the age.

"The Hundred Years' War": - The period between 1337 and 1453 is marked by a long succession of skirmishes between France and England, which are collectively known as the "Hundred Years War". Under the able and warlike guidance of King Edward III (1327-1377) England won a number of glorious victories, particularly at Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. The French might beaten and Edward was once acknowledged even the king of France. But later, after his demise and with the succession of the incompetent Richard II, the English might waned and the French were able to secure tangible gains. The war influenced the English character in the following two ways: the fostering of nationalistic sentiment; and the demolition of some social barriers between different classes of society.

It was obviously natural for the conflict to have engendered among the English a strong feeling of national solidarity and patriotic fervour. But, as Compton-Rickett reminds us, "the fight is memorable not merely for stimulating the pride of English men." It is important, too, for the second reason given above. It was not the aristocracy alone which secured the victory for England. The aristocracy was vitally supported by the lowly archers whose feats with the bow were a force to reckon with. Froissart, the French chronicler, referring to the English archers says: "They, let fly their arrows so wholly
together and so thick that it seemed snow". The recognition of the services of the humble archers brought in a note of democratisation in the country, and the age-old "iron curtain" between the nobility and the proletariat developed a few chinks. This was an advance from medievalism to modernism.

**The Age of Chivalry:** Nevertheless, the dawn of the modern era was yet far away. Compton-Rickett observes: "Chaucer's England is 'Still characteristically medieval, and nowhere is the conservative feeling more strongly marked than in the persistence of chivalry. This strange amalgam of love, war, and religion so far from exhibiting any signs of decay, reached perhaps its fullest development at this time. More than two centuries were to elapse before it was finally killed-by the satirical pen of Cervantes."

The Knight in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales is typical of his kind. Even the tale he narrates concerns the adventures of two true knights-Arcite and Palamon.

**The Black Death, Peasants' Revolt, and Labour Unrest:** In the age of Chaucer most people were victims of poverty, uncleanliness, and filth (epidemic). Even well-educated nobles eyed soap with suspicion, and learned physicians often forbade bathing as harmful for health. That is why England was often visited by epidemics, especially plague. The severest attack of this dread epidemic came in 1348. It was called "the Black Death" because black, knotty boils appeared on the bodies of the hopeless victims. It is estimated that about a million human beings were swept away by this epidemic. That roughly makes one-third of the total population of England at that time.

One immediate consequence of this pestilence was the acute shortage of working hands. The socio-economic system of England lay hopelessly paralysed. Labourers and villains who happened to survive started demanding much higher wages. But neither their employers nor the king nor Parliament was ready to meet these demands. A number of severe regulations were passed asking workers to work at the old rates of payment. This occasioned a great deal of resentment which culminated in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 during the reign of Richard II. The peasants groaning under the weight of injustice and undue official severity were led to London by the Kentish priest John Ball. He preached the dignity of labour and asked the nobles:

**When Adam delved and Eve span**

**Who was then the gentleman?**

The king, overawed (pressurized) by the mass of peasantry armed with such weapons as hatchets, spades, and pitchforks, promised reform but later shelved his promise. The "Peasants' Revolt" is, according to Compton-Rickett, "a dim foreshadowing of those industrial troubles that lay in the distant future." Chaucer in his Nun's Priest's Tale refers to Jack Straw who with Wat Tylar raised the banner of revolt.

R. K. Root thus sums up the significance of this uprising: "This revolt, suppressed by the courage and good judgment of the boy King, Richard II, though barren of any direct and immediate result, exerted a lasting influence on the temper of the lower classes, fostering in them a spirit of independence which made them no longer a negligible quantity in the life of the nation". This was another line of progress towards modernism.

**The Church:** In the age of Chaucer, the Church became a hotbed of profligacy, corruption, and materialism. The overlord of the Church, namely, the Pope of Rome,
himself had ambitions and aptitudes other than spiritual. W. H. Hudson maintains in this connection: “Of spiritual zeal and energy very little was now left in the country. The greater prelates heaped up wealth, and lived in a godless and worldly way; the rank and file of the clergy were ignorant and careless; the mendicant friars were notorious for their greed and profligacy.” John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, whom he calls “moral Gower” (on account of his didactic tendency) thus pictures the condition of the Church in his Prologue to Confessio Amantis:

Lo, thus ye-broke is cristes Folde:
Whereof the flock without guide
Devoured is on every side,
In lacks of hem that been urrware
In chepheredes, which her wit beware
Upon the world in other halve.

Another contemporary has to say this about the priests “Our priests are now become blind, dark and beclouded. There is neither shaven crown on their head, nor modesty in their words, nor temperance in their food, nor even chastity in their deeds.” If this was the condition of the ecclesiasts, we can easily imagine that of the laity. Well does Chaucer say in the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales: “If gold rust, what iron shall do?” Chaucer himself was indifferent to any reform, but his character-sketches of the ecclesiastical figures in The Canterbury Tales leave no uncertainty regarding the corruption which had crept into the ecclesiastical rank and file. The round-bellied epicurean monk, the merry and devil-may-care friar, and the unscrupulous pardoner are fairly typical of his age.

This widespread and deep-rooted corruption had already begun to provoke the attention of some reformists the most prominent of whom was John Wyclif (1320-1384) who has been called “the morning star of the Reformation.” He started what is called the Lollards's Movement. His aim was to eradicate the evil and corruption which had become a part and parcel of the Church. He sent his "poor priests" to all parts of the country for spreading his message of simplicity, purity, and austerity. His self-appointed task was to take Christianity back to its original purity and spirituality. He exhorted people not to have anything to do with the corrupt ministers of the Pope and to have faith only in the Word of God as enshrined in the Bible. To make the teaching of the Bible accessible to the common masses he with the help of some of his disciples translated the Bible from Latin into the native tongue. He also wrote a number of tracts embodying his teaching. His translation of the Bible was, in the words of W. H. Hudson, “the first translation of the scriptures into any modern vernacular tongue.” That Chaucer was sympathetic to the Lollards' Movement is evident from the element of idealization which characterizes his portrait of the "Poor Parson" in the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales. The movement launched by Wyclif and his followers in the age of Chaucer was an adumbration of the Reformation which was to come in the sixteenth century to wean England from the papal influence.

**Literary and Intellectual Tendencies:** Latin and French were the dominant languages in fourteenth-century England. However, in the later half of the century English came to its own, thanks to the sterling work done by Chaucer and some others like Langland, Gower, and Wyclif who wrote in English and wrote well. The English language itself was in a fluid state of being, and was divided into a number of dialects.
The Universities of Cambridge and Oxford employed Latin as the medium of instruction. Latin was also the language of the fashionable who cultivated it as a social necessity. We recall here Chaucer's Summoner who "wolde speke no word but Latyn" after having drunk "well"! The contribution of Chaucer towards the standardization and popularization of the English language cannot be over-estimated. As regards his contribution to English poetry, he has well been characterised as the father of English poetry. No doubt there were other poets contemporaneous with him Langland, Gower, and a few more, but Chaucer is as head and shoulders among them as Shakespeare is among the Elizabethan dramatists. He stands like a majestic oak in a shrubbery. The English prose, too, was coming to itself. Mandeville's travelogues and Wyclif's reformative pamphlets give one a feeling that the English prose was on its way to standardization and popular acclamation.

In another way, too, the age of Chaucer stands between the medieval and the modern life. There was in this age some sort of a minor Renaissance. The dawn of the real Renaissance in England was yet about two centuries ahead, yet in the age of Chaucer there are signs of growing influence of the ancients on native literature. Chaucer's own poetry was influenced by the Italian writer Boccaccio (1313-75) and to a lesser extent, Petrarch (1304-74). The frameworks of Boccaccio's Decameron and of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales are almost similar. However, it is somewhat doubtful if Chaucer had read the Italian writer. It was through the work of the two above-named Italian writers that humanism made its way into English intellectual culture. Well does Compton-Rickett observe: "Chaucer's world is medieval; but beneath his medievalism the leaven of the Renaissance is already at work."

**Literary Influences on Chaucer's Poetry**

It is convenient to divide Chaucer's literary output into three stages, which show three distinct influences on the development of his poetry:

**The French Period:** Chaucer's early poetry was directly influenced by contemporary French poetry. He composed in his wild youthful days a number of love poems, none of which have survived, but which gave him some fame as a poet. It is supposed that A B C a prayer to the Virgin, is the first of his extant poems. He translated some portions of the famous French work Roman de la Rose, an elaborate love allegory. Its translation helped Chaucer to fashion his style. He cultivated an allegorical style. He learnt from French poetry the charm of fluent simplicity, complete correspondence of words and thoughts, constant restraint in the expression of emotion and satire. Chaucer wrote in 1369 The Book of Duchesse on the death of Blanche, John of Gaunt's wife. It is an allegory in the manner of reigning French school, but Chaucer gave his elegy freshness and seeming sincerity.

**The Italian Period (1372-1384):** Chaucer's Italian period is characterised by variety and new technical innovations in his poetry. During his visits to Italy Chaucer saw a new world of art and literature which had reached an astonishing excellence. He read Dante's Divine Comedia, Petrarch's Sonnets and Boccaccio's Decameron. In Italy he saw the dawn of Renaissance, which, to some extent, influenced his poetry which is secular and humanistic in spirit. Moody and Lovett remark: "The unquenchable curiosity of the men of Renaissance was his, more than a century before the Renaissance really began to affect England. He, too, shared their thirst for expression. The great books he had come
to know in Italy gave him no peace until he should equal or surpass them." The important works which he produced in emulation of the Italian masters are the House of Fame, The Parliament of Fowls, Troylus and Cryseyde and The Legend of Good Women.

The House of Fame (1382) is a dream allegory, which shows Dante's influence. It is remarkable for the rare combination of lofty thought and simple, homely language, and the presentation of genuine Chaucerian humour. The Legend of Good Women (1385), the unfinished work, was originally planned to contain nineteen tales of virtuous women of antiquity. But in the extant volume it consists of eight accomplished tales and the ninth only begun. It is conspicuous for its masterly narrative, particularly in the portion dealing with Cleopatra, and the skillful handling of the heroic couplet in English for the first time. Troylus and Cryseyde is founded on Boccaccio's Filostrato. It marks a significant development in Chaucer's poetic career. He uses his material very freely and with great artistic ability. In it he "reflects the ideals of his own age and society, and so gives to the whole story a dramatic force and beauty which it had never known before." The characters of Cryseyde and Pandarus reveal a new subtlety of psychological development, and reveal Chaucer's growing insight into human motives. Troylus and Cryseyde is considered as Chaucer's best narrative work. The rhyme royal stanza is used with much deftness and beauty. Chaucer also wrote the Story of Griselda (The Clerk's Tale) and The Story of Constance during this period.

The English Period (1384-1390): In this period Chaucer "becomes independent, relying upon himself entirely even for the use which he puts his own borrowed themes." A few smaller poems which belong to this period are Former Age, Fortune, Truth, Gentilesse and The Lach of Stedfastnesse, but the crowning and monumental work of this period is The Canterbury Tales.

The Plan of 'The Canterbury Tales': The plan of the Tales was probably adopted soon after 1386, in which year Chaucer composed the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women. They are not, and cannot be looked on as a whole. Many were written independently, and they fitted into the framework of the Prologue. Many which he intended to write were never written. The whole existing body of the Tales was completed before the close of 1390. The composition of the General Prologue to the tales is commonly associated with 1387.

The manner in which Chaucer knitted the tales together was very simple, and likely to please the English people. The Canterbury Tales is a collection of twenty-four tales in verse and prose, some incomplete, told as entertainment by a group of pilgrims riding from London to the shrine of Thomas A. Beckett at Canterbury. Chaucer had probably made the pilgrimage to Canterbury in the spring of 1385 or 1387, and was led by this experience to the framework in which he set his pictures of life. For the general idea of the tales Chaucer was indebted to Boccaccio, but "in nearly every important feature the work is essentially English". To realise his purpose Chaucer grouped around the jovial host of the Tabard Inn twenty-nine pilgrims, including himself, of every class of society in England. He sat them on horseback to ride to Canterbury and home again, intending to make each of them tell tales. But the company never reaches Canterbury, and only twenty-three pilgrims get their turn. Some tales are left unfinished. There are two prose tales, Chaucer's own Tale of Melibeus and The Parson's Tale. The rest of the tales are composed in the decasyllabic or heroic couplet.
In the famous Prologue, Chaucer makes us acquainted with the various characters of his drama. The twenty-nine characters are carefully chosen types, who represent various segments of contemporary society. Endowed with creative imagination Chaucer individualised his characters. All of them are fully realized figures with an importance of their own. F. N. Robinson remarks about Chaucer's characters: "Chaucer's pilgrims are far more vivid and personal than the medieval figures with which they have been compared." William J. Long also remarks: "Chaucer is the first English writer to bring the atmosphere of romantic interest about the men and women and the daily work of one's own world, which is the aim of nearly all modern literature.

Chaucer assigned to a pilgrim a tale suited to his character and vocation. The tales are of astonishing variety and give us a true and faithful picture of differing aspects of medieval life in England. Stopford A. Brooke remarks: "The Tales themselves take in the whole range of the poetry and the life of the middle ages; the legend of the saint, the romance of the knight, the wonderful fables of the traveller, the coarse tale of common life, the love story, the allegory, the animal-fable and the satirical lay."

Chaucer emerges as the first great story-teller in verse in The Canterbury Tales. All the best tales are told easily, gracefully and sincerely. The tales are remarkable for the dramatic quality. F. N. Robinson says: "In fact the pilgrimage is a continuous and lively drama, in which the stories contribute to the action. Because of this sustained dramatic interest and the vivid reality of characters, as well as for the inclusive representation of English society, The Canterbury Tales has been called a Human comedy. The implied comparison with Balzac's great series of stories of the life of modern France is not inappropriate."

In The Canterbury Tales Chaucer made English into a true means of poetry and literature. He developed the resources of English language for literary use, and set an example which was followed by a long line of poets.

In Tales Chaucer appears as a great humorist who has a consummate knowledge of human life. His humour is rich, tolerant, profound and sane, devoid of spite and cynicism. He also had a keen sense of pathos in human life. He can bring tears into our eyes, and he can make us smile or be sad as he pleases.

The Canterbury Tales is the first finest poetic testament of England. It has coherence and imaginative drive of a great work of literature, and presents a firmly realized view of life. Of all medieval poems, The Canterbury Tales gives a modern reader the strongest sense of contact with the life and manners of fourteenth-century England.

**Background to “The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”**

The Canterbury Tales is at once one of the most famous and most frustrating works of literature ever written. Since its composition in late 1300s, critics have continued to mine new riches from its complex ground, and started new arguments about the text and its interpretation. Chaucer's richly detailed text, so Dryden said, was "God's plenty", and the rich variety of the Tales is partly perhaps the reason for its success. It is both one long narrative (of the pilgrims and their pilgrimage) and an encyclopedia of shorter narratives; it is both one large drama, and a compilation of most literary forms known to
medieval literature: romance, fabliau, Breton lay, moral fable, verse romance, beast fable, prayer to the Virgin... and so the list goes on. No single literary genre dominates the Tales. The tales include romantic adventures, fabliaux, saint's biographies, animal fables, religious allegories and even a sermon, and range in tone from pious, moralistic tales to lewd and vulgar sexual farces. More often than not, moreover, the specific tone of the tale is extremely difficult to firmly pin down.

This, indeed, is down to one of the key problems of interpreting the Tales themselves - voice: how do we ever know who is speaking? Because Chaucer, early in the Tales, promises to repeat the exact words and style of each speaker as best he can remember it, there is always a tension between Chaucer and the pilgrim's voice he ventriloquizes as he re-tells his tale: even the "Chaucer" who is a character on the pilgrim has a distinct and deliberately un Chaucerian voice. Is it the Merchant's voice - and the Merchant's opinion - or Chaucer's? Is it Chaucer the character or Chaucer the writer? If it is Chaucer's, are we supposed to take it at face value, or view it ironically?

No one knows for certain when Chaucer began to write the Tales - the pilgrimage is usually dated 1387, but that date is subject to much scholarly argument - but it is certain that Chaucer wrote some parts of the Tales at different times, and went back and added Tales to the melting pot. The Knight's Tale, for example, was almost certainly written earlier than the Canterbury project as a separate work, and then adapted into the voice of the Knight; and the Second Nun's Tale, as well as probably the Monk's, probably have a similar compositional history.

Chaucer drew from a rich variety of literary sources to create the Tales, though his principal debt is likely to Boccaccio's Decameron, in which ten nobles from Florence, to escape the plague, stay in a country villa and amuse each other by each telling tales. Boccaccio likely had a significant influence on Chaucer. The Knight's Tale was an English version of a tale by Boccaccio, while six of Chaucer's tales have possible sources in the Decameron: the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's, the Clerk's, the Merchant's, the Franklin's, and the Shipman's. However, Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury form a wider range of society compared to Boccaccio's elite storytellers, allowing for greater differences in tone and substance.

The text of the Tales itself does not survive complete, but in ten fragments Due to the fact that there are no links made between these ten fragments in most cases, it is extremely difficult to ascertain precisely in which order Chaucer wanted the tales to be read.

**Prologue to the Canterbury Tales : Summary**

"When April comes with his sweet, fragrant showers, which pierce the dry ground of March, and bathe every root of every plant in sweet liquid, then people desire to go on pilgrimages." Thus begins the famous opening to The Canterbury Tales. The narrator (a constructed version of Chaucer himself) is first discovered staying at the Tabard Inn in Southwark (in London), when a company of twenty-nine people descend on the inn, preparing to go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. After talking to them, he agrees to join them on their pilgrimage.
Yet before the narrator goes any further in the tale, he describes the circumstances and the social rank of each pilgrim. He describes each one in turn, starting with the highest status individuals.

The Knight is described first, as befits a 'worthy man' of high status. The Knight has fought in the Crusades in numerous countries, and always been honored for his worthiness and courtesy. Everywhere he went, the narrator tells us, he had a 'sovereyn prys' (which could mean either an 'outstanding reputation', or a price on his head for the fighting he has done). The Knight is dressed in a 'fustian' tunic, made of coarse cloth, which is stained by the rust from his coat of chainmail.

The Knight brings with him his son, The Squire, a lover and a lusty bachelor, only twenty years old. The Squire cuts a rather effeminate figure, his clothes embroidered with red and white flowers, and he is constantly singing or playing the flute. He is the only pilgrim (other than, of course, Chaucer himself) who explicitly has literary ambitions: he 'koude songes make and wel endite' (line 95).

The Yeoman (a freeborn servant) also travels along with the Knight's entourage, and is clad in coat and hood of green. The Yeoman is excellent at caring for arrows, and travels armed with a huge amount of weaponry: arrows, a bracer (arm guard), a sword, a buckler, and a dagger as sharp as a spear. He wears an image of St. Christopher on his breast.

Having now introduced the Knight (the highest ranking pilgrim socially), the narrator now moves on to the clergy, beginning with The Prioress, called 'Madame Eglantine' (or, in modern parlance, Mrs. Sweetbriar). She could sweetly sing religious services, speaks fluent French and has excellent table manners. She is so charitable and piteous, that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap, and she has two small dogs with her. She wears a brooch with the inscription 'Amor vincit omnia' ('Love conquers all'). The Prioress brings with her her 'chapeleyne' (secretary), the Second Nun.

The Monk is next, an extremely fine and handsome man who loves to hunt, and who follows modern customs rather than old traditions. This is no bookish monk, studying in a cloister, but a man who keeps greyhounds to hunt the hare. The Monk is well-fed, fat, and his eyes are bright, gleaming like a furnace in his head.

The Friar who follows him is also wanton and merry, and he is a 'lymytour' by trade (a friar licensed to beg in certain districts). He is extremely well beloved of franklins (landowners) and worthy woman all over the town. He hears confession and gives absolution, and is an excellent beggar, able to earn himself a farthing wherever he went. His name is Huberd.

The Merchant wears a forked beard, motley clothes and sat high upon his horse. He gives his opinion very solemnly, and does excellent business as a merchant, never being in any debt. But, the narrator ominously remarks, 'I noot how men hym calle' (I don't know how men call him, or think of him).

The Clerk follows the Merchant. A student of Oxford university, he would rather have twenty books by Aristotle than rich clothes or musical instruments, and thus is dressed in a threadbare short coat. He only has a little gold, which he tends to spend on books
and learning, and takes huge care and attention of his studies. He never speaks a word more than is needed, and that is short, quick and full of sentence (the Middle-English word for 'meaningfulness' is a close relation of 'sententiousness').

The Man of Law (referred to here as 'A Sergeant of the Lawe') is a judicious and dignified man, or, at least, he seems so because of his wise words. He is a judge in the court of assizes, by letter of appointment from the king, and because of his high standing receives many grants. He can draw up a legal document, the narrator tells us, and no-one can find a flaw in his legal writings. Yet, despite all this money and social worth, the Man of Law rides only in a homely, multi-coloured coat.

A Franklin travels with the Man of Law. He has a beard as white as a daisy, and of the sanguine humour (dominated by his blood). The Franklin is a big eater, loving a piece of bread dipped in wine, and is described (though not literally!) as Epicurus' son: the Franklin lives for culinary delight. His house is always full of meat pie, fish and meat, so much so that it 'snewed in his hous of mete and drynke'. He changes his meats and drinks according to what foods are in season.

A Haberdasher and a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and a Tapycer (weaver of tapestries) are next described, all of them clothed in the same distinctive guildsman's dress. Note that none of these pilgrims, in the end, actually tell a tale.

A Cook had been brought along to boil the chicken up with marrow bones and spices, but this particular Cook knows a draught of ale very well indeed, according to the narrator. The Cook could roast and simmer and boil and fry, make stews and hashes and bake a pie well, but it was a great pity that, on his shin, he has an ulcer.

A Shipman from Dartmouth is next - tanned brown from the hot summer sun, riding upon a carthorse, and wearing a gown of coarse woolen cloth which reaches to his knees. The Shipman had, many times, drawn a secret draught of wine on board ship, while the merchant was asleep. The Shipman has weathered many storms, and knows his trade: he knows the locations of all the harbors from Gotland to Cape Finistere. His shape is called 'the Maudelayne'.

A Doctor of Medicine is the next pilgrim described, clad in red and blue, and no-one in the world can match him in speaking about medicine and surgery. He knows the cause of every illness, what humor engenders them, and how to cure them. He is a perfect practitioner of medicine, and he has apothecaries ready to send him drugs and mixtures. He is well-read in the standard medical authorities, from the Greeks right through to Chaucer's contemporary Gilbertus Anglicus. The Doctor, however, has not studied the Bible.

The Wife of Bath was 'somdel deef' (a little deaf, as her tale will later expand upon) and that was a shame. The Wife of Bath is so adept at making cloth that she surpasses even the cloth-making capitals of Chaucer's world, Ypres and Ghent, and she wears coverchiefs (linen coverings for the head) which must (the narrator assumes) have 'weyeden ten pound'. She had had five husbands through the church door, and had been at Jerusalem, Rome and Boulogne on pilgrimage. She is also described as 'Gat-tothed' (traditionally denoting lasciviousness), and as keeping good company, she knows all the
answers about love: 'for she koude of that art the olde daunce' (she knew the whole dance as far as love is concerned!).

A good religious man, A Parson of a Town, is next described, who, although poor in goods, is rich in holy thought and work. He's a learned man, who truly preaches Christ's gospel, and devoutly teaches his parishioners. He travels across his big parish to visit all of his parishioners, on his feet, carrying a staff in his hand. He is a noble example to his parishioners ('his sheep', as they are described) because he acts first, and preaches second (or, in Chaucer's phrase, 'first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte'). The narrator believes that there is no better priest to be found anywhere.

With the Parson travels a Plowman (who does not tell a tale), who has hauled many cartloads of dung in his time. He is a good, hard-working man, who lives in peace and charity, and treats his neighbor as he would be treated. He rides on a mare, and wears a tabard (a workman's loose garment).

A Miller comes next, in this final group of pilgrims (now at the bottom of the class scale!). He is big-boned and has big muscles, and always wins the prize in wrestling matches. There's not a door that he couldn't lift off its hinges, or break it by running at it head-first. He has black, wide nostrils, carries a sword and a buckler (shield) by his side, and has a mouth like a great furnace. He's good at stealing corn and taking payment for it three times. But then, Chaucer implies, there are no honest millers.

A noble Manciple (a business agent, purchaser of religious provisions) is the next pilgrim to be described, and a savvy financial operator. Though a common man, the Manciple can run rings round even a 'heep of lerned men'. The Manciple, his description ominously ends, 'sette hir aller cappe': deceived them all.

The Reeve, a slender, choleric man, long-legged and lean ("ylyk a staf"). He knows exactly how much grain he has, and is excellent at keeping his granary and his grain bin. There is no bailiff, herdsman or servant about whom the Reeve does not know something secret or treacherous; as a result, they are afraid of him 'as of the deeth'.

The Summoner is next, his face fire-red and pimpled, with narrow eyes. He has a skin disease across his black brows, and his beard (which has hair falling out of it) and he is extremely lecherous. There is, the narrator tells us, no ointment or cure, or help him to remove his pimples. He loves drinking wine which is as 'reed as blood', and eating leeks, onions and garlic. He knows how to trick someone.

Travelling with the Summoner is a noble Pardoner, his friend and his companion (in what sense Chaucer intends the word 'compeer', meaning companion, nobody knows) and the last pilgrim-teller to be described. He sings loudly 'Come hither, love to me', and has hair as yellow as wax, which hangs like flaxen from his head. He carries a wallet full of pardons in his lap, brimful of pardons come from Rome. The Pardoner is sexually ambiguous - he has a thin, boyish voice, and the narrator wonders whether he is a 'geldyng or a mare' (a eunuch or a homosexual).

The narrator writes that he has told us now of the estate (the class), the array (the clothing), and the number of pilgrims assembled in this company. He then makes an important statement of intent for what is to come: he who repeats a tale told by another
man, the narrator says, must repeat it as closely as he possibly can to the original teller - and thus, if the tellers use obscene language, it is not our narrator's fault.

The Host is the last member of the company described, a large man with bright, large eyes - and an extremely fair man. The Host welcomes everyone to the inn, and announces the pilgrimage to Canterbury, and decides that, on the way there, the company shall 'talen and playe' (to tell stories and amuse themselves). Everyone consents to the Host's plan for the game, and he then goes on to set it out.

What the Host describes is a tale-telling game, in which each pilgrim shall tell two tales on the way to Canterbury, and two more on the way home; whoever tells the tale 'of best sentence and moost solas' shall have supper at the cost of all of the other pilgrims, back at the Inn, once the pilgrimage returns from Canterbury. The pilgrims agree to the Host's suggestion, and agree to accord to the Host's judgment as master of the tale-telling game. Everyone then goes to bed.

The next morning, the Host awakes, raises everyone up, and 'in a flock' the pilgrimage rides towards 'the Wateryng of Seint Thomas', a brook about two miles from London. The Host asks the pilgrims to draw lots to see who shall tell the first tale, the Knight being asked to 'draw cut' first and, whether by 'aventure, or sort, or cas', the Knight draws the straw to tell the first tale. The pilgrims ride forward, and the Knight begins to tell his tale.

**Prologue to the Canterbury Tales : Analysis**

The General Prologue was probably written early in the composition of the Canterbury Tales, and offers an interesting comparison point to many of the individual tales itself. Of course, it does not match up to the tales as we have them in a number of ways: the Nun's Priest and the Second Nun are not described, and, most significantly, the work as we have it does not reflect the Host's plan. For starters, the pilgrimage only seems to go as far as Canterbury (for the Parson's Tale) and only the narrator tells two tales on the way there, with all the other pilgrims telling only a single tale (and some who are described in the General Prologue not telling a tale at all).

We must, therefore, view the General Prologue with some hesitation as a comparison point to the tales themselves: it offers useful or enlightening suggestions, but they are no means a complete, reliable guide to the tales and what they mean. What the General Prologue offers is a brief, often very visual description of each pilgrim, focusing on details of their background, as well as key details of their clothing, their food likes and dislikes, and their physical features. These descriptions fall within a common medieval tradition of portraits in words (which can be considered under the technical term ekphrasis), Chaucer's influence in this case most likely coming from The Romaunt de la Rose.

Immediately, our narrator insists that his pilgrims are to be described by 'degree'. By the fact that the Knight, the highest-ranking of the pilgrims, is selected as the first teller, we see the obvious social considerations of the tale. Still, all human life is here: characters of both sexes, and from walks of life from lordly knight, or godly parson down to oft-divorced wife or grimy cook.
Each pilgrim portrait within the prologue might be considered as an archetypal description. Many of the 'types' of characters featured would have been familiar stock characters to a medieval audience: the hypocritical friar, the rotund, food-loving monk, the rapacious miller are all familiar types from medieval estates satire (see Jill Mann's excellent book for more information). Larry D. Benson has pointed out the way in which the characters are paragons of their respective crafts or types - noting the number of times the words 'wel koude' and 'verray parfit' occur in describing characters.

Yet what is key about the information provided in the General Prologue about these characters, many of whom do appear to be archetypes, is that it is among the few pieces of objective information - that is, information spoken by our narrator that we are given throughout the Tales. The tales themselves (except for large passages of the prologues and epilogues) are largely told in the words of the tellers: as our narrator himself insists in the passage. The words stand for themselves: and we interpret them as if they come from the pilgrims' mouths. What this does - and this is a key thought for interpreting the tales as a whole - is to apparently strip them of writerly license, blurring the line between Chaucer and his characters.

Chaucer's voice, in re-telling the tales as accurately as he can, entirely disappears into that of his characters, and thus the Tales operates almost like a drama. Where do Chaucer's writerly and narratorial voices end, and his characters' voices begin? This self-vanishing quality is key to the Tales, and perhaps explains why there is one pilgrim who is not described at all so far, but who is certainly on the pilgrimage - and he is the most fascinating, and the most important by far: a poet and statesman by the name of Geoffrey Chaucer.
Chaucer's Realism

Literature is the mirror of its age. Supreme literary artist is one who becomes a mouthpiece and provides a real picture of his age with its minute details. Chaucer is the true representative of his age. He portrayed a comprehensive picture of contemporary life. He realistically epitomizes the social, economic and religious conditions of his age. He was a keen observer of men and manners, and was endowed with the talent of imaginatively presenting contemporary society upon a great scale. He is in true sense a social chronicler of England. His poetry reflects the 14th century not in fragment but as a complete whole. He for the first time made poetry the medium for the expression of social reality. Various aspects of Chaucer's realism are elaborated below:

The Old and the New: Chaucer's age was transitional. It was medieval but beneath the medievalism—the desire for change was already at work. He saw the early rays of Renaissance. Ecclesiastical ideas and the medieval habits of mind were still the controlling elements in Chaucer's period. The Knight in the Prologue reflects the fading chivalry of the middle ages. The old Knight was a brave warrior and was a true symbol of the fast vanishing old world of knighthood. The Knight is a fine expression of the medieval spirit.

The Squire, the Knight's son, represents the new conception of chivalry. He has the more luxurious and less idealistic temper of the age of the French wars. Like his father he does not dream of chivalry and war. He takes delight in the pleasures of life:

Well could he sit a horse and ride,
Make songs, joust and dance, draw and write.

The Clerk of Oxford represents the interest that people had started showing in classical learning. Chaucer was influenced by Boccaccio, Petrarch and Dante, the pioneers of Renaissance in Italy. He imbibed from them humanism which is clearly reflected in The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer was pioneer of Renaissance humanism in English literature. He was the Evening Star of the medieval day and the Morning Star of Renaissance.

Social Condition: Chaucer for the first time made poetry a powerful medium for the expression of contemporary social conditions and life. He had a wide experience of men of many ranks and conditions, and he had been storing up for years, with his keenly observant, quiet eyes, the materials for a literary presentation of contemporary society upon a great scale.

Chaucer exposes the corruption in village life in The Prologue. The village was a self-sufficient economic and social unit. The Reeve was mainly responsible for the organisation of village life. He used to be the elected representative of villagers. Some of the reeves were corrupt and exploited the people. The Reeve in The Prologue took advantage of all his opportunities for cheating the lord of mansion.

Chaucer was aware of the rise of the new class of gentlemen farmers. The Franklin who is quite well off represents this new class.
The Church and Religious Life: Chaucer does not attack like Wycliff or Lollard but he is content to expose the growing corruption, love of luxury and materialism, and laxity of discipline through his ecclesiastical figures. He realistically depicts the growing corruption of the church through his ecclesiastical characters. He draws the vivid portraits of the fat, pleasure-loving Monk, the merry and wanton Friar, the clever-rogue Pardoner who wanders about selling indulgences and relics, clearly show that he was alive to the shocking corruption that prevailed in the church of his times. The ecclesiastics are hangers on and caterpillars of the church. The Friar is intimate with hospitable franklins, inn-keepers and worthy women, and despises beggars and lazars. The Summoner is a repulsive man. Chaucer's Parson is the type of the true shepherds of the church. He is poor in this world's goods, but "rich in holy thought and work". The Parson's brother, a Plowman, travels with him. He is a "true swinker and a good man" who helps his poor neighbours without hire and loves them as himself.

Realistic Presentation of the Cross-Sections of Society: Chaucer realistically presented the varied sections of contemporary society. His men and women represent social realism. Chaucer's Merchant represents the new class of traders and merchants. The merchant is conscious of his importance. He delights in pomp and show:

A merchant was there with a forked beard,
In mottallee, and high on horse he sat.

The low classes also emerged as power group. They clamored for better conditions of life. Chaucer's carpenter, dyer, plowman etc. represent the new power these commoners were getting in those days. Each of them seemed important and their wives, too, were conscious of their growing importance in the national life. The growing prosperity of the new-rich class manifested itself in the love for display and extravagance. The, Knight, the Squire, the Wife of Bath and many other characters in The Prologue love display of pomp and show.

Chaucer's Doctor of Physic represents the medieval medical profession. He has little time to read Bible. He knows about herbal remedies and he is also well versed with astrology. Chaucer laughs at him for his fee loving propensities:

For gold in physick is a cordial
Therefore he loved gold in special.

The poor Clerk of Oxford represents the passion of learning. The Prioress, the Nun, and the Wife of Bath represent women of his time. Chaucer's characters represent almost the entire range of English society in the fourteenth century, with the exception of the highest aristocracy and the lowest order.

In short, Chaucer is a perfect representative of his age. He is in true sense a social chronicler of England. His poetry reflects the 14th century not in fragment but as a complete whole.

Chaucer’s Art of Characterization
**Characterization** is the concept of creating characters in a piece of literature. It can be said without any doubt that the worth of every writer is judged from the delineation of his characters. Geoffrey Chaucer stands above head and shoulder of all other English writers in art of Characterization. His characters breathe, walk and talk as we do and their wishes and aspirations, their likes and dislikes are quite akin to men of “flesh and blood”. They are so universal in nature that we meet these characters daily in every society; therefore, they do not look unreal to us at all.

Chaucer’s Prologue is a picture-gallery. His pilgrims are like twenty-nine pictures hung on a wall. These pilgrims are from different walks of life. They are so carefully chosen that they represent the whole of the English society and fully reveal social, moral, material, commercial, romantic and chivalric trends prevailing in the society. He presents each of them with minute details about their dresses, physical features, habits, peculiarities of manner, speech etc.

Chaucer follows the methods common to all painters. He paints with words and not with a brush. He had the seeing-eye, the retentive memory and the judgment to select rightly. Many of his characters are drawn from his own acquaintances. For example, the host Hairy Bailey is drawn from an actual host known to Chaucer. Similarly, the Wife of Bath, and the Oxford Clerk are also drawn from individuals with whom he came in contact in his life. That is why his characters are life-like. They are living and breathing human beings having the force of reality. His picture-gallery is made up real men and women.

In many respects, Chaucer shows a marked preference for brilliant colours, both in dress and appearance. On entering his picture-gallery, one is at once impressed by the remarkable brightness of his portraits. For example, the gown of the Squire is embroidered,

as it were a meede
Al ful of fresshe floures, wyite and reede;

Similarly, the Friar is dressed all in green and the hose of the Wife of Bath is of fine scarlet red. The face of the Summoner is fiery red and the Miller has a reddish beard. The atmosphere of Chaucer's portrait-gallery is sunlit, bright and colourful.

In the portraits of the Prologue Chaucer excels the art of the painter. He has an advantage over the painter. He can make use of sounds which the artist with the brush cannot do. He hears the jingling of the bells of the Monk’s palfrey, notes the nasal tones of the Prioress, and the lisping of the Friar.

He highlights one set of character by presenting it as foil to another. The refined and delicate Prioress is contrasted with the coarse and broad-speaking Wife of Bath. His ecclesiastical characters represent the degeneration of the church and the corruption that had overtaken the clergy of the times. His Monk, the Friar, the Pardoner and the Summoner have all forgotten their duties. They have grown greedy and selfish and are given to all sorts of corrupt practices. They have been individualized by noting their personal peculiarities and oddities. For example, the Monk has been individualized by his eyes.
His eyen stepe and rollynge in his heed,
That seemed as a forneys of a leed;

Chaucer uses apt similes and metaphors to present his characters. His similes are always drawn from common, familiar and homely aspects of life and nature. His pictorial imagination constantly uses such imagery. He makes his characters gleam and glow as on a canvas. For example, the merry nature of the Squire is described in a single line by, saying that “he was as bright as is the month of May.” The brightness of the Friar’s eyes is his most peculiar feature and it is emphasized through an equally apt image:

His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.

Chaucer portrays his characters objectively and impartially. He is so broadminded that he shows his equal sympathy to all the characters, the just and the unjust, the pious and the sinner.

Chaucer’s characters are types as well as individuals: they are the symbols of some particular class, age group, or profession, but they also have their own peculiar traits, their own idiosyncrasies, their own ways of talking and doing things. Each of the twenty-nine pilgrims in the Prologue is morally and socially representative, but he is also an individual with marked peculiarities of his own. For example, his Knight is a typical Knight of his age representing the fast fading chivalry of the middle ages. But he is also an individual who, for his personal qualities, had been honoured in foreign lands above all other knights and who had been the guest of honour at many a feast. His son, the young Squire, represents the jollity of youth as well as the spirit of the rising chivalry of the times. He is not, like his father, interested so much in war and adventure as in singing and dancing and Jove-making. He is also an individual, who has a fondness for bright colours and fine apparel,

Embrouded was he,as it were a meede
Al ful of fresshe floures, wyite and reede;

Another worth mentioning about Chaucer's characterization is that he' has the gift of seeing the universal in the particular and he presents both these aspects of life in the picture of pilgrims. These pilgrims possess all those traits, humours and habits that characterize the men and women of all ages and nations in this world. They are not, of an age but of all ages, “They are timeless, creations on a time determined stage.” The Squire, the Monk, the Prioress, the Franklin, the Wife of Bath etc., may have changed their names, the title by which they are known, but they are all human beings having the same passions, desires and instincts as are common to humanity. All of us feel at home in their company, for we all recognize in them an element of our own selves.

His characters are not static: they constantly grow and develop like real men and women. They talk to each other, narrate their own tales, and comment on the tales told by others. They reveal a hundred aspects of their natures. They are shown to us as moving, acting, talking and disputing just like men of flesh and blood. In short, it can be said that there is nothing of the dreamer about Chaucer-nothing of the stern moralist
and social reformer. Like Shakespeare, he makes it his business in The Canterbury Tales, to paint life as he sees it, and leaves other to draw the moral.

**Modernity in Chaucer**

Chaucer is regarded as the earliest of the great modernism. In those dark days when light of modernism was not visible on the horizon, Chaucer anticipated the modern taste and the modern mind and in his poetry, he introduced qualities of advanced age. Though Chaucer has not written a drama or a novel as we know it, yet his works contain the seed of modern drama and novel. If he had lived a few years, he would certainly have been our first dramatist and novelist, just as we know he is the first true national poet of England.

When we make a careful and critical analysis of Chaucer’s poetry, we arrive at a definite conclusion that sympathy, realism, intelligence, straight forwardness, humor, irony, satire and keen observation are salient features of Chaucer’s literary works. He enchants the reader by his lovely diction, his description and narrative power and the graceful movement of his verse. He is the founder of pure pimple and musical style of writing verses, which was later on followed by Spencer, Shakespeare and Milton.

**Firstly** Chaucer is rightly regarded as the father of English poetry. He may also be described as the first modern writer in English. He Made a considerable contribution to the development of English prosody and versification, as well as to the development of various poetic forms. He is great delineator of character as well of manners and customs’. The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales is a valuable social document. Chaucer is also a great story teller, as well as a prominent humourist. His role in the development of English Language was also a significant one. He enabled English language to replace Latin and French as the medium of ambitious literature.

**Secondly**, his poetry links with the poetry of his predecessors. Here and there we have in Chaucer’s poetry words and phrases from earlier poets, as well as rhyme-tags and other items in the stock-in-trade of medieval poets. Some examples of this are words and phrases like ‘rose-red’, ‘silver’bright’, ‘grey as glass’, ‘still as a stone’, ‘brown as a berry’, etc. However, the most characteristic part of Chaucer’s poetry is that here such borrowing is the minimum. Poetry before Chaucer, and to a certain extent even after Chaucer, was alliterative in nature. Chaucer’s poetry is accentual and not alliterative, though we now and then have alliterative phrases in his poetry which reflect the alliterative conception of poetry. However, in many cases, his alliterative phrases occur even in modern speech and writing, such as “fish and flesh”, “busy as bees”, “friend or foe”, “sigh and. sob”, “weary or wet”. etc Chaucer also used many stock phrases, but they only help to accentuate the conversational quality of his poetry. Some examples of this type are “No more of this”, “ride and go”, “Old and .young”, “more and less”, “weep and cry”, “as old bokes seyn” (as old books say), “deep and wide”, etc.

**Thirdly**, Chaucer attempted the new realistic task of portraying men and women as they were and to describe them so that the readers could recognize them as their own acquaintances. His characters have for this reason become a permanent treasure of English literature. Beowulf and Roland are ideal heroes, essentially figures of the fancy, but the merry Host of the Tabard Inn, Madam Eglantine, the fat .Monk, the good Parson,
the kindhearted Plowman, the studious Oxford Clerk, these strike us more like personal acquaintances than characters in a story. "Chaucer is the first English writer to bring the atmosphere of romantic interest about the men and women and the daily work of one’s Own world which is the aim of nearly all modern literature.”

Fourthly, With Chaucer, the English language and English literature grew at a bound to full maturity. No Other Middle English writer has his skill, his range, his complexity, his large human outlook. Unfortunately, the English language was still in the process of rapid change, and major shifts in pronunciation and accentuation were to occur in the following century and a half. This meant that Chaucer’s achievement in establishing English as a fully developed literary language could not be adequately exploited by his immediate successors. It was not long before readers were unable to scan him -properly. This fact helps to emphasizes Chancer’s loneliness. His followers lack both his technical brilliance and his breadth of vision, leaving him the one undisputed master in medieval English literature. Not until Shakespeare is there an English writer with Chaucer’s combination of technique and insight and his ability to put each at the service of the other, and Shakespeare’s genius, which was the greater, ran in different channels.

**His Trend of Borrowing Material :-** Chaucer takes the material for his poems wherever he can find it. He borrows profusely form Latin, French, and Italian literature. But whatever he borrows, he makes entirely his own. His originality consists in giving an old story some present human interest, making it express the life and ideals of his own age. In this respect The Knight’s Tale is noteworthy. Its names belong to an ancient civilization, but its characters are men and women of the English nobility as Chaucer knew them. This is perhaps his finest work as a narrative poet. It is heroic in subject, chivalrous in sentiment, and romantic in tone. Nominally, it is a tale of the heroic age of Greece, hut everything in it is medievalised. It may be regarded as an idealised picture of the Middle Ages. Its account of the, tournament, its presentation of the principles of knightly ethics, and its vivid portrayal of the chivalrous conception of love give it a distinctly medieval flavour.

**Conclusion:** - Chaucer is regarded as the first English short story teller and the first English modern poet. Popular literature till Chaucer’s time had been occupied mainly with the gods and heroes of modern era. Chaucer was

**The morning star of song, who made**  
**His music heard below,**  
**Don Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath**  
**Preluded those melodious bursts that fill**  
**The spacious times of great Elizabeth**  
**With sounds that echo still.**

He was the

**Father of verse, who in immortal song**  
**First taught the Muse to speak the English tongue.**

**Geoffrey Chaucer: A Representative of His Age**
Well does Compton Rickett observe: “Chaucer symbolizes, as no other writer does, the Middle Ages. He stands in much the same relation to the life of his time as Pope does to the earlier phases to the Eighteenth century; and Tennyson to the Victorian era; and his place in English literature is even more important than theirs…”

The social groups of thirty pilgrims cover the entire range of fourteenth century English society, leaving only royalty on one hand, and the lowest on the other.

**Medieval Chivalry:** - Chaucer's knight is a true representative of the spirit of the medieval chivalry which was a blend of love, religion, and bravery. He has been a champion of not fewer than fifteen battles in the defense of Christianity. Being the embodiment of chivalric ideals, Chaucer's knight observes utmost courtesy. He was not only worthy in politeness but also wise in decisiveness.

We must, however, point out that the spirit of true chivalry was breathing its last in the age of Chaucer. The Knight, in fact, is a representative of an order which was losing its ground. The true representative of the new order is his young son. The Squire, who has as much a taste for revelry as for chivalry. He is a lover and a lusty bachelor.

**So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale**  
**He slept namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale**

Trade, Commerce and Art: - The Merchant is a typical representative of his class. The countrymen and merchants have always made the two most common objects of humour and satire. But Chaucer lets the Merchant go without much of satire, perhaps in recognition of the importance that his class had gained in his age.

**Medicine:** - The knowledge of Astronomy rather Astrology was a must for a physician as all the physical ailments were supposed to be the consequences of the peculiar configuration of the stars and planets. That is why the Doctor of Physic, too, was grounded in Astronomy. Chaucer has a sly dig at the Doctor in his reference to his gold-loving nature.

**The Church:** - The Church had become a hotbed of profligacy, corruption and rank materialism. The Monk is a fat, sprouting fellow averse to study and penance. The Friar is a jolly beggar who employs his tongue to carve out his living. The Prioress bothers more about modish etiquettes than austerity. The Pardoner is a despicable parasite in trading in letters of pardon with the sinners who could ensure a seat in heaven by paying hard cash. The summoner is likewise a depraved fellow.

The only exception is the poor Parson apparently a follower of Wycliffe who revolted against the corruption of the Church.

**The New Learning:** - The Clerk of Oxford represents the new intellectual culture. He is an austere scholar who prefers twenty books of Aristotle's philosophy to gay clothes and musical instruments. And

**Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede**  
**Noght a word spak he moore than was neede**
Thus, The Prologue is a comprehensive representation of the fourteenth century society which consisted of three main classes—that of the knights representing medieval chivalry, that of the clergy representing the Church, and that of the workers. These three classes constituted the main social structure and we can reconstruct the life of the fourteenth century through it.

**Chaucer's Treatment of women**

Literature reflects the tendencies of the age in which it is produced and there is always a supreme literary artist who becomes the mouthpiece of his age and gives expression to the hopes and aspirations, its fades, and fetishes, its tears and doubts, its prosperity and enterprise in his work. Chaucer, too, represents his age and holds mirror up to the life of his time. His poetry represents the fourteenth century and not only one limited aspect of it. For example, the unknown author of “Pearls” shows the mysticism of refined mind. Wycliff, points out the surging wave of religious reformation, Gower shows the fear produced in the wealthier class by the Peasant Rising and Langland, presents corruption in the church and the religious order. Each of these authors throws light on only one aspect of life of fourteenth century. It is Chaucer’s greatness that he directs his comprehensive gaze not on one aspect of his time, but on all its wide and vanegated life. He is a wide and capacious soul and takes a fuller view of his times more than anyone else could have taken in those days. Chaucer takes into consideration the chivalry, trade, medical profession, clergymen and women of the fourteenth century.

Chaucer’s attitude towards women is impartial, unprejudiced, realistic and comprehensive. According to Chaucer, a woman is neither a goddess nor necessarily an evil. She is just a companion of man and as there are gods and devils among men, so there are goddesses and witches among women. Chaucer’s realistic approach towards life never allows him to go to extremes. For instance, the Franklin’s opinion about women reflects the whole story. According to his tale, the real question is not of mastery, but of mutual adjustment and co-operation.

In Chaucer’s age, there were two views with regard to women. According to the opinion of the church, woman in the person of Eve was the cause of fall of Adam. It was she who had brought sin and death into the world. On the other hand, quite contrary to this view the poets held positive opinion about them. According to poets, she was a goddess who descended from Heaven with pomp and majesty and filled the world with a unique glow. Women in Chaucer’s England did not enjoy an enviable social position. Women of lower class of society, in particular were doomed to a life of unrelieved drudgery. They were treated as slaves or serfs. Women belonging to the upper classes, however, led a comparatively better social life and they received some education and wore the fine clothes and ornaments.

In “The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”, Chaucer tells that there are two kinds of woman in the world in all ages. He tells this by depicting two women, The Prioress and The Wife of Bath. The Prioress is the embodiment of sweetness, beauty, grace and good manners whereas The Wife of Bath is a combination of ugly features and shrewish
qualities. Both of them are present in all ages. Sometimes, The Prioress predominates and sometimes The Wife of Bath.

In Chaucer’s time, a woman was regarded as inferior to man. A woman who attempted governance was very often beaten by her husband. A woman’s welfare lays in accepting the mastery of her husband. We are told that fifth husband of The Wife of Bath tried to assert his male superiority over her and once struck her about her ear so violently that she became deaf. Thus, women like The Wife of Bath always manage to escape from the life, a humdrum love, gossip, finery, company of men and never like to stay at home with their husbands. Chaucer explains the nature of such women in the following lines of the Wife’s portrait.

In felawshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe;
Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
For she koude of that art the oIde daunce.

The Prioress represents the conventional woman with all those vanities dear to feminine heart. In “The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”, her description includes her physical appearance, table manners, affected speech and tender sentimentality. Her name is “Madame Eglentyne”. One wonders what this wild flower has to do in the convent. She wears fine clothes and on her brooch is inscribed the motto “Amor Vincit Omnia” (Love conquers all).

The Wife of Bath has expounded her views on women, marriage and love at a great length in the Prologue. She tells the company that she has no faith in virginity. God has given them bodies to use. Let saints be continent. God never forbade marriage, nor did He command virginity. The Clerk replies to the Wife’s heresies by telling the story of Griselda. She was a retort to the Wife’s heretical doctrine.

Chaucer’s “Tale of Melibeus” poses the problem of mastery in domestic life and suggests that husband should accept the mastery of his wife. The Nun’s Priest’s tale puts the opposite view. Similarly, different pilgrims express their views in their tales. However, the Franklin’s tale gives a balanced view. According to this tale, the real question is not of mastery but mutual adjustment and co-operation. The real bliss of wedded life can be enjoyed through mutual co-operation, forbearance and patience; this is the view of Chaucer himself.

**Humour in the Prologue**

Humour is the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement. Humour is the sympathetic appreciation of the comic and enables us to love while we laugh. Humour enables us to see the person’s point of view, to distinguish between crimes and misdemeanours. There is no sting in humour, no consciousness superiority. On the contrary, it contains an element of tenderness. Satire, being destructive, not constructive, is in a class apart, but even satire may become so softened by humour as it does in Chaucer that it may lose the element of caricature and serve only to give a keener edge to wit.
Chaucer's whole point of view is that of the humorist. He is a comic poet who walks carelessly through life pausing the notice every trifle as he passes. He views the world as the unaccustomed traveller views a foreign country. He possesses the faculty of amused observation in a pre-eminent degree. Again and again he contrives to invest some perfectly trifling and commonplace incident with an air of whimsicality, and by so doing to make it at once realistic and remote.

Chaucer's humour is essentially English. It is born of a strong common-sense and a generous sympathy; and there are the qualities of the greatest English humorists like Shakespeare and Fielding.

Chaucer's humour has been acknowledged as always sympathetic. In the Prologue, except in his handling of the Monk and the Friar there is no sting in it. Chaucer does not treat with disdain those whose foolishness he has fathomed, nor does he turn away in disgust from the rascal whose tricks he has detected. If humour can be defined as "the sympathetic appreciation of the comic", i.e. the faculty which enables us to laugh—but to laugh affectionately and sympathetically, then Chaucer was indeed a great humorist. In his description of the Wife of Bath, he reminds us of Shakespeare's treatment of Sir Toby in Twelfth Night and of Falstaff in Henry IV. In fact, Chaucer makes us appreciate a character even when laughing at it. Moreover, Chaucer invariably makes more fun of the individual than of the institution to which he belongs. Mockery either discreet or uproarious never withered in him the gift of poetry.

Chaucer's humour springs from the rich fields of character. He derives pleasure from the "quaintness of individuality". By his keen observation and insight he detects incongruities in men and women and presents before his readers in an amusing manner. Some of the facts are quite trivial in themselves but become amusing in the way Chaucer tells them e.g. the Squire's locks which look as if they were laid in press, the hat of the Wife of Bath weighing 19 lbs., the Reeve's thin legs, the Franklin's weakness for sharp sauce, etc.

Chaucer's humour is his distinct quality. He says that in the literature of his time, when so few poets seem to have any perception of the fun in life, the humour of Chaucer is invigorating and delightful. There is great variety in his humour. It is kindly and patronising as in the case of the Clerk of Oxford, broad and semi-farcical as in the Wife of Bath; pointedly satirical as in the Pordoner and the Summoner; or coarse, as happens in the Tales of the Miller, the Reeve and the Pordoner. Chaucer's humour is not a pure fun. It is seldom that the satirical intent is wholly lacking, as it is in the case of the Good Parson, but, except in rare cases, the satire is good-humoured and well-meant.

Chaucer's humour in the Prologue derives from the fact that he is himself one of the pilgrims, one of the original twenty-nine. He is both actor and spectator and both he and his audience enjoy the antics which this clever arrangement enables him to perform. As pilgrim-narrator, he often discloses to his readers something about a character which none of the other pilgrims could possibly know, but which adds something important to our impression of the person concerned. For example he reveals to the delight of the readers that the Merchant was in debt and the Prioress sang the divine service intoning through the nose while she would not like to do so outside her convent.
Chaucer's humour in the Prologue is also due to his unconventional descriptive style. He deliberately departs from the artificial, lifeless forms of traditional portraiture and addresses himself to strikingly realistic or lifelike portrayals which by their very realism of speech and idiom make the incident or the object delightful.

Chaucer's witty comments upon the pilgrims such as "This Manciple sette his aller cappe" or his lavish praise upon some knave such as The Shipman or his pun on some word such as Philosopher in the sense of true 'philosopher' and 'alchemist' are also conducive to a good deal of humour. About the Oxford Clerk Chaucer says:

**But al be that he was a philosophere,**
**Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre.**

Not least among the manifestations of Chaucer's humour is the quality of exaggeration. The merry Friar with his twinkling eyes is the best beggar in his friary; the Franklin has not his equal; in all the world there was none like the Doctor of Physic; the Shipman had no peer from 'Hulle to Cartage'; and in cloth-making the Wife of Bath excelled even the matchless weavers of Ypres and Ghent.

To conclude, Chaucer's humour is one of the greatest assets of his poetic art. As Compton-Rickett says, indeed for all his considerable power, pathos, his happy fancy, his lucid imagination, it is as a great humorist that he lingers longest in our memories, with humour, rich, profound and sane, devoid of spite and cynicism, irradiated by a genial kindliness and a consummate knowledge of human nature.

**Chaucer as the Father of English Poetry**

Chaucer has rightly been called "the father of English poetry". He founded English language and poetry alike. Alber calls him "the earliest of the great moderns" because he imparted modernity to English language and poetry, and "it is through him that its free secular spirit first expresses itself in our poetry". Matthew Arnold was right in asserting that "with him is born our real poetry". He was rightly recognised during the Renaissance as the Father of English poetry:

**Father of verse ! who in immortal song**
**First taught the muse to speak the English tongue.**

**New Poetic Subject:** As regards Chaucer's poetic material he unhesitantly took what suited him. He sometimes borrowed wholesale without change, and often adapted and reshaped his matter freely. Moody and Lovett write in this connection: "But what is more important is that Chaucer improved whatever he borrowed, and stamped it with his individuality of thought and style and structural skill. That part of his work we value most, however, such as the prologues to the Legend of Good Women and to The Canterbury Tales, was original in every sense, and some of the Tales have been so radically and vitally remodelled that they stand as genuinely original." Besides striking the note of originality, Chaucer turned his eyes to the life and people of his time. His realism reflects his modernity.
Humour and Pathos: Chaucer is the first genuine humorist in English poetry. Stopford A. Brooke writes: "Sometimes his humour is broad, sometimes shy, sometimes gay, but it is also exquisite and affectionate. His pathos does not go into the far depths of sorrow and pain, but it is always natural. He can bring tears into our eyes, and he can make us smile or be sad as he pleases."

Chaucer's Language and Versification: Chaucer is the first national poet of England, for he gave to the people a language, so reformed and reshaped, as to be a potent instrument for the expression of national life and thought. During Chaucer's time there was no standard form of English. There were four dialects — Southern, East Midland, Northumbrian and Kentish. Chaucer popularised the East Midland dialect by giving it a new form and shape. Chaucer made it the standard for future writers and the model of current modern English. He imparted to it smoothness, suppleness and simplicity and breathed into it a high poetic life. Chaucer wrote his memorable work The Canterbury Tales in the reshaped and reformed East Midland dialect. Lowes rightly remarks: "He found English a dialect and left it a language." Spenser called him "the well of English undefiled".

Chaucer imparted musical sweetness and liquidity to language. Stopford A. Brooke remarks: "His eye for colour was superb and distinctive. He had a very fine ear for the music of verse, and the tale and the verse go together like voice and music. Indeed, so softly flowing and bright are they, that to read them is like listening in a meadow full of sunshine to a clear stream riffling over its bed of pebbles."

Chaucer's style is noticeable for vigour, clarity and concreteness. His images are conspicuous for "uncomplicated naturalness". They are taken from the familiar areas of common experience; for example, the Monk's horse is "as broun as is a berie", the Friar's eyes twinkle "as doon the sterres in the frosty night", the Franklin's purse is as white as morning milk, and the threadbare Clerk's mount is "bene as is a rake". Chaucer uses'simple and direct adjectives to describe his pilgrims, for example: worthy, gay, bright, fair, fresh, perfect, sharp, wise etc. His descriptions are graphic and startling. The description of the Wife of Bath creates a graphic effect:

Booled was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.

Albert writes: "Chaucer's best descriptions of men, manners and places, as when giving details of conventional spring mornings and flowery gardens, have a vivacity that makes his poetry unique."

Instead of using courtly and elegant style Chaucer preferred the simple and racy vocabulary of colloquial English. James Winny writes: "In its racy turn of phrase and pithy commentary, the style of the General Prologue is close to the terse, pungent manner of the proverbial sayings which are scattered plentifully through his work. ...... By using this direct and richly vernacular style Chaucer is able to secure an effect of sensational reality, in which material objects take on a heightened power, as though seen with the intensity of imaginative insight."

Chaucer is the first man to use "naked words" in English; "the first to make our composite language a thing compact and vital". Stopford A. Brooke points out that he wrote The Canterbury Tales in "almost the English of our time. Chaucer made our tongue
into a true means of poetry. He did more, he welded together the French and English elements in our language and made them into one English tool for the use of literature, and all our prose writers and poets derive their tongue from the language of The Canterbury Tales."

As a poetic artist, Chaucer is superb. In this respect he stands apart from other poets of his age. Gower wrote with a set object, and nothing can be less beautiful than the form in which he puts his tales. The author of Piers Plowman wrote with the object of reform of social and ecclesiastical affairs, and his form is harsh and uncouth. Chaucer wrote because he was full of emotion and joy in his own thoughts, and he did his best to arouse the same feelings and thoughts in the heart of his readers. He does not moralise. He does not reform. He is a pure poet. He, then, has the best right to the poet's name. He is, within his own range, the clearest of English artists.

As a versifier Chaucer is unique in contemporary poetry. He struck a modern note in versification because he discarded altogether the Old English irregular lines and alliteration—rim, ram, roff. He deftly adopted the French method of regular metre and end rimes. He introduced the heroic couplet into English verse and invented the rhyme royal.

**Chaucer's Narrative Art or Chaucer as the Father of English Novel:** Chaucer is a matchless narrator in verse. He is "often called the father of English poetry, it would be perhaps less flattering, but certainly true, to call him the father of English novel." His Troilus and Cressyde is the first English novel in everything except that it is written in verse. It is a love story and it contains all the elements of a modern novel. It has plot, dialogue, humour, irony, realism, conflict, dramatic element etc. In it Chaucer naturally told a story with delicacy, humour and psychological insight. The character of Cressyde is the first true psychological study of a complex woman and Pandarus is the first great comic character in English. S. D. Neil remarks: "Had Chaucer written in prose, it is possible that his Troilus and Cressyde and not Richardson's Pamela would be celebrated as the first English novel."

The Canterbury Tales is the best exposition of the spirit of novel. Almost all the tales are novels in miniature. What makes these tales novels in miniature is their realistic description of contemporary life and manners, singleness of plot, vivid characterisation with psychological insight, subtle sense of humour and dramatic element. In the words of W. J. Long, Chaucer's Tales "are stories as well as poems, and Chaucer is to be regarded as our first story-teller as well as our first modern poet."

Chaucer's method of narration is dramatic. Action and dramatic vitality are the keynotes of his tales. Action, dialogue, gesture and costume are all there as in real life. Prologue "is the first act in the drama and gives us the dramatis personae of that "comedy which is not intended for the stage." F. N. Robinson comments on dramatic element in the Tales: "In fact, from one point of view, the pilgrimage is a continuous and lively drama, in which the stories themselves contribute to the action. Because of this sustained dramatic interest and the vivid reality of characters, as well as for the inclusive representation of English society, The Canterbury Tales has been called a Human Comedy. The implied comparison with Balzac's great series of stories of the life of modern France is not inappropriate."
Chaucer, as we have seen, created English language which became the future medium of English novel. Church says: "It is important to remember that from this fountainhead (Chaucer) there trickled, as a side-stream, the new medium of prose which was to become the appropriate vehicle for the novel proper." Chaucer anticipated the novel in the real sense. G. K. Chesterton humorously remarked: "If Chaucer is the father of English poetry, he is the grandfather of English fiction."

**Chaucer's Contribution to English Language and Literature**

*Father of verse! who m immortal song  
First taught the Muse to speak the English tongue*

Chaucer was in many respects a pioneer, the first realist, the first humorist, the first narrative artist the first great character-painter, and the first great metrical artist in English literature. Further, he has been credited not only with the "fatherhood" of English poetry but has also been hailed as the father of English drama before the drama was born, and the father of English novel before the novel was born.. He is not only the first English poet, but a great poet in his own right.

**Contribution to Language:** Chaucer found his English a dialect and left it a language. Chaucer found the English language brick and left it marble. When he started his literary career, the English speech, and still less, the English of writing was confusingly fluid and unsettled. The English language was divided into a number of dialects which were employed in different parts of the country. The four of them vastly more prominent than the others were: The Southern, The Midland, The Northern or Northumbrian and The Kentish.

Out of these four, the **Midland dialect**, which was spoken in London and its surrounding area, was the simplest in grammar and syntax. Moreover, it was the one patronised by the aristocratic and literary circles of the country. Chaucer employed in his work the East midland dialect, and by casting the enormous weight of his genius balance decided once for all which dialect was going to be the standard literary language of the whole of the country for all times to come. It is certain that if Chaucer had adopted some other dialect the emergence of the standard language of literature would have been considerably delayed. All the great writers of England succeeding Chaucer are masters of the language of which Chaucer is, before them, the great master.

Not only was Chaucer's selection of one dialect out of the four a happy one, but so was his selection of one of the three languages which were reigning supreme in England at that time-Latin, French, and English. In fact Latin and French were more fashionable than the poor "vernacular" English. Latin was considered "the universal language" and was patronised at the expense of English by the Church as well as the learned. French was the language of the court and was used for keeping the accounts of the royal household till as late as 1365. Chaucer chose **English** which was a despised language, and as the legendary king did to the beggar maid, raised her from the dust, draped her in royal robes, and conducted her coronation. That queen is ruling even now.
**Contribution to Versification:** - Chaucer's contribution to English versification is no less striking than to the English language. He sounded the death-knell of the Saxon alliterative measure and firmly established the modern one.

Chaucer may be designated as the father of modern English versification. In *The Canterbury Tales* he mostly uses lines of ten syllables each (with generally five accents); and the lines run into couplets; that is, each couple of lines has its end-syllables rhyming with each other. For example:

**His eyes twinkled in his heed aright**  
**As doon the sterres in the frosty night.**

Not only this, Chaucer seems to be the first Englishman who realised and brought out the latent music of his language. "To read Chaucer's verse is like listening to a clear stream, in a meadow full of sunshine, rippling over its bed of pebbles." The following is the tribute of a worthy successor of his:

**The morning star of song, who made**  
**His music heard below,**  
**Don Chaucer, the first -warbler, whose sweet breath**  
**Preluded those melodious bursts thatfiU"**,  
**The spacious times of great Elizabeth**  
**With sounds that echo still**

He made English a pliant and vigorous medium of poetic utterance. His astonishingly easy mastery of the language is indeed remarkable. With one step the writings of Chaucer carry us into a new era in which the language appears endowed with ease, dignity, and copiousness of expression and clothed in the hues of the imagination.

**The Content of Poetry:** - Chaucer was a pioneer in the poetic field also. Not only the form of poetry, but its content, too, is highly indebted to him. He not only gave English poetry a new dress, but also a new body and a new soul. His major contribution towards the content of poetry is in his **strict adherence to realism**. His Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* embodies a new effort in the history of literature, as it strictly deals with real men, manners, and life. The Prologue holds a mirror to the life of Chaucer's age and shows its manners and morals completely. He effectively replaces the shadowy delineations of the old romantic and allegorical school with the vivid and pulsating pictures of contemporary life.

Chaucer does not forget the **universal beneath the particular**, the dateless beneath the dated. The portraits of the pilgrims in the Prologue constitute not only an epitome of the society of fourteenth-century England, but the epitome of human nature in all climes and all ages. They are all with us today, though some of them have changed their names. The knight now commands a line regiment, the squire is in the guards, the shipman was a rum-runner while prohibition lasted and is active now in the black market and so on.

**His Geniality, Tolerance, Humour, and Freshness:** - Chaucer's tone as a poet is wonderfully instinct with geniality, tolerance, humour, and freshness. In spite of his awareness of the corruption and unrest in the society of his age Chaucer is never upset
or upsetting. No one can read Chaucer without feeling that it is good to be alive in this world however imperfect may it be in numerous respects. He is a chronic optimist. He is never harsh, rancorous, bitter, or indignant, and never falls out with his fellow men for their failings. The great English humorists like Shakespeare and Fielding share with Chaucer the same broad human sympathy which he first introduced into literature

**Contribution to the Novel:** The novel is one of the latest courses in the banquet of English literature. But in his narrative skill, his gift of vivid characterization, his aptitude for plot-construction and his inventive skill Chaucer appears as a worthy precursor of the race of novelists who come centuries afterwards. His Tales are replete with intense human interest, and though he borrows his materials from numerous sundry sources, his narrative skill is all his own. His narration is lively and direct, if we make exception for the numerous digressions and philosophical and pseudo-philosophical animadversions having little to do with the tales proper, introduced after the contemporary fashion. It is difficult to find him flagging or growing dull and monotonous.

Chaucer's Prologue to The Canterbury Tales has been rightly called "the prologue to modern fiction." It has characters if not plot, and vivid characterization is one of the primary jobs of a novelist. According to Meredith "A novel should be a summary of actual life." So is, indeed, the Prologue. Several of the tales, too, are novels in miniature and hold the attention of the reader from the beginning to the end.

**Contribution to the Drama:** Chaucer wrote at a time when secular drama had not been born. His works have some dramatic elements which are altogether missing in the poetry before him. His mode of characterisation in the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales is, no doubt, static or descriptive, but in the tales proper it is dynamic or dramatic. There the characters reveal themselves, without the intervention of the author, through what they say and what they do. Even the tales they narrate, in most cases, are in keeping with their respective characters, avocations, temperaments, etc. If the drama had been known in Chaucer's time as a branch of living literature, he might have attained as high an excellence in comedy as any English or Continental writer.

We can conclude the discussion with the words of David Daiches, 'With Chaucer the English language and English literature grew at a bound to full maturity. No other Middle English writer has his skill, his range, his complexity, his large humane outlook. His followers lack both his technical brilliance and his breadth of vision, leaving him the one undisputed master in Medieval English Literature'. Well said:

The morning star of song who made,
His music heard below,
Don Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath,
Preluded those melodious bursts that fill,
The spacious times of Great Elizabeth,
With sounds that echo still

**Ecclesiastical Characters in the Prologue**

In spite of the fact that in Chaucer's age, religion had a control over the personalities and soul of the individuals, yet lamentably, its impact was degenerate. The cloisters
were advertising debasement, misusing the blameless people and were gaining cash under the cover of religion. Moralties and morals were blurring. The ministers had gotten famous for their covetousness, defilement and deceitfulness. They had overlooked their consecrated obligations and had gotten declined.

Of the thirty-one pilgrims of the Canterbury Tales, twelve were attached to religion in some way or other, and the manner in which Chaucer depicts them gives us some idea of the slack condition of many Church officials at the time and the poor opinion which the average man of education had of them. The bishops of the day were mainly shrewd men of business, quite respectable and hardworking; all of them English, owing their position to the joint efforts of King and Pope, but their energies were often devoted to public affairs rather than to the interests of their bishoprics. This was no new thing, but Wycliffe spoke and wrote fiercely against the corrupt clergy.

William Langland and John Wycliffe, as well as Chaucer, derided the practices of summoners, pardoners, and friar confessors, who were persecuting blackmailers protected by the law courts. How Chaucer exposes the corrupt clergy we can see it in his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

The **Priores** is the first ecclesiastical figure in "The Prologue". She smiles amiably and sings in her nasal tone. Chaucer says ironically that she is aware of the manners of the society and knows how to carry morsel to her mouth. He says:

**Wel koude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe That no drope ne fille upon hir brest.**

She wears fashionable dress with a golden broach, engraved with the words: **“Amor Vincit Omnia” i.e. “Love conquers everything”.**

She truly signifies high-class religious-minded ladies of the 14th century. She is not an ideal Nun and typifies the traits of the contemporary prioress.

The **Monk** is a pleasure-loving fellow. **An outridere, that lovede venerie,**

He is fat like a lord, for he leads a relaxed life and passes his time in eating, drinking and merry-making. He is entirely misfit to his profession. He is fond of fine dresses. He wears fur-lined sleeves, gold pins and love-knot. **A love knot in the gretter end there was**

He does not like to study the strict rules and discipline of the cloister. He likes hunting and has fine horses and hounds in his stable.

The **Friar** is a wanton, greedy and corrupt fellow who neglects his duties and does not bother about religion. He is fond of singing, merry-making, drinking and visiting inns and public places. He builds relations with the rich Franklin and worthy women. He is a rogue, seducer of women and scoundrel. He encourages sins by setting an easy solution of apology, misuses his authority and exploits others in terms of their sin. He was also very expert in the art of begging.

**For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho, So plesaunt was his In principio**

Prepared by Atta Ur Rahman Jadoon 03335499069 33
Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente

The **Summoner** is a nasty figure. Children are afraid of him. Of his visage children were aferd.

He loves garlic, red wine and onion. He is a hypocrite who allows people to carry on their sins and forgives them for a small donation to him. He knows the secret of young women and men and exploits them to his own interest.

The yonge girles of the diocise,
And knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed.

The **Pardoner** is a thorough cheat. His bag is full of relics which he sells to housewives and earns a lot.

He hadde a croys of latoun, ful of stones,
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.

He deceives the simple folk. He sings merrily, sweetly and attracts the people in this way. Chaucer has a poor opinion of him and ironically calls him “a noble ecclesiastical”.

In contrast to these corrupt religious characters, Chaucer gives a pleasant picture of the **poor Parson**, a shepherd, who protects his flock from the wolf.

A good man was ther of religioun,
And was a povre persoun of a toun;

He preaches sincerely, correctly and tries to practice what he preaches. He leads a simple, virtuous life of devotion and service. **A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys;**

The **Clerk** is not an ecclesiastical character but he is studying at church. The Clerk is one of the idealized characters. He is well-versed in logic.

A clerk ther was of Oxenford also,
That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.

He does not run after showiness and worldly grandeur. He is a miser and poor. He is quick and meaningful in his talk. He is glad to learn and glad to teach. He is the picture of the poet’s learning.

A very notable point in the portrayal of Chaucer's ecclesiastical characters is that the **good ones are dull and drab; they are not as alive and interesting as the bad ones**. This indicates that Chaucer was much more at home among real people who had their share of faults and failings which he enjoyed describing with all the artistic means at his command. People like the poor Parson and oxford clerk are idealized, unsubstantial figures whom we find without the warmth and vitality of the Friar and the Pardoner. Likewise, the Wife of Bath is a much more flesh and blood character than the Prioress.
To conclude, the profiteering clerics in the Prologue are easy going who lack spirit of sacrifice, respect for authority, acceptance of discipline, and at least a modicum of otherworldliness. The principal characteristics of Chaucer's monk, friar, pardonner and Summoner are greedy self-seeking, contempt for authority, evasion of discipline self-imposed in the vows of their orders, and a thorough-going worldliness, which not only sought the good things of life, but sought them at the expense of the needy. This great organisation, with its wealth, its power, and its conservative traditions, might have been expected to offer a safeguard against social decay but it was itself a fruitful breeding-ground for the very things which were disorganising feudal society.

"Chaucer's portraits do not illustrate a moral or philosophical thesis."

On first reading them, Chaucer's character sketches in the General Prologue certainly seem to serve as moral judgments on the portrayed individual. However, are these to be seen as functional as typifications of the entire social class that they represent or as portraits of contemporary individuals? I would argue that allegorist and literalist readings of the General Prologue are not mutually exclusive: that characters can exist for the reader on both levels. Insofar as they serve to illustrate an overall thesis, however, it seems sensible to concentrate on the characters as exemplars of their type and class.

Brewster states that "The only class system know to mediaeval theory" has "the familiar Three-fold division... into Knights, Clergy, and Ploughmen... Knights defend society, and maintain law and order; clergy defend men's souls and feed their minds; ploughmen provide food to maintain men's bodies." Although Chaucer chooses not to order his characters appearance in the General Prologue according to the class to which they belong, presumably because doing so would result in less opportunity for comparison, he appears to be sympathetic to such divisions.

The Knight, who we are first introduced to, obviously falls into the first category. Although Terry Jones sees him as something of a bloodthirsty mercenary, I feel he is projecting his own presentist negative attitude towards warfare onto a character Chaucer himself seems to be very sympathetic to. Indeed the Knight embraces and stands for values which Chaucer seems to wholeheartedly support: "trouthe and honour, freedom and curteusie." The rest of his household, his son the squire and the yeoman, seem to be morally worthy by association. His son, for all his youthful faults, is imbued with the same 'curteusie', and it seems so inevitable to me that he is going to mature into the Knight, that I see him as an image of the Knight as he was, before being ennobled by age and experience. As a fellow upholder of the law, the Sergeant of the Lawe can also be placed in this class, and he too is presented in largely sympathetic terms.

Chaucer's treatment of the ecclesiastical class is far less homogenous, ranging from his irony-free beautification of the Parson, to the little satirised Prioress and Monk, to the pilloried figure of the Friar. In fact, some view Chaucer's unfinished Canterbury Tales as the smoking gun, which reveals that the Church has him murdered for publishing such negative views of the clergy. However, his treatment of the clergy is not in any real sense radical or subversive; it merely reflects charges commonly levelled at the orders at the time. The Prioress is the first member of the clergy to appear and through her association with the Benedictine order we are invited to examine the behaviour of these
characters in light of their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Routine breaking of these supposedly sacred vows, along with the selling of indulgences and other such abuses are what eventually led to the Reformation.

The relative dearth of characters who can be considered ploughmen, figures who are directly concerned with the production of food, reflects the breakdown in feudal society and, more specifically, the breakdown in food supply due to the deaths of massive numbers of labourers at the hands of the Black Death. Although many contemporary figures attacked farm labourers of the day for demanding extortionate wages because of these conditions, Chaucer holds up his Ploughman as the epitome of simple, Christian living, "lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee". The Cook, with his very direct relationship to food production, is also characterised as an amenable fellow, but without the saintly virtues of the Ploughman. However, the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 seems to have soured Chaucer's congeniality to the rural poor. This is evident in Chaucer's animalisation of the strong and brawny Miller. He compares his beard o the bristles on a sow. The fact that the Miller routinely breaks down doors with his head marks him out as a threshold-crosser, who does not respect the natural civic order. Chaucer time and time again employs physiognomy, the pop psychology of his day, in order to highlight the bestial and depraved side of his character. Similarly in the Pardoner physical and spiritual deformity go hand in hand.

The characters that do not fit in to this social framework are generally satirised as being overly concerned with the pursuit of profit or pleasure, the Merchant and Franklin being chief in each of these respective categories. The disinterested, asexual, and devoutly religious Clerk seems to be the moral example they should be following. In the five guildsmen, Chaucer mildly mocks middle-class self-importance, but neither holds them up as moral beacons or attacks them as degenerates.

As far as there is a philosophical thesis in The General Prologue, it centres on two qualities: caritas: charity and compassion, and cupiditas: greed and the inordinate desire for wealth. Chaucer seems to accept the cupiditas is a necessary evil insofar as it leads to a functional and productive society. For example, the Merchant's cupiditas is respected as it is honest and makes him a 'better' merchant. On the other hand, the Reeve's dishonest pilfering of his master's estate is seen as bestial, sub-human. His animal nature is reinforced by his association with his master's livestock: "His lorde sheep, his neet, his dayerye | His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye." Little more than an animal, his fate is evinced by his constant position at the rear of the company of pilgrims: the furthest from salvation. This seems to recognise that there will be recompense paid in the afterlife for holding cupiditas as one's central tenet, and, conversely, reward for caritas.

It is important to note that Chaucer's characters are neither stereotypes nor, as DW Robertson puts it "elaborate iconographic figures designed to show the manifold implications of an attitude". They are not one-sided unequivocal creations and my own interpretation of what Chaucer saw as their moral virtues and vices is far from unequivocal. The General Prologue, and of course The Canterbury Tales itself, is a rich and complex text, often ambivalent and ironic. Although we are dealing with archetypal figures, we are dealing with them outside the moral boundaries and strictures of everyday life; pilgrims in an amoral zone of 'pleye' and 'game'. In Malcolm Andrew's words, "The poet creates a fiction with decontextualises his pilgrims: the commentators employ
a method which recontextualises them." In conclusion, Chaucer does not present us with a moral or philosophical thesis in these portraits. Nor does he provide an antithetical reaction against the hierarchal imposed moral and philosophical theses of church and feudal state. Instead, through his ambiguity and he offers us the opportunity to define and redefine the moral meaning of these brilliantly drawn portraits.

**Elements of Drama and Novel in the Prologue**

Chaucer had in him distinct characteristics of a novelist and a dramatist. His consummate art of story-telling in The Canterbury Tales does indicate that if he chose he could be one of the immortal novelists of the world. Chaucer proves himself a master of the art of characterisation, skilful in his handling of dialogue, delighting in action, and keenly alive to the value of effective situation and climax. Above all, he is the master of constructive art. He is able to weld different tales into harmonious groups.

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales is the prologue of modern fiction. Its characterisation, realistic portrayal of life and a sort of structural unity give it the semblance of a novel in miniature. If we could take thirty per cent of Goldsmith, fifty of Fielding, and twenty of Walter Scott, and vitalise this compound with the spirit of the fourteenth century, we should get perhaps fairly near to another Chaucer. But it would be a Chaucer whose right hand wrote in prose and only his left in verse, and our formula, though it may be useful in suggesting the writers to whom Chaucer is most akin, and how modern he really is, would still be defective, for the charm of his poetry remains personal and individual. Chaucer like any other modern novelist was gifted with the ability of revealing the human heart and unravelling the complexities of sentiments.

Like a novelist Chaucer has a masterly **art of description and narration**. His portraits in the Prologue are no less vivid than the characters in any human comedy. The narrative style in the Prologue speaks of an inimitable precision and enviable literary style. The central incident is the pilgrimage which unifies the whole band of travellers to the shrine of St. Thomas into the inter-related people of a novel or the actors of a drama. Above all, it is Chaucer's stark realism and nearly complete objectivity which are the hall-marks of a modern novelist or a real dramatist of any age. The point is that Chaucer as it is evident to us in the Prologue does seem to be possessing the talents of a novelist and a dramatist. The prologues to the Tales are the counterparts of the soliloquies of Shakespeare or the monologues of Browning or the interior monologues of modern fiction writers. His negative capability matches the aesthetics of a true artist who presents his viewpoint not as a lyrical poet but as a passionate at the same time detached story-teller or playwright.

In Chaucer's works contains the seeds of the drama and novel. Had Chaucer been a contemporary of Shakespeare, he might well have written plays. Had he been a contemporary of Fielding, he might well have written novels. The power for both is implicit in the Canterbury Tales, and adds richness to that incomparable work. Throughout the Tales, there is not only creation, but interplay and clash of characters. The pilgrims, brilliantly pointed for us in the Prologue, are developed, and elaborated, some more, some less, as the poem proceeds, and always with a beautiful consistency. There is the mutual disparagement between the Miller and the Reeve, between the Summoner and the Friar; the attempt of the pardoner to make capital out of his story
and his vigorous repulse by the landlord. The Wife of Bath in the immensely garrulous and entertaining dissertation upon marriage, which precedes her story, reveals herself as a full-length comedy character, and satisfies, incidentally, the curiosity of the reader as to why he was casually told, in the Prologue, that she was deaf in one ear. The Knight (perfect and gentle) finds the Monk's catalogue of historical disasters unspeakably tedious. By means of these passages of narrative and comment between the tales Chaucer keeps his characters alive, each one being aware of the rest, so that the tales themselves, though they are in fact the main body of the work, are yet but an incident in the whole.

Chaucer is indeed properly to be called a poet; but he bears a closer relation to the great English novelists than to Spenser. The scholarship which is preoccupied with exposing the derivativeness of Chaucer's poetry tends also to obscure the remarkable newness of what Chaucer has done. How new Chaucer's poetry is it is difficult for us to apprehend because so many of the remarkable developments in English literature since—and each original author has been a new development—have been developments from what Chaucer did for the first time. The Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde are, if one thinks back to what there was before them which they are developments from, surprisingly new works of art.

With the Canterbury Tales Chaucer inaugurates the English novel; and, moreover, the Great Tradition of it. In this dramatic-poetic novel we see the English novel actually in being, with the characteristics of our eighteenth and nineteenth-century masterpieces. Chaucer's preoccupations here are those of the great novelists. He explores the theme of the individual's relation to the society in which he lives; launches the comedy of the clash of character and the conflict of interest and motives; and shows the comic and ironic effects obtainable from the class distinctions felt by the newly emerged bourgeoisie associated with the growth of town life and of the trades and commerce (the Wife of Bath is the new bourgeois wife asserting her independence). He observes, as do Jane Austen and George Eliot, the changes in manners and outlook between the older generation and the new—between the Knight and his son, and Franklin and his—and, like them he develops to the highest artistic level what is only in an elementary form elsewhere in his contemporaries the kind of characterization which distinguishes the English novel from Bunyan to Henry James—characters which, while exquisitely realistic in detail, are morally and socially typical.

Chaucer's tolerant observation and relish of humanity gave him a power of representing it, which has been rarely surpassed in any respect save depth. It has been disputed whether this power is rather that of the dramatist or that of the novelist, a dispute perhaps arguing a lack of the historic sense. In the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, Chaucer would certainly have been the one, and in the mid-nineteenth the other. It would be most satisfactory could we have his work. The author has, in fact, set himself a high task by adopting the double system above specified, and by giving elaborate descriptions of his personages before he sets them to act and speak up to these descriptions. It is a plan which, in the actual drama and the actual novel, has been found rather a dangerous one. But Chaucer discharges himself victoriously of his liabilities. And the picture of life which he has left us has captivated all good judges who have given themselves the very slight trouble necessary to attain the right point of view, from his own day to this.
Irony in The Prologue

Irony is a method of humorous or sarcastic expression in which the intended meaning of the words used is the direct opposite of their usual sense. It is also the feigning of ignorance in argument. The voice of the satirist speaking out of a mask is subtle irony. Behind the mask his face may be dark with fury or writhing with contempt, but his voice is calm, sometimes soberly earnest, sometimes lightly amused. The lips of the mask and its features are persuasive, almost real, perfectly controlled. Some of those who hear the voice, and see the polite lips, from which it issues, are persuaded that it is the utterance of truth and that the speaker believes everything he says. Aristotle said that irony was the opposite of boasting: it was mock-modesty, dissimulation, and self-depreciation.

Geoffrey Chaucer is frequently ironical in many respects. His irony is what metaphor is for later poets. Both irony and metaphor put into the same set of words a double meaning; whereas in metaphor they are linked by comparison, in irony they are linked by contrast. The linkage is important. In each case the two elements of the double meaning modify each other, though one may be dominant. In the case of irony the superficial 'false' meaning is still part of the total meaning. It modifies the "true" meaning, if only by asserting that even the underlying meaning is not the only competitor for our assent; or by establishing a limited validity even for simple mindedness. The obvious meaning is the contribution innocence makes to experience. More generally the duality of irony contributes a certain kind of uncertainty, and hence a need for toleration, not least for the poet himself, who uses irony to evade responsibility.

Chaucer’s irony is always gentle, seldom severe, and never savage. He is to all intents and purposes a comic ironist. His portraits in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales are excellent examples of comic irony. In fact, throughout the Prologue the reader has to be on his guard against Chaucer's seeming enthusiasm towards each of his pilgrims, realising that his irony operates indirectly through praise that is characteristically excessive and generous, whether sincere or not.

In the Prologue his remarks about the Knight that 'He was a verray, parfit gentil knight' are straightforwardly respectful, but his generous tribute to the Monk 'A manly man, to been an abbot able' should leave us wondering whether he means that most abbots were appointed for their worldliness and self-indulgence. When he rounds off the description of the Merchant by remarking "For sothe he was a worthy man with alle" Chaucer's irony is obvious, for he has just disclosed the pilgrim's dishonesty and hypocritical manner. Similarly, that 'verray parfit praktisour' the Physician, although described in terms which recall the Knight, observes a code which inverts the standards of truth, honour and liberality which the Knight strives to uphold. Here Chaucer's seeming praise is doubly ironic.

The physician is not the genuine, perfect practitioner of a noble ideal but shrewd, miserly and self-regarding. The nun in Madame Eglientine is a charming imposture, imperfectly concealing a woman whose social ambitions lead her into an absurd confusion of purposes—a mimicking of courtly mannerisms that are completely inappropriate to her calling. She is a specimen of fascinating disparity between what she is and what she seems to be, and Chaucer exploits this comic incongruity in a very subtle manner. The Wife of Bath is subjected to irony when Chaucer while praising her
charitable nature points out that she goes out of all charity if some other woman in the parish takes precedence over her in making the offering. The implication is that charity should be evidenced by humility, not by pride, by gentleness, not by anger.

Leaving aside such idealisation as the **Knight**, the **Parson** and the **Plowman**, it may be undeniably asserted that Chaucer takes men as he finds them, obtaining that kind of amusement in the ironic yet sympathetic observation of his fellows which yields itself only to the artist’s vision. Although he has a loving relish for human behaviour and human weakness, it is wrong, as some critics tend to do, to play down his irony. A high proportion of his pilgrims are rascals, and Chaucer knows that they are. Nor can we ignore his clear attack on corruption in the Church, though here again the attack is done obliquely through the presentation of individual characters. The **Monk** and the **Friar** and the **Summoner** are amusing enough characters as Chaucer describes them, but the behaviour of the latter two, brilliantly presented and magnificently comic though it is, is the behaviour of petty blackguards. The **Pardoner**, perhaps Chaucer’s greatest masterpiece of character drawing, implies a whole world of moral hypocrisy.

Lastly, there is an element of Socratic irony in the prologue. He not only uses irony in portrayal of other character but also his own character and says: *My wit is short, ye may well understand.* Chaucer’s point of view is no doubt secular throughout the Prologue, and he is intrigued rather than shocked by the weaknesses of human nature. But irony always has moral implications, and Chaucer in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales was not an ironist for nothing.

**Satire in The Prologue**

Satire is a genre of literature in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, government or society itself, into improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be humorous, its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit as a weapon and as a tool to draw attention to both particular and wider issues in society. Satire differs from humour in that it has a definite moral purpose. The satirist deliberately alienates our sympathies from those whom he describes, and as the true humorist is apt to pass from comedy to romance, and from romance to tragedy, so the satirist not infrequently ends by finding rage and disgust overpower his sense of the ridiculous. The fact is that satire is not Chaucer’s natural bent. His interest lies in portraiture rather than in exposure. His object is to point life as he sees it, to hold up the mirror to nature.

Chaucer’s kinship as a satirist is with Fielding. They are alike in a certain air of rollicking good-fellowship and a determination to paint men and women as they know them. Both enjoy a rough prank, and have little patience with over-refinement. Both give the readers a sense of studies honesty and kindliness, and know how to combine tenderness with strength. Both with all their tolerance, have a keen eye for hypocrisy or affectation and a sharp tongue wherewith to chastise and expose it. Chaucer hates no one, not even the Pardoner.

In Chaucer we have no sustained satire of the Popean or the Swiftian type. His genius is like that of Shakespeare, having a high degree of negative capability. Hence, Chaucer gives us no impression of being a great satirist, although in his writings especially in the
portraits of the Prologue we have sharp little sallies of satire. It would be rather more suitable to call Chaucer a comic satirist in relation to his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. Comic satire predominates in extraordinarily rich Prologue.

There are, therefore, certain limitations of scope. The higher aristocracy are excluded, for the Knight is comparatively low ranking, and is in any case an ideal figure. The painfulness and rough comedy of the life of the great mass of the really poor find no place, and again their two representatives are idealized portraits. The characters of highest and lowest ranks were not suitable for comic treatment. In the Prologue we mainly see the middling people, and we see them through Chaucer's eyes from a slightly superior moral and social station. We can afford to laugh at them. We look through the eyes of a poet masculine, self-assured, delighted, who knows that there is "joy after woe, and after joy, sadness. He sees abuses but is neither surprised nor stung by them. Men are not angels, but neither are they devils. Chaucer gives us a vision of men and women in the world, and most of them have some relish of absurdity when looked at carefully especially when they require neither our loyalty nor our fear.

Chaucer does not see his company of pilgrims simply as an incongruous assortment of pantomime figures, to be enjoyed for their grotesquely comic oddity. The pervasive element of social satire in the General Prologue—most prominent in his account of the ecclesiastical figures—suggests Chaucer's serious concern at the debasing of moral standards. There are moments, as when he records the Friar's sneering contempt for the poor, which seem to show Chaucer's habitual good temper revolting against the cynical opportunism which had become widespread in ecclesiastical life. His usual attitude towards the moral weakness which he discloses is one of mocking. The Shipman is a thievish pirate, the Reeve a cunning embezzler, the Physician has a dishonest private understanding with his druggist, and the Man of Law 'semed bisier than he was'. The efforts of the Prioress to mimic courtly manners are detected and set down with the same intuitive sense of false appearance as allows Chaucer to penetrate the Merchant's imposing disguise. The mask of respectability is not roughly torn off, for while he is describing his pilgrims Chaucer is maintaining an outward manner that is awed and deferential; telling us that the Prioress was 'of greet desport', that the Monk was a manly man, 'to been an abbot able', or that the murderous Shipman was an incomparable navigator and pilot.

Because he does not insist upon their moral failings or hypocritical nature, revealing them with an ironic innocence of manner and leaving them to speak for themselves, Chaucer's approach to his pilgrims suggests a psychologist rather than a moralist' He presents vices and shortcomings within the context of human individuality, as a product of the curious pressures which stamp a unique personality upon each of the pilgrims. The Shipman's easy conscience is an integral part of the tough, self-reliant spirit of the man, which has acquired the wilfulness and moral unconcern of the elements in which he lives. His thefts and murders, the Franklin's Epicureanism, the Physician's avarice, interest Chaucer not as evidence of a breakdown of moral values but for what they reveal of individual character.

Thus Chaucer's satire is not directed against contemporary morals, but against the comic self-ignorance which gives man two' identities—the creature he is, and the more distinguished and inscrutable person he imagines himself to be.
Chaucer's Poetic style

The style of an author is his distinctive manner of writing or expressing thought in language. In commenting on Chaucer's style, it would be well to remember that he was writing in English at a time when that language was in a rather poor state of development. To Chaucer goes the credit of having developed the condition of his native language to such an extent, that only the addition of blank verse was required to make English poetry fully equipped. He took up a dialect and left it a language. He enriched it by adapting words from foreign languages, especially French. He infused the rough English dialect with the refinement and polish of the French language. He brought flexibility to his native language.

Conversational and colloquial style: - As we read The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales, we are immediately struck by its conversational tone. The verse flows with a pleasing fluidity. It shows Chaucer's mastery of the decasyllabic couplet. We find ordinary speech, common proverbs and idiomatic terms, and even contemporary slang in his poetry. It provides a conversational viewpoint to Chaucer's style.

Chaucer's use of contemporary idiomatic terms and phrases, adds to the colloquial style. One such instance, which immediately comes to mind, is in the lines about the Monk:

He yaf not of that text a pulled hen And But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre.

In The Prologue, we come across a racy and forceful style, which has the pungency of a proverb. It is especially evident in the fabliaux (comic verse), which present the comic aspects of ordinary life.

His owene hand he made ladders thre, To climben by the rouges and the stalkes...... Unto the tubbes hanginge in the balkes ...

Chaucer's skill, in fact, lies in the smooth transition, which is effected from the "high" to the colloquial style.

Forceful directness and immediacy of style: - Chaucer's style has a directness and immediacy, which comes from the habitual employment of the verb 'to be' in describing the pilgrims. His statements are so plain and simple that they admit no qualifications.

"A Monk ther was", "his heed was balled", "whit was bard as is the dayesie"—these statements are clear, solid and irrefutable. The terms in which the pilgrims are described, are simple and direct. The most common of the adjectives used are, perfect, gay, fair, wise, and worthy. They often gain their strength and directness through masterly placing in a line. The Wife of Bath comes alive before us in the simplest, but so very graphic terms: Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.

The Shipman's tanned face is vividly described in very ordinary words:
The hoote smoer hadde masd his hewe brown.
Forceful directness of the figures of speech

The simple immediacy which marks the adjectives used for the pilgrims is to be found in Chaucer's images, too. Chaucer has plenty of images and similes. But they are all simple, direct, and never elaborate. At the same time, they have vivid and arresting quality. His mouth as greet was a greet forneys says Chaucer, and we get a direct picture of the cavernous mouth of the Miller. The Squire is "as fresh as is the month of May". The Friar's neck is as white as a lily (flour-delies), and his eyes shine like "stars in the frosty night." The Miller's beard is as red "as any sow or fox", while the Franklin has a beard, "white as is a daisy." The graphic description of the tuft of hair on the wart of the Miller's nose, is unforgettable. It is red "as the bristles of a sow's ears". The Pardoner's eyes look like those of a hare, and he has a voice which resembles that of goat. The Monk's horse is "as brown as a berry", and the Franklin's purse is "white as morning milk", while the poor Oxford Clerk's horse is "lean as rake".

The images are derived from the common spheres of experience. They are uncomplicated and direct. Chaucer does not employ extended simile and metaphor in his poetry. His images are drawn from homely and familiar fields of life.

Use of intensifying terms to emphasise a point: - A special stylistic device used by Chaucer is the emphatic manner in which he underscores his point. Some of his statements have an air of clear finality. "He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght", sums up the Knight in simple and direct words. Some of the words which Chaucer uses frequently to intensify and emphasise a point, are ful, wd, al, certainly. They are all affirmative and positive terms. It seems to indicate a stylistic device through which Chaucer associates himself with the positive and generous outlook on life.

The Monk is "a lord ful fat and in good poynyt" and "certainly he was a fair prelate". The Frankin had "full many a fat partrirch" in his house to satisfy his epicurean taste. The use of these intensive adjectives is at its most effective in the description of the five Guildsmen. Though they are described collectively, they are given a sharper reality by the emphasis implied in the terms, ful and al.

Ful fresshe and newe hir geere apiked was;
hir knives were chaped noght with bras
Bill al with silver; wrought ful clene and wel.

Chaucer emphasises on a point at times through arranging words in a way, which is not the normal manner:

God loved he best with al his hoote herte

The medieval stylistic device of alliteration is also to be found in Chaucer's poetry:

Ful long were his legges and ful lene
Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones.
It gives the lines a musical effect. There are some words which Chaucer seems very fond of and which he uses fairly often. ‘Wel koude he’, wel knew he,’ ‘ful byg, etc., occur quite a few times in his poetry. Mostly, ‘wel’, ‘ful’, etc., are employed to enhance the metrical effect of the lines.

In conclusion, his style is direct, plain and conversational. His imagery is likewise direct and vivid, drawn from common and familiar fields of experience. He has a masterly ability of making a smooth transition from the ‘high’ to the colloquial style, without losing any fluidity of movement. He shows a sure judgement and confidence in the choice of the right words. The charm of fluent simplicity and perfect appropriateness of word to thought, make Chaucer's style an important aspect of his poetry.

**Character of the Wife of Bath**

The most vivid and famous portrait in The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales, is, perhaps, the Wife of Bath. She is one character in whom the realistic and the individualistic elements of portraiture outweigh the typical. She is the most entertaining character in The Prologue. We enjoy her sheer vitality, robustness and earthy essence. Chaucer accepted folly, vice and immorality as part and parcel of men as well as women. In presentation of the Wife of Bath, we certainly do have satire, but the satire is not violent or bitter and fierce.

**A vivid character of flesh and blood:** - The Wife of Bath is the essence of elemental vitality. She is the woman of earthy physical passion, firm boldness and dominating personality. She comes before us vividly. Her red face, bold expression, huge and voluptuous body attired in a riding coat, the gaps in her teeth, her new shoes, broad wimple adoring her head, and her heavy and fine kerchiefs, all add to a startlingly vivid character of flesh and blood. She would not tolerate any other woman of her parish to give the offering before her at church. She was fully insistent on her rights of precedence, as she was a rich and prominent member of her parish. If any confusion about precedence occurred, she would be 'out of all charitee'. The Wife of Bath did not suffer from any false modesty. She knew her place in society and laid full claims to it.

**Her forceful personality and experience of the world:** - It is not without significance that she is the finest weaver in the country. She is a prosperous and important member of her community. Naturally, she dresses in accordance with her position in society. Her appearance is neat as well as forceful. She wore the best of clothes, though she was slightly overdressed on Sundays. However, she would want to impress upon the world that she is a successful business woman. She wears her bright scarlet stockings neatly and straight.

Her kerchiefs are ‘full fine of ground’, i.e., of fine texture. Her knowledge of travelling and experience of pilgrimages is shown in her choice of suitable dress and mount for the occasion. She wears a protective outer skirt around her broad and generous hips, and is mounted on an ambling horse, which has been trained to walk in a manner most comfortable for the rider. She also wears spurs, and hence we can conclude that she rides astride and not side-saddle.
The Wife of Bath has a forceful personality which suits her generous physical attributes. She has a firm mind which knows its wants clearly. She also knows how to get what she wants. She is jolly, gossipy, and popular woman fond of men's company and well versed in the art of love. She has widely travelled. We are told that she had visited Jerusalem thrice, besides other places of pilgrimage.

**Her amorous adventure:**

Her physical vitality is best represented by her various amorous adventures. She is a much-married woman—she has had five husbands and is ready for the sixth. Her promptitude in getting husbands would not have surprised her fellow pilgrims. The Wife of Bath, with her eager willingness to get married, would have found husbands with even greater promptitude. She is, however, the dominant partner in marriage. She would not allow her husband to rule the home. She would have firm control over her home as well as her husband. In her Prologue to her tale, she remarks.

"I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
In the acts and in fruyt of marriage"

She is entirely as secular figure, and confesses that she has never aspired to live the perfect life. She has no use for transcendental religion.

The Wife of Bath has experienced not merely marital love, but has had a number of affairs in her youth. Her experience of love is subtly summed up by Chaucer when he says at the end of her portrait:

**Or remedies of love she knew per chaunce,**
**For She koude of that art the old chaunce.**

**Two striking features: gap teeth and deafness:** The most vivid physical attributes of the Wife of Bath are, perhaps, that she was 'some-del def' and 'gat-toothed'. Gap teeth indicated wide travel, amorousness, and an envious, faithless, irreverent, luxurious, and bold nature. The Wife of Bath has all these features. The reason for her getting somewhat deaf is given later. Her fifth husband in an attempt to assert his male superiority hit her across her ears. But beyond the damage to her ears, we may be quite sure that Wife of Bath would not have allowed her husband to gain any superiority.

**Her war against male domination:** The Wife of Bath is a pure militant as far as women's liberation is concerned. She is not merely an aggressive, uninhibited, vulgar woman dominating the particular men fortunate or unfortunate enough to have been married by her. She embodies the eternal female in revolt against a male-ordered and male-centred civilization. Men's evils and vices were firmly attributed to the temptation signified by women. The Wife of Bath, despite all her vulgarity and boisterous coarseness, embodies the demand for respectability for woman as individuals. She is at once a representative of all that a man dislikes in a woman—nagging, spending, gossiping, etc.—and what every woman desires for, which is domination over males.

**Conclusion:** The Wife of Bath has an awe-inspiring personality, overwhelming in its impact and flamboyancy. It is apt that she should be on the pilgrimage to Canterbury, for a pilgrimage in the Middle Ages was a means of pleasure as well as an object of
piety. The Wife of Bath is a clear-cut individual in her self-revelation before she tells her tale or gives her opinion on marriage, and tells her adventures in the marital field without a sign of inhibition. The Wife of Bath is the most complex character among the pilgrims.

**The Prologue as a Picture of Fourteenth Century England**

Chaucer is truly the social chronicler of England at the end of fourteenth century. His work is the most precious document for whoever wishes to evoke a picture of life as it then was. The fact is that Chaucer had intimate knowledge of the crosscurrents of English society of his time. His keen observation, vast study, extensive travel and variegated experience in the service of the state had familiarised him with the entire pageant of social life of those days. It was with the intention of describing his boundless knowledge of men and manners that he conceived the plan of the Canterbury Tales which encompass every aspect of life in the fourteenth century England.

The group of pilgrims described in the Prologue is itself an unequalled picture of the Society of Chaucer's time. Here are some thirty persons belonging to the most different classes. There is a **Knight** lately come from the foreign wars. He is a high-minded gentle-mannered, knightly adventurer, type of the courteous, war-loving chivalry which was passing rapidly away. With him is his son, a young **Squire**, curly haired and gay, his short, white-sleeved gown embroidered like mead with red-and-white flowers. He is an epitome of the gifts and graces of brilliant youth. Their servant is a **Yeoman**, in coat and hoof of a green, a sheaf of peacock-arrows under his belt, a mighty bow in his hand. He is the type of solid English yeomanry.

There is a whole group of ecclesiastical figures, representing in their numbers and variety the diverse activities of the medieval church. Most of them are **satirical portraits**, in their worldliness and materialism only too faithfully representative of the ecclesiastical abuses against which Wycliffe struggled. First of all there is a **Monk**, who cares only for hunting and good cheer. His bald head shines like glass, his bright eyes roll in his head. He rides a sleek brown palfrey, and has "many a dainty horse" in his stables. His sleeves are trimmed with fine fur at the wrists; his hood is fastened under his chin with a gold love-not. As a companion figure to the hunting Monk, Chaucer gives us "Madame Eglantyne," the **Prioress**. She is a teacher of young ladies, speaks French "after the school of Stratford-atte-bowe." is exquisite in her table-manners, counterfeiting as well as she can the stately behaviour of court.

Other ecclesiastics are there, hangers-on and caterpillars of the church. The **Friar**, intimate with hospitable franklins, innkeepers, and worthy women, despises beggars and lazars. The ** Summoner** is a repulsive person with "fire-red cherubim face". The **Pardoner** "come from Rome all note" has a bag full of pardons which he sells as relics of the holy saints to gullible people. Chaucer's treatment of these evil churchmen is highly good-natured and tolerant. He never takes the tone of moral indignation against them. But he does better, he sets beside them, as the type of true shepherds of the church, a "poor **Parson**". Chaucer paints the character of the Parson, poor in this world's goods, but "rich of holy thought and work," with loving and reverent touch. The Parson's brother travels with him—a **Plowman**, a "true swinker and a good", who helps his poor
neighbours without hire and loves them as himself. He reminds us of Piers the Plowman, in the wonderful Vision which is the antitype of Chaucer’s work.

A crowd of other figures fill the canvas. There is a shipman from the west-country, a representative of those adventurous seamen, half merchant-sailors, half smugglers and pirates, who had already made England’s, name a terror on the seas and paved the way for her future naval and commercial supremacy. There is a poor Clerk of Oxford, riding a horse as lean as a rake, and dressed in threadbare cloak, who spends all that he can beg or borrow upon his studies. He represents that passion for learning which was already astir everywhere in Europe, and which was awaiting only the magic touch of the new-found classical literature to blossom out into genuine thought and imagination. There is a Merchant, in a Flemish beaver hat, on a high horse, concealing, with the grave importance of his air, the fact that he is in debt. There is a group of guild-members, in the livery of their guild, all worthy to be aldermen; together with the merchant, they represent the mercantile and manufacturing activity which was lifting England rapidly to the rank of a great commercial power. There is the Wife of Bath, almost a modern feminist figure, conceived with masterly humour and realism, a permanent human type. She has had "husbands five at church-door, "and though" somdel dea," hopes to live to wed several others. She rides on an ambler, with spurs and scarlet hose on her feet, and on her head a hat as broad as a buckler.

Apart from the men and their manners, the Prologue also sheds light on contemporary clothing, food and occupations. Almost every character man or woman is in a typical dress and other personal array. Several of the pilgrims are conspicuously armed, others carry small items of equipment, like a silken purse or a pouch or a pair of spurs or a musical instrument. Chaucer uses the details of clothing and other outfit not only to describe the pilgrim’s appearance but also to throw further light on his or her character. Thus the Wife of Bath, with her ambition to be the first wife in her parish. The brooch of the Prioress bearing the motto Amor Vincit Omnia indicates that this nun has a character vacillating between secular and divine love.

Chaucer's descriptions of the pilgrims and their food vary at a great deal. We only read that the Knight on his campaigns had often "the bord bigonne," that the Squire "carf before his fader" at the table, and that the Prioress had elegant table manners, never slobbered, and liked to feed her little dogs on bread and milk. The Monk loved hunting and presumably ate venison and game. His special dish was a roast fat swan, a delicacy usually eaten only by kings, abbots, and such folk. We are not told that the Friar had any specially favourite dish, but instead of consortig with the poor, like St. Francis, he loved taverns and tapsters, and all "sellers of vitaille." The Summoner loved garlic, onions, leeks, and strong bood-red wine. This exuberant taste no doubt accounted for his bad, incurable complexion. The Clerk of Oxford quite frankly preferred books to food, and economised in order to add to his library. But the Franklin was a real epicure. His bread and ale were always first class, and his house was never without baked meats, both fish and flesh. It snowed meat and drink in his house, and he had all seasonable dainties provided, partridges, bream, pike, with suitable sauces. He kept practically open house, and was severe with his cook if the flavouring of his dishes was not absolutely to his taste.

The Cook who accompanied the party was the sort of man employed by a City company or at an Inn of Court or by an innkeeper. He was an expert, and could boil chickens and
marrow bones, and cook well-flavoured tarts. He appreciated London ale, and could roast, seethe, boil, and fry and was a successful maker of meat-pies and blanc-mange.

The list of the Cook's capabilities gives us a good idea of the scope of entertainment possible for people of comfortable means, and a good deal of this variety could be obtained at biggish inns on well-known highways and in large towns.

Chaucer has made a direct transcription from common life; and, since ordinary things and ordinary people are the most representative, he has provided an invaluable document for those who wish to call up the social life of the time. But Chaucer does not attempt to chronicle contemporary events, nor concern himself with politics or public questions. Chaucer, like his pilgrims, is more interested in his own. His characters, like the majority of people in all time, are wrapped up in their own affairs, and untroubled by the storms around them, except insofar as their private interests are touched. Nevertheless, they are distinctive of their time and country. The Knight stands for the finest chivalry of the Crusades. The clergy are characteristic of his time. Chaucer painted from the life, are the actual men whose vices and corruption Wycliffe and his followers denounced so vehemently.

Finally, it must be borne in mind that as a painter of his society Chaucer acts more as a poet and artist than as a chronicler. His treatment of English men and manners of the fourteenth Century is not as a social reformer but as a tolerant humanist and his attitude of toleration carries more conviction than the denunciation of a moralist.

**The Prologue:** As a portrait gallery

The Prologue has rightly been called a 'portrait-gallery'. The pilgrims, who collect at the Tabard to set out on their journey to Canterbury, belong to a variety of classes and professions. Chaucer is the first English poet to present such a lovely procession of men and women, who are differentiated from one another by the subtlest touches of characterization. The characters come alive on the pages of The Prologue. They are vital and realistic.

**Cross-section of the fourteenth century English society:** The Prologue is often referred to as a social chronicle, and Chaucer as a social historian. Though The Prologue is much more than a mere social chronicle, there is truth in the remark that it gives a cross-section of English society in the fourteenth century. Through the clever device of a pilgrimage, Chaucer has been able to assemble the representatives of the widest possible section of the society of his day. Only the aristocracy and the lowest rungs of society are left out—both classes would have been out of place on such a pilgrimage.

The Knight heads the procession of pilgrims. He has the highest social position among Chaucer's pilgrims. He belongs to the Chivalric code. He is accompanied by his son, who is also his Squire, and by his Yeoman, as was customary for the knights of the medieval times. The Knight has distinguished himself in battle, both in heathen and Christian lands. His son, too, has shown his prowess in wars. He represents the devotee of courtly love. The Yeoman is a forester and a loyal servant to the Knight and the Squire.
After the chivalric order, comes the ecclesiastical order, i.e., the representatives of the regular clergy. We have a Prioress, a Monk, and a Friar. Each presents the various degrees of corruption and degeneracy which was prevalent in the religious orders of the day. The Prioress' mind seems to be divided between the demands of the religious and the attractions of the secular aspects of life. The motto on her brooch, 'Love Conquers All', clearly indicates the confusion. The Monk hunts and enjoys sumptuous food, contrary to his vows of seclusion and abstinence. The Friar is typical of the order as found in Chaucer's time. He makes money by misusing his authority.

After the ecclesiastical characters representing the regular clergy, we have a procession of middle class representatives. Among them are the representatives of trade, the learned professions, a sailor, and other occupations. The Miller typifies his class of the day in his ability to cheat and make money. The Municipal is clever enough to outwit his learned masters. The Reeve cheats both his lord and the tenants.

The rising interest and stability in trade is represented by the Merchant, whose main desire is to keep the seas free of piracy. The Shipman represents England's widening power over the seas. He is typical of the sea captains of the day in his ruthlessness and lack of conscience. There is a Franklin who is hospitable and well off. The learned professions are represented by The Doctor of Physic and The Oxford Clerk. Typical of his age and, perhaps, typical of some doctors through all ages, Chaucer's physician is not too worried by making money out of an epidemic. He likes gold, we are told. The Lawyer, too, is adept at entailing property for his own benefit. The rising middle class is represented by the five prosperous guildsmen whose wives are ambitious of great status and respectability.

If the corruptness of the clergy is once again evident in the lecherous Summoner and the Cheating Pardoner, we have the good Christian spirit exemplified in the Parson and his brother the Ploughman. But the Summoner and The Pardoner exemplify the corruption and degeneracy of morals in Chaucer's time. The Summoner teaches the people the exact opposite of what he is supposed to tell them. He is quite ready to ignore the sins of people if they are willing to bribe him. The Pardoner sells false relics and bogus pardons. Both are partners of an equal temper.

Perhaps the most vibrant personality in The Prologue is the Wife of Bath. While she is more individualised than typical, she also represents the rising middle class. She is a first-rate weaver of cloth, and a very rich woman. A much married woman, she indicates the existing social conditions in which rich single women were never left single for long.

Typical, universal and individual traits of the characters: - The pilgrims represent different classes and professions of the time. They embody the traits which are considered typical of them: particular position in society and their profession. Incidentally, Chaucer's pilgrims represent the ‘best’ in each profession. The Doctor's greed for making money at the time of an epidemic is at once typical of the medieval doctor and also seems to be an individual trait of the particular doctor.

Particulars of dress, moral qualities, behaviour, special features, idiosyncrasies, etc., serve to individualise the pilgrims. The Squire's pleasantly embroidered dress and his constant singing, give an individual touch. The Knight's fustian doublet indicates his sober nature while contrasting him with its hair like the bristles of a sow's ears. We 'see'
the thinness of the Reeve and the Franklin's beard, which is white as a daisy. The Wife of Bath is a vibrant personality who wears scarlet stocking and huge kerchiefs. She laughs and jokes and exhibits exuberant energy. The fearsome ugliness of the Summoner comes out clearly in his red face full of pimples. He gets drunk and is fond of garlic and leek. The Pardoner, has thin hair and shining eyes like hare's. His voice is thin as a goat's. The Monk wears rich clothes, which at once typifies the fourteenth century monks while individualising him. The Prioress has exquisite table manners.

The details are not only typical of each pilgrim's class. They often belong to basic human nature. We may not find such a Miller now, but the traits embodied in the Miller could easily be found in some other person. The vibrant sexuality and boisterous sense of fun of the Wife of Bath can be found in some human beings in all ages and nations. This is true of most of the traits shown by Chaucer in his pilgrims. He has given in each one certain basic feature which are common to human beings through the ages. And he has dealt with all possible facets of the human personality in his pilgrims. We see a mixture of the good and the bad, and all shades of grey as well. We see the Chaucer's tolerant vision and joy in God's creation.

Lastly, Chaucer shows the full realisation that God has created all kinds of human beings, and there is no cause for man to disapprove or criticise violently. He accepted the imperfections in human beings, and presented them in all their variety without castigating their vices or frowning upon their follies. He was an amused and tolerant spectator of God's plenty. He took keen joy in the created world. Life to him was a vast field of delights, and this is very much evident in The Prologue.
“Three poets, in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed;
The next, in majesty; in both the last.
The force of Nature could no further go.
To make a third, she joined the former two.”

John Dryden

“O mighty-mouth’d inventor of harmonies,
O skill’d to sing of Time or Eternity,
God-gifted organ-voice of England,
Milton, a name to resound for ages;”

Alfred, Lord Tennyson
JOHN MILTON (1608-1674)

John Milton was born in London on December 9, 1608, into a middle-class family. He was educated at St. Paul's School, then at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he began to write poetry in Latin, Italian, and English, and prepared to enter the clergy.

After university, however, he abandoned his plans to join the priesthood and spent the next six years in his father's country home in Buckinghamshire following a rigorous course of independent study to prepare for a career as a poet. His extensive reading included both classical and modern works of religion, science, philosophy, history, politics, and literature. In addition, Milton was proficient in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, and Italian, and obtained a familiarity with Old English and Dutch as well.

During his period of private study, Milton composed a number of poems, including "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," "On Shakespeare," "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and the pastoral elegy "Lycidas." In May of 1638, Milton began a 13-month tour of France and Italy, during which he met many important intellectuals and influential people, including the astronomer Galileo, who appears in Milton's tract against censorship, "Areopagitica."

In 1642, Milton returned from a trip into the countryside with a 16-year-old bride, Mary Powell. Even though they were estranged for most of their marriage, she bore him three daughters and a son before her death in 1652. Milton later married twice more: Katherine Woodcock in 1656, who died giving birth in 1658, and Elizabeth Minshull in 1662.

During the English Civil War, Milton championed the cause of the Puritans and Oliver Cromwell, and wrote a series of pamphlets advocating radical political topics including the morality of divorce, the freedom of the press, populism, and sanctioned regicide. Milton served as secretary for foreign languages in Cromwell's government, composing official statements defending the Commonwealth. During this time, Milton steadily lost his eyesight, and was completely blind by 1651. He continued his duties, however, with the aid of Andrew Marvell and other assistants.

After the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, Milton was arrested as a defender of the Commonwealth, fined, and soon released. He lived the rest of his life in seclusion in the country, completing the blank-verse epic poem Paradise Lost in 1667, as well as its sequel Paradise Regained and the tragedy Samson Agonistes both in 1671. Milton oversaw the printing of a second edition of Paradise Lost in 1674, which included an explanation of "why the poem rhymes not," clarifying his use of blank verse, along with introductory notes by Marvell. He died shortly afterwards, on November 8, 1674, in Buckinghamshire, England.

Paradise Lost, which chronicles Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden, is widely regarded as his masterpiece and one of the greatest epic poems in world literature. Since its first publication, the work has continually elicited debate regarding its theological themes, political commentary, and its depiction of the fallen angel Satan who is often viewed as the protagonist of the work.

The epic has had wide-reaching effect, inspiring other long poems, such as Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock, William Wordsworth's The Prelude and John Keats's Endymion, as well as Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein, and deeply influencing the work of Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Blake, who illustrated an edition of the epic.

The Rise of Puritanism in the Age of Milton
The Age of Milton, the age in which the great poet matured and created, covers roughly the first seventy years or so of the 17th century. Thus in a way Milton is the connecting link between the glorious age of Queen Elizabeth, the Puritan age which followed, and the Restoration Age. It was an age of disillusionment, of increasing gloom and pessimism, and this melancholy and gloom of the age colours the literature of the period. In order to appreciate the spirit of Milton's works it is essential to form an idea of his age.

Nature of Puritanism: - It was during this period that Puritanism emerged as the great controlling, moral and social force. Let us here first consider what we exactly mean by Puritanism and then proceed to examine the political, social and religious causes that gave rise to it, and its impact on the literature of the period.

In the broadest sense Puritanism may be regarded as the renaissance of the moral sense of man. The Greco-Roman renaissance of 15th and 16th centuries was largely pagan and sensuous. It did not touch the moral nature of man, it did nothing for his religious, political and social emancipation. The Puritan movement, on the other hand, was the greatest movement for moral and political reform. Its aims were:

1. Religious liberty i.e., that men should be free to worship according to their conscience
2. Civil liberty i.e., they should enjoy full civil liberty.

The Puritans wanted to make men honest and to make them free. They insisted on the purity of life. In matters of religion the Puritans were fanatics. They were extremists. There had been Puritans even during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. They did not accept the Anglican Church, which was essentially a compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. They considered its creeds and public worship as too much like Popery. They advocated Church reform. Moreover, they had very strict view about life and conduct. They laid down very austere ideals of life. They were against common pleasures, even innocent ones, like drama, considered singing and dancing as immoral, and hence in the beginning the term 'Puritan' was a term of contempt applied to such extremists. We find frequent satirical references to them in the plays of Shakespeare. The general tendency of the Puritan was anti-social. "Beauty in his eyes was a snare and pleasure a sin; the only mode of social intercourse which he approved was a sermon." As Macaulay puts it, he hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectator. The Puritans thus stood for

1. Church reform,
2. For the reform of social life according to their austere ideals,
3. For the ideal of liberty, both religious and political—man should be free to worship according to his own conscience unhampered by the state.

Various Causes of Its Rise

Political: - The wise, moderate policies of Queen Elizabeth had appealed to all sections of society and Puritanism could not make much headway. But conditions changed with the coming of James I to the throne; the wise Elizabethan compromise soon broke down. A number of causes led to widespread discontent and the emergence of the Puritans as a strong national force. First, there was the theory of the divine right of kings, the theory that the king could do no wrong. James I had exalted ideals of kingship and aimed at despotic powers, but he was not fitted to play the role of flawless divinity. He was ill-mannered, grotesque, and tactless in appearance, and soon made the English Court the laughing stock of Europe. This divine right theory was not palatable to
the English people, it smacked of tyranny and shocked the innate English love of independence. Puritans regarded it as a direct attack upon their personal and political liberty.

**Immorality and Corruption:** Secondarily, the immorality and profligacy of the king and his courtiers also fed the flames of discontent. The corruption in high places did much to alienate the sympathies of the common man, and greatly strengthened the moral and social influence of the Puritans, who despised the Court, “as a place of infamy, alien to all good morals”. Immorality of the king and the Court is a frequent object of satire in the contemporary literature.

**Economic:** Thirdly, James and his ministers were extravagant, they were constantly in debt and constantly in need of money. When James approached the Parliament for money, it demanded more rights and privileges for itself—that it should control religion and finance, and even give advice on foreign policy. James then tried to raise money by granting trade monopolies to his favourites. This raised the hostility of the traders, merchants and manufacturers. It was an encroachment on their rights, and economic virtues of thrift, sobriety and economic living appealed to this middle-class element. Thus emerged a union of interests against James I. This makes the Jacobean Age, a period of stress and strain giving rise to a sense of frustration, and disillusionment.

**Internal Dissensions:** The absence of foreign wars also did much to foster internal dissensions. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada, there was no longer any danger of a foreign attack. A foreign war has the great merit of diverting the attention of the people. Now freed from the fears of foreign war, more and more people turned to the discussion of domestic politics. Criticism of the policies of the King and of the immorality and artificiality of his court was widespread. Thus was fostered the critical and satirical temper which is reflected in the plays of Ben Jonson. Social evils were rampant, and satirical references to the follies of the age are frequent in the literature of the period. The rift between the king and his people widened. The court became more luxurious and extravagant, the people were more and more alienated, the appeal of Puritanism increased, and it became a significant force in national life.

**Tactlessness of Charles I:** James I was sufficiently clever and died just sufficiently soon, and thus in his reign there was no open conflict between the king and his people. But he left behind him serious problems for his son Charles I (1625). Charles was handsome, cultured and graceful, just such a king as was likely to win the heart of his people. However, he was tactless and did not attach much importance to public sentiments. He surrounded himself with evil counsellors—and with their help tried to enforce the divine right theory of kings. His absolutism roused the apprehensions of the people. In politics he was entirely unscrupulous. Moreover, he had a Catholic queen and was himself suspected of having Catholic leanings. His policies both religious and political, both in Scotland and Ireland, were complete and abject failures. The treasury was already bankrupt and he and his courtiers were not only profligates but also highly extravagant. In dire need of funds, he appealed to the Parliament which demanded even greater privileges for itself. No compromise was possible between the despotic Charles and the Parliament consisting mainly of elements hostile to the King. The stress and strains in national life increased resulting in the Civil War between the King and the Parliament which broke out in 1641.

**Frustration and Disillusionment—Loss of Faith:** The age of Milton is an age of uncertainty, misgiving, despondency, anxiety, frustration, pessimism and inner gloom, and in all these respects in sharp contrast to the glorious and exuberant age of Elizabeth when the nation marched from achievement to achievement with zest and confidence. There are a number of political and social causes for this mood of mis-giving and apprehension which overtook the nation during this period. The personal unpopularity of
the king, James I, uncouth and awkward, who made the English court the laughing stock of all Europe, the lowering of standards of national morality and conduct, loss of national dignity, slackness of discipline, plots and intrigues both political and religious, increasing fear of French and Papal interventions, all contributed to the atmosphere of uncertainty and misgiving, and this in its turn bred pessimism and frustration. Further, there was a clash of ideals and philosophies; the old world, the medieval world, with its scholastic learning and metaphysics was breaking down under the impact of new philosophy. Another cause was the influence of Machiavelli whose work The Prince enjoyed wide popularity. His materialistic doctrines along with his Satanic philosophy—that the world order is not moral, but essentially immoral—caused much bewilderment and confusion, and loss of faith in existing values and ideals. All this finds expression in the literatures of the day, more specially its Drama.

**London: The Centre of National Life:** - In the end, a word may be added regarding the prominence of London during the age and its influence on the literature of the period. It was the centre of the English court and so the abode of the fashionable and cultured upper classes. As the court patronised art and learning, the city was also the haunt of the men of letters of the age. Practically, all the prominent writers of the day made London their home. Shakespeare, Donne, Ben Jonson, Milton—to name only the greatest—were all Londoners. They would meet in taverns, discuss literature or current politics, and frequently come to blows. Tavern brawls were frequent, and even leading personalities were involved in them. The setting of Jonson’s Comedies is London, and London fashions, follies and frivolities are frequent objects of his satire.

**Literary Trends:** - The atmosphere of conflict, stress and strain, which enveloped the nation even before the death of Queen Elizabeth, in 1603, had an adverse effect on literature. The decline from the high Elizabethan standard is apparent in several ways:

(a) The output, especially of poetry, is much smaller, and the fashion is toward shorter poems, especially the lyric. The poetry of the period is largely lyrical, and Donne and Ben Jonson are the two most outstanding and original lyricists of the age. Milton who links up the Puritan age with the Restoration is a class by himself,

(b) There is a marked decay in the exalted poetical fervour of the previous age. In the new poetry there is more of intellectual play than of passion and profundity. And especially in prose, there is a matured melancholy that one is apt to associate with advancing years,

(c) There is a marked increase in prose activity, and prose is an almost invariable accompaniment of a decline in poetry.

In an age which, by comparison with the Elizabethan age, produced relatively few great writers, Milton stands as the one man who may claim a place among the very greatest. His prose is among the finest controversial writing in the language, and his poetic achievement has generally been considered to be second only to that of Shakespeare.

Besides Milton, there are the Metaphysicals and the Caroline lyricists. The term Metaphysical was first used by Dr. Johnson, who applied it to Cowley and Donne. It denotes the work of a group of poets who came directly or indirectly under Donne’s influence. Donne’s poetry is a poetry of revolt, revolt against Elizabethan tradition. Usually lyrical in nature, his work shows a surprising blend of passion and thought; his poems are full of learned imagery and striking conceits, and, at their best, reveal great psychological insight and subtlety of thought. To this school belong such great poets as Crashaw, George Herbert, Vaughan, and Marvell.
While most of the Metaphysical poets were of a religious and mystical cast, the Cavalier lyricists best represented by Herrick, Lovelace, and Suckling, deal with the theme of love. They followed Ben Jonson in their classical restraint and concise lucidity. Their work is simple and graceful in structure and finely polished in style.

The prose output during the age is copious and excellent in kind. There is a notable advance in the sermon; pamphlets are abundant; and history, politics, philosophy, and miscellaneous kinds are well represented. Milton’s Areopagita is an immortal monument of English prose. In addition, there is a remarkable advance in prose style and the dramatists contribute a great deal to this advance. Jonson uses prose in his comedies. The controversies and conflicts of the day, both political and religious, result in the rise of satire and pamphleteering, and this in turn contributes to the advance of prose.

Many things combined to cause the decay of drama at this time. Chief among these was the strong opposition of the Puritans. In temper, the age was not dramatic. The actual dramatic work of the period is small and unimportant and characterised by immorality, obscenity, sensationalism, violence, and a free exploitation of unnatural themes, such as incest. However, Milton’s Samson Agonistes occupies a unique place in the history of English drama. It is the only successful classical Tragedy in the English language.

**Paradise Lost: Summary and Critical Analysis**

The fable or story for the epic is taken from the Bible; it is the simple and common story of the fall of Adam and Eve from the grace of God due to their disobedience of Him. Paradise Lost encompasses a little more of the biblical story. In heaven, Lucifer (who became Satan after his being thrown to the hell), was unable to accept the supremacy of God, and led a revolt against His divine authority. After a terrible war with His Angels, he was finally thrown to hell, where they lay nine days in a burning lake.

Then Lucifer arose from the burning pitch and resolved - though at the same time despairing - that "all was not lost," that he would take revenge on God. Arousing his friends, he did his best to bring them to spirits, and decided that his purposes could be achieved by guile rather than by force; he decided to take revenge on God by spoiling his latest creation the Eden and the human beings there. The devils built an elaborate palace, Pandemonium, in which Satan organized a conference to decide on immediate action. Moloch advised war. Belial recommended a slothful existence in Hell.

Mammon proposed peacefully improving hell so that it might equal and rival Heaven. Beelzebub, second in command, arose and informed that God and created Earth, which he had peopled with good creatures called humans. It was Beelzebub’s proposal to investigate this new creation, seized it, and seduces its inhabitants to the cause of the fallen angels, and saw Satan approaching Earth. God’s angel Gabriel under the command of God, appointed two other angels to safeguard Adam and Eve, but they arrived too late to prevent Satan. He had already influenced Eve’s dreams. Eve, in her strange dream had been tempted to taste of the fruit of the Tree of knowledge. After the sinful act of disobedience had been committed, God sent the angel Raphael to the garden to warn them. Raphael told Adam and Eve in detail the story of the Great War between the god and the bad angels (much of such stories are told in such conversation and flashback). He told of the creation of the world and how Earth was created in six days and angelic choir singing the praises of God or the seventh days. He cautioned Adam not to be too curious. Adam then told how he had been warned against the Tree of knowledge of God and Evil, and how Eve was created from his rib. After the departure of Raphael, Satan entered the body of a sleeping serpent. In the mourning Eve proposed that they work apart. Adam, remembering the warning of Raphael, opposed her wishes, but Eve prevailed and the couple parted. Alone, Eve was accosted by the serpent, which flattered
her into tasting the fruit of the Tree of knowledge. Eve gave the fruit to Adam, who was at first horrified, but who in his love for Eve, also ate the fruit. Just after eating the forbidden fruit, the couple knew lust for the first time. They knew sickening shame. The guardian angel came to earth to pass judgment. Christ sentenced the serpent to be forever a hated enemy of mankind. He also announced punishment of Eve; her sorrow would be multiplied by the bearing of children and that she would be the servant of Adam to the end of time. Adam, said Christ, would eat in sorrow, would eat bread only by toiling and sweating. This was the curse to man. But more important, he lost God’s grace. As Christ announced the punishment, Death and sin, left the gates of Hell to join their father Satan on Earth. Satan sent sin and Death as his ambassadors on Earth. He went back to hell to see that his followers had all become hissing snakes. God made great changes on earth. He replaced the eternal spring with the changing seasons; he created the violence and misery of storms, winds, hail, ice, floods and earthquakes; he sentenced Adam and Eve to expulsion form Eden. Adam and Eve thought of committing suicide, but Michael, the angel sent by God, gave them new hope; he gave Adam a vision of life and death, the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires, and also showed them how in the future Adam and Eve’s progeny would go through their evil days, to the flood when God would destroy all life except the good seeds preserved by Noah; and be finally redeemed through Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension as the redeemer. After Michael gave Adam and Eve this vision, they were pacified, especially because they saw that their children would be saved. They walked form the heights of paradise to the barren plains below. Metaphorically, they fell from the original bliss of god’s grace to the present state of mortality, guilt, shame and suffering.

This simple story of ‘fall’ has become a locus of many themes after Milton used in his epic. He took an apparently very simple story of the “Fall” form the Bible, but he blended within it his puritan thoughts, renaissance humanism, his political as well as domestic ideals, and many such meanings. The ‘invocation’ is the very beginning of the epic in which Milton prays to the Muse, the Christian spirit, to help him write well. The ninth book is the climactic part of the epic narrative, as well as a book that contains several thematic issues of the whole epic.

The most obvious theme of Paradise Lost is justifying the fall of man, God’s punishment and his reopening of the path of salvation to them; in short, the epic justifies how God is right in his treatment of man throughout all these. Milton has explored the sin which brought about the downfall of man. The prime cause of the fall is disobedience to God; the cause of Eve’s disobedience is her passion overwhelming her right reason. Adam is also guilty of disobedience; his sin is dread of loneliness and also the surrender of his God given reason to passion. Due to love, he immediately decides to share Eve’s fate. Milton emphasizes the importance of reason. Man is noble by nature, but he has free will, and hence free to choose and capable of action, morally good or bad for which he alone is responsible. Milton does not believe in Calvinism according to which God has decided everything, and a man’s destiny has been fixed before his birth. Milton is a great humanist pinning his faith in the liberty and adventure of man. Milton therefore believes that God was justified in leaving Adam and Eve exposed to evils, and leaving their reasoning free; only that defines human beings as supreme creatures. God was also right in punishing Adam and Eve. The purpose of Paradise Lost is, therefore, to assert eternal providence and justify the way of God to men.

Milton believes in the orthodox idea of redemption. When men will be redeemed through Christ, they will rise to a more excellent state than Paradise form which Adam and Eve were turned out. Thus Adam did a useful act while sinning. Tillyard says, “Paradise Lost is a mental pilgrimage; the loss of one paradise and the finding on this earth of a paradise within ourselves that is happier far”. The paradise in which Adam and Eve lived before eating the forbidden fruit was like a prison. It might have satisfied God, but it would have kept man spiritually undeveloped. So long as knowledge was withheld from
man, his obedience to God was meaningless. Moreover the virtue which Adam and Eve possessed in Paradise was a “fugitive and cloistered virtue”, and therefore it was no virtue in the real sense. What man lost by disobedience was only a state of innocence and ignorance. Men gain spiritual rebirth by controlling their passions. And they will find a Paradise within them ‘happier far’. Man has all the powers of working out the best, and moves upward, and finds the paradise within himself. This could not be possible by paying homage to God in a state of ignorance in Eden’s paradise. Eve sins through weakness of reason whereas Adam through weakness of will.

Milton’s style in writing the Paradise Lost has been called a ‘grand style’, which means it is an elevated, serious, highly crafted, and different from common speech. It is in fact so unfamiliar to common language, even the usual literary language, that Dr. Johnson accused Milton of ‘pedantry’. The charge is basically based on his writing that was heavily Latinated. Indeed many critics have complained that Milton spoilt the English language. But in other ways he has contributed to the development of the English language as a literary language. Milton’s ‘grand’, style can be discussed under four or five heads: rhythm and music, word game and figures of speech, diction and decorum, syntax, and remoteness and sublimity of language and theme.

The meter or rhythm of Milton’s epic poem is usually called the blank verse, but it is not the common blank verse (lines in iambic pentameter without rhyme); Milton adapted it to his own convenience and purpose. The lines in Paradise Lost do contain ten syllables usually, but the lines contain any number of stresses from three to eight. So, it would not be appropriate to say that this is done by using traditional techniques of variation. Furthermore, the stresses differ in degree and position. The pause or caesura is another even more important feature of rhythm in Milton. The pause falls at different places of the lines, and the weight of different pauses is also different; there are light or shorter pauses and heavy or longer pauses give different effects to the narrative.

Milton’s diction is heavily Latin. Even when he uses English words, they have the Latin connotations beneath. The words are so meticulously chosen that many critics have blamed his diction as too labored. Milton somehow ‘invented English that is extremely unfamiliar and pedantic. He uses words in such ways that there are always both literal and symbolic meanings, with both English denotations and Latin connotations. His descriptions are florid and highly picturesque. He uses images to reinforce the theme. He shifts tone along with the change of description and setting. That usually helps him shift the emotional intensity, or avoid monotony.

**Paradise Lost Book I**

**Summary**

Book I of Paradise Lost begins with a prologue in which Milton performs the traditional epic task of invoking the Muse and stating his purpose. He invokes the classical Muse, Urania, but also refers to her as the "Heav'nly Muse," implying the Christian nature of this work. He also says that the poem will deal with man’s disobedience toward God and the results of that disobedience. He concludes the prologue by saying he will attempt to justify God’s ways to men.

Following the prologue and invocation, Milton begins the epic with a description of Satan, lying on his back with the other rebellious angels, chained on a lake of fire. The poem thus commences in the middle of the story, as epics traditionally do. Satan, who had been Lucifer, the greatest angel, and his compatriots warred against God. They were defeated and cast from Heaven into the fires of Hell.
Lying on the lake, Satan is described as gigantic; he is compared to a Titan or the Leviathan. Next to Satan lies Beelzebub, Satan's second in command. Satan comments on how Beelzebub has been transformed for the worse by the punishment of God. Still he adds that it is his intention to continue the struggle against God, saying, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (263).

With effort, Satan is able to free himself from his chains and rise from the fire. He flies to a barren plain, followed by Beelzebub. From the plain, Satan calls the other fallen angels to join him, and one by one they rise from the lake and fly to their leader. As they come, Milton is able to list the major devils that now occupy Hell: Moloch, Chemos, Baalam, Ashtaroth, Astarte, Astoreth, Dagon, Rimmon, Osiris, Isis, Orus, Mammon, and Belial. Each devil is introduced in a formal cataloguing of demons. These fallen angels think that they have escaped from their chains through their own power, but Milton makes it clear that God alone has allowed them to do this.

This devil army is large and impressive but also aware of its recent ignominious defeat. Satan addresses them and rallies them. He tells them that they still have power and that their purpose will be to oppose God, adding, "War then, War / Open or understood, must be resolv'd" (661-62).

This speech inspires the devil host, and under Mammon's direction, they immediately begin work on a capital city for their Hellish empire. They find mineral resources in the mountains of Hell and quickly begin to construct a city. Under the direction of their architect, Mulciber, they construct a great tower that comes to symbolize the capital of Hell, Pandemonium. The devil army, flying this way and that, is compared to a great swarm of bees. When the work is done and the capital completed, they all assemble for the first great council.

Analysis

Milton begins Paradise Lost in the traditional epic manner with a prologue invoking the muse, in this case Urania, the Muse of Astronomy. He calls her the "Heav'nly Muse" (7) and says that he will sing "Of Man's First Disobedience" (1), the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace. As the prologue continues, it becomes apparent that this muse is more than just the classical Urania, but also a Christian muse who resides on Mt. Sinai, in fact the Holy Spirit. In these first lines, Milton thus draws on two traditions — the classical epic exemplified by Homer and Virgil and the Christian tradition embodied in the Bible as well as Dante's Divine Comedy and Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene.

Milton further emphasizes in the prologue that his theme will be Man's disobedience to God's will, implying not only Adam's disobedience, but all mankind from first to last. He does add that his subject will include the "greater Man" (4) who saved all others from the original disobedience. Moreover, his intention will be to "justify the ways of God to men" (26) through the aid of "Eternal Providence" (25). By "justify," Milton means more than simply to explain; he means that he will demonstrate that God's actions in regard to man are just. This goal suggests that Milton was not bothered by any sense of false modesty, an idea underscored by his statement that he will write in a high style and attempt a purpose never tried before. The one truly poignant line in this prologue is Milton's request of the muse, "What in me is dark / Illumine" (22 — 23), with its oblique reference to Milton's blindness, a subject he will return to more directly in the prologue that begins Book III. At no point in this prologue and invocation does Milton mention Satan, who, though he is the main character of the poem, is not the actual subject.

Following the invocation and prologue, Milton continues in the epic style by beginning in medias res, in the middle of things. Satan is first seen lying in the pit of Hell. That a great religious epic focuses on Satan, presents him first, and in many ways makes him
the hero of the poem is certainly surprising and something of a risk on Milton's part. Milton does not want his audience to empathize with Satan, yet Satan is an attractive character, struggling against great odds. Of course, Milton's original audience more than his modern one would have been cognizant of the ironies involved in Satan's struggles and his comments concerning power. The power that Satan asserts and thinks he has is illusory. His power to act derives only from God, and his struggle against God has already been lost. To the modern audience, Satan may seem heroic as he struggles to make a Heaven of Hell, but the original audience knew, and Milton's lines confirm, that Satan's war with God had been lost absolutely before the poem begins. God grants Satan and the other devils the power to act for God's purposes, not theirs.

Also, at this point in the narrative, Satan is at his most attractive. He has just fallen from Heaven where he was the closest angel to God. He has not completely lost the angelic aura that was his in Heaven. As the poem progresses, the reader will see that Satan's character and appearance grow worse. Milton has carefully structured his work to show the consequences of Satan's actions.

The catalogue of demons that follows Satan's escape from the burning lake follows an epic pattern of listing heroes — although here the list is of villains. This particular catalogue seems almost an intentional parody of Homer's catalogue of Greek ships and heroes in Book II of the Iliad. The catalogue is a means for Milton to list many of the fallen angels as well as a way to account for many of the gods in pagan religions — they were originally among the angels who rebelled from God. Consequently, among these fallen angels are names such as Isis, Osiris, Baal, and others that the reader associates not with Christianity but with some ancient, pagan belief. Of the devils listed, the two most important are Beelzebub and Belial. (For a complete description of each devil, see the List of Characters.)

The final part of Book I is the construction of Pandemonium, the capital of Hell. A certain unintentional humor pervades this section of Book I as well as Mammon's argument in Book II. In both cases, a sense of civic pride seems to overcome the devils, and they act on the idea that "Hell is bad, but with a few improvements we can make it lots better, even attractive." In both Mammon and the hellish architect, Mulciber, the attitude of the mayor whose small town has been bypassed by the Interstate comes out. They both seem to think that with improvements Hell may be nice enough that others may want to relocate.

Milton's real goal here, though, is to establish Hell's capital, Pandemonium — a word which Milton himself coined from the Latin pan (all) and demonium (demons). Thus, the capital of Hell is literally the place of all demons. With the passage of time, the word came to mean any place of wild disorder, noise, and confusion. This idea is subtly emphasized with Milton's choice of Mulciber as the architect. Mulciber was another name for Hephaestus, the Greek God of the Forge, who was tossed from Olympus by a drunken Zeus. Mulciber is consequently a figure of some ridicule and not the most likely architect to build a lasting monument.

One other aspect of the construction of Pandemonium is worth consideration. Mammon and the other devils find mineral resources including gemstones in their search for building materials. This discovery of resources suggests that the Hell Milton has imagined is a multifaceted place. In the first scene, as Satan and the others lie chained on the burning lake, Hell seems totally a place of fiery torture and ugliness. The construction of Pandemonium shows that there is more to Hell. Geographic features such as a plain and hill, mineral resources such as gemstones, and even the possibility for beauty seem to exist in Hell. Other aspects of Hell will be brought forward in later books. All in all, Milton depicts a Hell that has more than one essence, or, at least in the opening books, seems to.
Paradise Lost Book-I : Speeches of Satan

Introduction

Satan of Book-I Paradise Lost, is one of the glorious examples of political leadership and political oratory. His speeches are the key to his character and his art of oratory excels the best of Roman rhetoric. He is the leader of the rebel-angels in Heaven and the uncrowned monarch of Hell. By following his lead, the fallen angels are deprived of "happy fields, where joy forever dwells." Satan has now the task of retaining their loyalty and does so by the sheer magic of his high-pitched oratory. There is a certain pathetic grandeur of injured merit in them which wins the hearts of his followers. Around the character of Satan, Milton has thrown a singularity of daring, a grandeur of sufferance and a ruined splendour, which constitute the very height of poetic sublimity.

Satan is the first to recover from the stupor into which all the rebel angels fall. Soon he notices his first lieutenant, Beelzebub, wailing by his side. He finds that his compeer is much changed. So he makes a cautious approach, for he is not sure whether his friend is in a mood to blame him or he still loves him.

First Speech: "What though the field be lost...tyranny of Heaven."

The speech is an embodiment of Satan’s resilience in face of a mortifying defeat. This rout, instead of humbling his aspiring pride has fuelled his design of usurpation and revenge against God. He’s aghast at seeing the diminished glory of his minions, the fallen angels who revolted at his command. The deplorable state of Beelzebub and his lost lustre incites Satan to admonish him for his irresolute spirits and weak convictions. Satan in his speech ushers forth convincing arguments to dissuade the bleak hopelessness of his fallen angels. He accepts his defeat ‘field be lost’ but questions whether it has trampled his armaments of ‘unconquerable will’, ‘study of revenge’, ‘immortal hate and courage!’

God’s glory shall remain a pipe dream as Satan shant surrender to Him. Satan has faith in his strengths which cannot be suppressed by the ‘wrath or might’ of God Himself. His speech resounds with this consolation which is so convincing to Satan himself that he broaches to battle the Supreme again. He reprimands the cowardly stance of his army which smacks of ignominy far worse than their defeat itself. Satan deters his legion from pleading God’s mercy and extolling His power. He mocks His clout as a mere façade aptly proved by God’s apprehensions when Satan’s mighty terror shook His sovereignty.

Satan assures his fallen cherubs that the fiery mettle of angels as ordained by their fate can never perish but remain immortal. And with the benefit of hindsight he along with his minions must rage another war against the ‘tyranny of heaven’ that they equal both in arms and in foresight. To war anew, Satan believes portends greater hope of victory and can turn out to be their coup. Satan wishes to execute this ‘eternal war’ by dint of ‘force or guile’ but for him the option of reconciling with God is closed sine die, as he’s fervent in his convictions to overthrow the tyranny of heaven-God!

A critical Note: By Satan’s vaunting of “All is not lost” one is compelled to wonder whether God’s victory is a mere pyrrhic one, as He is unable to smother the soul, the ignition of Satan’s rebellion which even after a crushing defeat still remains fervent in his spirits ‘the unconquerable will, revenge, immortal hate and courage.’ This ironic defeat or apparent victory of God provokes Satan to pervert God’s holy plans such as instigating the lamentable fall of Adam and Eve.
Even in his last speech of Book-1, Satan sends this message to his legion that the supreme shall learn from his tactics of guile and deceit that he "who overcomes by force hath overcome but half his foe", which quite aptly explains the situation.

**Second Speech:** “Fallen cherub...resolution from despair”

**Analysis:** Beelzebub despite Satan’s claims of victory after a ‘sad overthrow and foul defeat’ is tormented by the thought of eternal punishment. He confides to Satan his fear of God’s ‘vengeful ire’ that only their painful suffering can satiate. Satan is quick to allay his apprehensions and without a note of fear in his speech paints his coward whimpering as contemptible. Whether they are coerced to suffer His errands or bear His punishments, ‘to be weak is miserable’. Satan further instigates his fallen angel to flout God’s high will and seek out evil undertakings as it shall be their ‘sole delight.’

In this speech Satan displays his confirmed aversion towards God and defies His plan to bring forth good’ out of their sinister stratagems. Rather he proposes to blight such intention of God and seize upon any means of evil to derail His objectives and aggrieve him beyond measure. Satan wishes to consume malicious joy out of wrecking Almighty’s ‘destined aim.’

Satan’s next lines of his speech further stamp his fortitude against distinct signs of despair and hopelessness. In these lines he’s salvaging a break, an opportunity in ‘the gloomy deep’ to plan retaliation. To Beelzebub he lays bare the various opportunities which he presumes to be propitious to his plot. God, the angry victory, he claims has withdrawn His good angels-‘ministers of vengeance’ and so they have retreated back to the gates of heaven. The ‘sulphurous hail’ has ceased to blow, the ‘fiery surge’ emanating from the edges of heaven has drawn to a close, and the thunder has dissipated its shafts- this occasion could have resulted either because of God’s disdain or His ire has been satiated for a while, but be that as it may ‘Let us not slip the occasion’.

While still floating above the ebb and flow of the fiery waves, Satan glimpses a ‘dreary plain’ beyond the lake of fire. He commands his troop to fly towards the vantage ground- ‘that seat of desolation’ to repose awhile if any respite is feasible. Then reconvene their ‘afflicted powers’, in order to forge various ways to affront the Almighty, to make amends for the loss, and to triumph over ‘this dire calamity’. Finally, he beckons his minions to salvage strength and support from faith, failing which learn and gain from despair a resilient resolve.

**A critical Note:** What Beelzebub fears is exactly what Satan is putting into practice. By contriving to play foul and offend Almighty, he’s in fact obeying His high will, and as its endorsed in the text that only by the ‘high permission of all-ruling heaven’, which has kept him loose and unfettered, Satan is able to execute his ‘dark designs.’ That is to say he’s in fact carrying out God’s ‘errands in the gloomy deep’ to ‘heap on himself damnation’ without truly knowing it. This is Beelzebub’s apprehension of the eternal punishment which Satan’s believes he has overcome by his wits.

**Third Speech:** “Is the region, this is the soil...what more lost in Hell?”

In this speech lies the key to Satan’s dogged tenacity against God and His instruments of eternal punishment. Satan invokes every ounce of his strength to withstand his antagonists and uses firm reasoning to wake up his dispirited angels from the slough of despondency. Many have referred to his reasoning as ‘satanic logic’ which though connected to such an infamous personage, yet bears relevance in our daily lives.

Satan in a rhetorical fashion comes to term with his new abode and the deprivation of Heaven-‘this mournful gloom for that celestial light’, and accepts his fate with profound
indifference as if the odds aren't that formidable as they seem. He asserts that God 'who now is Sovran', has the prerogative to execute what He considers right; yet as we are far away from His dominion, this should serve as our consolation in this misery. This 'Sovran' if we measure by the yardstick of reason shall find us as His equals, and only due to His power-'whom thunder hath made greater?' does He claim authority.

Satan confronts his present predicament and bids farewell to the 'happy fields'. Welcoming the 'infernal abode' as its new sovereign, he proclaims that his mind, his spirits, his convictions shall remain undeterred even at the prospect of changing 'place or time'. He explains his logic by asserting that mind can envisage the torments of hell as the pleasant bliss of heaven or can imagine heaven as a seat of gloom -'Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven'. Such is the strength of mind that it drives Satan to persevere in his pursuit of revenge, without any regard to his greatest nemesis.

Satan pictures his dilemma as a boon in disguise because hell shall offer a breeding ground for their evil escapades and as God cannot expel them out of it or purge hell of its 'new possessor' – they 'may reign secure'. His single-minded aim is to be in power, to govern, to reign and his such resolution eclipses the miserable despair he has been plunged into- 'To reign is worth ambition, though in hell...than serve in heaven'.

With such sense of autonomy, Satan invigorates the beleaguered spirits of his 'associates' to partake each other’s grief and once again join forces to recoup from heaven what their might is capable of, or on the flip side be deprived of what is still left of hell.

**A critical Note:** It is interesting to observe the shrewdness of Satan, when he dictates 'we may reign secure', 'we' on the face of it, might denote Satan and his troop but its connotations are obviously pertaining to the sole monarchy of Satan himself. Perhaps he knows there can be only one sun in the firmament (Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare). Such is the convincing sway of his rhetorical reasoning that hardly his minions can see through his design. His persuasive art is further attested by the mortal rebellion his legion waged and for him 'have their lot in pain'- The same sentiment I read in the words of Mephistopheles, “unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer, conspir’d against our god with Lucifer, and are forever damn’d with Lucifer' ( Doctor Faustus, Marlowe). Satan hence can be regarded as the epitome of cunning politicians and wining speakers.

**Fourth speech:** "Princes, Potentates...be forever fallen!"

Satan in this speech tolls the final knell of his legions’ apprehensions and numbed spirits. He summons his army with noble epithets as Princes, Potentates, Warriors, which is enough to massage their ego and obliterate their melancholic dispositions.

He commands them to accept the bereavement of heaven because their cowardly visage doesn't become ‘eternal spirits’, nor is it befitting of them to rest their beaten heroism in this gloomy place. Their current milieu shall not be as soothing and peaceful as it would have been in 'the happy fields'.

He further attacks their wretched and humble stoop, by which they have apparently vowed to revere the God Almighty. God is, as Satan claims planning to ambush and quash them in their slumped posture. And finding it as an advantage His henchmen with their ‘thunderbolts’ shall spellbind all of them to the underbelly of this gloomy chasm. Hence, Satan’s final cry- “Awake, arise, or be forever fallen!”

**A critical note:** Satan sure knows his way around the angels as he quite shrewdly concocts panic alarms to make them subservient to his will, if they wish to survive the looming danger. He strikes a balance in his extol and condemnation of the angels and
makes them believe if they don't arise, they shall be forever fallen. This ‘forever fallen’ however, is their irrevocable fate which can’t be obscured whether they arise or remain ‘in this abject posture’.

Fifth speech: “O myriads of immortal spirits...must be resolved.”

Satan has successfully wrenched the ‘fellows of his crime’ out of their regretful stance. Seeing their absolute obedience, in face of overwhelming pains, Satan is conquered by tears and tries to confront their mutual loss- ‘amerced of heaven’. His pride falls meek as he mourns and sighs for their cataclysmic defeat, yet he remains sane enough to dispute the cause of their fall. Satan reinforces in their minds that though their defeat shall be counted as a calamity for its done untold damage to them, it yet cannot be rendered as a dishonorable event.

One would have doubted the very omen of their rout for his legion is a union of gods themselves. As if this doesn’t sound preposterous enough, the more perplexing is the helplessness of these mighty gods to regain their ‘native seat’ in heaven. Satan apprehends the cause of their defeat which he presumes either could be the conflicting counsels among the angels or his dread of danger that made him shrink away from the revolt at hand.

Finding these self-accusations unfounded, Satan reprehends Almighty for keeping his supreme power under wraps, which seduced him to challenge God’s might-‘tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall’. God might have achieved his stature as a monarch either by old repute, consent or custom, but had He abjured displaying royal pomp, and not concealed his strength, Satan and his minions wouldn't have undertaken such a drastic crusade.

Satan appeases his legion to look at the bright side of their defeat, for with benefit of hindsight they are now conscious of Almighty’s power and their own. As his reasoning suggests it would be futile to declare an open war with Him yet again, so the only course of combat is –‘to work in close design, by fraud or guile’. If they resort to force, their battle shall be half won as Satan’s reasoning suggests and so the combative maneuvers shall be underhanded intrigues and furtive treacheries.

To begin their stealthy warfare, Satan mentions the report of God fostering a new generation, which shall be lavished with favours reserved for Sons of Heaven. Their first expedition shall be to inquire of God’s holy plan and in such a pursuit hell shant hold divine spirits captive, nor the abyss teeming with darkness, blind their motives.

Satan calls for a profound deliberation on this matter, and urges his army to forswear the dreams of harmony as the price to gain it is slavish submission. Hence he hails war and advocates its resolution.

A critical Note: Satan is desperate to go at lengths and sacrifice his followers for his ambition. As his methods of warfare change, one gets an insight into his degenerating self. From glorious battles, he is shifting to despicable tactics of covert intrigues and deceit. Instead of fighting God like a true warrior, Satan is scheming to pervert God’s creations that had no role in his downfall. His change of heart marks his collapse from an angelic Lucifer to a wicked Satan.

Next interesting point Of Satan’s speech is his belief that peace demands absolute submission. This if read in modern times, suggests the sacrifice of media, capitalism, and individual sovereignty to the diktats of authority. Surely, this perspective shall find many takers but I believe peace doesn’t entertain an authority in the first place. It can entail
the freedom of an individual to give voice to his opinions and let the other fellow contest it with rational justifications.

And if the former is proved wrong, instead of hanging him, lawful penalty can be meted out as per the degree of his falsehood. The case shouldn’t become a deterrent for people to leash their thoughts but be an example of how to avoid indecent practices as perjury, outrageous slander, and scandals etc.

Satan if had not chosen insurgence as a tool to question God’s tyranny, but a peaceful discourse, then world would have been different. But then again, Satan’s avaricious ambition to oust God from his stature, strove him to forgo peaceful measures, and finally exclaim ‘Peace is despaired, for who can think submission.’

**Conclusion**

Thus in five speeches Satan finishes his primary manipulation in the first book of Paradise Lost. In doing so, he has used rhetorical devices in his speeches, so that they may appear logical to his followers, because they have a good deal of deception in their very nature. So much in manner kingly, or like a politician he tries to manipulate the rebel angels that their state is not so despairing as not to wage another war against God, and indeed he succeeds in this pursuit by the aid of his eloquence and tricky speeches. It can be said that it is his speech that makes him become more Satanic, because whenever he talks he talks evil, as if vomiting out all the disease he has inside him, consequently inflicting the multitude that stands in front.

**Major themes in “Paradise Lost”**

Milton’s subject in Paradise Lost was the failure of human kind to live according to divine order and its slow deliverance (God-given) from the consequences of the fall. The myth with which he chose to deal, and in which he believed literally, was, like many other parallel myths and folktales, and exploration of the moral consequences of disobedience. The discovery of the knowledge of good and evil is neither accidental nor happy. The central character Adam has no heroic destiny. Through Eve’s corruption all humankind is corrupted and as both are finally obliged to understand, the spiritual struggle to regain paradise equity and equability (self-control) extends through each generation their descendants. In a profound sense Adam and Eve fall from the ideal into the human condition. The great theme of the poem is obedience to a creative order of an omnipotent God. The will of God is imprinted in the harmony of nature, and disaster of the fall is as ecological as it is moral. Despite the temptation we see the rebellion of Satan as a heroic gesture of liberation and the fall of Adam as a species of attentiveness towards his wife, Paradise Lost insistently attempts to assert the ultimate justness of a loving God’s ‘Eternal Providence.’

Milton’s Paradise Lost God is powerful; He creates man from his own image. They were in Eden and Satan live in Hell. Satan revoluted against the God and challenged the authority of God so sent in the Hell. Adam is lesser than angels; Eve is created as Adam’s partner. They were sent on the paradise in Eden Garden and said that please don’t go near to this tree of knowledge and prohibited to eat the fruit of knowledge. But they committed the sin to eat that prohibited fruit. It is in conman human nature, that if someone said that it is prohibited thing than we attract to do that thing. Eve was tempted by Satan because Satan wants to take revenge with God and he knows very well that if he wants to take revenge with God he has to harm His creation. As he is not able to harm him directly he tempts Eve ate that apple and for love of Eve Adam ate that apple willingly and in conscious manner. Knowledge makes man more unnatural, when
both ate that apple they came know about the good and evil, sexuality and other things. In Paradise Lost, Milton has used many themes to write further about the epic. But main theme of Paradise Lost is Disobedience of Adam and Eve. The purpose of Paradise Lost is religious and has three parts (1) Disobedience (2) Eternal providence (3) Justification of God to men.

Disobedience:- The first part of Milton’s arguments hinges on the disobedience and its opposite obedience. The universe that Milton imagined with heaven at the top hell at the bottom and earth in between is a hierarchical place. God literally sits on the thrown at the top of Heaven Angels are arranged in groups according to their proximity to God. On the Earth Adam is superior to Eve humans rule over animals. Even in the Hell, Satan sits on a thrown, higher than demons. The proper way of the world was for inferiors to obey superiors because superiors well superior. A king was not because he was chosen but he was superior to his subject. It was therefore, not just proper to obey the kind was merely required. Satan’s rebellion because of jealousy is the first great act of disobedience and commences all that happens in the epic.

The crucial moment in the poem results from the disobedience and a breakdown of hierarchy. Eve argues with Adam about whether they should work together or apart. The problem here lies with both humans. Eve should not argue with her superior, Adam, but like arise, Adam should not yield his authority to his inferior, Eve. Likewise, when Adam also eats the fruit, he disobeys the God. Further, he disobeys by knowingly putting Eve ahead of God. Disobedience and disruption of the correct order result in sin and death.

Justification of ways of God to Man: - Eternal providence moves the story to a difference level. Without the fall, this divine love would never have been demonstrated because Adam and Eve disobeyed God. By obeying God, he can achieve salvation. The fall actually produces a new and higher love from God to Man.

Eve’s revolt: - There is an argument between Adam and Eve for Division of work. Adam insists that Eve should be closed to him and they have work together. Eve wants to work independently without Adams supervision. She wants to ;live independent life. “If so near.....good works in her husband to promote”

She furthers her argument saying that their presents are barrier to their work assign by God. Adam tries to pursuit Eve not to part from him because they have threat to their live from the enemy. But Eve is not convinced by the argument and ultimately decides to part from Adam.

Stan’s Revolt: - His revolt for God because is disobeying Him. He speaks against God so he was punished and thrown into the Hell. He knows that he is not capable to take revenge with God so he harms the creation of God. Satan takes the advantage of Eve and Adam’s separation. He seduces Eve in the form of serpent. Satan enters in Eden garden unobserved during midnight to take revenge against God. Satan’s motto is to destroy the creation of God.

John Milton's Grand Style

In his Oxford lecture ‘On Translating Homer: Last Words’, Mathew Arnold used this now famous phrase. 'Such a style, he maintained, arises when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject'. Arnold refers to Homer, Pindar, Virgil, Dante, and Milton as exponents of grand style. It was a lofty or elevated style suitable for epic, a style Arnold himself attempted in, for instance in 'Sohrab and Rustum'.
Now, we discuss the devices used in 'Paradise Lost' by Milton which have caused his style to be characterized as the Grand Style.

**Erudite Style, Full of Allusion:** - The language of 'Paradise Lost' is that of a scholar writing for scholars. A beautiful illustration of the poet's fondness for allusions is provided by his description of Satan's forces, which dwarfed the mightiest armies known to history or legend:

- the giant brood mentioned by Hesiod
- the heroic race that fought at Thebes and Troy mentioned by Homer
- the knights of king Arthur mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth
- the Crusaders who fought the Saracens mentioned in history, and
- the warriors of Charlemagne mentioned in the Italian epics.

The whole treasury of poetry and the whole storehouse of learning are at his command.

**Suggestive Quality in Style:** - In Milton's poetry more is meant than meets the ear. He means more than what he says. As the poet's difficulty throughout the poem is to describe what cannot be exactly described—Heaven, Chaos, Hell, God, Angels, Devils—he throws out a broad hint or two of the intended shapes and appearance and asks the reader to imagine the rest. Thus Satan's huge figure, which nobody can have an idea of, is described with a few suggestive strokes: 'head uplift above the wave', 'eyes that sparkling blazed', and other parts in bulk as large 'as whom the fables name of monstrous size'. Hell is described

> As one great furnace flam'd: yet from those flames  
> No light, but rather darkness visible........  
> Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell.

We have to suggest a lot to form a whole picture of the Hell.

**Unusual Structure of Sentences:** - Milton's common practice is to place a noun between its two qualifying adjectives, though the English grammar requires both to be placed before the noun: the upright heart and pure', 'the dismal situation waste and wild', 'ever burning sulphur unconsumed'. Sometimes he uses one part of speech for another, such as verb as noun in 'the great consult began'; adjective as noun 'the palpable obscure' etc. In spite of the violation of the accepted rules of grammar, one cannot deny that 'Paradise Lost' is a poem for scholarly readers. The violation of grammar is not so much criticized as the beauty of his style is appreciated.

**Use of Similes:** - A striking feature in 'Paradise Lost' is Milton's use of similes. These are expanded to draw complete pictures. They had dignity of the narrative, and do not merely illustrate but also decorate the epic theme and character.

**Elevated Speeches:** - The lofty tone is maintained in the speeches of Satan, as for instance in the speech to Beelzebub. One cannot help noting the rhetorical eloquence with which Satan encourages the fallen angels.

**Conclusion:** - Milton maintains a constant elevation and dignity of style corresponding to the greatness of theme, and Mathew Arnold is absolutely right when he
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refers to Milton as a poet of grand style. Thus vocabulary sentence, imagery, allusion, Latinisms all mingle and unite to form the majestic garment of Milton’s thought and feelings.

Three poets, in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.  
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed;  
The next, in majesty; in both the last.  
The force of Nature could no further go.  
To make a third, she joined the former two.”

Paradise Lost: Milton's Use of Epic Similes

Epic similes are used in literary works to create elaborate comparisons beyond the original point of similarity Milton uses a number of epic similes in his poem Paradise Lost. As Harding suggests in his article “Milton's Bee-Simile,” Milton could have used epic similes in order to raise his poetry to the level of his Greek predecessors. The similes create sympathy for the characters by comparing Satan and the fallen angels to objects and creatures that reduce their severity. As Paradise Lost progresses, Milton’s use of epic similes gradually diminishes those that they describe, making the reader more sympathetic to Satan and the Fallen Angels as well as aligning humanity to the fallen characters.

The Greek poet Homer is thought to have originated the epic simile in his poem The Iliad, to which we can make connections to Milton. Milton’s bee-simile is an excellent example of a “shared” epic simile between Homer and Milton. There are various functions of Milton’s epic similes: foreshadow, exaggeration, emotion / intellectual functions, aesthetic, relief and illustrative. The first simile in which something greater is happening is that when Satan is compared to the sun. Milton’s comparison of Satan to the sun is not as straightforward. A “sun new risen” often represents light, life, and all that is good. If the sun represents good and Satan embodies evil, then why does Milton align the two? This is the first instance where Satan appears sympathetic. We become entranced with Satan’s character as something alike the goodness of the sun, causing us to create sympathy for him, his angels, and his mission.

Milton often uses epic similes in his descriptions of the Fallen Angels that create sympathy for these sunken characters. Milton compares the fallen angels to fallen leaves. The image Milton creates with this simile is extremely depressing and shows just how far the angels have fallen from their previous glory. Like the leaves from the trees, the angels too have fallen and are strewn about in hell; they are lifeless and piled on top of each other.

Just lines after the fallen leaves simile, Milton compares the Fallen Angels to a swarm of locusts, further instilling the reader’s sympathy in the fallen characters. The leaves simile portrays the Fallen Angels as pathetic, fallen beings who are strewn on top of the Earth. The locust simile is unsettling and creates sympathy in a different way than the leaves simile. The reader’s initial impulse could be that locusts are evil due to various biblical implications. The movement in the locust simile suggests that the angels have become restless in anticipation for Satan’s plan of action. This image of the angels swarming their leader, trapped in unfamiliar bodies, creates a great deal of sympathy.

Milton also uses epic similes to compare Satan to various creatures and with each comparison Satan becomes further diminished. The first epic simile of Satan is found in book one and compares Satan to a large sea monster known as the Leviathan. The
Leviathan is referenced many times in the Bible. The Leviathan, like Satan, also takes form as a giant serpent. This comparison foreshadows Satan’s last state of existence in Paradise Lost when he appears as a serpent in books nine and ten. Satan as the Levitation is a disturbing image. In the Bible, the Leviathan is large, has many heads, and dwells in the sea. This simile implies Satan’s power and fury as the angels awaken to find they have fallen into hell. Milton does not create any sympathy for Satan in this first simile. Milton offers another simile of Satan in book one that describes him as a sympathetic leader. Although this simile comes not far after the Leviathan simile, there is a drastic difference in how Satan is described. Milton writes,

He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a tower; his form had not yet lost
All her original brightness nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined and the excess
Of glory obscured, as when the sun new arisen (Milton 1.589-594).

This is the first simile in which we see Milton’s attempt to create sympathy for the fallen characters. Before this he was compared to a giant sea monster, here Satan is likened to solar eclipse. Milton writes that Satan is “shorn of his beams/or from the behind the moon/in dim eclipse” (Milton 1.596-97) Satan is compared to the sun trapped behind the moon. In a solar eclipse, one can only see the outer rays of the sun protruding from behind the moon’s shadow.

In book nine, back in Paradise, we see Satan’s transformation. Satan says,

“O foul descent, that I who erst contended/
With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained/
Into a beast and mixed with bestial slime/
This essence to incarnate and imbrute/...
But what will not ambition and revenge/ Descend to?” (Milton IX.163-69).

We see that Satan has become aware of his “imbrutement.” What makes this transformation sympathetic is how little Satan has learned after his fall. To end his speech Satan says, “spite when with spite is best repaid” (Milton IX.177). Satan’s disfigurement has only convinced him further that “Who aspires must down as low as high he soared”(Milton IX169-70). Milton wonders why he is being punished for his ambition rather than recognizing his own evils.

Milton’s similes bring sympathy and understanding to those characters that they describe and also align the characters within the comparisons to humankind. Satan begins his journey as an angel in heaven, and ends his journey as a tormenting serpent. As Satan digresses, he becomes more concrete. We see Adam and Eve follow a similar path. Before the fall, man and woman are unfamiliar because their lives are surrounded by perfection and bliss. Once they have fallen, they experience emotions that are easier for us to understand: lust, jealously, revenge. The further Satan falls from heaven, the closer he becomes to humankind and the further Adam and Eve fall, the closer they become to Satan. We cannot picture Satan atop a tree, perched as a large bird or Satan whispering temptation into Eve’s ear as a toad. These comparisons are what make Satan relatable; they make Satan more than an angel dispelled from heaven. Satan becomes earthly, sympathetic, and arguably more human. In this context, one should remember Addison’s famous observation about the essential characteristic of Milton’s epic similes:

“When Milton eludes either to things or persons he never quits his similes until it rises to some very great idea, which is often foreign to the occasions that
gave birth to. He runs on with the idea till he has raised out of it some glorious image to inflame the mind of the readers and to give it that sublime kind of entertainment which is suitable to the nature of a heroic poem”.

**Paradise Lost as a Classical Epic**

An epic is a long narrative poem, ordinarily concerning a serious subject containing details of heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation. Homer and Virgil were the two great masters of the Classical epic. Homer’s Iliad and Virgil’s Aeneid have invariably served as models for all writers of the classical epic. Milton was a great classical scholar and he sought to write an epic. He dreamt of immortality and he aspired to be one with Homer and Virgil as the author of a classical epic. Milton turned his great classical and Biblical learning to a poem to “assert eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men”.

“I may assert Eternal Providence, And justify the ways of God to men.”

Milton achieved eminent success in making Paradise Lost as classical epic. In spite of certain drawbacks and defects, Milton’s epic is entitled to take its rightful place among half a dozen classical epics in the world. The first essential feature of the epic is its theme. The theme of an epic must have a national importance or significance; that is, the epic must be a true and faithful mirror of the life and of a nation. Homer represented the national life, thought and culture of the Greeks in the Iliad, and Virgil gave expression to the hopes and aspirations of the Romans in the Aeneid. The Fall of Man is the theme of the epic.

“Of Man’s first disobedience, and the fruit Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste Brought death into the world, and all our woe,”

The epic action has three qualifications. First, it should be one action, secondly, it should be an entire action, and thirdly, it should be a great action. In short, the action of an epic should be one, entire and great. All these three qualities of epic action are followed by Milton.

The action of Paradise Lost is one and there is a unity of action. The central action is the Fall of Man, and everything in the epic as, the battle of angels, the creation of the world, is subordinated to this central action. There are digressions at the beginning of the third and seventh books, but they do not affect the unity and central action of the poem. The whole action of Paradise Lost is single and compact. In the second place, its action is entire which means that it has a beginning, middle and an end. The action in Paradise Lost is contrived in hell, executed upon earth, and punished by heaven. In the third place the action ought to be great, by greatness of the action, Aristotle means that it should not only be great in its nature but also in its duration. The entire action of Paradise Lost has a stamp of grandeur and greatness about it. Milton’s subject is greater than Homer’s Iliad and Virgil’s Aeneid. It does not determine the fate of one single person or nation; but of the whole human race.

Milton plunges into the middle of the action. Milton, in imitation of the great poets, opens his Paradise Lost, with an infernal council plotting the fall of man.

The characters of the epic must have dignity and variety. In Paradise Lost, we have a wide variety of characters marked with qualities. In Paradise Lost, we have human as well as superhuman characters. Adams and Eve are human characters, whereas God, Christ and Satan are superhuman characters.
An **epic must have a hero with great qualities**. Identification of the hero is different in Paradise Lost. Adam can be called the hero of the epic. He is not a warrior or a conqueror but a noble figure.

An epic is a **serious poem embodying sublime and nobler thoughts**. Milton’s Paradise Lost is a sublime and noble poem characterized by loftiness of thought and sentiment.

An epic is **not without a moral**. Moral forms an integral and intrinsic part in Milton’s poem. It seeks to “vindicate the ways of God to man, to show the reasonableness of religion and the necessity of obedience to the Divine Law”.

Milton, in conformity with the epic practice, begins Paradise Lost by **invoking the Muse** to help him in his great task. But since Milton seeks the aid of the Heavenly Muse, the Holy spirit,

> “And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
> Instruct me, for thou know’st:”

He requests:

> “- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - : what in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support,”

In an epic poem the poet narrates very little in his person. The characters themselves carry forward the mission of the poet.

Lastly the **language of an epic** must be sublime and rose above the language of common vernacular.

> “- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - What though the fields be lost?
> All is not lost”

Aristotle observes that a **sublime style** can be formed by three methods - by the use of metaphors, by making use of the idioms and by lengthening of the phrase by the addition of words. Milton employs all these three methods to give the air of grandeur to his epic. His similes and metaphors are epical. Latin words are frequently introduced. The style of Paradise Lost is the truest example of grand style. On one place, Satan says:

> “The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n”

On the other place:

> “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.”

Milton’s Paradise Lost is a successful classical epic. Paradise lost has thus many excellences as an epic but the defects in it also not be forgotten. The introduction of allegorical persons like sin and death, the frequent allusions to heathen mythological fables, the intervention of grotesque incidents, the frequent indulgence in puns and useless display of learning and the unnecessary use of technical terms as in the description of Pandemonium are some blemishes in the style of the poem.

One other point must also be noted. An epic is an objective poem, and personal
reflections are out of place in it. But the most sublime parts of Paradise Lost reflect the individuality of the poet. However this has added to the interest of the work as a poem though it is not, strictly speaking, permissible in an epic.

The Theme & Moral Purpose of "Paradise Lost" Book-I

Introduction: - An epic worthy of the name should deal with an action or story which has universal or even cosmic appeal. All epics of antiquity deal with personalities and events of divine or superhuman dimensions. The Iliad dealt with Gods and heroes, lovely women and romantic lovers, doughty deeds on the battle-field and heroic achievements and death. But the ancient epics dealt with men and events which we know could not have happened as described. Much of it is pure imagination, much of it is fantastic or incredible and many other parts are beyond human agencies. They help us to realise that we are surrounded by invisible powers which can shape us to some extent, and which exert a continuous influence over us for good and ill. Faith in God and a divine order is thus inculcated, and we do not feel as strangers or helpless beings in this world. Death is the final end of all mortal men. But before death comes, we are impelled to do something worthy of our higher natures so that it may remain as an object of inspiration to all mankind. Thus, epics give us delight, instruction, edification and consolation.

Milton's Subject: Fall of Man: - Milton was a profound student of the classics, and from a very early period of his life, he was seized with the ambition to write an epic poem. But the course of his life was chequered by many interests, conflicts and crosses which prevented him from taking up the work on which he kept on brooding. At last he hit upon the subject of the fall of Man as narrated in the Bible as a fit theme for his epic, and planned and completed his Paradise Lost. The actual story of Adam and Eve, of their blissful state of innocence in paradise and the manner of their fall from it is very briefly narrated in the Genesis. Taking it as the kernel of his work, he decided to enrich it in all possible ways with the resources of his poetical faculties, his wide knowledge, learning and scholarship. Coleridge commenting on the theme of Paradise Lost said:

"It represents origin of evil and the combat of evil and good, it contains matter of deep interest to all mankind, as forming the basis of all religion and the true occasion of all philosophy whatsoever."

The fall of man is a subject of universal interest. Unlike other epics of ancient times, he could treat it in such a way as to ring conviction to the modern mind. But as mythology is a very essential aspect of all epics, he decided to make use of all his classical lore to embellish and illustrate his own narrative. As an epic should provide for the free play of all the nova rasas as we call them, he developed a plot which provided scope for them in ample measure. Biblical history is a part of the Semitic racial heritage; and the ancient Hebrews had come into contact with the pre-classical body of knowledge which goes back to a much more ancient past than that of ancient Greece and Rome. At the same time, according to the Christian religion, all mankind has been cursed as a result of the disobedience and fall of Man. Also that religion connects it with the coming of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind from the sin of which Adam and Eve were guilty. A.C. George states:

"We can state the essential theme of Paradise Lost as the sustained opposition between love and hate, God responds to the destructive challenge of Satan with the creative expression of love." "Milton has combined two traditional elements - the story of the challenge and response through an indirect agent. The former theme is the direct physical conflict of the Celestial Battle, and the latter is Satan's challenge of God-indirectly through God's own creature man. The second theme arises out of the first."
Another interpretation is that the theme of Paradise Lost is "the Fall of Man" from Paradise on account of his sin. Milton has tried to show that every action of man has its consequences. His principal concern is that man must make the right use of every moment of life because his actions are irrevocable. Milton's object in this poem was also to emphasize the role of Christ as the Redeemer of mankind and to justify the ways of God to men.

The doctrine of Free Will has been insisted on by Milton frequently and emphatically. The kind of action or state of mind Milton felt desirable was one perfectly controlled by the conscious will. Any deed, however significant, performed instinctively or without the full significance of the issue realized, was of little value. Milton has not condemned the element of desire in human nature but the difference between love that is genuine and passion that is not controlled by reason has been brought out.

God's Pity on Mankind: - As every sin has to be punished so was it the lot of mankind to suffer death although they had been promised immortality by God. But God himself took pity on mankind after a time, and resolved to come down in human shape to save men from hell and death. So Christ is represented as the Son of God, according to Christian belief, who came on earth and suffered Himself to be crucified, thus taking on himself the sin of mankind. This is known as the doctrine of vicarious suffering. God as man, suffered despite being pure and guiltless. By following Christ men were thus giving a chance of regaining their lost Paradise. This is the main topic which Milton has elaborated in his two great epics called Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The first deals with the entire story of the Universe from the moment of the creation of the world and of Adam and Eve, down to the disobedience of Adam tempted by Satan.

Two Groups of Angels: - To explain how Satan came to be an evil spirit, we have another mythological story of how there was formerly great war between one group of angels devoted to God and another group of angels led by Lucifer who wished to overthrow God so that he himself might become the most supreme of spirits, in the end, Lucifer was defeated and hurled down by God with all his hosts into a bottomless pit there to suffer for ever. But Lucifer, thereafter called Satan rankled in his defeat and planned to seek revenge against the Almighty. On hearing that God had created Man to take the place of the fallen angels, he decided to tempt him and wean him away from God. He found an opportunity to do so, since God put Adam and Eve in Paradise and gave them the lordship of all creation with one exception alone. This was that they should not taste of the fruit of the tree of knowledge which grew in Eden.

Satan seized the opening, and after recognising his shattered hosts and placing them in suitable dwellings in Hell, came out, and taking the form of a serpent, entered Eden and caused the fall of both Adam and Eve by persuading Eve to eat the fruit of knowledge. With knowledge, Adam and Eve lost their innocence, and God cursed them not only with the loss of their immorality and happiness but also drove them out of Eden to wander over the earth and earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

Various Episodes: - Into this main Biblical story, Milton has woven many episodes, drawn from the entire range of ancient lore to give his poem both substance, bulk and impressive majesty and sublimity.

Vastness of the Theme: - Critics have admired Milton's courage in dealing with the universal subject. The scene of action is the universal space; time is represented by eternity. The characters are God and His creation. The epic deals with the fortunes of the whole human race and not of a particular country and nation.

The Problem of Evil: The Conflict between Good and Evil: - The problem of evil is a very old subject. Philosophers have given different views regarding the origin of
the evil. Some regarded it as something external. Others regarded it as something eternal. For Satan, evil is the disobedience of the order of God. It is the will of the Man asserting himself. In fact, Satan brought freedom to Man. He gave consciousness of personality to Man. Man began to act with free choice and judgement. Now this freedom meant facing the consequences of one's choice. Adam and Eve have, therefore, to leave paradise because they followed their own free will. Milton condemned the act of Man. He did not appreciate man's free will and judgement because he was a very strict Puritan. His stress was on the results of the evil which led man to his ruin.

Some critics feel that there are two themes which are quite balanced, namely, the Fall of Angels and Fall of Man. The first half deals with Satan's efforts to do something against God. The second half is the drama of Adam and Eve. But this cannot be accepted. Milton clearly said that his story dealt with the Fall of Man. Satan's story is subsidiary to the main story of Adam and Eve.

Milton's Failure to Justify the Ways of God to Man: - Some critics believe that the poet instead justifies the ways of Satan to men, he has not justified the ways of god on the poetic level. Milton has tried to do so through arguments which are unconvincing. Moreover, the punishment given to Adam and Eve is out of proportion to their sin of disobedience. Handford points out that the justification of divine ways lies in the representation of Adam as a free agent and in the revelation of the working of God's Grace which allows to him and his descendants the opportunity for a new exercise of moral choice and of consequent salvation even after the Fall. The poet has gone out of his way again and again to insist on the fact of Adam's freedom. Neither personally nor as a part of the system did the idea greatly move or interest him.

Poetic Justice: - The theme of the epic is the justification of "God's ways to Man. "Milton justified the punishment of Adam and Eve for the crime they committed. They are expelled from Paradise. However, Milton is not a pessimist. He believe in spiritual development from Hope to Faith. God through His Goodness redeems man from sin. His son namely Christ offers his own sacrifice for the sake of Adam and Eve. At the end of the Paradise Lost, Adam and Eve feel repentant. They are punished in Heaven by God through the angel named Michael. David Daiches states: "Milton's heart was not fully in this sort of justification. Whatever he might have consciously thought."

However, he adds that the true justification lies in the way in that virtue can only be achieved by struggle, that the Fall was inevitable because a passive and ignorant virtue, with the challenge of an imperfect world, cannot release the true potentialities of human greatness.

Conclusion: - Milton's Puritanism and his great faith in the Bible made him choose his subject which was of interest to all men. His great achievement lies in making such a serious subject which is agreeable and acceptable to all. In fact, his sublimity (greatness and grandeur) can only be maintained at high level on a very lofty subject,

Character of "Satan"

Satan occupies the most prominent position in the action of Paradise Lost. Though the main theme of the poem is the “Man’s first disobedience” yet it is the character of Satan which gives a touch of greatness to this epic. All the poetic powers of Milton are shown on the delineation of the majestic personality of the enemy of God and Man, i.e. Satan.

As it is shown in Paradise Lost Book-I that the character of Satan is a blend of the noble and the ignoble, the exalted and the mean, the great and the low, therefore, it becomes difficult to declare him either a hero or a wholly villain.
In Paradise Lost Book-I we can hardly doubt his **heroic qualities** because this book fully exhibits his exemplary will-power, unsurpassable determination, unshakable confidence and unbelievable courage. However, the encyclopaedia of religion removes some of the confusion from our minds regarding Satan’s character in the following words:

“**Satan means the arch-enemy of men, the adversary of God and of Christianity, a rebel against God, a lost arch-angle.**”

Milton also confirms the remarks and tells us that Satan is an archangel. When God declares the Holy Christ his viceroy, Satan refuses to accept God’s order because he himself is a confident for it, his false strength and pride leads him to revolt against God for the fulfillment of his lust for power but he and his army suffers a heavy defeat and throw headlong into the pit of hell.

Milton’s description of Satan’s huge physical dimension, the heavy arms he carries, his tower like personality and his gesture make him every inch a hero. In his first speech, Satan tells Beelzebub that he does not repent of what he did and that defeat has brought no change in him at all. He utters memorable lines:

“**What though the field be lost?**
All is not lost – the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield.”

Actually he is not ready to bow before the will of God and is determined to wage and eternal war by force and will never compromise. He proudly calls himself the new possessor of the profoundest hell and foolishly claims to have a mind never to be changed by force or time. As he says:

“**The mind is its own place, and in itself**
Can make a heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.”

Although Satan undergoes perpetual mental and physical torture in hell yet he is fully satisfied because he is at liberty to do whatever he likes, without any restriction. The following line clearly indicates his concept of freedom.

“**Better to reign in Hell, the Serve in Heaven.**”

It can be said without any doubt that Satan gives an evidence of great leadership qualities which are certainly worthy of an epic hero and Beelzebub appreciates him for his undaunted virtues as the commander of undaunted virtue as the commander of fallen angels. His speech to the fallen angels is a sole roof of his great leadership because it infuses a new spirit in the defeated angels who come out of the pit of hell with their swords and are ready to face any danger regardless of their crushing and humiliating defeat at the hands of God. We fully laud Satan’s views on the themes of honour, revenge and freedom, but we cannot help sympathizing him because he embodies evil. He is the embodiment of disobedience to God.

As the poem proceeds, the character of Satan degenerates and he fails to produce any impression to true heroism because he is morally a degraded figure. When we closely examine his addressed to his followers, we find that it is full of contradictions and absurdities, because he tries to throw dust into the eyes of his comrades. In fact, on the one hand, he says that they will provoke war against God and on the other hand, he wants peace which is only possible through submission. Then, on reaching the earth, he enters into a serpent and is completely degrades. Pride is the cause of his fall from Heaven – Pride that has ‘raised’ him to contend with the mightiest. But where is that
pride when the Archangel enters into the mouth of a sleeping serpent and hides himself in its “Mazy folds”. Here from the grand figure that he is in the beginning, he degenerates into a man and cunning fellow, and then he tries to tempt Eve by guile. So, Satan degenerates from the role of a brave hero to that of a cunning villain as C. S. Lewis remarks:

"From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bed-room or bath-room window and thence toad, and finally to a snake – such is the progress of Satan."

So, it can easily be said in the light of above mentioned facts that Satan is out and pouter hero in Book-I of Paradise Lost, but in Book-IX he appears before us every inch a villain because of his evil design and he himself says that his chief pleasure lies in the destruction of mankind which lowers him in our estimation as a hero.

The Influence of Reformation and Renaissance on Milton

Introduction: - The Renaissance and the Reformation had their impact on England in the sixteenth century. Milton's work reflects the influence of both the Reformation and the Renaissance. He homogenised Reformation and Renaissance into a perfect whole. When he started writing, the initial exuberance ushered in by the Renaissance and the Reformation was already on its way out. His poetry is the first and the last example of the happy and effortless harmonisation of the two mutually antagonistic enthusiasms which stirred the England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Milton Blends the Two: - The spirit of the Reformation provides the content and spirit of Milton poetry, and the spirit of the Renaissance classicism its moulded pattern. Milton did in the seventeenth century what the poets of the French Pleiade had done in the sixteenth. "No poet", says Grierson in The First Half of the Seventeenth Century, "realised so completely the Renaissance ideal of poetry cast in classical moulds-carried out so entirely and majestically the programme of the Pleiade. Milton and Milton only, succeeded in producing living and beautiful poems in correct classical forms. And into these classical forms he poured the spirit of the Protestant movement." In fact Milton's Puritanism (a product of the Reformation) and his Hellenism (a product of the Renaissance) were more closely harmonised in his genius than the division of theme and form would suggest. Milton seems to have enlivened Puritanism with Hellenism and tempered his Hellenism with Puritanism. Milton was neither a godless pagan nor a Puritan formalist nor was he both simultaneously. He imbibed the true spirit of both tendencies and wrote under the unified impact of both.

The Reformation Elements: - In Milton's poetry the Reformation element is found as his soft and steady puritanism. Puritans were those who "protested" against even the Protestants who in their turn had protested against the Pope and the Popish religion. The Reformation signifies the great religious revolution of the sixteenth century which gave rise to the various Protestant or Evangelical organisations of Christendom. The movement was European in extent and was widely successful in the reign of Henry VIII, and later Elizabeth I. But some splinter sects rose against the Protestant Church of England which they thought was not yet fully reformed, and who urged to take Christianity back to the religion of Jesus Christ. These Puritans devotedly and rather superstitiously revered the Bible, condemned the Protestant bishop (episcopacy) and every institutionalised religion, emphasised every man's inner light, hated all arts such as painting, sculpture and music and even drama, all show and luxury, shied at the least appearance of evil, favoured highly formalised and rigorous conduct, and, in general, turned against all literature and aesthetic pursuits. Now, Milton was born in a Puritan
family. His schooling and surroundings, his social and political affiliations, and a number of other factors combined to instil in him a love of Puritan ideology and way of life. However, he was a man of too strong an individuality to accept any formal "ism" in its totality. He was a deeply religious man, and even at the age of twenty-three he could write:

**All is, if I have grace to use it so;**  
**As ever in my great Task Master's eye.**

Milton's puritanism has not much to do with the stoic creed of ordinary puritans. The Renaissance elements of his intellectual set-up effectively controvert these tendencies and any fanatic adherence to a rigorous code of conduct and ultimate values. His version of puritanism was tinged by his love of the classics, the love of nature, the love of beauty, and Renaissance humanism insisting on the world of man, and love of "the human face divine." Moreover, unlike most Puritans, Milton emphasises the spirit rather than the conduct. And this emphasis brings him into affinity with the Cambridge Platonists who were themselves mostly Puritans. Milton believed that "the Spirit which is given to us is a more certain guide than Scripture." In his pamphlet Of True Religion he states that along with external Scripture there is an internal Scripture, "the Holy Spirit written in the Hearts of believers". Milton departed from the Puritan creed even in some important doctrinal points. For instance, he did not subscribe to the doctrine of predestination and refused the Son an equal status with the Father. In more general terms, he tried to reconstruct the Puritan creed on the basis of the humanistic ideology of the Renaissance.

**The Renaissance Elements:**  
The Renaissance in England gave rise to a large number of tendencies. It brought in its wake love and appreciation of the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, a keen love of beauty and art, and a new stress on human life and pursuits. Milton is obviously affected by all these ramifications of the spirit of the Renaissance. In short, the Renaissance spirit in Milton was influenced and modified by his ingrained puritanism. The Renaissance elements show themselves in Milton in two ways:

(i) They provide, as we have already-said, the classical framework for most of his major poetical works.

(ii) They leaven, humanise, Hellenise, refine, and somewhat secularise his puritanism and mitigate its severity. Almost all of Milton's poetic works are embodiments of the Renaissance and the Reformation elements.

**Puritan Element in Paradise Lost:**  
The very theme of Paradise Lost shows the Puritan or Hebraic element in Milton. The fact that he chose the Fall of Man as the theme of his great epic shows the Puritan in him. Wars and adventurous deeds did not interest the Puritan poet.

**Not sedulous by nature to indite**  
**Warl, hitherto the only argument**  
**Heroic deemed...**  
(Book IX-27-29)

The theme is the most heroic of all great English poems. He based his great work on the story of the Fall of Man, as given in the Bible. To him this story was not fictitious or legendary, but literally and historically true. It was indeed his Puritan character that led him to this theme, but it gave full scope for the expression of his stupendous genius. Though he has introduced wars and adventurous deeds into the body of the epic, according to the classical tradition, the central theme of the poem is disobedience to...
God's command and the consequent Fall of Man. The conflict in the epic is not external; it is a spiritual conflict 'Man's first disobedience.' The theme of the epic, thus, is religious; it is based on the Bible.

In Paradise Lost, Milton's object is not only to "assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to men," but much more. For the poem contains profound observations on religion, morality, politics, government, war and peace and the relationship between man and woman, arts, sciences, explorations and on practically all the important aspects of life. All are sanctified by 'whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave."

"Paradise Lost" based upon classical model: - The division of the epic into twelve books, the relieving similes, the councils, the heroic catalogues and the heavenly messengers, are only some of the technical devices that show Milton's indebtedness to the classics.

The form of the epic and treatment of the religious theme are entirely in classical tradition. Milton had declared that he would write an epic in the style of Homer, and every element in the form of Paradise Lost is in the classical style. We have in Paradise Lost all the ingredients of the classical epic-invocation to the Muse, plunging into the very middle of the action, description of war, gradual development of action leading up to the climax - viz, plucking the fruit of the forbidden trees, resulting in the Fall of Man, and then the resolution of the conflict ending in Man's loss of Paradise. Thus the plan and design of Paradise Lost follows meticulously the classical models of homer and Virgil.

In telling the story of the Fall of Man, Milton fully expresses the spirit of the Renaissance. One of the fundamental attributes of Milton's character was his love of freedom and spirit of independence. In the story of Adam there was the conflict between pre-destination and free will. Without entering into theological controversy we may say that Milton was all for freedom, and pointed out how Adam plucked the fruit out of his free will (induced no doubt by Eve), though he had been commanded by God not to do so. And as a result of disobedience he fell under the wrath of God. The moral thesis of Genesis is submission to the Almighty, which makes out disobedience to be sinful. But Milton, who wished to emphasize this moral, had an independent spirit and had lived independently. He had acclaimed and advocated the rebellion against the prelates and even the king, and celebrated the glories of regicide. In spite of himself, he was in deep sympathy with Satan, the great rebel of Heaven and the enemy of God. This spirit of rebellion is embodied in the character of Satan, and it is in Satan that Milton put most of himself, his pride and temperament.

In Paradise Lost we have a combination which is absolutely unique in the literature of the time; a poem which has all the deep spiritual fervour of Puritanism, decorated and diversified by every ornament and beauty which could possibly be borrowed from classical literature and mythology. The reader will feel a sense of confusion arise at times from the strange mixture of Christian and pagan ideas. It is essentially the Hell of the ancient Greeks and Romans which Milton describes where the river of Lathe, Cocytus and Styx flow, and it is the Greek Fury, named Medusa who guards the fort. The dreadful figures of Sin and Death are modelled on ancient classical monsters, while Chaos is surrounded by the classical figure of Ades, Orcus and Demogorgon. This makes us wonder what Milton really did believe in, but the fact is that the Christian Bible does not supply a clear picture of Hell and is not very definite as regards the geography or population of the lower region. On the other hand, the classical conception was clear-cut, vivid and pictorial and hence Milton did not hesitate to draw boldly from it so that the nakedness and deficiencies of the Puritan conception would be well hidden under gaudy pagan robes.
Impact of Classical Scholarship in the Style of "Paradise Lost": -

In the style of Paradise Lost again, we find the unmistakable impress of classical scholarship. His use of similes, "his use of history and geography, his knowledge of the ancient and modern literature, his love of art and music, his culture and refinement-all point to the influence of the Renaissance and Hellenism on his receptive mind. There is no poetic work so stupendous in its scope, so sublime in its style and moral outlook, which can be compared with Milton's Paradise Lost.

A typical Renaissance figure Milton was impregnated with the classics but he equally drew his inspiration from the Bible and from Hebrew lore. His epic shows his familiarity with the literature, history and the lore of medieval and Renaissance Europe. He understood the technique of music, architecture, engineering, soldiering, astronomy and uses illustration from all of these to add majesty and variety to his work.

One of the most significant features of the use he makes of his learning in the manner in which he adapts classical lore to his Christian purpose and mingles reference to the classical with the use of the Bible and Hebrew mythology, i.e. He is inspired by a 'Muse' (classical) but the Muse is 'heavenly', the one which inspired Moses: he combines his appeal to the Muse for help with connected appeal to the New Testament of Holy spirit. His Hell is the Gehenna of the Jews but at the same time the Hades of the Greeks. His devils will be the Gods of Paganism (Palestinian, Egyptian, Greek), and in the remarkable 'naming' section he offers us a full display of his learning in the various mythologies. God-like Zeus - uses thunder and is the Thunderer. Sin and Death are allegorical figures from Milton's Christian imagination, but the description of Sin's birth is adapted from the classical accounts of the birth of Pallas Athene, while the revolting description of Sin herself is modelled on the account given of Scylla by Ovid and Virgil. The description of the position in space of the Earth's Universe-hanging by a golden chain from Heaven - is taken from Homer's story of the golden chain of Zeus, etc.

Conclusion: -

Paradise Lost is great by reason of its vast imaginative range, and its deep moral earnestness. It was the influence of the Renaissance, with spirit of humanism and classicism that gave to the poem its epic form and its imaginative grandeur; while its subject-matter and its moral earnestness are due to the influence of the Reformation with its spirit of Hebraism.

Autobiographical Elements in "Paradise Lost"

Paradise Lost is an epic, and an epic is a work of objective art. As such, there is hardly any scope for the poet to express himself in an epic poem. But Milton was a self-centred individual and so, in spite of the fact that he was writing an epic, his personality expressed itself all through the poem. In fact, he revealed himself in all his works, whether he was writing an ode or an elegy or an epic, or a masque or a drama. Coleridge rightly points out: "John Milton is in every line of Paradise Lost." The whole poem is coloured by the personality of Milton. Milton is in truth the only living being who exists in his own works. He projects himself, his feelings, knowledge and aspiration into the characters of his epic, both the primitive human creatures and the superhuman beings, whether celestial or infernal.

Self-revelation in "Paradise Lost": -

Being a great epic poem, Paradise Lost should be just as impersonal as that of the drama. But we find that the whole poem is coloured by the personality of Milton; we see Milton, the Puritan, Milton, the classical scholar, Milton, the hater of autocratic government and kingship, Milton, the despiser of women. Throughout the poem some passages stand out among the remaining ones because they form part of the spiritual autobiography of the poet. It is unlikely that they crept in
unconsciously, for their anticipations occur in his earlier utterances in prose or verse. His
tirades against the corrupt practices of the Roman Catholic Church, his poor opinion of
women, his condemnation of the rosy path of dalliance with particular reference to
courtly revelries, and his poignant references to his blindness and solitude.

**Milton, the Champion of Popular Liberty:** - Milton was particularly independent in
character, and could not fit himself into the discipline of an established University.
Whatever savoured to him of oppression in civil life or in religion was to his dislike. In his
own way he was as determined a rebel against constituted authority and as ardent an
apostle of liberty. This, unconsciously, he puts into the mouth of Satan reflects a great
deal of the ideals and aspirations of Milton. It is in the passage where Satan speaks of
the joy of independence, and of the hatred which he bears to the tyranny of Heaven's
Ruler, that he reaches the most commanding heights of noble eloquence. The reason for
this is obvious, for Milton was the great champion of popular liberty in his own day, and
gave up the best years of his life, as well as his eyesight, to the cause of England's fight
against oppression. Milton cannot impart to Satan some of his own sentiments and
putting him in the position of the champion of liberty against autocratic rulers. The very
idea of kingship had become hateful to Milton.

Thus, Satan is a projection of Milton's own self. The greatest character of Paradise Lost is
a projection of Milton's own self. Satan embodies Milton's courage, love of freedom,
republicanism and hatred of tyranny. Just as Milton opposed the autocracy of
King Charles I and became a stern republican, so also Satan defied the authority of God
and rebelled against Him. Again, the defeat of the republican's cause, with which Milton
identified himself did not and could not curb his spirit so also the defeat of Satan could
not damp his unconquerable spirit of defiance. It seems Milton himself speaks when
Satan says:

**What though the field be lost**
All is not lost; the unconquerable will
And courage never to submit or yield.
What else is not to overcome.

The wonderful eloquence of the council in Hell is an echo from a period of passionate
parliamentary life. It cannot be denied that "the debate in Hell would have been lacking
in power and verisimilitude if the poet had not lived through the period of the long
parliament." Moreover, the war in heaven is the civil war of England, characterized by
bitterness of feeling and language peculiar to internal broils.

**Milton's Self in Adam:** - Another part of Milton's self is exhibited in Adam, who is
pious, God-fearing and grave, but susceptible to feminine charm. Through Adam, Milton
expresses his feelings towards woman. Adam expresses a bitter cry wrung from Milton
by the unforgettable miseries of his first marriage. The scene of reconciliation between
Adam and Eve is reminiscent of a similar scene between Milton and his first wife.

**Style Bears Stamp of Milton's Mind:** - The style of Paradise Lost bears upon it the
unmistakable stamp of Milton's mind. The blank verse of Paradise Lost is the verse of a
great poet and a great musical artist. On the one hand, it soars high into the lofty region
of imagination and on the other; it possesses a grand music. His achievements in
constructing his new blank verse are unique indeed. He made his verse perfectly suited
to his lofty subject-matter.

The Biblical and classical allusions which abound in Paradise Lost indicate the scholarship
and learning of Milton. The style of Milton, unique in itself, has all the stamp of Milton's
personality. The word "Miltonic" has acquired a special significance, and is now
synonymous with "sublime". It is not only the theme of the poem that lifts the reader to
a lofty moral plane, but its style also reaches the highest watermark of grand style in English poetry. Milton's constant use of Latinism in his construction and phraseology is not merely a device to impart grandeur to his style, but it is a necessary mode of his self-expression. Though such Latinisms are alien to the genius of English language, they are a part of Milton's intellectual equipment, and come naturally to a man, whose mind was nourished on the classics as Milton's was.

**Unconscious symbolism in "Paradise Lost"** - The Cavaliers and High Church party were described as Philistines, Moabites, and Hitties, who were indulging in persecution of God's chosen people. Milton unconsciously adopts some of this attitude of Paradise Lost. He gives a list of all the heathen gods, and the tribes who worshipped them, and identifies the angels who fell from heaven with these gods. This leads him into a detailed account of many of the episodes in the history of the Israelites, and one cannot help feeling that Milton is continually thinking of his own party when he talks about God's chosen people, and of his opponents in politics, church, and the ideal worshippers.

**Conclusion** - The whole of Paradise Lost is full of autobiographical passages. His high seriousness, his proud and resolute will and his grave sadness at the folly of mankind are interwoven in the whole of his story. Both the theme and the style of Paradise Lost are expressions of Milton's personality, his thought, his learning, and his moral, political and religious outlook. The figure of Satan is partly an embodiment of Milton's own spirit of freedom, republicanism and stern determination and courage in the teeth of adversity. Apart from the revelation of Milton through the characters of Satan and Adam, there are occasional references in Paradise Lost to Milton's blindness. Milton had become totally blind when he wrote Paradise Lost and had fallen upon evil days. The lines describing his misfortune are full of pathos, because they come from the very heart of Milton. Thus the poem is full of passages that recall the life of the poet.

**Paradise Lost : Christ as a Hero**

The story of mankind's fall from Eden as written by John Milton in his epic poem Paradise Lost portrays a classically heroic Satan and a modern hero in Christ. While Satan fits the model of an epic hero as classic heroes are not the true savours of the people. He is directly contrasted by Christ, who is not a gloriously strong warrior like the antique heroes. The complex character of Satan has power beyond measure when compared to man but ultimately falls due to his refusal to bow down before God. Christ is not depicted as a warrior at all, but still remains as the savour of humankind who falls. However, this fall is not due to any of his flaw. His willingness to die for man is his greatest heroic strength.

Satan takes on the role of protagonist which presents him as a false hero. He is the most essential character to the entire story. Epic heroes such as Odysseus and Achilles were written with very similar traits: **strength beyond that of normal men, natural leaders and warriors**, followers who believed in them, **deities remaining watchful of their actions**, yet **imperfect to the death**. Like Satan, these heroes were the protagonists of their respected epics. This essentially appeals us into viewing him a hero. In Book I, he delivers a reuniting cry to his fellow fallen angel. He is the main character leading his men in a revolution against all powerful system. He is angry that God holds Christ in higher regard than His angels. His evil is brought to human level which enables us to understand him emotionally while his power is elevated to that of a hero, allowing us to see him as a powerful warrior capable of waging war. This deep building of the Satan character gives the illusion that he is a hero. He fits into the criteria for what the hero of an epic poem should be. But he is missing one trait to prevent him from being a true hero: **sacrifice for the greater good**.
Satan's desires are never noble. He is fighting for a cause he truly believes in as he struggles against what he considers oppression, but the actuality is that his cause is an evil one - the corruption of mankind. God explains that Satan was made "just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fail" (3. 98-99), indicating that his path is not the only one available for Satan. He does not need to serve evil. But he chooses that path, and with no greater noble cause to fight for, he is unable to be a true hero. Instead, his path is selfish as he chooses only to serve himself. Not once does he ask for God's redemption in order to serve Him again, nor does he try to serve God's will on Earth. Satan chooses, using his own free will, to continue down the path of bringing evil into the new perfect world that God has created for man. Without a noble cause, Satan is unable to be a true hero.

Christ is not a classic hero, but he is made to be the most heroic character in Paradise Lost. Milton introduces Christ and immediately depicts God warning Him of Satan's attempt to "by force... destroy, or worse, ...pervert" (3. 91-92). And while Satan looks to serve only himself, Christ shows willingness to take the ultimate sacrifice when he proclaims "I offer, on me let thine angel fall" (3. 237) and "on me let Death wreck all his rage" (3. 241). This is where Christ becomes the hero because he literally offers himself up to die. While the classic hero would fall because of a very human flaw, Christ's fall was because of mankind's flaws. He is separated from all of the classic heroes and placed above them because he did not save his people as a warrior, killing many armies. He followed God's most noble wish. Achilles died for his country, yet Christ died for all of mankind. Milton intentionally uses this fact to show Christ as not as epic hero, but a true savoir to humanity. This is what makes him a new hero, as Milton cleverly is able to justify by making his achievements so much more valuable to all of mankind than any classic hero.

To put Satan and Christ into heroic perspective, God must also be examined. In simple terms, Satan rose up against his oppressor in attempt to overthrow a government he felt was unjust. He fought against the Almighty being from which everything was created, including Satan's own ability to fight against Him. He is not like the Greek and Roman gods that can be fought against while remaining heroic because His will decides what is heroic or if any being is even able to fight against Him. In contrast to Satan's use of his free will to rise up against God, there is Christ, Jesus Christ, who chooses to be the sacrificial lamb for mankind. This separates him from any other hero in the fact that his death led to salvation, not his personal downfall.

John Milton's Paradise Lost does put a new perspective on what an epic poem's hero can be. Although Satan could be identified as the hero, it seems evident that, according to Milton, classical heroes with similar traits as Satan should not be considered true heroes at all. In the context of Paradise Lost, heroes of that nature are just men. Like all of man, they are sinners, and their true value comes from whether they can use their God enabled free will to do something God deems positive. Christ was the true hero of Paradise Lost, as he showed everything that Satan could not. When he was needed by God, he stepped up voluntarily and acted as an instrument of salvation for humanity. While not portrayed as a larger-than-life warrior, the character of Christ sacrifices himself to be a true hero, breaking all the traditions of an epic hero.

**Milton as an epic poet**

**No Metaphysical Influences:** - Milton's instincts and training kept him almost untouched by metaphysical influence — though we might ask, for instance, if "Himself is his own dungeon" (Comus, Line 385) is less metaphysical than Andrew Marvell's "mine own precipice I go". Milton conceived of poetry as “more simple, sensuous, and
passionate” than logic and rhetoric, but these terms are not an adequate description of his own work. Milton was, to put it roughly, as Spenserian who became the greatest of European neo-classical poets. In other words, he belonged to what had once been, and through him continued to be, the main stream, of English poetry. He moved rapidly from a thin and “conceited” Elizabetnan sweetness towards concentration, order, rationality, and restraint, Corm’s was a unified mosaic of the earlier and later styles of Milton and his whole century.

**His Steady and Sonorous Style:**

“The poetry of Milton’s earlier years was sensuous, ornate and beautiful, showing decorative features derived from the exuberant literature of the Elizabethan period. The sonnets written during the 1640s and 1650s show his style growing more direct. In Paradise Lost he brought together the exuberant fancy of his early poems and this new sense that poetry must speak directly about life with dramatic ‘immediacy if it is to have the strongest possible effect. The basic movement of Paradise Lost is -steady and sonorous, but the story moves steadily forward all the time without the ornate decorative movements that are so charming but undramatic in a work like Comus. Milton imparts information rapidly, even to the point of distorting the syntax of his blank verse lines so L as to crowd related classes or epithets close together.

**Decorative imagination:**

Paradise Lost reveals at almost every point a steady forward impulse. Yet the decorative imagination such as characterised Milton’s early poems is not excluded. Here, as in so many other respects, Milton learned how to bring all his gifts into plays, ordering them and subordinating them to the grand pattern of his narrative. For example, epic similes introduce the Arthurian legends with their chivalric elements that had fired Milton’s youthful imagination. The elves aryl fairies of Elizabethan poetry could be similarly admitted, as could the ornate decorativeness of Spenser. But because these elements are introduced through epic similes they are related to the main story and illuminate it. They exist in a clearly subsidiary position as vivid side-lights on the main action. yet, just as the mellifluous classical names of places and people (for which Milton had shown his fondness as early as in the Nativity Ode of 1629) relate Milton’s epic to all human experience and earlier literature, so the imaginative descriptive side of Paradise Lost links it not only with the work of other writers but also with the ideas and areas of study which had found expression in Milton’s youthful poems.”

**Paradise Lost – His Masterpiece:**

Milton’s Paradise Lost is the greatest epic poem in English literature. Indeed, with its sublime imagery, its harmonious verse, its Titanic background of heaven, hell, and the limitless void that lies between, it is unsurpassed in any literature. It is a colossal epic, not of a man or a hero, but of the whole race of man. The splendour of heaven, the horror of hell, the serene beauty of paradise, the sun and planets suspended between celestial light and gross darkness, are described with an imagination that is almost superhuman.

**Harbinger of Tradition “Paradise:—**

Lost shows Milton as Christian humanist using all the resources of the European literary tradition that had come down to him—biblical, classical, medieval renaissance ; pagan, Jewish and Christian. Imagery from classical fable and medieval romance, allusions to myths, legends and stories of all kinds, geographical imagery deriving from Milton’s own fascination with books of travel and echoes of the Elizabethan excitement at the new discoveries, biblical history and doctrine, — all these and more are found in this great synthesis of all that the western mind was stored with • by the middle of the seventeenth century. Like The Faerie Queene, Milton’s epic is a great synthesizing poem, but Milton’s synthesis is more successful than Spenser’s because he places his different kinds of knowledge — biblical, classical, medieval, modern— in a logical hierarchy, and never mingles, as Spenser often does, classical myth and biblical story on equal terms. If all the resources of classical
mythology are employed in order to build up an overwhelming picture of the beauty of Eden before the Fall, that is because Milton is saying that here, and here only, were all the yearnings of men for ideal gardens fully realised. The description of Eden in Book IV is, indeed one of the finest examples of Milton’s use of pagan classical imagery for a clearly defined Christian purpose.

**Milton’s imaginative Power:** Milton’s imaginative control of his scenes extends even’ to illustrative details and exact features of language. The epic similes are nearly always exactly linked in style and subject with the main events of the story at the moment they occur, while often providing an ironic commentary upon them.

Milton’s imagination was always at ease when dealing with immensity, and the scale of Paradise Lost is surely immense. More than any other English poet he is at home with huge panoramas on a cosmic scale. He had a curiously aerial imagination, and the breath taking account of Satan’s flight through Chaos at the end of Book II illustrates this. Even in his earliest poems Milton’s view frequently broadens out beyond the limits of a particular scene to become a great panorama on a cosmic scale. Here is a stanza from the Nativity Ode:

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So when the sun in bed,
Curtained with cloddy red
Pillows his head upon an orient wave.
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to th’ infernal
Each fettered ghost skips to his several grave,
And the yellow-skirted Pays
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.
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This stanza is typical of Milton’s imaginative practice and anticipates several features of the style of Paradise Lost. The idea of the sun in bed may be far-fetched and Milton writes effortlessly about things on this grand scale. His mind easily slips from this gorgeous, baroque scene to the world of ghosts and shadows and then to a fairy world in the final two

**Master of Grand Style:** With Milton’s sense of beauty was combined a stateliness of manner which gives a high dignity to his poetry. He is a master of what is known as the grand style. He wielded the blank verse with an exceptional mastery. His poetry is distinguished also by its music. The reader who is deaf to the harmonies of Milton has no music in himself. “After Shakespeare, Milton is the greatest English poet; which means that he is the greatest English poet outside the drama but within the tether of epic poetry.

**‘Free Will’ in Milton’s Paradise Lost**

Milton’s epic, *Paradise Lost* allows its readers a penetrating insight into the debates and anxieties of 17th century England. It is deeply informed by the poet’s own political sympathies with the Puritan revolutionaries and his experience of the rule of James I and Charles I. The rise of capitalism and imperialism in Britain too at the same time brought in an increasing consciousness of individuality and agency fuelling the debates on man’s free will and potential. However, the most powerful and radical contemporary debate of Milton’s concern, would have been the **Puritan rejection of the authority of the king and the church and the redefinition of man’s relationship with God in terms of the personal and the individual.** Puritanism in its bid to free Christianity of the bondages of ecclesiastical interpretation and the monopoly of the Church asserted the
right of every man to exert his free will in interpreting the Bible. The same, however, even in destabilizing the idea of authority and social hierarchy made necessary a re-thinking of the very idea of free will itself. The issue of free will and authority in Paradise Lost read in such a context becomes fraught with larger ideological and historical debates, and of great political implication.

A period of such religious transition as that to which Milton belonged could not have been but ridden with anxieties of disorder and loss of faith, also evident is the fact that the emphasis on free will permeating the text of Paradise Lost is much a product of Milton's ingenuity. It can be argued nonetheless that though intense, Milton's definition of free will remains inevitably and inherently wanting, in that it becomes more of an instrument to reiterate God's authority as supreme and absolute rather than man's own agency. As explicit in God's speech -

\begin{verbatim}
What pleasure I from such obedience paid
When Will and Reason( Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled
Made passive both, had serv'd necessity
Not mee (Bk III, Paradise Lost)
\end{verbatim}

The exercise of free will becomes a mode of servility to God; in fact it becomes a precondition for devotion and obedience. “Free will allows subjects to respond creatively to their calling for obedience and love and interpret it in their personal way.” Such a restricted understanding as this, derived from Milton's representation of the potential of free will in Paradise Lost, suggests some problem in his definition of the term itself.

As can be seen in Adam's parting words to Eve in the separation scene, “God towards thee has done his part do thine”, the exercise of agency should according to Adam and the sympathetic voice of the Miltonic bard ideally always be informed by a sense of total obligation towards God, and a fear of death or punishment. Even the exercise of reason becomes suspect

\begin{verbatim}
Lest by some fair appearing good surprised
She dictate false, and misinform the will
To do what God expressly hath forbid. (Bk IX, Paradise Lost)
\end{verbatim}

Everything therefore in the Miltonic scheme of things, even reason gets subordinated to the command of God. Here again one must mention as above that “reason is choice”.

Free will remains a convenient and non-existent ideal in terms of Milton's human rights agenda, where the only creatures to be exercising it are seen as Satanic or the causal agents of “all our woe”. Many critics hail the pre-lapsarian Eden as home to absolute freedom of will however the very example of the punitive relegation of Satan to Hell contradicts the belief.

Adam has been taken as the intellectual superior of Eve. Such a hierarchizing undermines her credibility at making decisions as equally informed as Adam’s. At the same time this frames Eve as more susceptible to giving in to temptation. Therefore all of her independent decisions and assertion of individuality becomes suspect. Eve’s decision that they work apart is an assertion of free will informed by a personal consciousness of the need for efficiency and to earn their supper. However, it gets branded as an act of transgression in the larger scheme of things as it conflicts with
the wishes of Adam, her “intellectual” superior and her voice is never sympathized with but seen as the voice of challenge or opposition to the feudal patriarchal world order, where God is to man what man is to woman, while the woman remains subjugated twice over.

Satan in his fall affords us with an interesting comparison with Eve. It is inescapable that both are in their social locations relatively inferior, Satan to Christ, and Eve to Adam. As embodied in the speech of the snake, the real temptation for both, Eve and Satan is then to rise above their given locations, to become equals with Adam and God respectively, “For unequal who is free?” What thus gets constructed as the sinful temptation is, as in Satan’s words, “vent’ring above my lot”. The construction of free will purely in terms of obedience to God, then gets exposed as a kind of control mechanism to ensure that all creatures:

Stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own arbitrament it lies
Perfect within, no outward aid require;
And all temptation to transgress repel (Paradise Lost Book VIII)

The actual scene of temptation and the instance of Eve’s exercise of free will suggests the presence of certain restrictions on her exercising her free will. “But his forbidding commends thee more” reveals how restrictions themselves take the form of temptation, not even in terms of absolute defiance of authority but as an assertion of the absolute freedom of will and aspiration to knowledge that she feels denied. Eve in stating,

For good unknown, sure is not had
And yet unknown is as not had at all

exposes the problems in Milton’s definition of free will in terms of its counter, i.e. disobedience, by using the same method of inversion of discourse to define “good” in terms of knowing it from bad. In her understanding of good being proved faulty is also automatically proved erroneous Milton’s understanding and adumbration of the idea of free will.

Contextualizing what we have thus argued our understanding of free will as depicted in Paradise Lost to be, we can see how such a construction of agency works vis-à-vis Milton’s political position. While the emphasis on individual agency is in keeping with the wider social currents and ethos of his time, the subordination of will to the command of God institutes a system of self-imposed morality in the absence of institutionalized systems of enforcement, i.e. the church; the threat of damnation for the sin of impertinence sets an example against the assertion of equal rights that may challenge patriarchy or the dominant. However conducive it might be to Milton’s politics, such an understanding of free will remains essentially incomplete and restricted as argued above.

**Humanism in “Paradise Lost”**

Humanism is an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. Humanist beliefs stress the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasize common human needs, and seek solely rational ways of solving human problems. It is in fact Renaissance cultural movement
that turned away from medieval scholasticism and revived interest in ancient Greek and Roman thought.

“Paradise Lost” has held its place for three centuries as the greatest poem in the English language. It has been the touchstone of literary appreciation, the test by which the reader’s taste and understanding have been judged. It came into the world unheralded and unsung, but within a few years it cut out all its contemporaries and the ancients too. To what amazing quality or combination of qualities can this supreme triumph be attributed? Many would answer: the style; and indeed no man, not even Shakespeare, handled the English language with such superb and dignified mastery, with such unerring skill and such sonorous effect as Milton. But no work of art survives merely because of style; it is the perfect combination of manner and matter, the language and the thought-content, which gives such work immortality and raises it to the rank of a classic. It was humanistic touch that made it to survive.

Milton was indeed a humanist. He was brought up in the tradition of Plato; the speculations of the Greek philosophers were his rod and staff, the dramas of the great tragedians his daily bread. He was a Renaissance scholar who had discovered afresh the vitality of the Greek outlook. The stories of Greece were parables that spoke that his inmost being. He had the Greek thirst for knowledge, the Greek love of beauty, the Greek devotion to liberty, the Greek insistence on the primacy of man. He was of the breed which strove with gods outside the walls of Troy and on the high seas. And when he decided to put himself wholly into one mighty utterance which the world would not willingly let die, he chose a theme which would have delighted his Greek predecessors. It had just that slightly ironic flavour which they appreciated, that emphasis on a human problem, that wide sweep which covered the three worlds that are found in the writings of the Greek masters. But Milton had something which the Greeks did not have—the assurance that the problem was not insoluble and—if only the Greeks would understand—it was a solution which continued to uphold the dignity of man, for one greater Man—yes, a Man, could restore us and regain the blissful seat.

Thus we see the fruition of the humanist outlook in Paradise Lost. The story revolves around that weak, helpless creature called Man. But, in spite of his frailty, he is the centre of the universe. For him a whole cosmogony has been devised, for him worlds have been created, and his welfare concerns regions beyond ours. For his salvation councils are held in Heaven and for his destruction pandemonium prevails in Hell. This gives Man a dignity and a status which is entirely different from the position afforded to him in Greek epic or drama. In Paradise Lost, Man is not the victim of some inexorable, inexplicable fate against which he is pitted in unequal struggle, nor can it be said of men that

Like flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,  
They kill us for their sport.

Adam’s position in Paradise Lost has been much misunderstood, though Eve’s role has been better appreciated. But Adam represents the real human element. He is, as his name implies, truly a man. In his long conversations with the angels are the questions which have always troubled man: Who am I, whence have I come, and what is my destiny? With the creation of the new and strangely fascinating creature Eve, a whole realm of problem and perplexity bursts upon Adam; love, without which man cannot exist which does not enter alone; for in his train are tears and doubts and immemorial pain; and companionship, failure and forgiveness. With the bitter experience of Eden comes the hard lesson that humanity refuses to learn but must learn, if it should survive in God’s universe—that obedience to the moral law is the guarantee of peace and security and that the price of disobedience is the loss of Paradise, the Paradise of an innocent and undefiled mind.
Most readers of *Paradise Lost* have been perplexed by one difficulty, that Milton seems to be on the side of Satan; in the titanic struggle between good and evil he seems to admire the infernal enemy rather than the All-wise and All-good. While it is true that much of Milton’s colossal energy has gone into the creation of Satan, it is not correct to say that he is on Satan’s side. He is interested in Satan more perhaps than in God, because in Satan he finds the same conflict as in Man, the same dualism, the same upsurging of the good, the same punishment of it and conscious choice of evil that have disfigured humanity. Indeed it is an intensely human Satan that Milton has created, a being who can feel the pangs of envy when he sees Adam and Eve imparadised in one another’s arms and realises that he can never know that bliss. So, in this sense, Milton is Satan, Milton is Adam, and now the triumphant instrument of God’s punishment.

So to all lovers of humanity, to all believers in the dignity of the human race, to all champions of human rights and liberties, Milton has left his legacy—the soul-stirring, challenging, elevating message of *Paradise Lost*. That such a challenge is needed more than ever today we need not doubt. Nor do we need to question Milton’s answer to our perplexity, that human problems cannot be solved merely on the human plane. In the acceptance of this truth lies our only hope, and the fulfillment of Milton’s vision of a new Heaven and Earth wherein the just shall dwell,

**And after all their tribulations long**  
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds  
With Joy and Love triumphing and fair Truth.

### Paradise Lost Book IX: Summary & Analysis

#### Summary

In the prologue to Book IX, Milton says that his work must now take a tragic tone and that this Christian epic, though different, is nonetheless more heroic than earlier epics like the Iliad and the Aeneid. Again, he calls on Urania as the muse of Christian inspiration to help him complete his work and show the true heroism that lies in the Christian idea of sacrifice. Then Milton returns to his story.

Satan returns to Eden eight days after being forced out by Gabriel. He has studied all the animals and has decided to approach Eve in the form of a serpent which he considers to be the "subtlest Beast of all the Field" (86).

The following morning, Adam and Eve prepare for their daily work tending the Garden. Because the Garden’s growth seems to surpass their labors, Eve suggests that on this day they work apart. She thinks they can accomplish more working individually. Adam argues the point with Eve, saying that Raphael has warned them of dangers and that she is more vulnerable by herself. He and she continue this argument — she proposing that they work alone; he proposing that they work together — until Adam finally relents; however, he makes Eve promise to return to their bower soon, but Milton comments that she will never return to Adam in the way that she was that morning.

Satan in the form of the serpent is surprised and excited to find Eve alone tending flowers. He watches her and for a few moments becomes enraptured and forgets his evil nature. Then he remembers what his purpose is — to destroy God's creation. The serpent approaches Eve upright upon its tail. His various acts fail to attract Eve’s attention because she is used to dealing with animals. However, when the serpent speaks, complimenting Eve on her beauty, playing on both her vanity and curiosity, Eve is suddenly interested. She is especially curious about how the serpent learned to speak.
Satan replies through the serpent that he learned speech by eating the fruit of a particular tree in the Garden. He acquired speech and the ability to reason and has, therefore, sought Eve out to worship as the most beautiful of God's creations.

When Eve inquires which tree gave the serpent his abilities, he takes her to the Tree of Knowledge. 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. Instead the tree will give them knowledge, which will make them like God. This fact makes God envious and has caused him to demand that Adam and Eve not eat of the tree. Eve is taken in by the words of the serpent, and after some rationalizing, she convinces herself that she should eat the fruit. And she does.

Now Eve suddenly worships the Tree of Knowledge as a god, even as all nature weeps for her fall. Her thoughts turn to Adam, and she decides that he must eat the fruit also. She cannot bear the idea that she might die and Adam would be given another wife. When Eve approaches Adam, he drops the wreath of flowers that he was weaving for her hair. Eve quickly tells him what she has done, and Adam just as quickly makes his own decision. He allows his physical love and passion for Eve to outweigh his reason. He knowingly eats the fruit and is immediately affected with carnal desire for Eve. The two humans exit to engage in "amorous play" (1045). The description here is not of love but lust.

After sex, Adam and Eve fall into a deep sleep. They awake and are overcome with shame and guilty knowledge. They both are weeping, and they launch into arguments with each other. Adam says Eve is at fault; she replies in kind. Milton describes them as spending "fruitless hours" (1188) in bitter accusation. Each is willing to blame the other, but neither is willing to accept responsibility. Paradise is gone and in its place guilt, blame, and shame. Milton says that both of them have given way to "Appetite" (1129), and reason is lost. Paradise has ended; the earth has begun.

Analysis

Milton's fourth invocation differs from earlier ones in that he does not call on Urania, except obliquely, and he does not mention his blindness. Rather he offers an explanation for his epic and says that the tone must now become "Tragic" (6). The word "tragic" had two connotations for Milton. First, it carried the simple moral meaning of something terribly bad or unfortunate. Christians since the Middle Ages had always considered the falls of Lucifer and Adam tragic. But "tragic" also refers to the dramatic concept of tragedy as first defined by Aristotle and developed through the centuries to its high achievement in Elizabethan England. Milton knew the nature of dramatic tragedy from his study of the Greeks (he patterned Samson Agonistes on Greek tragedy) as well as from reading Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists (he wrote an essay On Shakespeare for the Second Folio).

By the seventeenth century, tragedies had assumed a basic format. The play would have a noble hero who had a tragic flaw in either personality or actions. The fortunes of the hero would reverse during the play from good to bad with the hero recognizing his own responsibility for these consequences that resulted from his flaw. The end of the play would result in the death of the hero. Throughout the play, fate would, in one form or another, control the action, and, at the end, the audience would experience a catharsis or purging of emotions, resulting from their empathy with the hero. They should feel pity for the hero and fear for themselves.
To see that Paradise Lost has an underlying tragic structure is not difficult. Adam is a noble character. He has a flaw in his passion for Eve that overrides his reason. He makes the mistake of eating the fruit. He recognizes, eventually, his responsibility for his actions. Death, though not occurring in the epic, is the main result of Adam's action. Fate (God) knows what will happen throughout the poem. And finally, Milton wanted his audience to experience pity for Adam and all mankind but fear for the consequences of their own sinful lives. So when Milton speaks of changing his "Notes to Tragic" (6), he means more than a passing remark.

Yet for all of these connections to tragedy, Paradise Lost is not a tragedy; it is a Christian epic with a tragic core. Adam is a noble hero, but as Milton notes in this prologue, he is not a hero like Achilles, Aeneas, or Odysseus. He is, in Milton's words, a hero of "Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" (33). Ultimately too, Adam is regenerated and reconciled rather than just killed. Paradise Lost will end on a hopeful — even joyful — note, since through Adam's fall, salvation and eternal life will come to Man through God's mercy and grace. This felix culpa or "happy fault" is not the stuff of tragedy.

Moreover, even as an epic, Milton says that he was attempting something different in Paradise Lost. He did not want to glorify warfare as in earlier epics like the Iliad. Instead, in his only description of warfare (Book VI), he creates parody rather than magnificence. Rather Milton's goal was to write a Christian epic, specifically a Protestant Christian epic with a new sort of hero, one who wins ultimately through patience and suffering. At the time Milton wrote this particular invocation, he still prayed to the Muse (Urania, Christian inspiration) to help him complete his work and to let it gain acceptance in a time when such a work's fate was unclear.

After the invocation, Milton begins this book with Satan who has been absent for the three books in which Adam and Raphael talked. Satan has degenerated as a character. In his speech in Eden, he is unable to make his thoughts logical. He thinks Earth may be more beautiful than Heaven since God created it after Heaven. He thinks he might be happy on Earth but then argues that he could not be happy in Heaven. He fusses about Man being tended by angels. Satan's ability to think, which seemed potent in Book I, now appears weak and confused. An even greater indication of Satan's character degeneration is that he is now self-delusional. In the early books, he lied but only to get others to do his bidding. In this speech, he lies to himself. He questions whether God actually created the angels, he sees Man as God's revenge on him, and he says that he took half of all the angels out of Heaven. Satan who seemed somewhat heroic in his rebellion now seems to be a dangerous con man who has come to believe his own lies. In the early books, the reader can at least see reasoning as well as envy behind Satan's actions, but, here in Book IX, Satan has become the delusional psychopath who believes his own lies. The concept of heroism cannot be stretched to include Satan's attitude and thinking at this point in the epic.

Milton reinforces Satan's degeneration with visual images. Satan creeps along the ground of Eden in a low-lying mist and ultimately takes on the form of the serpent who crawls along the ground. The shape changes Satan has made in Paradise Lost show a pattern. From angel to cherub, from cherub to cormorant, then to lion and tiger, and finally to toad and snake, Satan has progressively made himself more and more earthbound and lowly. The irony of these shifts in shape is not lost on Satan. As he searches for a serpent to enter, he complains of the bestial nature of the animal that he must

"incarnate and imbrute,
That to the hight of deity aspired" (166-167).
That is, as he tries to become like God, he takes on lower and lower forms. The next scene of Book IX involves the argument between Adam and Eve over whether they should work alone or separately. Some commentators have seen Eve's arguments as a kind of calculated sophistry akin to Satan's that demonstrates Eve's complicity in her own fall. Her argument, however, is more of innocence. She has played the proper womanly role during Raphael's visit, and now she simply wants more freedom and responsibility. Perhaps she wants to show that she can be Adam's equal. To read Eve as a conniver is to overlook her naiveté and innocent desire to be more like Adam.

Satan's attitude when he finds Eve alone shows that the two humans made the wrong decision in separating. When Satan sees Eve by herself, he is pleased that she is not with Adam, who would have been a "Foe not formidable" (486). Eve's only real defense against Satan seems to be her basic beauty and goodness. Satan is so astounded when he first sees her that for a brief period he forgets his purpose and stands "Stupidly good" (465). The scene makes two points: First, the goodness expressed just by Eve's physical person is overwhelming. And second, Satan has lost the capacity for real goodness. He may be momentarily struck dumb and be "stupidly good," but he quickly recovers and is not in any way deflected from his evil purpose.

Satan's temptation of Eve is a cunning masterpiece. As a prelapsarian serpent, he is able to approach her standing upright upon his tail, a

"Circular base of rising folds, that tow'r'd
Fold above fold, a surging maze" (498-99).

* Prelapsarian means characteristic of or belonging to the time or state before the fall of humankind

The images of circuitous, folding mazes occur intermittently throughout Paradise Lost and reach their culmination in this image of the serpent rising to tempt Eve with his body a coiling labyrinth. Visually, Eve is pure, simple innocence; the serpent, unfathomable, complex evil. Eve will soon be lost in his labyrinthine argument and plot.

Satan as serpent first uses his physical beauty and speech to impress Eve, who finds him beautiful. A number of writers have found sexual undertones in the description of the serpent:

"pleasing was his shape,
And lovely" (503-04).

An old Jewish tradition even had it that Eve made love with the serpent. Milton's subtle sexualizing of the serpent followed this tradition and adds another element to Eve's fall. William Blake, in his illustration for this scene, certainly noticed sexual imagery. At first glance, Eve appears to kiss the serpent, but is, in fact, taking a bite of a very phallic apple in the serpent's mouth. The fruit hanging from the Tree of Life in Blake's illustration suggests nothing so much as male genitalia.

Eve is also taken with the fact that the serpent talks. Further, the snake is not in the angelic form of the tempter in Eve's dream, so she is not put on guard by the creature. (Milton has made it clear earlier that Adam and Eve were never threatened by any animal in Eden.) Satan first flatters Eve. He licks the ground. He says he worships her beauty. The reader recalls that Eve narcissistically became enamored of her own image in the water at her creation. She is vain, but she is also secondary to Adam. Here a talking snake praises her beauty and says he worships her. She is interested though not enraptured.
But when the serpent takes Eve to the Tree of Knowledge, his arguments come so fast and so deviously that she cannot follow them. At first, she does what she should. She tells the serpent that she cannot eat from the tree. He argues that he has eaten and did not die. Then he adds that God wants her to eat of the tree and, contradictorily, that he envies what the humans might learn if they did eat. The arguments come so fast that Eve cannot answer, let alone think through them. Her innocence in comparison with Satan’s cunning overcomes her reason. She is no match for Satan, and so his sophistic arguments seem reason to her. Unlike Adam, Eve buys into the arguments without grasping what is really happening. Eve eats the fruit, and eats, for the first time, gluttonously, letting her appetite take control of her reason.

After she eats, Eve at first feels elated. She thinks that she has reached a higher level but shows this ironically by starting to worship the tree. Her thoughts turn to Adam. Initially, she thinks she might keep this new power for herself and perhaps become his equal. At this point, Eve is conniving; already the fruit has changed her innocence. Even her reason for telling Adam shows this fact. If the fruit indeed leads to death, she does not want to die and leave Adam to another woman. She selfishly wants him to be in the same condition she is.

Adam's temptation and fall is much less complicated than Eve's. When Adam drops the flowery chaplet that he has been making for Eve, he symbolically drops all that he has in Eden. He immediately realizes what Eve has done. Adam makes a conscious decision to eat the fruit because he cannot give up Eve. He allows his physical passion for her to outweigh his reason, and so he eats. Adam's decision is willful, unlike Eve's, which was based on fraudulent argument and weak reason.

After the fall, the two are overcome by lust. Adam says to Eve, "if such pleasure be
In things to us forbidden, it might be wish'd,
For this one Tree had been forbidden ten" (1024-26).

The language of the entire scene is charged with sexual imagery and innuendo. Their appetites are in control, and reason is lost. After their lovemaking, they fall into a troubled sleep — no more innocent dreams. When they wake, they are cognizant of what they have done, and their arguing is that of real people. If their argument at the end of Book IX is compared with their discussion of whether to work alone or together at the beginning, the difference in Man before and after the fall is clear. The opening discussion is reasoned and pleasant; the closing, irrational and bitter.

Paradise Lost Book IX: Human Nature as Central Issue

"Paradise Lost" is a poem about the nature of man. The Biblical story of the fall and its consequences serve as a framework to get the desired aim. The exposure of human nature is made through the characters of Adam and Eve. Both are like and unlike human beings.

Prior to Satan’s entry into the Garden of Eden, they are unlike human beings. The degree of innocence, simplicity, credulity, nobility, gentleness, obedience, submission and purity, which the reader finds in them, is hard to be found in human beings. They are more angels-like and less like us. However, after Eve’s debate with Adam over the separation of their labour still repentance that they become attractive and representatives of universal human nature.

It is first of all Eve who attracts our attention. She argues with Adam over the division of work. Her dissatisfaction, doubts and complaints are familiar thinking processes of
human psychic make up. The complaining wife tries to convince her contended husband that their work to maintain the Garden of Eden is beyond their capacity that all their efforts to keep the garden well-trimmed have failed, hence, there is pressing desirability to divide their labours. The important thing to note is the presence of germs of evil in Eve’s mind, which is another, proof of her being a real human being. She, on the one hand, calls God unjust by complaining of excessive work while on the other hand, finds faults with Divine Plan, which enjoins them to work together. In short, her complaints and suggestions are natural to human mind.

Adam’s disagreement corresponds to the thinking of the typical God fearing human being. His arguments are sensible and logical but they are thoroughly coloured with religious sentiments like a gentle husband, he advises Eve not to criticize Divine Scheme because it is not binding on them to keep on working and to do nothing else. He further expresses his apprehension like a true Christian. He thinks that the ‘crafty importer’ would prefer to seduce one of them instead of seducing both. It is worth noting that Adam is too gentle to attract reader’s attention. Unlike Eve, he loves to live a life of obedience and submission. At the same time, Adam has a noble disposition, but neither he is authoritative nor assertive. The reader gets some dim glimpses of his Uxuriousness (excessively devoted to one’s wife).

Eve exposes typical female psychology by insisting upon her original plan. She wrongly interprets Adam by saying that if they confine themselves within a small area and remain all the time in a state of fear; their life cannot be called happy. Like a kind-hearted man, Adam reassures her that he does not doubt Eve’s virtuosity. What he means to say is that union is strength; when together they would administer to withstand any trial easily. He idealizes Eve that it is in her presence, he feels stronger and more courageous.

Eve reveals obstinacy in her behaviour. She once again gives clear indication of the presence of germs of evil in her mind. She advances a novel argument that God has not made them so imperfectly that they should be incapable of meeting danger or temptation individually. The implication of Eve’s argument is that if she fails to resist the temptation singly. It would mean that God made her imperfect. She becomes representative of universal human nature by showing her inclination towards evil. There is blend of both good and evil in Eve, though good dominates. Eve becomes more attractive human being than Adam as she behaves, talks and thinks, like an average human being.

Adam is more reasonable and convincing than Eve in his arguments. He rightly feels there is danger inherent in the fact that man may lose control over his own faculties or the devil might drag him into fraud and deception through something that seems too good and fair and that freewill requires to be exercised under the constant control of reason. Thus instead of endorsing Eve’s desire for independence and liberty he advises her to remain within the limits of divine rules and regulations. He knows that whosoever violates the human limits will be punished by God. His apprehensions are that of a true Christian. He also becomes a spokesman of human nature.

By now it becomes clear that exposure of human nature is central to "Paradise Lost". Both Adam and Eve are the proto-types of universal human nature. Hence, both are like human beings therefore attract our attention and appreciation.

**Paradise Lost Book IX: Drama of fall of Adam and Eve**

The climax of "Paradise Lost" is the fall of Adam and Eve. They become the victim of forbidden fruit, on the temptation of Satan. In the guise of serpent he secretly entered
the Garden of Eden in order to frustrate God’s plan about the new creation. The whole of this episode is described in a dramatic and epic style. Exchange of dialogue, interaction of characters, suspense and the interplay of the feelings of frustration, independence, warning, partition, flattery, praise, benefits, tough reasoning, silent thinking taste, effect of fruit, pride, superiority, pathos, love, relish companionship with Eve, nakedness, lustfulness and quarrel are the sources of dramatic element in Book IX of "Paradise Lost". But the major source is the internal and external conflict of characters. It is important to note here that the element of epic grandeur is never lost.

The first dramatic situation is the scene when Eve advances her suggestion that she and Adam would accomplish more if they were to divide their labour. She also criticizes on the ground that the work, which they do in Paradise, is somewhat more than their capacities permit. Her dissatisfaction with the order of things is a pointer towards her tragic and ominous fall. Adam in his turn dismisses Eve’s suggestion in a gentle way. He says that they are stronger when united. He also expresses his doubts about the wisdom of Eve’s plan; she may be found by “the malicious foe”. Hence, Adam insists that “the attempt itself” should be abided. Eve agrees about the existence of such an enemy but she is hurt at Adam’s opinion that she could be shaken or reduced. The argument with Adam ends when he allows her to work independently whenever she likes. Adam is embarrassed where Eve is happy at her newfound independence.

This newfound emancipation is the concept of liberty, which has been a point of discussion for critics. As far as Milton is concerned, he does not approve of this kind of liberty. The event of the fall would not have taken place if Adam and Eve have remained together.

Moreover, separation of Adam and Eve is directly against God’s plan that had devised an interdependent life programme for them. Violation of interdependent relationship becomes a tragic flaw. We compare this concept of liberty with the concept of liberty enunciated by Satan in Book 1, there is a clear-cut difference. Satan rebels against God on account of injured merit. He thinks that God was rewarding him in view of his qualities and merits. Satan’s rebellion germinates from his intense hatred for God. He prefers to reign in hell than serve in Heaven, Satan’s concept of liberty is, in short a, direct challenge to God’s authority. On the other hand, the concept of liberty expressed in Book IX and enacted through the character of Eve is a matter of difference of opinion with God’s way of doing things. If we take these two concepts of liberty together, one thing at least is sure that God does not approve any of these.

The next scene portrays Satan and Eve. Here the drama is at its height. If the scene with Adam is exposition, the scene with Satan is the development of action. Finding Eve alone at the early hours of the day, Satan becomes happy and makes his way towards her. Milton writes about Satan’s advancements in descriptive. This descriptive passage serves the purpose of pause in action and enhances the effect of suspense because it prepares us for the great events that are to follow. Reaching Eve, Satan flatters her in the manner of a court poet. Satan tells her that she is a

“Goddess among gods”.

Eve is flattered by her praise but at the same moment she is surprised at the serpent’s capacity for speech. She becomes curious and desires to know more about the reptile’s power of speech. This gives Satan an opportunity to continue his dialogue with her. He gives an account how he came to eat the fruit of “A godly Tree”. He describes the physical as well as intellectual pleasures, which he got from the fruit of that tree. Eve is compelled by her inquisitive nature and she asks him to show her the tree. On seeing the tree Eve bends her head because it was the forbidden tree. Eve tells the serpent that she has been forbidden to taste its fruit. Here the serpent shows a great psychological
understanding of the character of Eve. He delivers a powerful rhetorical speech. He turns his attention away from Eve to the tree, itself. Headdresses the tree in the following words:

“O sacred, wise and wisdom-giving plant. Mother of Science...”

In this way he withdraws his pressure from Eve for a moment, but at once catches her and starts with his usual manner of flattery.

He calls her “Queen of this universe” and informs her that there is no need to believe in the threats of death. The serpent traps her in his arguments in such a way that there is no way out left for her. He asks her if the tree offers knowledge of good how can it be just of God to refuse such knowledge. And if it offers knowledge of evil, why they should be effused since one Evil is known, it may be “easier to shun”.

He further tells her that God would praise their courage for eating the fruit of this tree. Eve is completely nonplussed at the argument of the famous temptation speech. But before committing the fatal sin, she pauses and thinks. Her thinking at that moment is a kind of soliloquy. What she reasons out is much more effective than the temptation speech of Satan. She argues that the prohibition is unreasonable since it prevents her from judging the very problem, which it raises. Ignorance of evil keeps her away from the full importance of goodness. But the irony is that her conclusion is based on Satan’s lie that he had tasted the forbidden fruit. She unmindful of all things plucks the fruit and greedily eats it. The immediate effect of eating the fruit is that there is an upheaval of Nature, which sighs through all his works.

Nevertheless, it is Satan’s encounter with Eve that Milton has exposed some of the prominent facets of human nature namely internal and external conflict between opposing forces, curiosity, vanity, love of flattery, self-projection, self-interest, failure to distinguish between the appearance and reality, greed etc. Since most of these aspects of human nature, we find in Eve’s personality, she appears more attractive than Adam. She is closer to normal, average and common human beings.

**Paradise Lost Book IX: The Temptation Scene and its Implication in the Development of Paradise Lost**

Satan is a con artist of a very high order. He adopts the right channel to seduce Eve. He flatters her in the persuasive manner. That Eve is trapped to Satan and it does not seem unnatural. His attack is well planned and well executed. Eve’s failure to see beyond false appearance is the predicament of almost each and every human being.

Satan hypnotizes Eve and succeeds in bringing her reason under his control by yelling fibs that his comprehension got sound and his vision broadened after he tasted the forbidden fruit. Accordingly, her curiosity inflated to the maximum. Like Faustus, she surrenders and gladly submits to Satan’s guidance. Her response or reaction is not surprising though it is shocking and painful.

It is an open secret that in the course of their life the human beings get strayed and run after false, illusive and hollow ideals. “Paradise Lost” is fundamentally a poem about the nature of man.

The last act of the drama of fall also depicts several shades of human nature. It is once again Eve who becomes Milton’s mouthpiece. After tasting the forbidden fruit on the one hand, she develops a sense of superiority while on the other hand exposes typical female
jealously. She is worried that if death comes and claims her life, Adam might marry another Eve.

On catching sight of Eve with a branch of tree of knowledge in her hand, Adam's temptation is different from that of Eve. In Adam's case his passions overrule his reason. He tastes the forbidden fruit out of sheer love for Eve. His act of disobedience confirms him a real human being of flesh and blood. Afterwards, their last sexual act, bickering, realization, shedding of tears, feeling of remorse and repentance are typical to human beings.

**Milton: Treatment of woman in "Paradise Lost"**

Adam and Eve are the very first human couple and the parents of the whole human race and the masterpiece of God's art of creation, primarily lived in Eden which is an indescribable beautiful garden in Heaven. God had given them the liberty to enjoy everything available there, with only one restriction that they were not to eat the forbidden fruit there, but they could not act upon this curb, therefore, God punished them for their disobedience and expelled them from Paradise.

When we make a careful and critical analysis of "Paradise Lost" Book IX, we discover that in spite of having many common features of character and personality both Adam and Eve have a world of difference between them as well. Both of them are made of clay, have steadfast faith in God and equally love each other yet at the same time they are divided in opinion about their work, passion and the fear of an enemy.

As far as Eve is concerned, she possesses female charm and attraction, a suggestive and justifying mind, a rational and convincing manner of conversation, but at the same time she is highly confident, short sighted, jealous and deluded about her powers.

Adam, on the other hand, is an embodiment of sagacity, moderation, contentment, foresightedness, knowledge, mankind, passionate love and sacrifice.

When Eve rationally suggests that they should work separately because when they are together, they waste most of their time in petty things, Adam foresightedly objects the idea and reminds her of the danger of her being seduced by Satan. At this, she pounces upon him for suspecting her faithfulness. She also under-estimates their enemy. Adam tries his best to convince her that they should not separate from each other but she remains unmoved. At last, he retreats and reluctantly allows her to work after her own heart and, thus, they part from each other for the very first time and this very alienation, in fact, leads to their expulsion from Heaven.

Satan, who possesses a great determination and an unyielding power and ever-scheming mind, is, in fact, afraid to face Adam because of his physical strength, intellectual powers, great courage and impressive manliness. He, therefore, is always in search of an opportunity to find Eve alone, so that, he may succeed in his evil and revengeful designs against God and His master creature. After assuming the shape of a serpent, which is the most cunning of all animals, he managed to enter Eden where he finds his target, that Eve is all alone, busy with her work. He very cleverly starts praising and flattering her that she is "the sole mistress", "the queen of this universe", "the empress" and "the humane goddess". When she, in the state of utter amazement, asks him how he can speak while he is a serpent he relates a fake story of his tasting the forbidden fruit of knowledge and its miraculous effects.

When she tells him about the warning of God that tasting the fruit of knowledge could result in death, he washes her brain by saying that this fruit will raise her to the stature
of God and that she will not die because he is a living example before her eyes. She is fully entrapped by the oily tongue of Satan, tastes the forbidden fruit due to short sightedness and over confidence. After eating the fruit she thinks if she dies, God will create another Eve for Adam and he will live a long life of everlasting enjoyment with the new Eve. This very thought arises in her an intense feeling of jealousy for the first time and she mounts to Adam to tell him about her blunder.

On the other side, Adam restlessly waits for her with garland of beautiful and attractive flowers to welcome her back, but she does not reach at the fixed time. He goes out in search of her and finds her on the way with a bough of apples in her hand. She tells him all about the talking-serpent and her act of tasting the forbidden fruit. Adam leaves a deep sigh of grief and scolds her, but at the same time his passionate love for Eve overpowers him and he expresses his uncontrollable sentiments of love in the following famous romantic and emotional words:

**The link of nature draw me; flesh of my flash,**
**Bone of my bone, thou art, and from thy state**
**Mine never shall be parted; bliss or woe.**

Thus Adam also eats the forbidden fruit deliberately just for the sake of his love for Eve for Adam feels himself incomplete without Eve. Thus he prefers a woman to obedience of God.

In the end, we can conclude that both Adam and Eve are responsible for their sin of disobedience and their consequent expulsion from Heaven. It is, however, clear that Eve is entrapped by the glib-tongue and the praising words of Satan while Adam falls a prey to his passionate love for Eve in the Victorian style, but she develops it in a new direction.

"**Oh goodness infinite, goodness immense!**
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done, and occasioned; or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring;
To God more glory, more good-will to men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound."
Milton: Pandemonium in "Paradise Lost"

0 John Milton, Poetry 2:59:00 AM

Some angels rushed towards a nearby hill, Pandemonium, a hill not far from there that emerged fire and smoke. All the rest of the hill shone with a bright crust, which was a sure sign that in its interior was buried metallic ore or sulphur. Towards that hill a company of numerous angels moved with great haste like groups of miners, hurrying in advance of the royal army to dig trenches in some battlefield or to build a fortification.

Those angels were guided thither by Mammon. He first taught human beings to pillage the earth, in order to obtain treasures buried. Soon had his companion made a huge opening in the hill and dug out large pieces of gold.
Let nobody feel surprised by the riches that exist in Hell. The soil of Hell perhaps is most appropriate for gold. And here let those who boast of human achievements and who describe, with a feeling of wonder, the Tower of Babel and the Pyramids of Egypt, learn how the greatest monuments, which have been built by human strength and skill and which have become famous, are easily surpassed by the work of worthless Spirits who can do in an hour what countless human beings, with unceasing labour, can hardly accomplish in a long period of time.

Nearby on the plain a second large group angles prepared many cells beneath which burns liquid fire. With wonderful art they melted the massive ore, separating each metal, and skimmed the scum or the impurities. A third group of angels had, with equal promptitude, set up, within the ground, moulds of various kinds and shapes, and filled each hollow recess with the melted gold transported there from the cells by a wonderful device.

Soon out of the earth, a huge structure emerged like a mist. This structure was built like a temple. It was set with round-shaped columns. It had pillars of the Doric style of architecture and the pillars were overlaid with a golden beam. Nor was there lacking cornice or frieze inscribed with sculptures in relief. The roof was carved with gold. Neither Babylon nor Cairo ever attained such splendour in all their glory, even in building temples dedicated to their gods. The rising structure now became complete, having reached its full and impressive height, and at once the doors, opening their brassy leaves, revealed over a wide area within, large spaces on the smooth and level pavement. From the arched roof, many rows of star-like lamps and bright fire-baskets hung as if by some mysterious magic. These lamps were fed with naphtha and asphaltus, and their light fell as if from a sky.

The multitude of angles entered the building hastily, admiring it. Some of them praised the building and some praised the architect. This architect’s sill was known in Heaven by a large number of high buildings, having towers, where angels holding their rods of authority dwelt and sat, like princes whom the supreme ruler, God, had raised to such power and to each of whom He had given the authority to rule according to his status and rank. The name of this architect was also well-known and much respected in ancient Greece; and in Italy he was known by the name of Mulciber. It was told in a fable how this architect had fallen from heaven, having been thrown by angry Jove clean over the bright walls. He had kept falling from morning to noon, and from noon to dewy evening, for the whole of a summer’s day; and with the setting sun he had alighted from the height, like a falling star, on the island of Lemnos in the Aegean sea. Such is the story people relate mistakenly because he, with that rebellious throng of angles, had fallen from Heaven long before that. Nor was it of any use to him now that he had erected building with high towers in Heaven. Not could he escape from his present fate in spite of all his contrivances, but was thrown headlong with his hard-working companion to build a palace for Satan and his followers in Hell.
Milton: Hell in "Paradise Lost"

0 John Milton, Poetry 3:02:00 AM

This is how Milton describes Hell as Satan sees it after his fall from Heaven:

*At once, as far as Angles ken, he views*

*The dismal situation waste and wild:*

*A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,*

*As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames*

*No light, but rather darkness visible*

*Served only to discover sights of woe,*

*Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace*
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes

That comes at all; but torture without end

Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed

With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.

Such place Eternal Justice had prepared

For those rebellious; here their prison set,

As fat removed from God and light of Heaven

As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.

Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell!

This description is brief but vivid and effective. We are to visualize a region which is sinister, barren and wild. The place is a horrible dungeon or pit burning like a huge furnace. Yet from the burning flames comes no light. The flames give out just as much light as is needed to make the darkness visible. The flames of Hell give no light. All around him Satan discerns sights of misery and unhappy dark spaces, where peace and rest can never dwell. It is a place where even hope which comes to all beings, is never felt. This region is far away from God. The contrast between this place and the Heaven conveyed to us is:

Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell!

The place is perpetually afflicted with “floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire”.

Thus Milton's Hell is a place of darkness where flickering light of fire serves only to make more dark. Geologically it is a volcanic region, “fed with ever-burning sulphur” in inexhaustible quantities. Satan and his followers have fallen into a “fiery gulf”, a lake that burns constantly
with liquid fire. The shore of this lake marks the beginning of a plain to which Satan flies after raising himself from the lake.

------------------------------- till on dry land

He lights—if it were land that ever burned

With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,

And such appeared in hue, as when the force

Of subterranean wind transports a hill

Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side

Of thundering Aetna, whose combustible

And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire

Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds

And leave a singed bottom al involved

With stench and smoke:

This means that in one case it is "liquid fire", and in the other "solid fire". The heat of the land is naturally as intense as is that of the boiling lake. Satan walks uncomfortably over the boiling soil. Heat is everywhere. In the background, we are later told, is a volcanic mountain:

There stood a hill not far, whose grisly top

Belched fire and rolling smoke, the rest entire
Shone with a glossy scurf—undoubted sign

That in his womb was hid metallic ore,

The work of sulphur.

All these description are certainly terrifying. Milton’s object in describing Hell is two-fold; firstly, to indicate the torments which the fallen angels have to endure in contrast to the bliss and joy of Heaven which they have lost for ever; and, secondly, to infuse a feeling of horror in the readers. The modern reader, with his scientific background and scientific notions, may not feel as awed or horrified by these descriptions as readers of Milton’s time might have felt. But even the modern reader has to recognize, not only the graphic quality of the description, but its oppressive and overwhelming effect.

The size of Hell, the nature of its tortures or the degree of heat that Satan feels, such thing can be felt to the reader’s imagination, simulated by words which carry frightening associations for all of us. Hell is a place of absolute darkness, fierce heat, hostile elements and most terrible sight of all, the entire space is “valued with fire”. Its all-enclosing dreadfulness typifies the dwarving awareness of remorse, distance from God and pain from which its inhabitants cannot escape. Though terrible it is not formless; sea and land exist and from its soil the precious metals are refined which go into the construction of Pandemonium.
ALEXANDER POPE

Satire’s my weapon, but I’m too discreet
To run amuck, and tilt at all I meet.
The Augustan Age

Introduction: According to Hudson the epithet —Augustan was applied as a term of high praise, because the Age of Augustus was the golden age of Latin literature, so the Age of Pope was the golden age of English literature. This epithet serves to bring out the analogy between the first half of the eighteenth century and the Latin literature of the days of Virgil and Horace. In both cases writers were largely dependent upon powerful patrons. In both case a critical spirit prevailed. In both cases the literature produced by a thoroughly artificial society was a literature, not of free creative effort and inspiration, but of self-conscious and deliberate art. It is also known as the —classic age. Hudson writes: The epithet —classic, we may take to denote, first that the poets and critics of this age believed that the writers of classical antiquity presented the best models and ultimate standards of literary taste, and secondly, in a more general way, that, like these Latin writers, they had little faith in the promptings and guidance of individual genius, and much in laws and rules imposed by the authority of the past. Some remarkable political and social changes began to take place in England during the closing years of William III and the accession of Queen Anne (1702). That had a great impact on the development of literature during this period. The literature of this era was partly new and partly a continuance of that of the Restoration.

This age may be divided into two periods: the first stretching from 1700 to 1750 in the neo-classic Age, and the second, the transitional period which spans from 1750 to 1798. The classical tendencies lost their hold during the second period and there was a transition from classicism to romanticism. The period of transition is also known as the Age of Gray and Collins.

Political and Social Milieu: Politically, this age witnessed the rise of two political parties: the Whigs and the Tories. Their political opinions and programmes were sharply divided. The Whig party stood for the pre-eminence of personal freedom and the Tory party supported the royal Divine Right. The Tories objected to the foreign wars because they had to pay taxes to prolong them, while the trading class Whigs favoured the continuance of war because it contributed to their prosperity. In order to propagate their ideologies and programmes both the parties utilized the services of literary men. And the politicians bribed the authors to join one or the other political party. The politicians took the authors into their confidence. Thus began the age of literary patronage. Consequently, most of the writers showed a strong political bias. It was, in other words, a party literature. Literature was honoured not for itself but for the sake of the party. The politics of the period helped to make it an age of political pamphleteering. And the writers were too willing to make the most of it. In order to get prominence in political struggle both parties issued a large number of periodicals. The periodicals were the mouthpieces of their respective political opinions. Thus began the age of journalism and periodical essay. The rise of periodical writing allowed great scope to the development of the literary talent of prose writers of the time. The real prose style—neat, simple, clear and lucid—was evolved during this period. In the words of Albert: “It was the golden age of political pamphleteering and the writer made the most of it”.

Coffee Houses and Literary Activities: People were keenly interested in political activity. A number of clubs and coffee houses came into existence. They became the centers of fashionable and public life. The Coffee houses were dominated by either of the parties. A Whig would never go to a Tory Coffee house and Vice Versa. The Coffee houses were the haunts of prominent writers, thinkers, artists, intellectuals and
politicians. They figured prominently in the writings of the day. The Coffee houses gave rise to purely literary associations, such as the famous Scribblers and Kit-cat clubs. In the first number of The Tattler, Richard Steele announced that the activities of his new Journal would be based upon the clubs. The discussions in coffee houses took place in polished, refined, elegant, easy and lucid style. Thus coffee houses also contributed to the evolution of prose style during the eighteenth century.

Interest in Reading and Publishing Houses: - The rising interest in politics witnessed the decline of drama. It resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of reading public. Consequently a large number of men took interest in publishing translations, adaptations and other popular works of the time. They became the forerunners of modern public houses. They employed hack writers (the writers who write for money without worrying about the quality of their writing) of the period. They lived in miserable hovels in the Grub Street.

The Rise of the Middle Class: - This period of literature saw the emergence of a powerful middle class. The supremacy of the middle class made it an age of tolerance, moderation and common sense. It sought to refine manners, and introduce into life the rule of sweet reasonableness. The church also pursued a middle way and the religious life was free from strife and fanaticism. The powerful dominance of the middle classes led to moral regeneration in the eighteenth century. The people were fast growing sick of the outrageousness of the Restoration period. People had begun once more to insist upon those basic decencies of life and moral considerations, which the previous generation had treated with contempt. The middle class writers were greatly influenced by moral considerations. Moreover, William III and Queen Anne were staunch supporters of morality. Addison in an early number of The Spectator puts the new tone in writing in his own admirable way: —I shall endeavor to enliven morality with wit and wit with morality. It was an era of the assimilation of the aristocracy and the middle class. The middle class appropriated classicism with its moralising needs. The emergence of middle class led to the rise of sentimentalism, feelings and emotions, which influenced the literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Evangelical Movement: - Religion in the age of Pope was deistic, formal, utilitarian and unspiritual. In the great Evangelical Revival, known as Methodism, led by Wesley and Whitefield, the old formalism and utilitarianism was abandoned. A mighty tide of spiritual energy poured into the Church and the common people. From 1739 the Evangelical Movement spread rapidly among the poor all over England, and it became particularly strong in the industrial towns.

Literary Characteristics of the Age: - The political and social changes exhibiting the supremacy of good sense, rationality, sanity and balance left an imperishable mark on the literature of the Age of Pope and Dr. Johnson. The literature of the period bore the hallmark of intelligence, of wit and of fancy, not a literature of emotion, passion, or creative energy. The main literary characteristics of the age are given below:

(a) Age of Prose and Reason: - It is an age of prose, reason, good sense and not of poetry. A large number of practical interests arising from the new social and political conditions demanded expression not simply in looks, but in pamphlets, magazines and newspapers. Poetry was inadequate for such a task. Hence prose developed rapidly and excellently. Indeed, poetry itself became prosaic, as it was not used for creative works of imagination, but for essays, satires and criticism. The poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century as
represented by the works of Pope and Dr. Johnson is polished and witty but lacks fire, fine feeling, enthusiasm and imaginative appeal. In short, it interests us as a study of life but fails to delight or inspire us. Matthew Arnold rightly calls if the eighteenth century—an age of prose. The poetry of this period, according to Hudson, lacked inevitably the depth and grasp of essential things which alone assure permanence in literature, and the quest for refinement in style resulted too often in stilted affectations and frigid conventionalism.

(b) Age of Satire: - The predominance of satire is an important literary characteristic of the age. Nearly every writer of the first half of the eighteenth century was used and rewarded by Whigs or Tories for satirising their enemies and for advancing their special political interests. Pope was an exception but he too was a satirist par excellence. W. J. Long writes: —Now satire—that is a literary work which searches out the faults of men or institutions in order to hold them up to ridicule—is at best a destructive type of criticism. A satirist is like a labourer who clears away the ruins and rubbish of an old house before the architect and builders begin on a new and beautiful structure. The work may sometime be necessary, but it rarely arouses our enthusiasm. While the satires of Pope, place them with our great literature, which is always constructive in spirit; and we have the feeling that all these men were capable of better things than they ever wrote.

(c) Age of Neo-Classicism: - The Age of Pope and Johnson is often called the neo-classic age. We should clearly understand the meaning of the word—classic. The term—classic refers to writers of highest rank in any nation. It was first applied to the works of Greek and Roman writers like Homer and Virgil. In English literature any writer who followed the simple, noble and inspiring method of these writers was said to have a classic style. Period marked by a number of celebrated writers who produce literature of a very high order, is also called the classic period of a nation's literature. The age of Augustus is the classic age of Rome. The age of Dante is the classic age of Italian literature. The age of the classic age is like those of Homer and Virgil. The writers of this period disregarded Elizabethan literary trends. They demanded that their poetry should comply with exact rules. In this respect they were influenced by French writers, especially by Boileau, who insisted on precise rules of writing poetry. They professed to have discovered their rules in the classics of Aristotle and Horace. Dryden, Pope and Johnson pioneered the revival of classicism which conformed to rules established by the great writers of other nations. They preferred only set rules to the depth and seriousness of subject matter. They ignored creativity, depth, vigour and freshness of expression. The true classicist pays equal consideration to the depth and seriousness of subject matter, and the perfect and flawless expression. The neo-classicist disregards the subject matter expresses the hackneyed and commonplace subjects in a polished and finished style modelled on the stylistic patterns of ancient writers. Grierson in his famous book The Background of English Literature asserts that the hallmark of ancient classical literature is a harmonious balance between form and substance. This harmonious balance between form and substance was disturbed in the Age of Pope and Johnson. The writers of this period care for form, not for the weight of matter. They care only for manner, for artistic finish and polish, but not for genuine poetic inspiration. The content thought and feeling are subordinated to form.
(d) **Age of Good Sense:** - Good sense is one of the central characteristics of the literature of this period. In the words of W. H. Hudson: —Good sense became the ideal of the time, and good sense meant a love of the reasonable and the useful and a hatred of the mystical, the extravagant and the visionary.

(e) **Follow Nature:** - Another important characteristic of the age was the belief that literature must follow nature. Pope wrote in *The Essay on Criticism*:

> The rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,
> Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd;
> Nature like Liberty is but restrained
> By the same laws which first herself ordain'd
> . . . . .
> Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem
> The follow Nature is to follow them.

By nature the Augustans meant to copy man and manners of society. Pope said, “The proper study of mankind is man”. Addison also wrote “Wit and fine writing consist not so much —in advancing things that are new, as in things that are known, an agreeable turn”.

(f) **Town and City Life as a Theme of Literature:** - Another feature of the literature of the age is that it has a limited theme. It is a literature of the town and the fashionable upper circles of the city of London. Pope, Johnson, Addison, Steele etc., though urban in outlook and temperament, show remarkable interest in the middle classes and, thus, broaden the scope of literature. The theme of literature before them was strictly confined to fashionable and aristocratic circles. In the works of middle class writers classicism shows itself slightly coloured by a moralising and secretly sentimental intension.

(g) **The Heroic Couplet and the Poetic Diction as Tools of Writers:** - The use of heroic couplet was predominant during this period. The heroic couplet was recognised as the only medium for poetic expression. In it the poets put all the skill and wrote with an unimaginable correctness and precision. The language of poetry became gaudy and inane. The common words or ordinary language were deliberately kept out from poetic literature. The result was that literature of the Augustan Age became artificial, rational and intellectual.

**Alexander Pope as a Poet**

Alexander Pope was born in London on May 21, 1688, disadvantaged from the start by being born into a Roman Catholic family (at a time when Catholics were severely restricted in their liberty and property by the English government). Barred from an English university education by his religion, he nevertheless received some schooling at a couple of Catholic institutions, but soon supplemented this with his own extensive reading in Greek and Latin authors. He began writing verse by doing translations of
these authors, and imitations and adaptations of others such as Chaucer, Waller, and Cowley.

Pope is by far the most important poetic figure of the age called after him (1700-1740). His importance lies in the fact that he exercised the greatest influence on the classical poetry of the century. His poetry was intellectual, didactic and satiric, and was almost written in heroic couplet. It is never of the highest class, but within its limits, it stands unrivalled in the language.

**Pseudo Classicist:** - The true classicism is meant to be a combination of poetic ardor and excellence of form. In Pope the true poetic ardor and energy is absent but he is exceedingly careful about the technique of form and style. When we look at the contents of Pope's poetry we do not find anything worthwhile. Satire, didactic poetry, and a flimsy mock-heroic poem---are all his poetic achievements. They are mere products of intellect, and artificially constructed; they do not reproduce true classical spirit. Hence it is not correct to describe Pope as a true classicist. (Milton, with his poetic impulse and perfection of form, is a true classicist.) The classicism of Pope is the shadow of classicism; it is false or pseudo-classicism.

**Intellectual Poetry:** - Pope's poetry was of his age, and it reflected in full measure the spirit of the age. It is intellectual and its appeal is to the mind rather than to the heart. It is full of wit and epigram, the brilliancy of which is unsurpassed. Pope is next to Shakespeare, in contributing quotable lines of verse, which are remarkable for their pregnancy, neatness and brevity. Here are some of his famous quotes.

- **To err is human, to forgive divine.**
- **Never elated when someone's oppressed,**
- **Never dejected when another one's blessed.**
- **We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow.**
- **Our wiser sons, no doubt will think us so.**
- **For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.**
The Rape of the Lock: Summary
Canto 1  :  Summary

The Rape of the Lock begins with a passage outlining the subject of the poem and invoking the aid of the muse. Then the sun (“Sol”) appears to initiate the leisurely morning routines of a wealthy household. Lapdogs shake themselves awake, bells begin to ring, and although it is already noon, Belinda still sleeps. She has been dreaming, and we learn that the dream has been sent by “her guardian Sylph,” Ariel. The dream is of a handsome youth who tells her that she is protected by “unnumber’d Spirits”—an army of supernatural beings who once lived on earth as human women. The youth explains that they are the invisible guardians of women’s chastity, although the credit is usually mistakenly given to “Honour” rather than to their divine stewardship. Of these Spirits, one particular group—the Sylphs, who dwell in the air—serve as Belinda’s personal guardians; they are devoted, lover-like, to any woman that “rejects mankind,” and they understand and reward the vanities of an elegant and frivolous lady like Belinda. Ariel, the chief of all Belinda’s puckish protectors, warns her in this dream that “some dread event” is going to befall her that day, though he can tell her nothing more specific than that she should “beware of Man!” Then Belinda awakes, to the licking tongue of her lapdog, Shock. Upon the delivery of a billet-doux, or love-letter, she forgets all about the dream. She then proceeds to her dressing table and goes through an elaborate ritual of dressing, in which her own image in the mirror is described as a “heavenly image,” a “goddess.” The Sylphs, unseen, assist their charge as she prepares herself for the day’s activities.

Commentary

The opening of the poem establishes its mock-heroic style. Pope introduces the conventional epic subjects of love and war and includes an invocation to the muse and a dedication to the man (the historical John Caryll) who commissioned the poem. Yet the tone already indicates that the high seriousness of these traditional topics has suffered a diminishment. The second line confirms in explicit terms what the first line already suggests: the “am’rous causes” the poem describes are not comparable to the grand love of Greek heroes but rather represent a trivialized version of that emotion. The “contests” Pope alludes to will prove to be “mighty” only in an ironic sense. They are card-games and flirtatious tussles, not the great battles of epic tradition. Belinda is not, like Helen of Troy, “the face that launched a thousand ships”, but rather a face that—although also beautiful—prompts a lot of foppish nonsense. The first two verse-paragraphs emphasize the comic inappropriateness of the epic style (and corresponding mind-set) to the subject at hand. Pope achieves this discrepancy at the level of the line and half-line; the reader is meant to dwell on the incompatibility between the two sides of his parallel formulations. Thus, in this world, it is “little men” who in “tasks so bold... engage”; and “soft bosoms” are the dwelling-place for “mighty rage.” In this startling juxtaposition of the petty and the grand, the former is real while the latter is ironic. In mock-epic, the high heroic style works not to dignify the subject but rather to expose and ridicule it. Therefore, the basic irony of the style supports the substance of the poem’s satire, which attacks the misguided values of a society that takes small matters for serious ones while failing to attend to issues of genuine importance.

With Belinda’s dream, Pope introduces the “machinery” of the poem—the supernatural powers that influence the action from behind the scenes. Here, the sprites that watch over Belinda are meant to mimic the gods of the Greek and Roman traditions, who are sometimes benevolent and sometimes malicious, but always intimately involved in
earthly events. The scheme also makes use of other ancient hierarchies and systems of order. Ariel explains that women’s spirits, when they die, return “to their first Elements.” Each female personality type (these types correspond to the four humours) is converted into a particular kind of sprite. These gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and nympha, in turn, are associated with the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. The airy sylphs are those who in their lifetimes were “light Coquettes”; they have a particular concern for Belinda because she is of this type, and this will be the aspect of feminine nature with which the poem is most concerned.

Indeed, Pope already begins to sketch this character of the “coquette” in this initial canto. He draws the portrait indirectly, through characteristics of the Sylphs rather than of Belinda herself. Their priorities reveal that the central concerns of womanhood, at least for women of Belinda’s class, are social ones. Woman’s “joy in gilded Chariots” indicates an obsession with pomp and superficial splendor, while “love of Ombre,” a fashionable card game, suggests frivolity. The erotic charge of this social world in turn prompts another central concern: the protection of chastity. These are women who value above all the prospect marrying to advantage, and they have learned at an early age how to promote themselves and manipulate their suitors without compromising themselves. The Sylphs become an allegory for the mannered conventions that govern female social behavior. Principles like honor and chastity have become no more than another part of conventional interaction. Pope makes it clear that these women are not conducting themselves on the basis of abstract moral principles, but are governed by an elaborate social mechanism—of which the Sylphs cut a fitting caricature. And while Pope’s technique of employing supernatural machinery allows him to critique this situation, it also helps to keep the satire light and to exonerate individual women from too severe a judgment. If Belinda has all the typical female foibles, Pope wants us to recognize that it is partly because she has been educated and trained to act in this way. The society as a whole is as much to blame as she is. Nor are men exempt from this judgment. The competition among the young lords for the attention of beautiful ladies is depicted as a battle of vanity, as “wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive.” Pope’s phrases here expose an absurd attention to exhibitions of pride and ostentation. He emphasizes the inanity of discriminating so closely between things and people that are essentially the same in all important (and even most unimportant) respects.

Pope’s portrayal of Belinda at her dressing table introduces mock-heroic motifs that will run through the poem. The scene of her toilette is rendered first as a religious sacrament, in which Belinda herself is the priestess and her image in the looking glass is the Goddess she serves. This parody of the religious rites before a battle gives way, then, to another kind of mock-epic scene, that of the ritualized arming of the hero. Combs, pins, and cosmetics take the place of weapons as “awful Beauty puts on all its arms.”

Canto 2 : Summary

Belinda, rivaling the sun in her radiance, sets out by boat on the river Thames for Hampton Court Palace. She is accompanied by a party of glitzy ladies (“Nymphs”) and gentlemen, but is far and away the most striking member of the group. Pope's description of her charms includes “the sparkling Cross she wore” on her “white breast,” her “quick” eyes and “lively looks,” and the easy grace with which she bestows her smiles and attentions evenly among all the adoring guests. Her crowning glories, though, are the two ringlets that dangle on her “iv’ry neck.” These curls are described as love’s
labyrinths, specifically designed to ensnare any poor heart who might get entangled in them.

One of the young gentlemen on the boat, the Baron, particularly admires Belinda’s locks, and has determined to steal them for himself. We read that he rose early that morning to build an altar to love and pray for success in this project. He sacrificed several tokens of his former affections, including garters, gloves, and billet-doux (love-letters). He then prostrated himself before a pyre built with “all the trophies of his former loves,” fanning its flames with his “am’rous sighs.” The gods listened to his prayer but decided to grant only half of it.

As the pleasure-boat continues on its way, everyone is carefree except Ariel, who remembers that some bad event has been foretold for the day. He summons an army of sylphs, who assemble around him in their iridescent beauty. He reminds them with great ceremony that one of their duties, after regulating celestial bodies and the weather and guarding the British monarch, is “to tend the Fair”: to keep watch over ladies’ powders, perfumes, curls, and clothing, and to “assist their blushes, and inspire their airs.” Therefore, since “some dire disaster” threatens Belinda, Ariel assigns her an extensive troop of bodyguards. Brillante is to guard her earrings, Momentilla her watch, and Crispissa her locks. Ariel himself will protect Shock, the lapdog. A band of fifty Sylphs will guard the all-important petticoat. Ariel pronounces that any sylph who neglects his assigned duty will be severely punished. They disperse to their posts and wait for fate to unfold.

**Commentary**

From the first, Pope describes Belinda’s beauty as something divine, an assessment which she herself corroborates in the first canto when she creates, at least metaphorically, an altar to her own image. This praise is certainly in some sense ironical, reflecting negatively on a system of public values in which external characteristics rank higher than moral or intellectual ones. But Pope also shows a real reverence for his heroine’s physical and social charms, claiming in lines 17–18 that these are compelling enough to cause one to forget her “female errors.” Certainly he has some interest in flattering Arabella Fermor, the real-life woman on whom Belinda is based; in order for his poem to achieve the desired reconciliation, it must not offend (see “Context”. Pope also exhibits his appreciation for the ways in which physical beauty is an art form: he recognizes, with a mixture of censure and awe, the fact that Belinda’s legendary locks of hair, which appear so natural and spontaneous, are actually a carefully contrived effect. In this, the mysteries of the lady’s dressing table are akin, perhaps, to Pope’s own literary art, which he describes elsewhere as “nature to advantage dress’d.”

If the secret mechanisms and techniques of female beauty get at least a passing nod of appreciation from the author, he nevertheless suggests that the general human readiness to worship beauty amounts to a kind of sacrilege. The cross that Belinda wears around her neck serves a more ornamental than symbolic or religious function. Because of this, he says, it can be adored by “Jews” and “Infidels” as readily as by Christians. And there is some ambiguity about whether any of the admirers are really valuing the cross itself, or the “white breast” on which it lies—or the felicitous effect of the whole. The Baron, of course, is the most significant of those who worship at the altar of Belinda’s beauty. The ritual sacrifices he performs in the pre-dawn hours are another mock-heroic element of the poem, mimicking the epic tradition of sacrificing to the gods before an important battle or journey, and drapes his project with an absurdly grand
import that actually only exposes its triviality. The fact that he discards all his other love tokens in these preparations reveals his capriciousness as a lover. Earnest prayer, in this parodic scene, is replaced by the self-indulgent sighs of the lover. By having the gods grant only half of what the Baron asks, Pope alludes to the epic convention by which the favor of the gods is only a mixed blessing: in epic poems, to win the sponsorship of one god is to incur the wrath of another; divine gifts, such as immortality, can seem a blessing but become a curse. Yet in this poem, the ramifications of a prayer “half” granted are negligible rather than tragic; it merely means that he will manage to steal just one lock rather than both of them.

In the first canto, the religious imagery surrounding Belinda’s grooming rituals gave way to a militaristic conceit. Here, the same pattern holds. Her curls are compared to a trap perfectly calibrated to ensnare the enemy. Yet the character of female coyness is such that it seeks simultaneously to attract and repel, so that the counterpart to the enticing ringlets is the formidable petticoat. This undergarment is described as a defensive armament comparable to the Shield of Achilles and supported in its function of protecting the maiden’s chastity by the invisible might of fifty Sylphs. The Sylphs, who are Belinda’s protectors, are essentially charged to protect her not from failure but from too great a success in attracting men. This paradoxical situation dramatizes the contradictory values and motives implied in the era’s sexual conventions.

In this canto, the sexual allegory of the poem begins to come into fuller view. The title of the poem already associates the cutting of Belinda’s hair with a more explicit sexual conquest, and here Pope cultivates that suggestion. He multiplies his sexually metaphorical language for the incident, adding words like “ravish” and “betray” to the “rape” of the title. He also slips in some commentary on the implications of his society’s sexual mores, as when he remarks that “when success a Lover’s toil attends, / few ask, if fraud or force attain’d his ends.” When Ariel speculates about the possible forms the “dire disaster” might take, he includes a breach of chastity (“Diana’s law”), the breaking of china (another allusion to the loss of virginity), and the staining of honor or a gown (the two incommensurate events could happen equally easily and accidentally). He also mentions some pettier social “disasters” against which the Sylphs are equally prepared to fight, like missing a ball (here, as grave as missing prayers) or losing the lapdog. In the Sylphs’ defensive efforts, Belinda’s petticoat is the battlefield that requires the most extensive fortifications. This fact furthers the idea that the rape of the lock stands in for a literal rape, or at least represents a threat to her chastity more serious than just the mere theft of a curl.

**Canto 3**

**Summary**

The boat arrives at Hampton Court Palace, and the ladies and gentlemen disembark to their courtly amusements. After a pleasant round of chatting and gossip, Belinda sits down with two of the men to a game of cards. They play ombre, a three-handed game of tricks and trumps, somewhat like bridge, and it is described in terms of a heroic battle: the cards are troops combating on the “velvet plain” of the card-table. Belinda, under the watchful care of the Sylphs, begins favorably. She declares spades as trumps and leads with her highest cards, sure of success. Soon, however, the hand takes a turn for the worse when “to the Baron fate inclines the field”: he catches her king of clubs with his queen and then leads back with his high diamonds. Belinda is in danger of being beaten, but recovers in the last trick so as to just barely win back the amount she bid.
The next ritual amusement is the serving of coffee. The curling vapors of the steaming coffee remind the Baron of his intention to attempt Belinda’s lock. Clarissa draws out her scissors for his use, as a lady would arm a knight in a romance. Taking up the scissors, he tries three times to clip the lock from behind without Belinda seeing. The Sylphs endeavor furiously to intervene, blowing the hair out of harm’s way and tweaking her diamond earring to make her turn around. Ariel, in a last-minute effort, gains access to her brain, where he is surprised to find “an earthly lover lurking at her heart.” He gives up protecting her then; the implication is that she secretly wants to be violated. Finally, the shears close on the curl. A daring sylph jumps in between the blades and is cut in two; but being a supernatural creature, he is quickly restored. The deed is done, and the Baron exults while Belinda’s screams fill the air.

Commentary

This canto is full of classic examples of Pope’s masterful use of the heroic couplet. In introducing Hampton Court Palace, he describes it as the place where Queen Anne “dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.” This line employs a zeugma, a rhetorical device in which a word or phrase modifies two other words or phrases in a parallel construction, but modifies each in a different way or according to a different sense. Here, the modifying word is “take”; it applies to the paralleled terms “counsel” and “tea.” But one does not “take” tea in the same way one takes counsel, and the effect of the zeugma is to show the royal residence as a place that houses both serious matters of state and frivolous social occasions. The reader is asked to contemplate that paradox and to reflect on the relative value and importance of these two different registers of activity. (For another example of this rhetorical technique, see lines 157–8: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / when husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last.”) A similar point is made, in a less compact phrasing, in the second and third verse-paragraphs of this canto. Here, against the gossip and chatter of the young lords and ladies, Pope opens a window onto more serious matters that are occurring “meanwhile” and elsewhere, including criminal trials and executions, and economic exchange.

The rendering of the card game as a battle constitutes an amusing and deft narrative feat. By parodying the battle scenes of the great epic poems, Pope is suggesting that the energy and passion once applied to brave and serious purposes is now expended on such insignificant trials as games and gambling, which often become a mere front for flirtation. The structure of “the three attempts” by which the lock is cut is a convention of heroic challenges, particularly in the romance genre. The romance is further invoked in the image of Clarissa arming the Baron—not with a real weapon, however, but with a pair of sewing scissors. Belinda is not a real adversary, of course, and Pope makes it plain that her resistance—and, by implication, her subsequent distress—is to some degree an affectation. The melodrama of her screams is complemented by the ironic comparison of the Baron’s feat to the conquest of nations.

Canto 4: Summary

Belinda’s “anxious cares” and “secret passions” after the loss of her lock are equal to the emotions of all who have ever known “rage, resentment and despair.” After the disappointed Sylphs withdraw, an earthy gnome called Umbriel flies down to the “Cave of Spleen.” (The spleen, an organ that removes disease-causing agents from the bloodstream, was traditionally associated with the passions, particularly malaise; “spleen” is a synonym for “ill-temper.”) In his descent he passes through Belinda’s bedroom, where she lies prostrate with discomfiture and the headache. She is attended
by “two handmaidens,” Ill-Nature and Affectation. Umbriel passes safely through this melancholy chamber, holding a sprig of “spleenwort” before him as a charm. He addresses the “Goddess of Spleen,” and returns with a bag of “sighs, sobs, and passions” and a vial of sorrow, grief, and tears. He unleashes the first bag on Belinda, fueling her ire and despair.

There to commiserate with Belinda is her friend Thalestris. (In Greek mythology, Thalestris is the name of one of the Amazons, a race of warrior women who excluded men from their society.) Thalestris delivers a speech calculated to further foment Belinda’s indignation and urge her to avenge herself. She then goes to Sir Plume, “her beau,” to ask him to demand that the Baron return the hair. Sir Plume makes a weak and slang-filled speech, to which the Baron disdainfully refuses to acquiesce. At this, Umbriel releases the contents of the remaining vial, throwing Belinda into a fit of sorrow and self-pity. With “beauteous grief” she bemoans her fate, regrets not having heeded the dream-warning, and laments the lonely, pitiful state of her sole remaining curl.

Commentary

The canto opens with a list of examples of “rage, resentment, and despair,” comparing on an equal footing the pathos of kings imprisoned in battle, of women who become old maids, of evil-doers who die without being saved, and of a woman whose dress is disheveled. By placing such disparate sorts of aggravation in parallel, Pope accentuates the absolute necessity of assigning them to some rank of moral import. The effect is to chastise a social world that fails to make these distinctions.

Umbriel’s journey to the Cave of Spleen mimics the journeys to the underworld made by both Odysseus and Aeneas. Pope uses psychological allegory (for the spleen was the seat of malaise or melancholy), as a way of exploring the sources and nature of Belinda’s feelings. The presence of Ill-nature and Affectation as handmaidens serves to indicate that her grief is less than pure (“affected” or put-on), and that her display of temper has hidden motives. We learn that her sorrow is decorative in much the same way the curl was; it gives her the occasion, for example, to wear a new nightdress.

The speech of Thalestris invokes a courtly ethic. She encourages Belinda to think about the Baron’s misdeed as an affront to her honor, and draws on ideals of chivalry in demanding that Sir Plume challenge the Baron in defense of Belinda’s honor. He makes a muddle of the task, showing how far from courtly behavior this generation of gentlemen has fallen. Sir Plume’s speech is riddled with foppish slang and has none of the logical, moral, or oratorical power that a knight should properly wield.

This attention to questions of honor returns us to the sexual allegory of the poem. The real danger, Thalestris suggests, is that “the ravisher” might display the lock and make it a source of public humiliation to Belinda and, by association, to her friends. Thus the real question is a superficial one—public reputation—rather than the moral imperative to chastity. Belinda’s own words at the close of the canto corroborate this suggestion; she exclaims,

“Oh, hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!” (The “hairs less in sight” suggest her pubic hair).

Pope is pointing out the degree to which she values outward appearance (whether beauty or reputation) above all else; she would rather suffer a breach to her integrity than a breach to her appearance.
Canto 5: Summary

The Baron remains impassive against all the ladies’ tears and reproaches. Clarissa delivers a speech in which she questions why a society that so adores beauty in women does not also place a value on "good sense" and "good humour." Women are frequently called angels, she argues, but without reference to the moral qualities of these creatures. Especially since beauty is necessarily so short-lived, we must have something more substantial and permanent to fall back on. This sensible, moralizing speech falls on deaf ears, however, and Belinda, Thalestris and the rest ignore her and proceed to launch an all-out attack on the offending Baron. A chaotic tussle ensues, with the gnome Umbriel presiding in a posture of self-congratulation. The gentlemen are slain or revived according to the smiles and frowns of the fair ladies. Belinda and the Baron meet in combat and she emerges victorious by peppering him with snuff and drawing her bodkin. Having achieved a position of advantage, she again demands that he return the lock. But the ringlet has been lost in the chaos, and cannot be found. The poet avers that the lock has risen to the heavenly spheres to become a star; stargazers may admire it now for all eternity. In this way, the poet reasons, it will attract more envy than it ever could on earth.

Commentary

Readers have often interpreted Clarissa’s speech as the voice of the poet expressing the moral of the story. Certainly, her oration’s thesis aligns with Pope’s professed task of putting the dispute between the two families into a more reasonable perspective. But Pope’s position achieves more complexity than Clarissa’s speech, since he has used the occasion of the poem as a vehicle to critically address a number of broader societal issues as well. And Clarissa’s righteous stance loses authority in light of the fact that it was she who originally gave the Baron the scissors. Clarissa’s failure to inspire a reconciliation proves that the quarrel is itself a kind of flirtatious game that all parties are enjoying. The description of the “battle” has a markedly erotic quality, as ladies and lords wallow in their mock-agonies. Sir Plume "draw[s] Clarissa down" in a sexual way, and Belinda “flies” on her foe with flashing eyes and an erotic ardor. When Pope informs us that the Baron fights on unafraid because he “sought no more than on his foe to die,” the expression means that his goal all along was sexual consummation.

This final battle is the culmination of the long sequence of mock-heroic military actions. Pope invokes by name the Roman gods who were most active in warfare, and he alludes as well to the Aeneid, comparing the stoic Baron to Aeneas ("the Trojan"), who had to leave his love to become the founder of Rome. Belinda’s tossing of the snuff makes a perfect turning point, ideally suited to the scale of this trivial battle. The snuff causes the Baron to sneeze, a comic and decidedly unheroic thing for a hero to do. The bodkin, too, serves nicely: here a bodkin is a decorative hairpin, not the weapon of ancient days (or even of Hamlet’s time). Still, Pope gives the pin an elaborate history in accordance with the conventions of true epic.

The mock-heroic conclusion of the poem is designed to complement the lady it alludes to (Arabella Fermor), while also giving the poet himself due credit for being the instrument of her immortality. This ending effectively indulges the heroine’s vanity, even though the poem has functioned throughout as a critique of that vanity. And no real moral development has taken place: Belinda is asked to come to terms with her loss through a kind of bribe or distraction that reinforces her basically frivolous outlook. But even in its most mocking moments, this poem is a gentle one, in which Pope shows a basic
sympathy with the social world in spite of its folly and foibles. The searing critiques of his later satires would be much more stringent and less forgiving.

**Critical Analysis of ”The Rape of the Lock”**

The occasion of the poem Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock was the quarrel between two aristocratic Roman Catholic families. Lord Petre, in a moment of youthful frolic had cut off a lock of hair from Miss Arabella’s Fermor’s head which caused a violent quarrel. The gentle satire was written to reconcile quarreling families.

Thus The Rape of the Lock was dedicated to Miss Arabelle Ferrors belonging to a distinguished Catholic family. It was dedicated to her as it was to reconcile her family with that of Lord Petre who had cut off a lock hair from the lady’s head which caused a violent quarrel.

Coming to the title the word Rape in the title means violence on women. In the poem no woman is the victim of rape but it is the lock of a woman named Belinda that is raped by a fashionable Baron. So, the title brings out the triviality of the subject-matter and is hence appropriate. Again the title of the poem bears literary reminiscence. The title is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Roman matron, Lucrece where the rape of the Roman matron Lucrece by Emperor Tarques arouses a most shameful and painful event. It also satirically refers to the rape of Helen of Sparta by Paris, the Trojan prince.

The poem also reflects the picture of the contemporary society. The Rape of the Lock mirrors eighteenth century elegant society and life in London with all its fashions, follies, frivolities and vices. The poem is a witty social document which mirrors false ideology. Morality intrigue debauchery corruption social scandals mostly sexual pleasure and fashion of the ladies the tawdriness of the morality of the beau-demon is revealed through the poem.

Pope in the manner of epic poets, Homer, Virgil and Milton, sets forth his mock epic with a proposition announcing the subject and in invocation to the muse to help him sing how a dreadful consequence arises from a love affair and a fierce quarrel results from a very trivial incident. However, Pope’s The Rape of the Lock is a mock heroic poem which imitates the elaborate form and ceremonious style of the epic genre and it applies to a common place or trivial subject matter. Pope’s The Rape of the Lock is the perfect of mock-heroic poem. The characteristics of a mock heroic poem -the discrepancy the triviality of the subject matter, the Invocation to the muse, epic similes, the sonorous and grand speeches, use of epic machinery, journey to the underworld the of amber a voyage on board are present here.

The proposition, the Invocation to the muse, epic machinery of sylphs and gnomes, the journey description of Belinda’s toilet in grand manner, the heroic battle between the sexes make the poem an epic. First of all The term epic machinery mean the agency of the fairy being called Sylphs Gnomes Deities and Demons and angels made to act in a poem. The machinery as pope said signifies the part that the fairy being played in the epics and dramas by intervening in human affairs and assisting the moral portages. Pope uses it to admirable humorous purposes in his mock-heroic. In conformity with classical epics where the gods and other supernatural being are seen intervening in human affairs and taking sides and ending. Assisting and fighting for this protégés. Pope introduces the sylph machinery for enhancing the comic effect. Again, it is Rosicrucian. Rosicrucian Doctrine is the name given to secret brotherhood supposed to have been founded by
Christian Rosankrents. The doctrine of the Rosicrucian was a mixture of religion and magic. In the poem Sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, salamanders are mentioned as being obtained from the Rosicrucian source.

Pope invokes to the muse in the epic convention which sets forth the theme of his mock-epic. The Invocation prepares us for an impending dreadful mischief arising from love affairs and its terrible result. At the same time it admits the triviality of the subject. Invocation to the muse is an epic convention Pope invokes the muse to learn the secret cause of the Lord’s assault on the gentle maid. He also wants the muse to enlighten how a little man could dare such a bold task and how a soft female heart could harbor such violent anger.

Pope in a mock heroic vein presents Belinda, the heroine of The Rape of the Lock, as a representation of the flawed manners, degraded morals false pretense and absurdities rampant in the life of the 18th century London. When Belinda sleep is prolonged beyond the meaning hours, she has a mysterious vision of a beautiful youth which sent by Ariel the guardian sylph. Ariel whispers to her ears continuing her against a dreadful event which might be fall her before sunset. Pope with an epic grandeur describes Belinda’s toilet to satirize the fashion and frivolity of the woman in the 18th century aristocratic society. Her toilet table displays a number of silver uses arranged in a mystic order. Toilet goods included a casket containing ornaments set with bright game a box of perfumes, combs made of ivory and tortoise shell, powders, pins puffs, a mirror some love-letters Bibles. Pope with an epic grandeur describes Belinda’s toilet to satirize the fashion and frivolity of the women of the 18th century aristocratic society. The articles of luxury are conceived of as the articles of worship with which Belinda worship, thus the poet treated a trivial subjection a grand style to register the cut and satire vivacity of the scene. When Belinda dons her safety aids with the help of Betty at her toilet it reminds us of Achilles arming himself for battle in Iliad. The arming of Achilles is an indispensable epic convention and the woman putting on make-up in terms of martial idiom effectively evokes the mock-heroic atmosphere.

**Major Themes**

**Gender Roles:** Pope constantly manipulates traditional gender roles in The Rape of the Lock. He portrays Belinda, the poem’s protagonist, alternately as an epic hero preparing for battle (I.139-44), a cunning military general reviewing his troops (III.45-6), and a Moor bellowing in rage (V.105-6). The poem thus describes Belinda in specifically male terms: heroism, battle, anger. Other women in the poem similarly demonstrate masculine characteristics. Thalestris displays her prowess on the battlefield while Clarissa provides a weapon to the otherwise impotent Baron. By contrast, the men act with feminine delicacy, fainting during the battle. Pope figures the Baron in mostly feminine terms. He is a fop, willing to prostrate himself before the altar of Love, and he cannot act on his desire without the explicit assistance of a woman. When Belinda conquers him in battle, she stands above him in a position of dominance. Even the poem’s more mechanical elements partake in this reversal of gender roles. The mythological sprites literally switch genders after they die, transforming from human women to male spirits. All this gender manipulation calls attention to the perverse behaviors of this fictional society. The poem certainly alludes to the expected behavior of each gender role: women should act with modesty while men should embody heroic and chivalric ideals. However, these characters flout the rules of traditional society.
Female Sexuality: - Pope frequently focuses on female sexuality and the place of women in society throughout the corpus of his poetry, and it was a popular topic in the early eighteenth century (just think of Jonathan Swift's misogynistic poems). The Rape of the Lock does not, however, feature a Swiftian tirade concerning the evils of women. It instead makes a considered exploration of society’s expectations for women. The rules of eighteenth-century society dictate that a woman attract a suitable husband while preserving her chastity and virtuous reputation. Pope renders this double-standard dramatically in his depiction of Belinda’s hair, which attracts male admirers, and its petticoat counterpart, which acts as a barrier to protect her virginity. Of course, a woman who compromised her virtue—either by deed or reputation—usually lost her place in respectable society. Pope examines the loss of reputation in the poem’s sexual allegory, i.e., the “rape” of the lock. By figuring the severing of Belinda’s hair as a sexual violation, Pope delves into implications of sexual transgression. After the Baron steals her curl, Belinda exiles herself from the party, retiring to a bedchamber to mourn her loss. Pope thus dramatizes the retreat from society that a sexually-compromised woman would eventually experience. Though Belinda is ultimately celebrated, not ostracized, by her community, her narrative provides Pope with the opportunity to explore society’s views on female sexuality.

The Deterioration of Heroic Ideals: - Pope’s use of the mock epic genre in The Rape of the Lock affords him the poetic occasion to lament the deterioration of heroic ideals in the modern era. Though he depicts conventional epic themes such as love and war, his comic tone indicates that the grandeur of these matters has suffered since the days of Homer and Virgil. The “amorous causes” in Pope’s poem have little in common with Hector’s love for Andromache or Paris’ theft of Helen in The Iliad or Penelope’s devotion to Odysseus in The Odyssey (I. 1). By contrast, the love Pope portrays is that of the Baron for Belinda’s icon (her hair), not Belinda herself. Similarly, the “mighty contests” that once populated epic poetry now arise “from trivial things” (I.2). Achilles’ rage at Agamemnon for affronting his honor with the theft of Briseis has diminished to the anger of a young beauty at the theft of her hair, which will certainly grow back. Pope thus presents a society that is merely a shadow of its heroic past.

Religious Piety: - The Rape of the Lock demonstrates Pope’s anxieties concerning the state of religious piety during the early eighteenth century. Pope was Catholic, and in the poem he indicates his concern that society has embraced objects of worship (beauty, for example) rather than God. His use of religious imagery reveals this perversion. The rituals he depicts in the first and second cantos equate religion with secular love. During Belinda’s toilette, the poem imbues the Bibles and billet-doux (love letters) on her dressing table with equal significance. The Baron’s altar to Love in the second canto echoes this scene. On the altar—itself an integral part of Christian worship, in particular Catholic Mass—the Baron places “twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt” to honor Love, rather than gilded Bibles (38). Pope symbolizes this equation of religious and erotic love in the cross that Belinda wears. This central symbol of Christianity serves an ornamental, not religious function, adorning Belinda’s “white breast” (7). The cross remains sufficiently secular that “Jews might kiss” it and “infidels adore” it (8). Of course, Pope leaves ambiguous the implication that the Jews and infidels are admiring Belinda’s breasts and not the cross. This subversion of established principles of Christian worship critiques the laxity of early eighteenth-century attitudes towards religion and morality.
Idleness of the Upper Classes: - The idleness and ignorance of the upper classes is integral to Pope's critique of contemporary society in The Rape of the Lock. His satire focuses largely on the foibles of the aristocracy and gentry, who he depicts as interested only in trivial matters, such as flirting, gossip, and card games. Pope's rendering of ombre as an epic battle demonstrates the frivolity of upper-class entertainment. In reality an excuse for flirting and gambling, the card game represents the young aristocrats' only opportunity to gain heroic recognition. This is not, of course, true heroism, but rather a skill that serves no purpose in the outside world. Chief among the upper classes’ other pastimes is gossip, but Pope limits their conversation to the insular world of the aristocratic lifestyle. They care most about “who gave the ball, or paid the visit last,” the irrelevant structures of upper-class socializing (III.12). Few discuss the world beyond the society of Hampton Court: “One speaks the glory of the British Queen, / And one describes a charming Indian screen” (III.13-4). This couplet alludes to the worldly pursuits of trade and empire that are occurring outside of these aristocrats’ small social world.

Ephemeral Nature of Beauty: - Beauty's ephemeral nature reinforces Pope's critical project in The Rape of the Lock. His poem attempts to dissuade society from placing excessive value on external appearances, especially since such things fade over time. Clarissa's lecture in particular questions the value that society places on appearances. She notes that men worship female beauty without assessing moral character. Pope demonstrates that this is essentially a house without foundation: because “frail beauty must decay,” women must have other qualities to sustain them (V.25). Though Clarissa is complicit in the general frivolity and pettiness that Pope censures in the poem, her articulated scruples with regard to appearances serve his social critique.

Man's Place and Purpose in the Universe: - In his prefatory address to the reader of An Essay on Man, Pope describes his intention to consider “man in the abstract, his Nature and his State, since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection of imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being.” Pope explores man's nature and his place in the world throughout the poem. The first epistle explains man's relation to the universe. Pope explains that man's place in the “Vast chain of being” is in a middle state, below the angels but above beasts and fowl (I.237). Because man is an integral part of God's creation, he cannot and should not try to comprehend God's design. The second epistle depicts man's relation to the individual. Pope argues that man is governed by the principles of self-love and reason. Self-love and the passions are the origins of human action while reason regulates human behavior. The third epistle examines man's relation to society. The bonds that unite man to others are governed by instinct or reason. Man's relationship with nature is largely instinctual, based on a primordial knowledge of the things necessary to survival (nourishment, sex, etc.). By contrast, man's relationship to other men and to God is based on reason, and consequently, man established the institutions of government and religion. The former proves his love for other men and the second his love for God. The fourth epistle investigates man's relation to happiness, which, Pope argues, is man's ultimate aim. Though Pope does not provide a universal solution to “the proper end and purpose” of man, he does reveal one of the defining characteristics of humanity: man will always seek to understand his purpose in the world.
The Rape of the Lock” as a Social Satire

Satire is humorous criticism intended to point out the flaws in the social and cultural fabric of a given society. Social satire focuses on aspects of society itself, including current events, prevailing attitudes, and political institutions. Social satire has existed for centuries, originating with the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is still a popular venue for social criticism in modern times. The Rape of the Lock exposes in a witty manner the follies and absurdities of the high society of the times. All the recognised weapons of satire have been employed by Pope in a most effective manner. The principal targets of satire in this poem are the aristocratic ladies and gentlemen of Pope's day.

Pope gives us an amusing picture of the society-ladies of his time. He tells us that the vanities of society-ladies do not end even with the death of the ladies. Apart from making fun of their late-rising, Pope tells us that the aristocratic ladies of those days were excessively fond of gilded chariots and of Ombre. He also gives us a satirical division of ladies of different temperaments into different categories—fiery termagants, yielding ladies, grave prudes, and light coquettes. He mocks at the extravagant aspirations of the ladies who imagined matrimonial alliances with peers and dukes and dreamt of "garters, stars, and coronets". Pope ridicules the fickleness and superficiality of the ladies 'by referring to their hearts as moving toy-shops and their varying vanities.

The poet ridicules women's excessive attention to self-embellishment and self-decoration. In a famous satirical passage, Belinda is described as commencing her toilet operations with a prayer to the "cosmetic powers". "Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet doux" lie in confusion on Belinda's dressing table. Ariel's conjectures regarding the disaster that threatens Belinda are stated in some of the most amusing lines in the poem. Ariel wonders whether Belinda shall break Diana's law, or some frail China-jar receive a flaw; whether she shall stain her honour, or her new brocade; whether she shall forget her prayers, or miss a dance-party; whether she shall lose her heart or her necklace. The paired calamities here are not merely ridiculous contrasts; they show the moral bankruptcy of the ladies of the time.

The superficiality of the ladies of the time and a lack of any depth of feeling in them are ridiculed in the lines in which the domestic pets of the ladies are equated with their husbands. The death of a domestic pet caused as much grief to a lady of fashion as the death of her husband would have caused not even the breaking of a China-vessel in the house had the same effect.

The poet makes ironical references to a lady's love of a coach-and-six, her interest in scandalous books, her desire to be invited to entertainments, and her readily making an appointment with a lover. Some very pungent satire is to be found in the lines which describe the strange shapes in the Cave of Spleen:

Here sighs ajar, and there a goose pie talks;
And maids turned bottles, call aloud for corks.

The poet is here making a sarcastic reference to the suppressed sexual desires of women and their unexpressed cravings or sexual gratification. Women's tendency quickly to give way to sorrow and grief is ridiculed in the lines which describe the contents of the bag and of the phial which Umbriel brings from the Cave of Spleen. The contents are sighs, sobs, soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears.
The moral bankruptcy of the ladies is further ridiculed when Thalestris points out the need for sacrificing everything, even chastity, for the sake of maintaining a good reputation. Virtue might be lost, but not a good name:

Honour forbid! at whose unrivalled shrine
Ease, pleasure, virtue, all our sex resign.

The same attitude of mind is expressed in the lines in which Belinda declares that she would not have felt so offended if the Baron had stolen any other hair from her but spared that particular lock of her hair:

Oh, hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!

The gallants of the time are not spared by Pope. They are the target of mockery which is as sharp and keen as the satire on the ladies. One of the most amusing passages is the one in which the Baron is described as building an altar of love and setting fire to it with his amorous sighs and with tender love letters. The Baron's worship of love here is comparable to Belinda's worship of the cosmetic powers. No less amusing is the satire on gallants like Sir Plume. Sir Plume's affectations are ridiculed with reference to his amber snuff-box and his spotted cane.

The conversation of the ladies and the knights at the court amuses us by its emptiness and shallowness. The talk generally centred round dance-parties, court-visits, and sex-scandals. The pauses in conversation were filled by snuff-taking, fan-swinging, singing, laughing, ogling, etc. The two principal diversions of the time, the game of Ombre and coffee-drinking, have also their share of ridicule. All these ceremonies expose the normal vacuum in which they are performed. Each ceremony highlights a social absurdity because of the extravagant importance that it receives at the cost of serious concerns of life.

Finally, The Rape of the Lock is a comic assault on a society preoccupied with superficialities. It is a commentary on polite society in general, and on fashionable women in particular. It exposes all values, especially trifling and artificial ones. It ridicules the laziness, idleness, frivolities, vanities, follies, shams, shallowness, superficiality, prudery, hypocrisy, false ideas of honour, and excessive interest in self-embellishment of the aristocratic ladies of the eighteenth century. It ridicules also the foppery, amorous tendencies, bravado, snuff-taking, and affectations of the aristocratic gentlemen of the time. Humour, wit, irony, sarcasm, innuendo, persiflage, insinuations are all employed as weapons of attack. An occasional touch of obscenity makes the satire spicy.

The Rape of the Lock: Representative Poem of the Age

An incredible masterpiece, however general in its claim, is the most ordinary result of its time. It is established in the contemporary society and social life and reflects that life is in its pith and totality. It is an extraordinary poem by all cannon of arts and it does all that splendidly. Its center chiefly catches the regular peculiarities of the highborn class of his age.

The Rape of the Lock is a mirror to this sort of society of which Master Petre and Belinda are the delegate figures. Belinda is displayed as amazing beguiling like the sun, and lap-canines were an alternate key part of their lives. She is representative women of the time. What is her life, and how can she use her day? There is not the scarcest flash of
earnestness or truthfulness, goodness or glory of human life in any of her words and activities. Belinda is a wonderful woman; she has an assembly of admirers; she is a coquette and a flirt.

At the same time regardless of all their flirtation and the contempt they indicated for their significant others, these women of the court did furtively pine for adoration as Ariel, the watchman sylph, uncovered about Belinda:

'A natural beau prowling at her heart. They furtively harbored desire to get hitched to rulers and dukes, or men holding some high titles. What’s more longing for their rich prospects ladies like Belinda rest late and are accustomed to climbing late from their cots.'

At the point when Belinda rises, she is locked in promptly with her can which takes up an expansive piece of her time. The excellence of Belinda and the involved subtle elements of her latrine are all situated hence with inimitable beauty, yet behind such a lot of entrancing depiction, there is an invading feeling of vanity and void.

Their hearts are toy-shops

In Canto III, Pope gives a point by point portrayal of the scene where Belinda’s lovely bolt of hair is to be assaulted. There is Hampton Court, the royal residence of the English Queen perfectly arranged on the banks of the stream Thames, where

Britain’s statesmen oft the fall foredoom,
Of outside dictators and of fairies at home.

The writer in an extremely unpretentious way parodies the exercises of the royal residence. The Queen’s interviews with her priests and her bringing tea with the lights of her administration are compared. The genuine and the paltry have been said in one breath, as though taking insight is as normal and pointless a matter as taking tea. The interests of the court are likewise revealed.

Not women just, however the men of honor of the keen set are similarly frivolous. Master Petre and his colleagues are the delegates of the trendy society of the time. They are all unmoving, vacant minded society, and appear to have nothing else to do yet making adoration to or playing with women. The fight between the women and men of honor shows void and vanity of their lives. They visit clubs and espresso houses, and there they enjoy unfilled outrageous talks. "At each expression a notoriety passes on”.

Pope depicts the card-diversion in point of interest, on the grounds that card-recreations appeared to involve a vital place in the everyday exercises of in vogue women and refined men of the period.

Sir plume is an alternate fashionable man of his word, surpassing all others in his vanity and utter void. When he is asked for by his woman love Thalestris to convince Lord Petre to surrender the valuable hairs of Belinda, he articulates words which are unsurpassed in their emptiness.

Conclusion: Pope completely bears the witticism of its age. In his origination of subject and determination of the tile, Pope shows his incredible wit. This was the sort of life
headed by the in vogue individuals of the privileged societies in the time of Pope, and Pope has depicted it in dazzling colors from one perspective and with scorching parody on the other. While it demonstrates the effortlessness and interest of Belinda’s latrine, he shows the vanity and uselessness of everything. There is nothing profound or genuine in the lives and exercises of the stylish individuals, all is vanity and void and this Pope has uncovered with symbolization and splendor. The Rape of the Lock reflects the fake age with all its outward quality and internal vacancy. It the mirror of a specific part of life in the period of Pope. It was, says, Lowell, a mirror in a drawing room, however it gave back a dependable picture of society.

**Supernatural Machinery in "The Rape of the Lock"**

Alexander Pope explains that "machinery" is a term invented by the critics to signify the part which deities, angels, or demons play in a poem. He goes on to say that the machinery in his poem is based on the Rosicrucian doctrine of spirits. According to this doctrine the four elements are inhabited by sylphs, nympha, gnomes, and salamanders. The sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are supposed to be the best-conditioned creatures imaginable.

Pope tells us in the poem that beautiful women return, after their death, to the elements from which they were derived. Violent tempered women become salamanders or spirits of the fire. Women of gentle and pleasing disposition pass into nympha or water-spirits. Prudish (Narrow-minded) women become gnomes or earth-spirits. Light-hearted coquettes are changed into sylphs or spirits of the air. Pope attributes to the mischievous influence of the gnomes many unguarded follies of the female sex which he holds up to ridicule.

The first and perhaps the foremost occupation of the sylphs is the protection of fair and chaste ladies who reject the male sex. It is they who guard and save the chastity of maidens who are on the point of yielding to their lovers. They save these maidens from falling victims to the allurements of "treacherous friends" and dashing young men whose music softens their minds and dancing inflames their passions. The gnomes fill the minds of proud maidens with foolish ideas which make them indulge in vain dreams of being married to lords and peers. These gnomes teach young coquettes to ogle and pretend blushing at the sight of fashionable young men who cause their hearts to flutter.

It is the sylphs, however, who safely guide the maidens through all dangers. Whenever a maiden is about to yield to the seduction of a particular young man, another who is more attractive and tempting appears on the scene and the fashionable maiden at once transfers her favour to the new comer. This may be called fickleness in women but it is all contrived by the sylphs.

In most of the famous epics gods and angels play a vital role in the action of the poems thus showing that the human world is not independent or even adequate and that supernatural powers have an important bearing on this world. Pope thought that his mock-epic would be incomplete without a parody of this established practice of epic poets in introducing machinery. The machinery of his poem comprises the sylphs led by Ariel (named after Shakespeare’s immortal creation in The Tempest).

Ariel tells us in the poem that to him and his followers has been assigned the humble but pleasant duty of serving fashionable young ladies. The functions of these
sylphs are described humorously and include saving the powder from being blown off from the cheeks of ladies, preventing scents from evaporating, preparing cosmetics, teaching the ladies to blush and to put on enchanting airs, suggesting new ideas about dress.

The sylphs are "light" by any heroic standards. They feel scared when a crisis approaches. Yet they are in every detail Belinda's intimates and counsellors. They explain the various complicated conventions and anxieties that make up Belinda's day.

The sylphs The Rape of the Lock poem are both a mirror and mock-apotheosis of customs and conventions of the society of the time. Belinda is told in a dream that sylphs guide and protect her through the dangers of life. Ariel's account of the predicament of the "tender mind" in a circle of rakes reduces his use of noble words such as "innocent", "honour", and "purity" to the level of a muddle and a sham. He is there, he tells her, to protect her purity according to sylphic theology. Defended by sylphs, the "melting maids" are safe, for what we call "honour" is really no more than Providence. Reassuring Belinda in this way, Ariel is in effect undermining her moral position, taking away with one hand the credit he gives with the other. He explains how a woman's defence is achieved. A maid would fall to Florio if Damon were not at hand to divert her attention, and if, an old folly were not expelled by a new. A maid "shifts the moving toy-shop of her heart" with her varying vanities. It is the sylphs that make her do that.

The machines are present at every crucial situation in the play. The sylphs are present in the course of Belinda's journey by boat to Hampton Court. They have been warned by Ariel to remain alert and vigilant, fifty of them having been deputed to take charge of Belinda's petticoat. They are in attendance on Belinda when she plays Ombre. They hover around her when she sips coffee. And they withdraw only when Ariel sees "an earthly lover lurking at her heart". A gnome, called Umbriel, goes to the Cave of Spleen and returns with a bag full of sighs, sobs, screams, and outbursts of anger, and a phial filled with fainting fits, gentle sorrows, soft griefs, etc.—all of which are released over Belinda. And the sylphs are present to witness the flight of Belinda's lock of hair to the sky. In short, the machinery of the poem is constantly kept in the reader's view, to the very last.

The use of machinery serves various other purposes in the poem. It imparts qualities of splendour and wonder to the actors and the actions in the story. Like Homer's gods, Pope's sylphs move easily in and out of the lower world; they surprise without offending our sense of the probable; and they give to ordinary human impulses a sensuous or concrete form. What they really stand for feminine honour, flirtation, courtship, the necessary rivalry of man and woman—are seen in its essence, and a human impulse seen in its essence is always beautiful.

These "light militia of the lower sky" increase dramatic suspense, and therefore story depth, since they foreknow and warn of the central disaster. They reflect the implied belief that humanity and its sensible world do not exhaust the total of a comprehensive statement. They are also spirits of the dead, acting as guardian angels to the living. The sylphan machinery is exquisite, but it must also be recognized as demonic. In tempting Belinda to transcend the flesh-and-blood world by lifelong chastity, Ariel offers her a Satanic substitute for Christianity.

**The Rape of the Lock as a Mock Epic Poem**
The epic is long a narrative poem of supposed divine inspiration. It treats a subject of great and momentous importance for mankind. The characters of the story are partly human and partly divine. The language and style, in which the incidents are related, are full of elevation and dignity. Mock-epic belongs to the class of literature called "burlesque". A burlesque is a parody on a large scale, in which not a single poem, but a whole type of style of literature is parodied, the language and thought proper to a serious theme reproduced in setting forth something ridiculous or trivial. In the Rape of the Lock all the epic traditions are parodied.

"The Rape of the Lock" opens with the proposition of the subject matter and Pope's invocation to the Muses to seek divine inspiration to compose the literary art. Such a grand treatment of a trivial subject matter like the clipping of the lock of Belinda provokes laughter when the poet says:

"I sing – this verse to Caryll, Muse! Is due:
This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view:"

Instead of grand passions and great fights between heroes in which the immortals take part, we have as the theme of The Rape of the Lock a petty amorous quarrel assisted by the spirits of the air. The epic portrays an age round the personality of a god or a semi-god, and its characters are heroes. The Rape of the Lock, on the other hand, gives us a picture of a fashionable society. The central figure in that picture is a pretty society girl, and the other characters are a rash youth, a foolish dandy and a few frivolous women. Instead of deep and genuine passions as found in ancient epics, we come across a succession of mock passions in The Rape of the Lock.

The action of The Rape of the Lock turns on a trivial incident—the cutting off a lock of hair from a lady's head. Such a thing had taken place in reality. One lord Petre cut off a lock of hair from the head of Lady Arabella Fermor. There was a quarrel between the two families, and Pope was requested to make a jest of the incident, and 'laugh them together'. This was the occasion of the composition of the poem. Pope did give to the world a fine work of wit—the best mock-heroic poem in the English language, but we do not know whether the families were reconciled.

The theme of the poem is suggested in the invocation, as in an epic poem, but the theme is ridiculously trivial, in comparison with the grand theme of an epic. The action opens with a mock-heroic manner with the awakening of Belinda, the heroine of the poem. Belinda is the very goddess of beauty, and the luster of her eyes surpasses that of the sun, who peeped timorously through the white curtains in Belinda's room:

"Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,
And opened those eyes that must eclipse the day."

The whole structure of The Rape of the Lock is cast in the epic mood, but it could not be a serious epic because the incident is trivial—so we have the mock-heroic or heroicomical poem. The poem is divided into Cantos like an epic poem, and there are ironic parallels to the main Incidents of the epic. The poem begins with an invocation in epic tradition:

"Say, what strange motive, Goddness! could compel
A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?"

As in epics, in The Rape of the Lock, too, divine beings are portrayed. Belinda is in the divine care of the sylphs:

"Fairest of mortals, thou distinguished 'care,
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air".
But then the sylphs are fragile, airy beings and they are helpless before the caprices of men. Despite all their concern for Belinda, her beautiful lock of hair is raped by the naughty Baron. There is the mischievous gnome who, like Milton's Satan, is intent upon making Belinda miserable and thereby all her admirers. The gnome addresses the wayward Queen who rules the sex from fifteen to fifty, thus:

"Hear me, and touch Belinda with chagrin,
That single act gives half the world the spleen."

The epic always uses the supernatural element. In The Iliad there are gods and goddesses; in The Rape of the Lock, there are the sylphs and gnomes. These aerial spirits are small and insignificant things, and are, therefore, exactly in keeping with the triviality of the theme. They guard the person of the heroine and when there is a fight between the followers of Belinda and those of the Baron; they take part in the fight, like the gods and goddesses in the Trojan War:

"Propped on their bodkin spears, the spirits survey,
The growing combat or assist the fray."

An epic poem must contain some episodes also. In keeping with this practice Pope has introduced the episode of the game of Ombre which is described in great detail. There is also the hazardous journey of Umbriel to the Cave of Spleen. Then there is the battle between the lords and ladies just like the battles in epic poetry. But in the true mock-heroic style this battle is fought with fans and snuff instead of with swords and spears.

There are single combats also between Belinda and the Baron and between Clarissa and Sir Plume. Belinda’s toilet is another engaging account in which Pope has attributed in a perfect mock-heroic manner, the solemnity of a religious observance to the luxurious toilet of a lady of fashion and frivolity. Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux, are all brought to the same table and the slight and the series are all strangely synthesized.

The Rape of the Lock is a rare instance in which the slight theme is given an exalted treatment for satirical purposes. All through the poem, a pose of importance is given to all that is thoroughly unimportant and insignificant and practically meaningless and farcical. The very conception of writing an epic on the rape of a lock of hair is funny and bears testimony to the poet’s effort to make the little great and the great little.

In The Rape of the Lock the balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity is nicely trimmed: the little is made great and the great made little. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly, the perfection of mock heroic.

Rape of the Lock - Significance of Cave of Spleen

Spleen was the Augustan name what Elizabethan described as melancholy. It is less of a disease than a fashionable affectation. Fashionable ladies, poets, and playwrights pretend to suffer from it so as to give an impression that the victims are serious thinkers of creative writers. Pope exalts Spleen to the level of Goddess and cave of Spleen to the level of underworld and personifies her as the Queen of underworld. This suits his scheme to mock the epic conventions systematically because the serious epics like “Iliad” and “Aenied” show heroes taking a voyage to the underworld. In mockery of this convention, however, Pope packs a lot of social criticism, especially the criticism of fashionable vanities and affectations of the fashionable women.
Sylphs were in attendance to Belinda when she plays Ombre. They hover around her when she sips coffee. They withdraw when Ariel sees “an earthly lover lurking at her heart”. A gnome, called ‘Umbriel’ holds the place of Ariel. After the rape of the lock of Belinda, Umbriel wanted to inflict her with Spleen. So he took a journey to the underworld to the cave of spleen.

It is reported that the Queen of Spleen as a fickle and eccentric goddess holds full control over the fashionable ladies ranging from fifteen to fifty. She, the Goddess of Spleen is the aspiration behind the affectation of melancholy as well as the pretension to the poetry by the female sex.

The effect of Spleen on the women varies according to their temperament. While some consult the physician for their treatments. Some begin to write scandalous plays and those who are proud give them an air and try to delay their visit as to show their importance.

While speaking of the cave of Spleen, Pope gives a vivid picture of the fantastic vision to which the men and women plagued with spleen are exposed to. At the moment we see flaming devils and snakes erected on their coils, lustrous ghosts, opening sepulchers and red fires and the other moment we visualizes the lakes of liquid gold, scenes of paradise, transparent places and angles coming to solve the difficulties in human life. Thus the description of the cave of Spleen is highly symbolic and conveys the accurate picture of the people suffering from Spleen.

Moreover, Pope points out the illusion from which morbidly melancholic people suffer. Such people are often plagued with fantastic ideas or visions and often imagine themselves transformed into various objects.

Then, there are two hand maidens who wait upon the Goddess of Spleen, are Ill-Nature and Affectation. Apparently, it is seemed that Pope has delineated the pictures of two hand-maidens just to emphasize the splendour of Goddess of Spleen. But since Spleen, Ill-Nature and Affectation are the typical feminine vices in Pope’s time, therefore, the delineation of their portraits provide the vivid picture of the fashionable women who affected so many things.

Ill-Nature is presented as an ugly, wrinkled and decayed woman who pretends to be virtuous and pious but essentially a vicious creature who takes delight in murdering reputations of the other people. The black and white lines of her dress presents the contrast between her pretension and reality – the white colour suggests purity, innocence and religiosity and the black colour suggest malice, envy and scorn. In fact, Pope has satirized the double role of the woman’s nature of his times that pretends to be pious and virtuous just to maintain their good reputation i.e. the woman of his age gives importance to their reputation than their virtues. In other words they are hypocrite.

The, Pope delineates the portrait of the Affectation, the second hand maiden of the Goddess of Spleen. Affectation is personified as an old woman who is beautiful, young and tender though she is fairly old. Delineation of the portrait of the Affectation provides a vivid picture of the fashionable woman. It includes a sharp, ironical commentary on the vanity, frivolity and hypocrisy of fashionable women.

There Affectation, with a sickly mien,
Shows in her cheek the roses of eighteen,
Practiced to lisp, and hang the head aside,
Faints into airs, and languishes with pride,
On the rich quilt sinks with becoming woe,
Wrapt in a gown, for sickness, and for show.
The fair ones feel such maladies as these,
When each new night-dress gives a new disease.

Then, the bag, which the Goddess of Spleen gives to gnome, Umbriel, is the clever mimicry of the bag in which Ulysses entrapped the winds. The bag contains all the violent and noisy emotions while the Phial contains the noisiest sort of sufferings. This bag is indicative of female weaknesses. Thus, Pope seems to imply that the women are capable of all sorts of antics to demonstrate their sufferings.

To sum up, the visit to the cave of Spleen is introduced for the sake of mock-heroic effect, which gives an opportunity to the poet to satirize the evil nature and the affectations of ladies and gentlemen of his society. Furthermore, it also serves the action of the poem.

Technique & Plot-Construction in "The Rape of the Lock"

The Rape of the Lock has greatly been admired for its development of the theme and its pattern of construction. The successive scenes, says a critic, are given with so firm and a clear touch—there is such a sense of form—that it is impossible not to recognise a consummate artistic power. The poem has the merit that belongs to any work of art which expresses in the most finished form the sentiments and characteristics of a particular class of society. It contains the truest and liveliest picture of eighteenth century high society. Its subject is of a more elegant nature, as well as more artfully conducted, than that of any other mock-epic poem.

The poem opens judiciously with the guardian-sylph warning Belinda against some unknown, imminent danger. The account which Ariel gives of the nature and activities of these inhabitants of the air, namely, the sylphs, is exquisitely fancied. Several strokes of satire have been inserted into this account with great delicacy. The transformation of women of different tempers into different kinds of spirits has a great appeal. The description of the toilet, which follows, is given in magnificent terms. Belinda's dressing is painted in as pompous a manner as Achilles arming. Canto 1 ends with a circumstance artfully contrived to keep this beautiful machinery in the reader's eye: "The busy sylphs surround their darling care", etc.

The mention of the lock of hair, on which the poem turns, is rightly reserved for the second Canto. The sacrifice of the Baron, to implore success for his undertaking, is another example of Pope's judgment in heightening the subject. The succeeding scene of sailing upon the Thames is most gay and delightful. The machinery is again introduced here, and with much propriety. Ariel summons his denizens of the air who are painted with a rich exuberance of fancy. A different sylph has charge of each part of Belinda's dress. But as many as fifty sylphs are deputed to guard Belinda's petticoat which, though a "seven-fold fence," has often been known "to fail". The celebrated raillery of Addison on the hoop-petticoat has nothing equal to Pope's description of the difficulty of guarding a part of dress of such high consequence: "Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail."
Pope shows great delicacy in his satire when he employs, with the utmost judgment and elegance, all the implements and instruments of the toilet as means of punishment to those spirits who shall be careless of their duties—of punishment such as sylphs alone could undergo. If Virgil has earned such high commendation for exalting his bees, by the majesty and magnificence of his diction, Pope deserves equal praise for the pomp and luster of his language on so trivial a subject.

The same mastery of language appears in the lively and elegant description of the game of Ombre in the third Canto. Here, again, Pope artfully introduces his machinery:

Soon as she spreads her hand, the aerial guard Descend, and sit on each important card. The majesty, with which the kings of spades and clubs, and the knaves of diamonds and clubs are spoken of, is very amusing to the imagination; and the whole game is conducted with great art and judgment. It is finely contrived that Belinda should be victorious, as the victory represents a change of fortune in the dreadful loss she was speedily to undergo, and gives occasion to the poet to introduce a moral reflection from Virgil, which adds to the pleasantry of the story:

O thoughtless mortals: ever blind to fate,
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.

To this scene succeeds a coffee-table. It is doubtless as hard to make a coffee-pot shine in poetry as a plough; yet Pope has succeeded in giving elegance to so familiar an object. The guardian spirits are again active, and importantly employed. But nothing can excel their behaviour, and their wakeful solicitude for Belinda, when the danger grows more imminent, and the catastrophe approaches: "Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair". The methods by which they try to preserve her from the intended mischief are such as could only be executed by sylphs. Still further to heighten the piece and to preserve the characters of the machines to the last, one of the sylphs intervening to protect the lock is cut into two by Fate with its shears. The line: "But airy substance soon unites again" is an admirable parody on that passage of Milton, which describes Satan wounded.

The parodies are some of the most exquisite parts of this poem. The introduction of parodies on serious and solemn passages of Homer and Virgil give much life and spirit to mock-epic poetry. The parodies of the speech of Sarpedon in Homer, and of the description of Achille's sceptre, together with the scales of Jupiter from Homer and Virgil are judiciously introduced in their several places. The mind of the reader is engaged by novelty, when it so unexpectedly finds a thought or object it had been accustomed to survey in another form, suddenly arrayed in a ridiculous garb. A mixture of ridiculous and comic images, with serious and important ones, add also no small beauty to this kind of poetry, as in the passage where real and imaginary misfortunes are coupled together with reference to captured kings, frustrated lovers, aged ladies, fierce dictators, and the moon-goddess.

In the same Canto (IV), the Cave of Spleen, the pictures of the attendants, Ill-nature and Affectionate, the effects of the vapour that hangs over the palace of Spleen, the imaginary diseases she occasions, the speech of Umbriel to this malignant deity, the phial of female sorrows, the breaking of the phial with its direful effects, and the speech of the disconsolate Belinda—all these circumstances are poetically imagined, and are far superior to any of Boileau and Garth. How natural it is for Belinda in her dismal and solitary situation to wish to be taken to some place where gilt chariots are never seen, where nobody plays Ombre, and where nobody tastes bohea (black tea). Nothing is
more common for poets than to introduce omens as preceding some important and dreadful event. Pope enumerates, with exquisite satire, the alarming prodigies which occur before the rape of Belinda's lock. The direfulness of the impending evil is aggravated by the muteness of Poll, and the unkindness of Shock.

The chief subject of the final Canto is the battle that ensues, and the efforts of the ladies to recover the hair. The battle is described, as it ought to be, in very lofty and pompous terms. The weapons used are the most proper imaginable in a mock epic—the lightning of the ladies' eyes, intolerable frowns, a pinch of snuff, and a bodkin. The machinery is not forgotten. Triumphant Umbriel claps his glad wings on viewing the fight. When the snuff is flung at the Baron, the gnomes carry it directly to the Baron's nose.

Then comes the grand catastrophe of the poem. The invaluable lock, which is so eagerly sought, is lost beyond recovery. And here the poet makes a judicious use of that famous fiction of Ariosto, that all things lost on earth are treasured on the moon. The denouement of this is well-conducted. What has become of this important lock of hair? It is made a constellation with that of Berenice. As it rises to heaven, the sylphs behold it in its flight and feel pleased with its progress through the skies. The machinery of the poem is constantly kept in the readers view, to the very last. Even when the lock is transformed into a constellation, the sylphs, who had so carefully guarded it, are here once again artfully mentioned, as finally rejoicing in its honourable transformation.

John Dennis was, however, not much impressed by the construction of this poem. According to him, the machinery of the poem renders the action extravagant, absurd and incredible instead of making it wonderful and delightful. The machines, he says, do not in the least influence that action; they neither prevent the danger of Belinda, nor promote it, nor retard it, unless perhaps for one moment, which is ridiculous. There is no opposition of the machines to one another in the poem. Umbriel, the gnome, is not introduced till the action is over, and till Ariel and the spirits under him have quitted Belinda.

Dennis is of the view that there is no such thing as the fable or characters in the poem. The sentiments, according to him, are both trivial and extravagant. Dennis considers Umbriel's journey to the Cave of Spleen to be irrelevant: "How absurd was it then for this to take a journey down to the central earth, for no other purpose than to give Belinda the spleen, whom he left and found in the height of it."

**The Character of Belinda in "The Rape of the Lock"**

There are several aspects of the personality of Belinda as portrayed by Pope in The Rape of the Lock. She is a coquette, an injured innocent, a sweet charmer, a society belle, a rival of the sun, and a murderer of millions. She has, indeed, a Cleopatra-like variety.

The primary quality of Belinda is **spiritual shallowness** and an **incapacity for moral awareness**. Ariel acquaints us with her flirtatious character when he says that it is not known whether the beautiful Belinda will allow her chastity to be violated, or some delicate China-jar will break; whether she will stain her honour or her new brocade; whether she will lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball. The first possibility in each of these pairs of calamities shows that Belinda is not likely to exercise sufficient caution in protecting her maidenly purity. These lines show how easily a lady like Belinda might lose her chastity in a world of womanisers and how irreparably.
She has transformed all *spiritual exercises and emblems into a coquette's self-display and self-adoration*. For instance, she wears a sparkling cross which is a religious symbol but which is put by her to the uses of ornamentation. For all her professed purity, Belinda is found to be secretly in love with Baron. There consists her "fall". When the sylphs warn her of the approaching scissors and the danger to her hair, she seems to be indifferent to the warning. A thousand spirits of the air rush to her to guard her lock. A thousand wings, by turns, blow back her hair. Thrice the sylphs jerk the diamond in her ear; thrice she looks back; and thrice the foe draws near. Her behaviour leads Ariel to make the surprising discovery that, in spite of all her pretence, she is amorously inclined toward a gallant:

**Sudden he viewed, in spite of all her art,**
**An earthly lover lurking at her heart.**

When Baron has clipped her lock, Belinda's reaction is described in a beautiful mocking vein.

**Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,**
**And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies.**

We see Belinda as a true Fury. While lamenting the loss of her lock, she deplots the fact that she was attracted by the pleasures of court-life. She says that it would have been better if she had stayed and said her prayers at home instead of roaming with youthful lords. She recalls the omens which she witnessed in the morning but which she ignored. She would not have felt so hurt if, instead of the curl which lent such glory to her head, some other hair had been stolen by the Baron.

Belinda behaves like a *spoilt child*. At the outset we learn that she is a lazy woman who continues to sleep till the hour of twelve in the day and who, on waking up, at that hour, falls asleep again, to be awakened ultimately by the licking, tongue of her pet dog. When she finally rises from bed, she goes through a love-letter which is waiting for her and makes her forget the vision that she has seen. Soon she gets busy with her toilet. She regards her toilet as a religious ceremony to be scrupulously gone through. She begins her toilet with a prayer to the "cosmetic powers". Apart from her laziness and her excessive preoccupation with her toilet (including the pains that she takes to curl her hair), she has a *thirst for fame* which leads her to engage herself in an encounter with two adventurous knights at the game of Ombre. Having won a victory at Ombre, she feels jubilant and her exultant shouting fills the sky. She undoubtedly possesses a superb skill in playing the game of Ombre, but the manner in which she rejoices over her victory shows not only her vanity and superficiality but a childish temperament. The poet appropriately points out the *shallowness of human beings in becoming too quickly depressed and too quickly joyous*. Belinda does not realise that this day of victory would soon be converted into a day of disgrace for her, though the disgrace would be as trivial as the victory.

Belinda's outbursts, when a lock of her hair has been clipped, also show her as a spoiled child. A trivial incident fills her with an uncontrollable rage. She utters "louder shrieks" than those uttered by women who have lost their husbands or their lap dogs. She experiences greater resentment and anger over the "rape" of her hair than youthful kings who are captured alive in battle, scornful old maids who have lost their charms, passionate lovers, who have been deprived of the pleasures of love, and even aged ladies whose desire to be kissed has been frustrated. Later, when Umbriel pours over Belinda the contents of the bag which he has brought from the Cave of Spleen, Belinda
begins to burn with an inhuman wrath. When Umbriel breaks the bottle, Belinda feels grief-stricken. The sorrowful head sinks on her breast, and she begins to heave sighs. She now recalls with deep distress on the kind of life she has lived.

Pope's attitude to Belinda is very mixed and complicated: mocking and yet tender, admiring and yet critical. The paradoxical nature of Pope's attitude is intimately related to the paradox of Belinda's situation. If Belinda is to find her role of woman, she must lose the role of a virgin, and the more graceful her acceptance of loss the greater the victory she achieves through it. Because Pope is dealing with this paradox, his attitude must be mixed and complicated.

There is no doubt that Belinda undergoes a "fall", at least in the eyes of Ariel. Yet this fall is only a fall from the self-love. It is merely a fall into a more natural human condition and best regarded, perhaps, as a kind of fortunate fall: Belinda simply falls in love, and thus a situation is created whereby she can escape from the meaningless virginity and honour represented by the sylphs.

"The Rape of the Lock" : Relationship between Literature and Society

The Rape of the Lock is a poem in which Alexander Pope shows himself emphatically as the spokesman of his age. This poem pictures the artificial tone of the age and the frivolous aspect of femininity. "It is the epic of trifling’s; a page torn from the petty, pleasure-seeking life of fashionable beauty. In short, the veritable apotheosis in literary guise of scent patches and powder." We see in this poem the elegance and the emptiness, the meanness and the vanity, the jealousies, treacheries and intrigues of the social life of the aristocracy of the eighteenth century.

At the very outset we become acquainted with the idleness, late-rising, and fondness for domestic pets of the aristocratic ladies of the time. Belinda wakes up at the hour of twelve and then falls asleep again. We also become acquainted in the very beginning of the poem with the superficiality of the ladies who loved gilded chariots, and affected a love of the game of Ombre. Their ambition to marry peers and dukes, or men holding other high titles, is indicated, too, in the opening Canto:

Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
While peers and dukes, and all their sweeping train....

The poem brings out the coquetry, the art, the artifice, and the "varying vanities" of the ladies of the time. These ladies learnt early in their life how to roll their eyes and to blush in an intriguing manner. Their hearts were like toy-shops which moved from one gallant to another:

With varying vanities, from every part,
They shift the moving toy-shop of their heart.

One gallant could drive put another gallant, and one coach could drive out another coach. "Levity" was the hallmark of these women. Their manners and behaviour were artificial and affected. They knew the art to lisp, to hang their heads aside, to faint into airs, and to languish with pride. They used to sink on their rich quilts and pretend sickness so that young gallant men should come to inquire after their health and in this way also see the costly gowns which they were wearing.
The women of the time felt glad to receive love-letters. When Belinda gets up from her bed her eyes first open on a love-letter. Another of the vanities of these ladies was to keep domestic pets such as dogs and parrots. Belinda has her Shock and her Poll. Among the ill-omens that Belinda recalls after losing a lock of her hair is the indifference of her two domestic pets: "Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind!"

Aristocratic ladies treated toilet as their chief concern. One important passage in The Rape of the Lock describes Belinda at her dressing-table. Before commencing her toilet operation, she offers a prayer to the "cosmetic powers". At her dressing-table are "the various offerings of the world"—India's glowing gems, Arabia's perfumes, speckled and white combs, files of pins, "puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux." Later in the poem, we are told how these ladies "take such constant care to prepare the bodkin, comb and essence!" They take special pains to curl their hair; they bind their locks in paper durance; and they strain their tender heads with fillets.

The ladies lose their tempers over trifles. Screams of horror from Belinda rend the affrighted skies, and a "living lightning" flashes from her eyes. Thalestris is described as the "fierce virago". The ladies in the poem are depicted as very aggressive, and it is they who start the battle. Women have been jealous of one another from time immemorial. Clarissa stealthily hands over a pair of scissors to Baron in order to assist him in his wicked design. It is in all probability Clarissa's jealousy of Belinda's beauty, and fame that prompts her to offer this assistance to Baron.

The ladies have no moral scruples. "Honour" is a word with little meaning for them; and "reputation" is more important to them than honour. The loss of "honour" does not matter if "reputation" is not lost. Several passages in the poem reveal the moral disarray of their lives. A lady's missing a dance-party is as serious a matter as her forgetting her prayers. A lady's losing her necklace is as serious as losing her heart. The death of a lap-dog or the breaking of a rich China-vessel is as serious a matter to the lady as the death of her husband. There is a complete confusion of moral values in their minds. Belinda herself has no real sense of feminine virtue or honour. She is in love with Baron, and for this reason Ariel gives her up when he sees "an earthly lover lurking at her heart". Her lament over the loss of a lock of her hair is sheer hypocrisy. Besides, she feels unhappy because the loss of this particular lock of hair was vital to her charm. She would not have been much hurt if Baron had stolen any other hair:

Oh, hadst thou, cruel, been content to seize Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!

The aristocratic young men of the time were, like the ladies, lacking in any serious purpose or morality. Florio and Damon are representatives of those gallants and fops who vie with one another to capture the hearts of the ladies. There is a keen competition among them to win feminine favours. Wigs strive with wigs, and sword-knots strive with sword-knots. The attitude of these fops to love is amusingly described in the manner in which Baron tries to pacify heaven in order to win Belinda's heart. Baron builds an altar to Love. This altar consists of twelve vast French romances, three garters, and half a pair of gloves and all the trophies of his former loves. He lights a fire with the tender love-letters that he has received, and breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire.

The life of the fops is as empty and shallow as the life of the ladies. This is emphasized by the role played by the empty-headed Sir Plume with bit "unthinking face". He is proud of his "amber snuff-box" and "the nice conduct of a clouded cane". He can hardly speak a dozen words without uttering half a dozen oaths. The manner in
which a "beau" or a "witling" perishes in the battle of the sexes shows the same thing. "One died in metaphor, and one in song." Taking snuff and wearing wigs were the foremost fashions among the men of that time.

Lastly, we are given a satirical picture of judges, jury men, and merchants. The judges are in a hurry to sign the judgment and the jury-men are in a hurry to pronounce a verdict of "guilty" because they want to get back home for dinner. The merchants spend feverish hours at the Exchange. Other aspects of the life of the time which are mentioned in an amusing manner are the wits of heroes and of beaux, courtiers' promises, cages for gnats, chains to yoke a flea, dried butterflies, and heavy books of casuistry (excuse).

**The Rape of the Lock : Treatment of Women**

The Rape of the Lock has rightly been described as a representation of the petty pleasure-seeking life of a fashionable beauty. The poem is a satire on beautiful aristocratic women of the eighteenth century whose lives centred round petty interests and the quest of shallow pleasures. The principal target of attack is Belinda, a fashionable beautiful lady of the upper classes of the eighteenth-century English society. There can be no doubt about the beauty of this lady. Early in the poem, she is compared to the sun.

She wears a sparkling cross which even Jews and infidels would like to kiss. If she has any faults, they would be hidden by her graceful ease and her sweetness of temper. Her care-free disposition is expressed thus: "Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay." She nourishes two locks of hair which greatly enhance the already irresistible charm of this lady. Indeed, the poet invests her almost with the character of a divinity. At one point the praise of her attractions may be a mere mask for Pope's satiric attack on her personality as a coquette; at another it is praise which no irony can fully undermine. Nor can there be any doubt that she belongs to the fashionable world.

But, although Belinda is a woman of superb beauty and charm, the poet fully reveals to us her petty, pleasure-seeking nature. She suffers from all the vanities, follies, and lack of moral scruple of the aristocratic ladies of the time. She is a lazy woman who continues to sleep till the hour of twelve in the day and who, on waking up at that hour, falls asleep again, to be wakened subsequently by the licking tongue of her pet dog, Shock. When she does ultimately get up from bed, she goes through a love-letter which is waiting for her and which makes her forget the dream that she has seen. Next, she gets ready for her toilet. Thus we see that her day begins at noon, and that too when she is awakened by her lap-dog's licking her face. Keeping pets, encouraging and receiving love-letters, and self-embellishment were some of the principal interests of Belinda and the whole class of the society to which she belonged.

Wearing a white robe, the beautiful Belinda now addresses a prayer to the "cosmetic powers". Then she looks at her heavenly reflection in the mirror, and naturally feels pleased by her beauty. By her side stands Betty to assist her in the sacred ceremony of toilet. Numerous caskets are opened and they reveal their precious contents brought from different countries of the world. This description fully exposes Belinda's vanity and her love of fashion. But, of course, these were the characteristics of all aristocratic ladies of the eighteenth century. Nor have aristocratic women shed these characteristics in our times.
Belinda's emergence from her house is compared to the rising of the sun. The eyes of everyone are fixed on her because of her superior charm. She gives her smiles to everybody but shows no special favour to anyone. Men who look at her are captured by her locks of hair with their bright ringlets which embellish her ivory-white neck. The adventurous Baron, Lord Petre, is prepared to use force or fraud to rob her of these locks. The whole of this description shows Belinda as the leading light of the fashionable world and as a woman whose chief desire is to win admiration. The manner in which Ariel describes the nature of the calamity which might befall Belinda also shows her superficial nature and her lack of moral scruple. It is not known, says Ariel, whether she will allow her chastity to be violated, or some delicate China-jar will crack; whether she will stain her honour, or her new brocade; whether she will forget her prayers, or miss a masked ball; whether she will lose her heart or her necklace; or whether Heaven has decreed that Shock must fall.

The coach carrying Belinda and her party takes them to Hampton Court. The gallant young men and the beautiful young ladies come here to enjoy the pleasures of the royal court. Their conversation covers a wide range of trivialities, much of it attacking the moral character of various persons: "At every word a reputation dies." We next become acquainted with Belinda's thirst for fame which leads her to engage herself in an encounter with two adventurous Knights at the game of Ombre. Her breast expands with the pleasure of an anticipated victory in this contest. Having won, she feels jubilant and her exultant shouting fills the sky. She undoubtedly shows a splendid skill in playing the game of Ombre, but the manner in which she gloats over her victory shows not only her vanity but superficiality of mind. After the game of Ombre, Belinda participates in the ceremony of coffee-drinking. Toilet, gossip, Ombre, and coffee drinking—these occupy much of Belinda's time in the day. She does not seem to have any intellectual interests whatever.

For all her professed purity, Belinda is found to be secretly in love with Baron. When Ariel finds "an earthly lover lurking at her heart", he feels amazed and retires from the scene with a sigh. Ariel realises that he can no longer protect her, because spirits like him can protect only maidens who have pure minds and who have no room in their hearts for earthly lovers. Baron then cuts off a lock of Belinda's hair. Another side of Belinda's personality is exposed. She grows furious. While lamenting the loss of her lock, she deplores the fact that she was so attracted by the pleasures of the court-life. She recalls the omens which she witnessed in the morning and which she ignored. Thrice from her trembling hand the patch-box fell; the China-vessels shook without wind; Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind. Not only is the cause of Belinda's lament trivial, but the very lament is hypocritical. She would not have felt so hurt if, instead of the curl which lent such glory to her head, some other hair had been stolen by the Baron.

The primary quality of Belinda is spiritual shallowness and an incapacity for moral awareness. She has transformed all spiritual exercises and emblems into a coquette's self-display and self-adoration. Even the Cross, which is a religious symbol, is used as an ornament. And she does all this with a frivolous heedlessness. The part or rather parts, which Belinda plays in the poem, are at once contemptible, ridiculous, endearing, precarious, poignant, and petty. It is difficult even to believe that, in spite of all her attractions, she is a true lady. If she were, she would not act as she does over the clipping of her lock or exercise her spleen to such a vigorous degree. She lacks the knowledge of the common fate of coquettes like herself. Even so, her reaction to the rape is, from the point of view of her society, perfectly natural. Baron's act is a rude
breach of the rules of courtship. She is faced now with the necessity of making a much more serious and deliberate decision. Her immediate response had been marked by prudery, hypocrisy, and affectation.

In spite of the accessory elements pointed out above, the fact remains that the poem is chiefly and largely the picture of the life of a petty-minded, pleasure seeking fashionable beauty.

"The Rape of the Lock" as a source of perpetual delight

There is no finer gem than The Rape of the Lock in all the lighter treasures of English fancy. Compared with any other mock-heroic poem in the English language, it shines in pure supremacy for elegance, completeness, point, and playfulness. It diverts us by its mimicry of greatness, and astonishes by the beauty of its parts, and the fairy brightness of its ornaments. It is a jewel of many facets, each shining brilliantly. The poem takes us into an enchanted, brilliant world in which, keeping the Cave of Spleen well aside, almost nothing is dull.

The most striking quality of this poem is its sparkling wit. The poem is in effect a satire upon the fashionable world of the eighteenth century, and more especially upon feminine frivolity. The vanities of the women of the time are exquisitely ridiculed. Their pre-occupation with self-embellishment is satirised in the famous passage which describes Belinda's toilet. Their moral bankruptcy is exposed in the amusing lines in which we are told that, for a lady, staining her new brocade was as disastrous as staining her honour, and losing a necklace was as calamitous as losing her heart. The breaking of a China-vessel or the death of a lap-dog was as great a misfortune for a woman as the death of a husband. Some very amusing satire is to be found in the lines which describe the strange shapes in the Cave of Spleen: "And maids turned bottles, call aloud for corks." Virtue was not a prime consideration.

Almost every aspect of the fashionable society of the time is mocked at by Pope, and the mockery sends us into laughter. Much of the pleasure of this poem results from this mockery. Fun is the key-note of the poem.

Pope also gives us many pictures of the elegance and glitter of that society. These pictures are also a source of delight to the reader. Belinda is a woman of superb beauty and charm. She is certainly an object of mockery in the poem, but she also earns our homage and adoration. She is regarded as the rival of the beams of the sun. She wears a sparkling cross which even Jews and infidels would, kiss. She has a Cleopatra-like variety of appearance and character. Her beauty and charm are emphasised when she gets busy with her toilet. Robed in white, she sees her heavenly reflection in the mirror. Her beauty is greatly enhanced by the various decorative aids which she employs. We are fascinated by her beauty as described in this famous passage dealing with her toilet. Although the hint of satire here also is unmistakable, these lines possess great poetic charm which is a source of much pleasure to us:

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Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
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Belinda's cheerful temperament adds to her attractions. She is not only cheerful herself but "maintains thousands more in equal mirth." At the end of the poem, her beautiful lock is turned into a constellation in the sky, adding "new glory to the shining sphere." We see Belinda in many different lights— as coquette, injured innocent, sweet charmer, society belle, rival of the sun, and murderer of millions. The parts Belinda plays in the elaborate social drama of manners are certainly ridiculous and even contemptible, but they are also endearing. She outshines all her sex in divine attributes and importance. The dazzling personality of Belinda greatly contributes to the appeal of the poem.

Pope ridicules not only the ladies but also the fashionable young men of the time. The Baron's worship of Love is an example of the ridicule. No less amusing is the satire on gallants like Sir Plume, with his amber snuff-box, his spotted cane, and his "unthinking face".

The machinery of the poem is another source of the pleasure which this poem affords. Basically the machinery of the sylphs and gnomes is intended to heighten the mock-epic effect of the poem. But the sylphs have a beauty and charm of their own. The occupations and tasks of the sylphs are described in exquisitely witty lines, often of great poetic beauty. The sylphs illustrate the sensuous richness with which Belinda is surrounded. The myth of the sylphs enables the poet to show his awareness of the absurdities of a point of view which, nevertheless, is charming, delightful, and filled with a real poetry. The sylphs are exquisitely related to traditional beliefs, both trivial and profound. Probably the largest single way in which Pope imparted qualities of splendour and wonder to his actors and actions was through his brilliant adaptation of epic machinery. They really stand for feminine honour, flirtation, courtship, the necessary rivalry of man and woman and it is seen in its essence.

Lastly, It would, however, be wrong to regard this poem as a work of beauty and grace devoid of any substance. Its airy and fanciful character certainly predominates, but it also has a serious moral purpose which cannot be ignored. Dr. Johnson complimented Pope on having put a moral in this poem which may be regarded as a condemnation of the ill-humour, spleen, vanity, and intolerance of women, and a plea for good-humour and a sane, rational approach to things. Clarissa's speech is most vital in this connection. The glories of social position and privilege are, in Clarissa's view, achieved in vain "unless good sense preserves what beauty gains." The best course for women is to make good use of their power and "keep good humour still whatever we lose." The poem is also a condemnation of the mentality of fops and dandies. Certain moral reflections are found scattered in the poem. For instance:

O thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,  
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.
JOHN DONNE, 1572-1631

A contemporary of Marlowe and Shakespeare, Donne (pronounced as "Dun") shares with them the spirit and the quality of the Renaissance. The contradictions of the age are reflected in the career and achievement of Donne. The inconsistency of the Elizabethans is mirrored in the complex personality of Donne, a poet of intellectual ingenuity and theological ingenuousness. It is not difficult to explain the versatility and the varied achievements of the poet, in the light of the age to which he belonged.

Birth, parentage, early life and marriage: - John Donne, born in 1572, was the eldest son of a London iron-merchant. His mother was the sister of John Heywood, the dramatist. After receiving education privately, Donne matriculated at Oxford in 1584. Probably he went to Cambridge for higher education, but obviously he could not take a degree on account of his opposition to the oath of thirty-nine articles. Of the years from 1584 to 1592, we know very little. He was admitted as a law student to Lincoln’s Inn in May 1592. Like many young members of the Inns of Court, he was fond of pleasure and company: “Not dissolute but very neat, a great visitor of ladies, a great frequenter of plays, a great writer of conceited verses.”

John Donne tells us that during that period, he “of study and play made strange hermaphrodites”. During these formative years, Donne studied both law and religion. He also wrote a number of songs, elegies and satires before his twenty-fifth year. There is no doubt that he visited Italy in order to proceed to Jerusalem but prevented from doing so, he passed over into Spain, where he studied the laws, the language and the arts of Spain. His collection of books contained many Spanish writers. The earliest portrait of Donne, dated 1591, bears a Spanish motto. The spirit of Italian life and literature and influence of Spanish philosophers and theologians dominated his early poetry. He also came across other Catholics who, like him, felt terribly the harassment and persecution they were subject to. John Donne wrote of this period: “I had my first breeding and conversation with men of suppressed and afflicted religion (Catholicism), accustomed to the respite of death and hungry of an imagined martyrdom.” These were the days of inner conflict. His soul was torn between Catholicism and Anglicanism. Ultimately, by 1597 he must have embraced the Church of England, when he entered the service of Sir Thomas Egerton. But before 1597, Donne enlisted as a volunteer in two combined military and naval expeditions. The Cadiz Expedition of 1556 and Azore Expedition of 1597 show that he was an adherent of the Earl of Essex His. The Storm and The Calm describe the experiences of his voyage. It was during the expedition that he came in contact with Thomas, the eldest son of Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. He served Egerton for four years as Secretary. He would have got promotion and advancement in public service had he not committed the indiscretion of contracting a run-away marriage with Anne More, daughter of Sir George More of Losely and niece of Egerton's second wife. Possibly Donne miscalculated, as he thought this marriage would strengthen his claims to promotion. On the contrary, Egerton dismissed him from service. The reconciliation with More, his father-in-law, saved him from a long imprisonment.

Donne’s conversion of Anglicanism:- A word may be said about his conversion to Anglicanism. Brought up among the Catholics in early age, his belief in the old faith struggled against the impact of the Established Church. Donne was no hypocrite; he knew the shortcomings of the Church of Rome; his intellectual spirit detached itself from Catholicism. His conversion to Anglicanism was not due to opportunism or expediency but intellectual persuasion. Even then, in later life he felt, to some extent, a sort of spiritual unrest:
Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse so bright and clear...

Donne’s hasty and imprudent marriage meant the loss of a promising and stable public career. The years from 1601 to 1609 were full of fluctuating fortunes, when Donne had to depend on the generosity of his patron, Sir Robert Drury, the Countess of Beford, Lord Hay, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, who helped him in different ways. The Pseudo Martyr (1610) shows him definitely on the Anglician side, trying to defend the oath of allegiance.

Two loves of Donne: -

Donne had two loves—poetry, the mistress of his youth, and Divinity, the wife of his mature age. Equally remote he stood from the ascetic ideal. He believed in the joy of living and the seduction of poetry. Donne followed the middle path between blind faith and reformation.

To adore or scorn an image, or protest,
May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right is not to stray;
To sleep or run wrong is.

Donne’s satiric genius found expression in his satire on heresy and on women. In The Progress of the Soul (1601), he traces the progress of the soul of heresy from the fall of Eve to the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The career of Donne entered a prosperous phase by his entering the Ministry of the Church of England in 1615. His steps to the altar, had cost him much misery and anguish. His pursuits were now controversial but devout. His sermons and poems written during this period reflect the complexity of his character, his varied erudition and his alert mind. The letters in verse written to different persons reflect his moods and interests. These metaphysical compliments and hyperboles need not make us forget the intensification of religious feeling and inner experience which found expression in the Holy Sonets. His Divine Poems, likewise, show the conflict of faith and reason, of hope and despair, and the penitence of a soul which has undergone a purgation of emotional experience. And yet the last poems queerly blend harshness with a sonorous harmony.

Some of his poems are in the amorous Cavalier tradition; such is his celebrated song Go and Catch a Falling Star, which avers that no-where lives a woman true and fair. In something of the same tradition is the poem Love’s Deity, beginning:

I long to talk with some old lover’s ghost
Who died before the god of love was born.

In a somewhat different strain, one more like his religious poems, is A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning. It is for his religious poetry, however, that Donne is most admired. Among the best of these are masterful sonnet Death, with the inspired couplet:

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more, Death, thou shalt die:

and the powerful A Hymn To God The Father, spun out of amazing puns on the poet’s own name: ‘When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done....”.

Donne—the Dean of St Paul’s

In 1619, Donne, the Chaplain, accompanied his friend the Earl of Doncaster to Germany. He was promoted to the post of Dean of St. Paul’s in 1621. His sermons attracted large audiences. During his serious sickness he composed a few devotional poems including the hymns Since I am Coming and Wilt thou forgive. Donne felt greatly comforted by the first hymn: “The words of that hymn have restored me to the same thoughts of joy that possessed my soul in my sickness when I composed it”. During his second sickness in 1630, he gave orders for his own monument which still stands in St. Paul’s. He died in London on 31st March 1631.
Conclusion: - Donne left a deep and pervasive influence on English poetry. The metaphysical lyricists owed a great debt to him. Sometimes, his followers excelled him in happy conceit, passion and paradoxical reasoning. And yet he gave a sincere and passionate quality to the Elizabethan lyric. He interwove argument with poetry. In spite of its intellectual content, his poems attract us with a sense of vision, an intensity of feeling, and a felicity of expression. He is one of those great poets who have left a mark on the history of English poetry. Look at the compliments in verses below:

That never any one could before become,
So great a monarch, in so small a room,
He conquered rebel passions, ruled them so,
As under-spheres by the first Mover go,
Banished so far their working, that we can
But know he had some, for we knew him man.
Then let his last excuse his first extremes,
His age saw vision, though his youth dream’d dreams’
—Sir Lucius Carie

The Age of John Donne

The age of Donne was an age of transition, standing midway between the age of Shakespeare and the Jacobean age (1572-1631). The age of Donne would effectively and substantially cover the first thirty years of the seventeenth century. This age stands midway between the age of Shakespeare-and the age of Milton. There is, however, some over-lapping which cannot be avoided because literary periods or ages cannot be separated chronologically.

It was a period of remarkable literary activity, a sort of prolongation of the Elizabethan age. The revival of learning had influenced not only Italy and Germany but also England. The classics were studied minutely and from a new angle. The re-discovery of the literature and culture of the past-known as humanism-gave the writers a new outlook on life. Life was a gay game and not a sorry penance. The new ideal man was to be a perfect courtier, a perfect soldier, a perfect writer and, above all, a perfect gentleman. For this, he had to undergo comprehensive training and a rigorous discipline.

(A) Historical and Political Perspective

The age of Donne was a period of transition. Many changes in the political, social and economic domains were being effected. Colonial expansion and increase in industry and trade made people materialistic. The study of medieval literature developed the minds of the readers. Though education was not so widespread, the common man spared no opportunity of obtaining knowledge from any source. Medieval beliefs held their ground both in Donne and his contemporaries.

The Reformation was a direct challenge to Rome. Why should Pope be supreme in the matters of religion? Religion, after all, is a personal matter and no dictation should be tolerated from-outside. Nationalism in its wider connotation was responsible not only for a new literature, but also a new faith. The abuses and weaknesses of the Catholic religion were laid bare. The new Church of England came into being. Donne, like some of his contemporaries, felt within himself the conflict of faith. His scepticism, his humanism and his learning made him challenge the faith of his ancestors. The result was that after a good deal of heart-searching and vacillation, Donne embraced the Established Church of England by 1598. But it was not until he was ordained in 1615 that he became a confirmed Anglican.
Peace and prosperity of Queen Elizabeth: - The heritage of Queen Elizabeth, who died in 1603, was one of peace and prosperity. It was also one of centralization. Although her monarchy had not been an absolute one, she delegated her authority wisely, and patriotism was loyalty to the Queen. Religion and politics were closely linked. Elizabeth, as the supreme head of the Church of England, maintained religious tolerance as the Puritan and Catholic minorities strengthened. Elizabethan developments in science were great, and included new discoveries in navigation, astronomy, cartography and medicine. England came to accept the Copemican view of the earth instead of the Ptolemic system.

James I and disillusionment: - James I, formerly James V of the Scotland, took over the English throne in 1603 at the death of Elizabeth. Though widely hailed at first, Englishmen rapidly became disillusioned with him. James did not understand the people he ruled, nor the nature of his office. He allowed his favourites and the Spanish government to influence him; his failure to recognize the rising power of Parliament, his reversion to rigid views of absolute monarchy, and the luxury and the corruption of his rule, and religious schisms widened and Puritanism and Roman Catholicism became more militant in their fight against the established Church of England. Political strife, intermingled with growing religious dissension, was brought to a head by his insistence on the oneness of Church and state.

Pessimism and optimism in the age of Donne: - In such circumstances, the spirit of the age became one of doubt and scientific analysis. The stretching of space in astronomy and geography, and the recognition of the great, unexplored territories in an expanding world threw man's place in the scheme of things into doubt. Both pessimism and optimism were offshoots of this need and quest for authority, the former as a natural manifestation of man's insecurity in a world increasingly governed by scientific law indifferent to man's position in the universe; the latter, as a natural assertion of man's greater control of his environment and a better life. It was an age of psychology, of biography, and of self-analysis at all social levels, as the works of Izaak Walton, John Donne, or Robert Burton show; it was also an age of scientific materialism as the works of Bacon and Newton show.

The conflict between the Church and the State: - The conflict between Church and State led men to wonder which was superior, with the answer resting in man's own conscience. The questioning of civil authority, of where true sovereignty should lie, made it possible to rebel against a king. The growth of the middle class, the rise of political parties, and the estrangement of the Puritans led to a long civil war. Charles I, who began his rule in 1629, following the death of his father, was beheaded in 1649, whereupon a Commonwealth was begun by the Puritans, leading to the eventual military dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, who, nevertheless, brought some measure of peace and stability to a turbulent England. Yet the idea of a military dictatorship was abhorrent to Englishmen and upon Cromwell's death in 1660, Parliament invited Charles II, in exile in France, to return to England and resume the rule of the Stuart kings.

The discovery of the physical world in the age of Donne: - The discovery of the physical world was another aspect of this age. Columbus discovered America and Vasco de Gama found a new route to India. The English ships sailed round the world and revealed the riches and the glories of ancient but hitherto-unknown lands. Donne was intensely interested in the extension of the limits and the knowledge of the physical world. His comparisons, references and allusions to different lands and the maps of new regions show conclusively that he was inspired by the wonder and the expanding horizon of the world he lived in:
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown.
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

The creative faculty of writers was encouraged to imagine new worlds and islands on the basis of the new discoveries.

(B) Social, Economic and Intellectual Perspective

The seventeenth century was fundamentally an age of transition and revolution. The old medieval world of ideas was undergoing rapid transformation. But there was an element of underlying continuity of tradition. So, one of the basic features of this age is the presence of a tension between the old and the new. The medieval thinker was religious. His outlook on science was theological and metaphysical. He was interested in the origin and the final end of man.

The approach of the new science was quite different. The scientific thinker was interested in the world itself. He expressed a concern with the sequence of phenomena. He, therefore, appealed to observation and experiment. Thus, there was far-reaching repercussion on the creative minds of the age. For example, John Donne indicated the scepticism of the conflict between the old and the new. In his poem, The First Anniversary, he indicated that the earth was shaking under his feet. His central problem was the relation of man to God. Previous explanations of this problem had already been displaced by the new trend in scientific thinking. The dichotomy between religion and science, reason and faith, in no small measure affected the intellectual altitude of the seventeenth century. Jacobean pessimism had its origin in this dichotomy. If we consider the representative minds of the seventeenth century, we might say that “normality consists in incongruity”.

In domains of human experience, we note the medieval and the Renaissance attitude co-existing in the seventeenth century. This is especially evident in many of the attitudes of the seventeenth century life. The Petrarchans praised love and in the Elizabethan lyrics we find the influence of Petrarch. But the medieval attitude to love was ambiguous. On the one hand, it condemned all love of created beings; on the other hand, love had to be tolerated as a necessary passion. Courtly love represented this evil aspect of love. But the attitude of the church was modified partly by Neo-Platonism. The Neo-Platonics were acutely aware of the love of God, through the world of the senses. They saw in human love a reflection of the divine love. According to Neo-Platonics, love held the world together.

Typical Renaissance poets apply these philosophical conceptions to the realm of erotic love. Beauty was the divine idea in the material object and love was the perception of that idea. The Renaissance Neo-Platonist found ideal truth in the beauty of his mistress and he could transcend into higher things by his love for her. The lover loved with a religious fervour. Thus, in the period of Renaissance, Neo-Platonism gavel to the conception of love a totally different significance than the one which medieval religion had given to it. An attitude of lyrical irony towards this new significance, is the essence of Donne’s love lyrics. Donne expresses both attitudes to love. In fact, John Donne sums up the intellectual situation of the seventeenth century in his poem The First Anniversary:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt.
The element of fire is put out;
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him when to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world is spent
When in the planets and the firmament
They seek so many new; they seek that this
Is crumbled out again to his atomies,
It is all in pieces, all coherence gone;
All just supply and all relation.

Empirical science: - Empirical science was a new development bringing about rapid changes in the sphere of science. There was unfettered exercise of reason and judgement. Copernicus gave a new view of astronomy. His views were further supported by Galileo with his telescope. This development gave a rude set-back to the old Ptolemic cosmology which changed the whole mental horizon of Europe. Its pressure did not attract so far literary figures of the day. Donne did not refute the old Ptolemic cosmology.

Habit of reading: - Habit of reading was increasing gradually in this period. There was considerable increase in the number of books printed annually. But many of the books were yet circulated in manuscripts among the authors, friends and acquaintances. The poems of Donne and Herbert were read chiefly in manuscript. But Browne’s Religio Medici was printed. The writers of this period reveal an astonishing versatility and range of knowledge.

University education: - There was no change in the pattern of University education. The under-graduates used to study the traditional subjects like logic and metaphysics. The aim of education was for imparting theological knowledge and thus producing priests. There were theological contro-versies at Cambridge.

(C) Literary Perspective

Donne, the founder of a new school of poetry: - A wave of romance swept the minds of creative writers. There was a spirit of adventure in literary output, in the efforts to create new literary forms and metres, the desire to reject the old traditions and conventions of theme and expression in literary writing. Donne was wholly unconventional in theme and expression. His independent spirit refused to submit to Petrarchan convention and Platonic idealism. His love poetry is fresh and original; he goes deep into his heart and dissects his own Elizabethan feelings. Donne’s revolt against the sweetness and harmony of verse is illustrated by the ruggedness and dissonance of his lines. He went to the colloquial, to that which was nearest to the speech of men, for revealing his feelings. And yet he did not abandon the Elizabethan conceit. He gave it a new form, a new vitality. He made his poetry dramatic and rhetorical. For example, he asserted:

For God’s sake, hold your tongue and let me love.
Donne is original not only in the matter of love but also in the concept of woman. Except his beloved, all women are false and faithless:

Nor can you more judge woman’s thoughts by tears,
Than by her shadow, what she wears,
O perverse sex, where none is true but she,
Who’s therefore true, because her truth kills me.

Probably in his early youth, he had known many women inside out. He knew love as sex attraction, as an impulse for physical gratifica-tion. He boasted of his conquests and ridiculed jealous husbands in his poems. But at the same time, he was not oblivious of love as the marriage of true minds, as the merging of one soul into another. His
passionate pleas to his beloved for union in Love’s infiniteness is a case in point. True love is neither subject to time nor decay:

All other things to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay.

Conclusion: - Every great writer is both a creature and creator of the age. In certain aspects, he is influenced by his times; in certain ways, he gives a new ideal to the age in which, he is born. Donne reflects in his poetry the aspiration, the adventure and the conflict of the age. He reacts to the humanism and the religious fervour of his time. He also gives a new direction to the literary activity of his age. He, in a sense, founded—the “metaphysical lyric” which was practised by a score of writers. He also set up new traditions in versification. By and large, Donne must be regarded as an original poet, a poet who gave much more than what he borrowed from his age:

So the fire,
That fills with spirit and heat the Delphic quire,
Which kindled first by the Promethean breath,
Glow’d here a while, lies quench’t now in the death;
The Muse’s garden with Pedantic weeds
O’rspeed was purg’d by thee; the lazie seeds
Of servile imitation thrown away;
And fresh invention planted, thou did pay
The debts of our penurious bankrupt age.

An intellectuality of temper made Donne grapple with his sensations and emotions and transform them into intellectual moulds. In this lies his unification of sensibility, otherwise his thinking is unsystematic. There is an indiscriminate mixing of the old and the new, and he arrives at no synthesis as scientific thinker, although it is with him that the new temper of the Renaissance culture, and the scientific temper, enters poetry. Of all the poets of the Jacobean age, he most successfully articulated the scientific ideas of his time. It was an age of intellectual and cultural transition and Donne was analytically concerned with the forces shaping contemporary thought and sensibility. It was this duality of his mind which, more than anything else, made him the founder of a new school of poetry.

The English Metaphysical Poets and Poetry

Introduction: - The term "metaphysical" as applied to Donne and his followers is, more or less, a misnomer. However, it has come to stick. It was Dryden who first applied the term in relation to Donne's poetry. "He affected," complained Dryden, "the metaphysics, not only in his satires but in his amorous verses." Dr. Johnson borrowed Dryden's ideas, and in his "Life of Cowley" called Cowley a poet of the metaphysical school of Donne.

He derided Cowley's pedantic exhibition of his learning and vocabulary in his poems. But the exhibition of their learning was only one of the many characteristics of the metaphysical poets. Their love of daring imagery, enigmatic expression, and a peculiar sensualism uneasily wedded to a mystical conception of religion, their intellectualism and taste for the expression of novel ideas in a novel manner, were some other qualities. The term "metaphysical" denotes, according to Saintsbury, "the habit, common to this school of poets, of always seeking to express something after, something behind, the simple, obvious first sense and suggestion of a subject." In this way Donne and his followers strike a note of variance from Spenser and the Spenserians and Elizabethan poetry in general.
Composite Quality: - According to Grierson, metaphysical poetry, in the full sense of the term, is a poetry which like Dante's Divine Comedy and Goethe's Faust "has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and of the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence." It arises when the physical world loses its stability, and the people lose faith in the orthodox patterns of thought and belief. At such times sensitive poets turn their attention inwards, and through self-analysis aim at better understanding of themselves, their situation in the world, and their relation to a philosophic or idealised "otherworld." The age in which Donne lived witnessed a gradual crumbling ?: the old order of things, the disturbing progress of science, and the scepticism which went with it. "The new philosophy", said Donne, "calls all in doubt". The realisation that the earth is not the centre of the universe, and the inference that man is not the greatest of all :reatures, dealt a rude blow to the orthodox Christian complacency. Donne's search for some principle of coherence in a world of chaos led ~.im to the reconciliation of opposites-resolution of doubts and the :-.egration of the world of reality with the world of the imagination, of sensual cynicism and highflown mysticism, and even of carnal and spiritual longings. This led him surely to the employment of what have been dubbed "metaphysical conceits" and an occasional display of rot-of-the-way, recondite learning. The subtler points of his feeling found outlet quite often in obscure and enigmatic expression which has been the delight of some, and the despair of many readers. In spite of Donne's obscurity and persistent intellectualism it may be said to his credit as a love poet that he imported into English love poetry a vigorous element of hard realism (which sometimes amounts even to cynicism). In this respect he scored a big advance over Spenser and his school who glorified Platonic love and celebrated almost unearthly and highly conventional mistresses of the Petrarchan tradition. Donne's "ead was accepted by a large number of poets succeeding him. Among them may be mentioned Herbert, Vaughan, Carew, Crashaw, Trasherne, early Milton, and Cowley. These poets are often classed together as "metaphysicals" or "metaphysical poets". Apart from them the influence of Donne and his school may also be discerned in the work of a sizable number of poets who flourished in the Caroline period. In fact the metaphysical vein was in evidence as a major current in the stream of English poetry till the age of Dryden, when it gave place to nee-classicism ushered in by him.

Now let us consider some salient characteristics of the poetry of the metaphysical school.

"Undissociated Sensibility": - The most important characteristic of the metaphysicals is their possession of, or striving after, what T. S. Eliot calls "undissociated sensibility" (the combination of thought and feeling) which Milton was to "split" later. However, Prof. L. C. Knights in his essay "Bacon and the Dissociation of Sensibility" in Explorations puts forward the view that sensibility came to be dissociated much earlier by Bacon. The metaphysicals are "constantly amalgamating disparate experiences" and forming new wholes out of materials so diverse as "reading Spinoza, falling in love and smelling the dinner cooking." Donne has the knack of presenting together different objects which have between them a quite remote though undeniable similarity. He connects the abstract with the concrete, the remote with the near, the physical with the spiritual, and the sublime with the commonplace and sometimes during moments of the most serious meditation breaks into a note of sardonic humour or pathetic frivolity. This juxtaposition and, sometimes, interfusion of apparently dissimilar or exactly opposite objects often pleasantly thrills us into a new perception of reality. And Donne, says Hayward, is a "thrilling poet." Donne wrote:

    Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one,
    Inconstancy naturally hath begot
A constant habit.
These "contraries" meeting in Donne's poetry "vex" not only the poet but also, sometimes, his readers. His successors handled these contraries rather crudely, with very unpleasant effects.

Metaphysical Wit and Conceits: - Dr. Johnson was the first critic to point out the tendency of the metaphysical poets to yoke radically different images forcibly together. This tendency arose, according to T. S. Eliot, from their undissociated sensibility. But it may be objected that Donne and his followers do not really seem to be serious and spontaneous in the tendency noted by Dr. Johnson. When Donne compares a pair of lovers to a pair of compasses, is he not speaking with his tongue in cheek? Such a tendency is a true manifestation of the metaphysical wit. Hobbes in his Leviathan defined wit as the capability to find out similarities between things which may look very dissimilar. When Carew said that Donne

ruled, as he thought fit,
The universal monarchy of wit
He was most probably referring to wit in this sense. All the metaphysicals have an incorrigible aptitude for witty comparisons, juxtaposition, and imagery, and what may be called "the metaphysical conceit"....some strained or far-fetched comparison or figure of speech. Dr. Johnson defined the wit of the metaphysicals as a kind of discordia concors, combination of dissimilar images. Let us consider some instances of this discordia concors. In Donne's Twicknam Garden we meet with the expression "spider love." Now, we are used to splendid, decorative, or moving images in connexion with the subject of love; but the word "spider" is quite contrary to our expectation. In the same poem the lover's tears are called the wine of love. The poet invites lovers to come equipped with phials to collect his tears! In another poem we have the very quaint line:

A holy, thirsty dropsy melts me yet.
The word "holy" is highly serious, "thirsty" stands for a simple revsical need, and "dropsy"...the name of a disease...has a clinical tKcTig. Again, consider the lines :

Go tell court-huntsmen, that the king will ride;
Call country 'ants to harvest offices.
See how the king and country ants are juxtaposed.

Learnedness: - The poetry of the metaphysicals has the impress of very vast learning. Whatever be the demerits of the metaphysical poets, even Dr. "rhnson had to admit that for writing such poetry it was at least -cessary to think and read. However, it may be said that this poetry is r-ain-sprung, mot heart-felt. It is intellectual and witty to a fault. Dr. "onson noted, that the metaphysical poets sometimes drew their conceits from "recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers rf poetry." Learning is an asset for a poet. Our quarrel with the -etaphysicals is not that they are learned but that, sometimes, they show off their learning just to impress the reader. An imaginative and learned writer, says Edmund Blunden, "calls for annotation, but the object of his difficult allusions is to give shape to his ideas of the world, of the soul, not to de/cide matters of astronomy, physics, geography and natural history/" Many of Donne's followers do not always prove so "imagin ative."

Paradoxical Ratiocination: - According to Grierson, the hallmarks of metaphysical poetry are pftssionate feeling and paradoxical ratiocination. The same critic observes that the metaphysicals "exhibited deductive reasoning carried to a high pitch." Too often does Donne state at the beginning of a poem a hopelessly insupportable proposition, which he defends soon after. Consider the poem "The Indifferent" which opens as below:
I can love both fair and brown.
Whatever qualities a woman has are made into so many reasons for loving her! Again, note this in his poem "The Broken Heart":

He is stark mad, who ever says,
That he hath been in love one hour.

With his tremendous ratiocinative ability Donne defends this proposition. In "The Flea" the proposition presented to his mistress is:

This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed. and marriage temple is.

It seems an unpromising subject, but there are twenty-seven lines of packed argument to drive it home. This excessive intellectualism not unoften makes for obscurity. See, for instance, the following clever lines:

You that are she and you, that's doubk she,
In her dead face half of yourself shall see.

Commenting on these, Tucker Brooke says: "The meaning can be made out, but the satisfaction of his mental ingenuity in so doing is the only reward the reader will receive." Lucas complains: "Donne treats poetry as a trapeze for mental frisks." Clay Hunt disapproves such "pyrotechnics of wit."

Diction and Versification: - In style and versification Donne and his fellowesi reacted against the cloying sweetness and harmony of the school of Spenser. The metaphysicals deliberately avoided conventional poetic expressions as they had lost their meaning through O'eruse. According to Wordsworth the language of poetry should "the natural language of impassioned feeling." The metaphysicals employed very "prosaic" words as if they were scientists or shopkeepers. The result is that in their work we often stumble against ragged and unpoetic words we seldom expect in serious poetry. The versification of the metaphysicals is also, like their diction, coarse and jerky in contrast to the honeyed smoothness of much of Elizabethan poetry. Their revolt, according to Grierson, is due to two motives:

(i) The desire to startle; and
(ii) The desire to approximate poetic to direct, unconventional colloquial speech.

Donne could "sing" whenever he liked, but often he seems to be bending and cracking the metrical pattern to the rhetoric of direct and vehement utterance." He very often throws all prosodic considerations to the winds and distributes his stresses not according to the metre but according to the sense. "In his work", say Tucker Brooke, "the Pierian flood is no clear spring: it is more like a Yellowstone geyser: overheated, turbid, explosive, and far from pure." Donne and other metaphysicals' metrical infelicity has been adversely commented upon by all.-But, to be fair, we may say that Donne writes as one who will say what he has to say without regard to the conventions of poetic diction or smooth verse; but what he has to say is subtle and surprising and so are often the metrical effects with which it is presented.

Religious Poetry of the Metaphysicals: - Most of the metaphysical poets wrote on religion. Indeed, we owe most of our good religious poetry to them. It must be emphasised that all the metaphysicals do not write exactly alike. All of them are strongly marked individuals. The English metaphysical poetry from Donne to Traherne should be treated not as a type but as a movement. Donne's religious poetry has all the qualities we have detailed above. Herbert followed Donne in most respects. He has been called the "saint" of the metaphysical school. His approach to God and Christ is full of, what
Edmund Gosse calls, "intimate tenderness." But he does use the imagery and conceits of the Donnean type. His Temple was the most popular Anglican poem of the age. Herbert had two distinguished followers— Vaughan and Crashaw. They acknowledged their debts to Herbert, but they had tempers fundamentally their own. Vaughan is temperamentally a mystic though he uses conceits after the manner of Donne and Herbert-conceits such as "stars shut up shop" when the arrival of the morning is described. He is at his best while dealing with such themes as childhood, communion with nature, and eternity. His thoughts concerning childhood, in his poem The Retreat are largely echoed by Wordsworth in the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Childhood. His poem The World has a daring image:

I saw eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light.
All calm as it was bright.

Crashaw's poetry is uneven work. Whereas Herbert is a gentle stream, Crashaw is an impetuous torrent. He is quite undisciplined and given to moods of religious exaltation and excitement. He has a taste for daring images and metaphysical conceits. The eyes of Mary Magdalene in The Weeper are described as

Two walking baths; two weeping motions;
Potable and compendious oceans.

"He sings", says a critic, "the raptures of soul visited by divine love in terms as concrete and glowing as any human lover has ever used to celebrate an earthly passion." Herein, again, his debt to Donne is discernible. It is the mystic vein in Thomas Traherne which tempts a critic to classify him with Vaughan among the metaphysicals. Traherne is not a great poet, however. He contemplates the beauty of God's universe till it stirs in him a mystic response. Like Vaughan he idealises childhood as the age in which a human being is nearest God. Crashaw was the only Roman Catholic among the metaphysical poets; and Andrew Marvell, Milton's secretary, the only Puritan. Unlike most Puritans. Marvell was not a hide-bound fanatic; rather he appears in the colour of a Christian humanist dating from the Elizabethan age. He as a poet has been assigned a quite high status by the school of modern critics led by F. R. Leavis. But in him we find English poetry already on its way to the neo-classicism of Dryden's school. His greatest poem "To His Coy Mistress" is secular (and not religious) in theme and execution. He urges his "coy" mistress to shed her coyness and make the best of the opportunity granted by Time to them to make merry.

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime...
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.

The following lines have tragic pathos wedded to a metaphysical conceit:

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

The Contribution of the Metaphysical Poets to English Literature:

(1) The metaphysical poets have given to the English language its best religious poetry. The moods of incisive introspection and mysticism could best be expressed not through commonplace, conventional poetic images and language but unconventional and bold imagery which would jolt the mind and spirit of the reader into an intimate rapport
with the mood of the poet. Herbert, Donne, Vaughan, Crashaw, and Traherne are the most important among the religious English poets of all ages.

(2) In the field of love poetry, too, the contribution of the metaphysicals is considerable and quite important from the historical point of view. When Donne appeared on the stage, Spenser and his followers were following the Petrarchan tradition of highly sentimental and idealised love poetry which had not much to do with reality. Donne demolished this claptrap and started a vein of highly realistic, frankly sensual, and sometimes, downright cynical, amatory verse. He was critical of the Elizabethan sonneteers and lyricists who put their mistresses, real or imaginary, on the pedestal of a deity, and pretended to woo them as their "servants,'" dying or living in accordance with their moods of rejection or acceptance of their supplications. Donne was frank enough.

Love's not so pure and abstract as they use
To say which have no mistress but their Muse.
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do

(3) Even in the ruggedness and occasional vulgarity of their r-con and versification the metaphysical did some service to English poetry in that they made the poets realise that the "smoothness of rrmbers" alone does not make for great poetry. What was needed was a hard core of sense and deft handling of experience related to the poet himself who reserved for himself the liberty to employ whatever diction and style he thought was eminently suitable for his purpose. After Donne and his followers the mere music of poetry could not capture for it any appreciative audience.

(4) The intellectualism of the metaphysical poetry and the compositeness of its imagery, and even the crabbed nature of its style, secured for it a continuous stream of readers from generation to generation. In the modern times all these qualities appear agreeable to a large number of readers. The modern poets, particularly T. S. Eliot, living in an age of crumbling values (like the age of Donne), have found a guide and a source of inspiration in Donne. It is not surprising, then, that in the modern critical canon Donne is rated as one of the best English poets.

**John Donne: a love poet**

Donne was the first English poet to challenge and break the supremacy of Petrarchan tradition. Though at times he adopts the Petrarchan devices, yet his imagery and rhythm, texture and colour of his love poetry is different. There are three distinct strains of his love poetry – Cynical, Platonic and Conjugal love.

Giving an allusion to Donne’s originality as the poet of love, Grierson makes the following observation: “His genius temperament and learning gave a certain qualities to his love poems ... which arrest our attention immediately. His love poems, for instance, do have a power which is at once realistic and distracting.”

Donne’s greatness as a love-poet arises from the fact that this poetry covers a wider range of emotions than that of any previous poet. His poetry is not bookish but is rooted in his personal experiences. Is love experience were wide and varied and so is the emotional range of his love-poetry. He had love affairs with a number of women. Some of them were lasting and permanent, other were only of a short duration.

Donne is quite original in presenting the love situations and moods. The “experience of love” must produce a “sense of connection” in both the lovers. This “sense of connection” must be based on equal urge and longing on both the sides.

“The room of love” must be shared equally by the two partners.
Donne magnifies the ideal of “Sense of connection” into the physical fulfillment of love.

"My face in thine eyes thine in mime appears"

This aspect of love helps him in the virtual analysis of the experience of love. Donne was a shrewd observer who had first hand knowledge of "love and related affairs. That is why in almost all his poems, he has a deep insight.

His love as expressed in his poetry was based not on conventions but on his own experiences. He experienced all phase of love – platonic, sensuous, serene, cynical, conjugal, illicit, lusty, picturesque and sensual. He could also be grotesque blending thought with passion.

Another peculiar quality of Donne’s love lyrics is its “metaphysical strain”. His poems are sensuous and fantastic. Donne’s metaphysical strain made his reader confused his sincerity.

Donne’s genius temperament and learning gave to his love poems power and fascination. There is a depth and range of feeling unknown to the majority of Elizabethan poets. Donne’s poetry is startlingly unconventional even when he dallies, half ironically, with the hyperboles of petrarch.

Donne is realistic not an idealistic. He knows the weakness of Flesh, the pleasure of sex, the joy of secret meeting. However he tries to establish a relationship between the body and the soul. Donne is very realistic poet.

Grierson distinguished three distinct strains in it. First there is the cynical strain. Secondly, there is the strain f conjugal love to be noticed in poems like “valediction: forbidding mourning”. Thirdly, there is platonic strain. The platonic strain is to b found in poems like “Twicknam Garden”, “The Funeral”, “The Blossoms”, and “The Primroses”. These poems were probably addressed to the high-born lady friends. Towards them he adopts the helpless pose of flirtations and in high platonic vein boasts that:

Different of sex no more we know
Than our Guardian Angles doe

In between the cynical realistic strain and the highest spiritual strain, there are a number of poems which show an endless variety of mood and tone. Thus thee are poems in which the tone is harsh, others which are coarse and brutal, still other in which he holds out a making threat to his faithless mistress and still others in which he is in a reflective mood. More often that not, a number of strains and moods are mixed up in the same poem. This makes Donne as a love poet singularly, original, unconventional and realistic.

Whatever may be the tone or mood of a particular poem, it is always an expression of some personal experience and is, therefore, presented with remarkable force, sincerity and seriousness. Each poem deals with a love situation which is intellectually analyzed with the skill of an experienced lawyer.

Hence the difficult nature of his poetry and the charge of obscurity have been brought against him. The difficulty of the readers is further increased by the extreme condensation and destiny of Donne’s poetry.

The fantastic nature of the metaphysical conceits and poetry would become clear even we examine a few examples. In “Valediction: Forbidden Mourning” true lovers now parted are likened to the legs of a compass. The image is elaborated at length. The lovers are spiritually one, just as the head of the compass is one even when the legs are apart. One leg remains fixed and the other moves round it. The lover cannot forget the
beloved even when separated from her. The two loves meet together in the end just as the two legs of the compass are together again, as soon as circle has been drawn.

At other times, he uses equally extravagated hyperboles. For example, he mistakes his beloved to an angel, for to imagine her less than an angle would be profanity.

In Donne’s poetry, there is always an “intellectual analysis” of emotion. Like a clever lawyer, Donne gives arguments after arguments in support of his points of view. Thus in “Valediction: Forbidden Mourning” he proves that true lovers need not mourn at the time of parting. In “Canonization” he establishes that lovers are saints of love and in “The Blossome” he argues against the petrarchan love tradition. In all this Donne is a realistic love poet.

**John Donne as a metaphysical poet**

Metaphysical poetry, in an etymological sense, is poetry on subjects which exist beyond the physical world. In other words, it is a type of poetry dealing with abstract or philosophical subjects such as love, religion, God, beauty, faith and so on. But in reality the poetry which comprises the ideas or aspects that – physical love leading to spiritual union or religious, argumentative presentation of emotion, terseness of expression, use of conceit and wit in profusion, skillful use of colloquial language instead of Elizabethan lucid diction with the abrupt opening can be considered to be metaphysical. Originally the term ‘Metaphysical Poetry’ was coined by John Dryden and later popularised by Samuel Johnson and the features of the school which unite the various authors are quite numerous. As well as making widespread use of conceit, paradox and punning, the metaphysical poets drew their imagery from all sources of knowledge particularly from science, theology, geography and philosophy. However, John Donne is the founder of the school of metaphysical poetry and the other practitioners of the type of poetry are Crashaw, Cowley, Denham, Davenant, Herbert, Marvell, Vaughan and Waller.

The most striking quality of Donne’s poetry is the use of metaphysical conceit which is a figure of speech in which two far-fetched objects or images of very different nature are compared. It surprises its readers by its ingenious discovery and delights them by its intellectual quality. Such conceits are available in his poetry. Such a famous conceit occurs in the poem titled “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”. The conceit reads as:

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“If they be two, they are two so
A stiff twin compasses are two;
They soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th’ other do.”
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Here in the poem the two lovers are compared to the two feet of a compass. The lover is compared to the moving foot and the beloved to the fixed foot consecutively to show the ideal relationship between them. It is made clear that in this relationship the woman’s part is passive and her place is in the home, while the man’s duty is to move in the world of affairs. She stays in the centre apparently unmoving, but certainly as the outer foot moves around describing the circle, the inner foot moves too, revolving on the point which is the centre. The two, in fact, move in harmony and neither is unaffected by the movement of the other. At first sight such a comparison seems to be impossible but after the discovery of the underlying meaning it delights the readers.

Another leading feature of Donne’s poetry is his dramatic presentation that arrests the attention of the readers very quickly. Like other famous poets, Donne has the capacity of opening a poem abruptly adding a dramatic quality to the poem. As we find such abruptness in opening the poem “The Canonization”. The line goes as:
“For God’s sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,”

Upon reading or hearing those opening lines, we can easily understand that the poem begins somewhat in the middle of a conversation. Now the more we advance, the more clear it becomes that why the speaker of the poem makes such a request to the unidentified listener.

Closely related to the dramatic directness and abruptness of opening is Donne’s dexterous use of colloquial speech. This dramatic quality is strengthened by its colloquial tone. In the song: “Go and Catch a Falling Star” we can trace such a quality:

“Go, and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,”

On perusing the two lines we will see that like many other poems Donne has employed colloquial language to make the poem more lifelike. From the lines it is clear that a conversation is going on between two people.

Through all the love poems of Donne, there runs a belief that physical passion is a good thing and he recognises the claim of body side by side with the souls. His love poems enhance its attraction and novelty by blending physical, spiritual and mystical love. Although there is a complexity in the poem, “The Ecstasy” Donne deals twin aspects of love - physical and spiritual; love here is concretised through physical enjoyment of sex and then turns in its pure essence, spiritual. The setting of the two lovers provides the physical closeness by their love is enriched by the mutual understanding of their souls and like heavenly beings that influence the actions of men through manifestation. The soul must express themselves through the bodies. The greatness of the poem lies in reconciling the opposites – physical love and spiritual love, the physical aspects of love must precede the spiritual union. Donne’s poetry lies far reconciling dichotomy between psychical and spiritual shifting quickly from the physical to the spiritual fashion.

“The Sun Rising” is another poem illustrating the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination. The delight of satisfied love is the feeling in the poem, but it is expressed in intellectual terms and not merely in an emotional tone. How well the fusion of feeling and thought is expressed in the finality of:

“She is all States, and all Princes, I
Nothing else is.”

Passion is conveyed in images which are erudite, logical and of an intellectual nature. In the poem, we again see Donne’s ratiocinative style, reasoning step by step towards his conclusion, which in this case, is that love is self-sufficient and unaffected by outside force.

Terseness is another characteristic of all the metaphysical poets. It is true in the case of Donne in particular. And the use of such terseness results in obscurity. Such compactness is traceable in “Go and Catch a Falling Star”.

“No where
Lives a woman true, and fair.”

In the compact idea Donne wants to show that just as it is impossible to catch a falling star in the sky, so a woman with both honesty and fairness is rare to find out as they first seem to be honest but later they are found to be different.

In addition to that, the poems “The Canonization”, “Twicknam Garden”, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”, “Go and Catch a Falling Star” and “The Sun Rising” in one or other
way deal with the abstract idea which is most dominating feature of the metaphysical poetry and is a must for this type of poetry.

Donne was the greatest of the metaphysical poets. In some of their poems he was equalled by Vaughan and Marvell and in religious poetry by Herbert. But the body of his work is poetry of a quality which, when compared with that of any other of these poets, is unsurpassed. When his images are understood in their function of communicating a state of mind, and his ideas in their power to give expression to emotion, Donne’s poetry is appreciated for its wit, beauty and perception. In conclusion, considering all the characteristics of Donne’s poetry as discussed above, Donne can be regarded as a true metaphysical poet. Although he was considered a minor poet till the 20th century, he is regarded as one of the major English poets by T.S. Eliot and other major modern poets.

Conceit in Donne’s poetry

Many of John Donne’s poems contain metaphysical conceits and intellectual reasoning to build a deeper understanding of the speaker’s emotional state. A conceit can be defined as an extended, unconventional metaphor between objects that appear to be unrelated. Metaphysical conceit is a highly ingenious kind of conceit widely used by the metaphysical poets. It often exploits verbal logic to the point of the grotesque and sometimes creates such extravagant turns on meaning that they become absurd. The metaphysical conceit is characteristic of seventeenth century writers influence by John Donne, and became popular again in this century after the revival of the metaphysical poets. However, Donne is exceptionally good at creating unusual unions between different elements in order to illustrate his point and form a persuasive argument in his poems.

By using metaphysical conceits in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”, Donne attempts to convince his beloved (presumably his wife) that parting is a positive experience which should not be looked upon with sadness. In the first stanza, Donne compares the speaker's departure to the mild death of virtuous men who pass on so peacefully that their loved ones find it difficult to detect the exact moment of their death. Their separation must be a calm transition like this form of death which Donne describes. The poet writes,

"Let us melt, and make no noise"

Then we find another example of conceit which was not found in any poems of any poets before. Here he compares the two lovers to the pair of legs of compass. Like the compass they have one central point (love) and two sides (bodies) which note in a circle. Here he says,

"If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two,
Thy soule the fix foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the 'other doe"

Similarly, in the poem, "The Good-Morrow", we find some startling and shocking or fantastic conceits which had never before found. Here he says, the lover is a whole world to his beloved and she is a whole world to him, not only that they are two better hemispheres who constitute the whole world. Here the poet says,

"Where can we finde two better hemispheres,
Without sharpe North, without declining West?"

Again he says that as the four elements, earth, air, fire and water were supposed to combine to form new substance, so two souls mix to form a new unity. The strength and
durability of this new unit is dependent upon how well the elements of the two souls are balanced, as we see from these lines from The Good-Morrow:

What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
It our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.

In the poem "The sunne Rising" there are a lot of conceits in almost every stanza. The poet says that the lover can eclipse and cloud the sun with a wink. He says,

"I could eclipse and cloud them with a winke"

Again he says that the beloved lying in the bed by the lover's side is to his both west and East Indies; the beloved is all states and the lover is all princes. He says,

She's all states, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is"

In the poem "The Canonization", we find the use of conceit. Organic imagery is a strong point of this poem. In the second stanza, the poet says,

"Alas, alas. who's injur'd by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?"

The poet assumes that a lover's ship have the power to drown ships, that his tears may flood the grounds, that his "colds" may bring about the season of winter, and that his "heats" may bed to the list of deaths by plague. (These are all fantastic hyperboles. The poet is, of course, mocking at the Petrarchan exaggeration). Then he says,

"We' are Tapers too and at our own cost die"

The beloved is one fly, the lover is another fly. And they are tapers too. In then are to be found the Eagle and the Dove. They provide a clue to the riddle of the phoenix because they are one representing both sexes. These are all fantastic conceits.

In the poem "The Extasie", we find conceits. Here he says that the souls of the lovers have left their bodies temporarily and are communicating with each other (like two armies facing each other). And the images of the two lovers in each other's eyes are regarded as the lovers "propagation" or the issue which they have produced. And the two souls of the lovers have become one and the resultant soul is abler or finer than each taken singly. Moreover, the bodies are spheres, and the lovers' minds or souls the intelligences which move the sphere.

In the poem "The Flea", we find another use of conceit where the Flea is thought to be their marriage temple as well as their marriage bed because it sucks a tiny drop of blood from the lover's and the beloved's body. And according to the poet it means that they two have got married. Here he says,

"Marke but this flea ,and marke in this,
Low little that which thou deny'st me is;
Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;"

The killing of the flea will mean destroying three lives - those of the poet, his beloved and the insect. It will also be an act of sacrilege because a temple will be destroyed. He says that the beloved should surrender her body to the poet because she will, by doing so, lose just as little honour as the life she has lost by a drop of her blood having been sucked by the flea.

In summing up we can say that John Donne's poetry is abound with metaphysical conceits. Conceits are the effortless creation of John Donne. To him, conceits come to his
poetry as leaves come to the tree. And for the use of conceits he stands supreme and mostly for such uses of conceit, he becomes the best metaphysical poet.

**Donne: A Religious Poet**

The intensity of Donne’s feeling and the inner conflict is reflected in his religious poetry. His religious sonnets and songs are intensely personal and sincere. Donne was a Catholic by birth. He felt humbled and persecuted like other Catholics of his age. Religion, for most of the people, was a matter of accident.

Those who liked antiquity and tradition turned to Rome, those who disliked formality and ritual turned to Geneva. But, religion should be, according to Donne, a matter of deliberate choice, made after careful study and consideration. Many of the principles Rome did not stand his intellectual inquiry. It is difficult to fix the precise date of his conversion. It is, however, Convenient to assume that by 1598, when Donne entered Sir Thomas Egerton’s service, he must have embraced the Church of England. Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, could never have employed a distinguished Catholic for important public duty.

Donne’s conversion to Anglicanism greatly influenced his poetry. Grierson calls this conversion, a “reconciliation, an acquiescence in the faith of his country—the established religion of his legal sovereign”. Probably, the Renaissance spirit, leaning towards nationalism, was partly responsible for Donne's change of faith. But the conversion caused Donne some pangs and heart-searching. Dr. Johnson says: “A convert from Popery to Protestantism gives up so much of what he has held as sacred as anything that he retains; there is so much laceration of mind in such a conversion, that it can hardly be sincere and lasting”. Undoubtedly, Donne felt this laceration of the mind and this conflict between the old and the new faith. “Show me dear Christ thy spouse so bright and clear”. There was also the other conflict in Donne—the conflict between ambition and asceticism, between the prospects of civil service and the claims of a religious life. But after a number of years, Donne continued to retain a soft corner for Catholics.

**MAIN ASPECTS OF DONNE’S RELIGIOUS POETRY**

Donne was essentially a religious man, though he moved from one denomination to another. His spirit of rational faith continued throughout his life. The following are the main aspects of Donne’s religious poetry:

**Conflict and doubt: -** As a man of the Renaissance, he could not but question the assumptions and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Being born in a particular religion is one proposition and being convinced of the Tightness of one’s faith, is quite another. As he was sceptical of the religious dogmas of the Catholic Church, he adopted the Anglican faith, but even so his mind was not at peace. He could not reconcile the inner conflicts and as such he prayed for God’s mercy and grace, so that he might be able to build his faith on a sound foundation. In his A Hymn to God the Father, he ultimately arrives at a firm faith. It is perhaps the culmination of his spiritual quest.

**Note of introspection: -** The metaphysical clement which is so evident in his love poems, finds expression of an inner heart searching. He digs deep within himself in order to measure his sincerity and devotion to God and above all his consciousness of sin and the need of penitence. His fear of death—Donne must have seen many of his friends on their death-beds and their last struggles—makes him repent for his past follies and hence his prayer to God for His mercy and compassion. The Holy Sonets particularly maybe regarded as poems of repentance, and supplications for divine grace. Donne's
intention is not to preach morality or to turn men to virtue. Grierson writes in this connection: “To be didactic is never the first intention of Donne’s religious poems, but rather, to express himself, to analyse and lay bare his own moods of agitation, of aspiration and of humiliation, in the quest of God, and the surrender of his soul to Him. The same erudite and surprising imagery, the same passionate, and reasoning strain, meet us in both”.

The themes of his religious poetry: - Donne found the contemporary world dry and corrupt. He felt that its degeneration would lead to untold human misery. The main theme of his religious poems is the transitoriness of this world, the fleeting nature of physical joys and earthly happiness, the sufferings of the soul imprisoned in the body and the pettiness and insignificance of man. Above all, the shadow of death is all pervasive and this makes him turn to Christ as the Saviour. Even so, his metaphysical craftsmanship treats God as ‘ravisher’ who saves him from the clutches of the Devil. Though Donne regarded the world a vanity of vanities, he could not completely detach himself from the joys of the world and there is a turn from other-worldliness to worldliness. However, we cannot doubt the sincerity of his religious feelings and his earnest prayer to God for deliverance. His moral earnestness is reflected in his consciousness of sin and unworthiness for deserving the grace of Christ. He uses the images of Christ as a lover who will woo his soul.

Parallelism with love poetry: - There is a great similarity of thought and treatment between the love poems and holy sonnets, though the theme is different. The spirit behind the two categories of poems is the same. There is the same subtle spirit which analyses the inner experiences like the experiences of love. The same kind of learned and shocking imagery is found in the love poems:

Is the Pacific sea my home? or are
The Eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyam, and Magellan, and Gibraltar.
All straits (and none but straits) are ways to them.
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Ham, or Shem.

Similarly in his treatment of divine love, the poet uses sexual images in holy situations. As for example:

Betray kind husband thy spouse to cur sights,
And let mine amorous soul court thy mild Dove
Who is most true, and pleasing to thee then
When she’s embraced and open to most men.

CRITICAL SURVEY OF DONNE’S RELIGIOUS POETRY

There are two notes in Donne’s religious poems—the Catholic and the Anglican. The Progress of the Soul leans towards Catholicism and it records the doubts and longings of a troubled subtle soul. The following lines show the working of the mind and are full of bold and echoing vowel sounds:

O might those sights and tears return again
Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent.
That I might in this holy discontent
Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourned in vain;
In mine Idolatory what showers of rain
Mine eyes did waste? What grieves my heart did vent?
That sufferance was my sin; now I repent.
Cause I ‘did suffer I must suffer pain.
The Progress of the Soul, though written in 1601 was published after his death, in 1633. Ben Jonson called it “the conceit of Donne’s transformation.” Donne describes his theme in the very first stanza.

I sing the progress of a deathless soul
Whom Fate, which God made, but doth not control
Pla’d in most shapes; all lines before the low
Yok’d us, and when; and since, in this I sing.

He describes the soul of heresy which began in paradise (in the apple) and roamed through souls of Luther, Mahomed and Calvin and is now at rest in England:

The great soul which here among us now
Doth dwell, and moves that hand, and tongue and brow,
Which as the moon the sea moves us.

Donne moves from the aesthetic to the ethical plane of existence. His curiosity about the microcosm and his scepticism find expression here:

There’s nothing simply good, nor all alone,
Of every quality comparison,
The only measure is, and judge, opinion.

The poem was written soon after the inner crisis and his conversion:

For though through many straits and lands I roam,
I launch at Paradise and I sail towards home.

The psychological problem finds its solution in a spiritual reintegration.

The Divine Poems include ‘La Corona’ and six holy sonnets on Annunciation, Nativity, Temple Crucifying, Ressurrection and Ascension. Donne seeks divine grace to crown his efforts:

But do not with a vile crown of frail bays,
Reward my muses white sincerity,
But what thy thorny crown gain’d, that gives me
A crown of glory, which doth flower always.

The other, group of sonnets also entitled Holy Sonnets contains 19 sacred poems. They belong to the period of doubt and intense inner struggle which preceded Donne’s entry into the Church of England. Here is a mood of melancholy and despair.

This is my play’s last scene here heavens appoint.
My pilgrimage’s last mile. (Sonnet VI)
Despair behind and death before doth caste
Such terror and my feeble flesh doth waste.

In sonnet II, Christ appears as a lover and Donne as a temple usurped by the Devil.

Myself a temple of thy spirit divine

Why doth the devil then usurp on me...
In Sonnet III, Donne is sincerely repentant for his past sins:

That I might in this holy discontent
Mourn with some fruit, as I have moun’d in vain....
No ease, for long, yet vehement grief hath been
The effect and cause, the punishment and sin.

In Sonnet IV, Donne compares himself to a felon charged with treason, and yet he cannot resist conceits.
Christ’s blood, though red, will whiten the souls stained and polluted with sin.
Oh make thyself with holy mourning black
And red with blushing, as them an with sin;
Or wash thee in Christ’s blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red souls to white.
Sonnet V shows Donne’s Renaissance-spirit–his wander-lust:

You which beyond that heaven which was most high
Have found new spheres, and of new lands, can write,
Power new seas in ruined eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly.
Donne prays sincerely for pardon for his misdeeds:

Teach me how to repent; for that’s as good
As if thou hadst seal’d my pardon, with thy blood.
The pilgrim-soul is not afraid of death.
Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.
In Sonnet XIII, Donne brings forward the argument that because beautiful women have liked him in his youth, so Christ, the Incarnation of Beauty, should be kind to him:

No, no; but as in my idolatry,
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pity, foulness only is
A sign of rigour: so I say to thee.
In Sonnet XVII, Donne refers to the death of his wife which has now made him turn his attention to spiritual attainment:

Since she whom I lov’d hath paid her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead.
In Sonnet XVIII, Donne expresses his desire to see the true church (England, Rome, Geneva) undivided, because it is indivisible. The bride of Christ is the mistress of the whole world.

Who is most true, and pleasing to thee then

When she is embrac’d and open to most men.
The Hymn to God, written during his serious illness in 1623, is a sincere prayer to God to receive him in His grace:

So, in his purple wrapp’d receive me Lord,
By these his thorns give me his other Crown,
And as to others’ souls I preach’d thy word
Be this my Text my sermon to mine own,
Therefore that he may arise the lord throws down.
The Divine Poems contain a vivid and moving record of a brilliant mind struggling towards God. Truth, is the goal but there are hurdles and temptations in the way. Donne is not afraid of analysing the appalling difficulties of faith. The vacillations, the doubts, of this imperfect but sincere man are reflected in all their passion. Donne’s aim is not didactic or moral; he wishes to lay bare his own moods, his aspirations, his sins, his humiliation in the quest of God. He is the most sincere and introspective Anglican poet of the seventeenth century. He had experienced the intensification of religious feeling mentioned in the holy sonnets. Walton writes: “His aspect was cheerful and such as gave a silent testimony of a clear knowing soul, of a conscience at peace with itself. His melting eye showed that he had a soft heart full of noble compassion, of too brave a soul
to offer injuries and too much a Christian not to pardon them in others.” W.B. Yeats, a mystic poet, writes of Donne, “his pedantries and his obscenities, the rock and loam of his Eden, but make us the more certain that one who is but a man like us all has seen God!”

**Conclusion:** Some critics question use of the metaphysical method in holy sonnets and religious poems. Grierson, however, justifies use of the metaphysical method in these serious poems. He writes: “Here, he recaptures the peculiar charm of his early love verse their best, the unique blend of passionate feelings and rapid subtle thinking, the strange sense that his verse gives of a certain conflict between the passionate thought and the varied and often elaborate pattern into which he moulds its expression, resulting in a strange blend of harshness and constraint with reverberating and penetrating harmony. No poems give more...the sense of conflict of soul, of faith and hope snatched and held desperately....”

Donne’s religious poetry cannot be called mystical poetry. Donne does not forget his self as the mystics do. His is always conscious of his environment, of the world in which he lives and of his passionate friendships. As such his religious poetry lacks the transparent ecstasy found in great religious poetry. Helen White writes in this connection: “There was something in Donne’s imagination that drove it out in those magnificent figures that sweep earth and sky, but whatever emotion such passages arouse in us, Donne was not the man to lose himself. In another world beyond the release of death, he hoped to see his God face to face, and without end. But he was not disposed to anticipate the privileges of that world in this, nor even in general try to do so... The result is that in most of the mystical passages in both his poetry and his prose, the marvellous thrust into the ineffable is followed by a quick pull-back into the world of there-and-now with its lucid sense-detail and its ineluctable common sense.”

Donne’s holy sonnets are deservedly famous and are remarkable. They embody his deeply felt emotions in a language reflecting conscious craftsmanship.

### The Wit of John Donne

**What is wit:** It is difficult to give a satisfactory definition of wit. The dictionary definition mentions a keen perception and cleverly apt expression of amusing words or ideas or of those connections between ideas which awaken amusement and pleasure. Wit is revealed in the unusual or ingenious use of words rather than in the subject-matter.

Inferior wit lies in the use of paradox, pun, oxymoron and word-play. Higher wit is the discovery of conceits and the assembly and synthesis of ideas which appear dissimilar or incongruous.

> In a true piece of wit, all things must be<br>Yet all these things agree<br>As in the Ark join’d without force or strife<br>All creatures dwelt, all creatures that had life (Cowley)

Donne is remarkable as much for his metaphysical element as for his wit. Hartley Coleridge, however, pokes fun at Donne’s wit:

> Twist iron pokers into true love knots<br>Coining hard words not found in polyglots.

**Peculiar wit:** Donne has been called “the monarch of wit’. Dryden wrote: “If we are not so great wits as Donne, we are certainly better poets.” Pope echoed the same thought: “Donne had no imagination, but as much wit, I think, as any writer can possibly
have.” Dr. Johnson felt that Donne’s wit lay in the discovery of hidden resemblances in dissimilar things.

Donne’s wit is deliberate and peculiar. It impresses us with its intellectual vigour and force and does not merely lie in the dexterous or ingenious use of words. Secondly, it comes naturally from the author’s expansive knowledge and deep scholarship. According to Leishman, Donne’s wit lies in his imprudent and shocking language. T.S. Eliot, however, finds his wit in the fusion of opposites—the blend of thought and feeling, what he calls ‘sensuous apprehension of thought’.

The wit of Donne stands in a class by itself. Though his wit has points in common with Caroline poets, it has certain points which are peculiarly its own. Moreover, there is a world of difference between the wit of Shakespeare and Pope and the wit of the metephysical poets. T.S. Eliot remarks: “The wit of the Caroline poets is not the wit of Shakespeare, and it is not the wit of Dryden, the great master of contempt, or of Pope, the great master of disgust.” In Elizabethan poets, wit is decorative and ornamental. It is a result of light-hearted fancy or strange setting. In Donne, wit is the result of weighty thought and brooding imagination. It is a living image, and a subtle conceit, coloured with the quality of his thought:

**I saw Eternity on the other night.**
Donne’s wit is grave and full of significance and sometimes pregnant with strange ideas.

**Its complexity:**
Donne’s wit is a compound of many similes extracted from many objects and sources. His wit has certain distinct qualities. Donne’s wit is scholastic or dialectical rather than metaphysical. He is fond of a logical sequence, ingenious and far-fetched analysis. In his poem entitled, The Anagram, Donne by a series of dialectical paradoxes defends the preposterous proposition that an old and ugly woman will make a better wife than a young and handsome one.

Similarly Donne defends his apparent gaiety during the absence of his beloved in his own paradoxical manner:

That Love’s a bitter sweet, I never conceive
Till the sour minute comes of taking leave
Another I taste it. But as men drink up
In haste the bottom of a next civned cup
And take some syrup after, so do I.
To put all relish from my memory
Of parting, drown it in the hope to meet
Shortly, again and make our absence sweet.

**Variety of moods:**
Donne’s wit expresses all moods from the gay to the serious, and from the happy to the pessimistic. Sometimes he is flippant and irreverent. In the Flea, he deifies a flea and calls it a marriage temple. In many poems, the poet debunks the customary vows of lovers and the Petrarchan conventions. Sometimes there is self-mockery and the poet plunges from the sublime to the ludicrous. The variety of poems on love like Love’s War, Love’s Diet, Love’s Exchange, Love’s Usury, and Love’s Alchemy shows the range of his passion and wit.

**Mental vigour:**
The secret of Donne’s wit lies in its mental strength and intellectual power. It is an expression of his rational outlook on life, an embodiment of his poetic sensibility, and a reflection of his vision of life. One critic observes in this connection that it is “the outward projection of his sense of the many-sidedness of things, of his manifold possibility, and ultimately a recognition of the multiplicity of experience.” Donne could afford to laugh at established practices and convictions because he disliked humbug and pretence. A critic remarks: “What one sees all the time are established certainties being
crambled, positive pretensions denied or mocked, the very affirmations of the poem doubted or discredited before it ends, and a few certitudes won by hard proof in the face of contingent circumstance”.

**Irony:** The secret of Donne’s wit lies in his use of irony. Irony is a literary device by which words express a meaning that is often the direct opposite of the intended meaning. In this manner, the poet by implication comments on the situation. Donne’s irony is noticed in his attitude to love which can, to an extent, be summed up in the phrase: “What fools these mortals be!” The indignation and mockery takes on a literary phraseology and the intention of the poet is obvious. A.J. Smith writes in this connection: “The outright mockery of people and sects, and the impugning of motives in general, certainly isn’t cynical. It expresses a perspective which takes the world’s activities as ludicrous feverishness in respect of bedrock human certainties; not however occasion for despair but, diverting by their own zestful life. The overturning of accepted evaluations seems the more convincing because it is the reverse of solemn: and because it emphatically doesn’t imply any rejection of experience, but rather a delight in it.”

**Comparisons:** Donne’s analogies are apt and full-blooded. In Love’s War, Donne compares the qualities of a good lover and a good soldier; as for instance, the capacity to keep awake for nights together, the courage to face an enemy (rival) boldly, to besiege and take by storm, to elude watchmen and sentries. Donne’s analogies are compressed syllogisms. Just look at this syllogism:

- All that is lovable is wonderful
- The mistress is wonderful,
- Therefore the mistress is lovable.

Donne compresses the above argument in the following two lines:

- All love is wonder; if we justly do
- Account her wonderful, why not lovely too?
- At times, Donne’s wit takes the form of epigram:
- If things of sight such Heaven be
- What Heavens are those we cannot see.

Donne makes a sort of pattern of thought, of a mind moving from the contemplation of a fact to a deduction from a fact, and thence to a conclusion. Oliver Elton notes the endless ‘teasing of words and thoughts’. Prof. Croft observes: “Thus the brain-sick fancies are piled up, twaddle upon twaddle, until the whole thing explodes with a passionate contrary or a familiar image.” The notable thing about his comparisons is their novelty and freshness, their references to unlikely things and places. For example, the poet compares the two lovers to the Phoenix and to both the eagle and the dove. The lovers will be resurrected after death like the Phoenix. Joan Bennett observes: “They evoke severe sense memories of a literary heritage. If they evoke memories, they are of large draughts of intellectual drink, imbibed from science rather than poetry. “Donne is in the habit of elaborating a figure to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it.

**Exaggeration:** Exaggeration is an important element in Donne’s wit. This exaggeration appears to be outrageous in its high spiritedness:

- Go and catch a falling star
- Get with child a mandrake root....

Donne being an anti-traditionalist, is keen on shocking people. His wit takes a kind of moral holiday by flouting traditional ideals and morals in several relationships. Dr. Johnson takes exception to Donne’s wit on two grounds, aesthetic and moral. Dr. Johnson is offended by its lack of proportion and decorum, its “fundamental unseriousness, its detachment, and its immorality”
To teach thee, I am naked first, why then
What needst thou have more covering than a man

Dr. Johnson applies Pope’s definition to the works of Donne: “That which had been often thought, but was never before so well expressed”. Donne does not conform to this concept of wit. According to Dr. Johnson, wit is both conventional and new, but the wit of Donne is a combination of dissimilar images, a discovery of the occult resemblances in things unlike. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together, nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtlety surprises, but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased. If they frequently throw their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck at unexpected truth; if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage.

**Paradox:** Dr. Johnson compares Donne’s paradoxes to remarks made by epicurean deities on the actions of men, devoid of interest or emotion. T.S. Eliot is also struck by the “telescoping of images and multiplied associations, constantly amalgamating disparate experiences always forming new wholes out of matter so diverse as reading of Spinoza, falling in love and smelling the dinner cooking”. In one of his satires, Donne emphasises his companion’s inconsistency and absurdity in hating naked virtue, although he loves his naked whore. Leishman dwells on the outrageous hyperbole and perversity of Donne’s wit—“wit, often deliberately outrageous and impudent and coat-trailing, often breath-takingly ingenious in the discovery of comparisons and analogies, but nearly always, in one way or another, argumentative, sagacious, rigid, scholastically argumentative, whether in the defence of preposterous paradoxes or in the mock-serious devising of hyperbolical compliments.”

*She is all States and all Princes, I,*
*Nothing else is.*
*Countries, Towns, Camps, beg of from above*
*A pattern of your love.*

What can be more dramatic and hypothetical than:

*I wonder, by my troth what thou and I Did, till we lov’d?*

When the lover is dead on account of disappointment in love, ghost of the lover will haunt and harass the beloved.

Donne is not merely witty but passionately witty or wittily passionate, in the two poems entitled The Anagram and The Bracelet. The words in themselves are not difficult, but the structure of sentences is far from simple.

**Conclusion:** To some critics, Donne’s wit is one of the means of escape, an escape from boredom and depression which constantly afflicted him during the years of his creative activity. Through wit and intellectual ingenuity, Donne avoids both self-pity and Hamlet-like frustration. Drummond rightly calls him “the best epigrammatist we have found in English”.

In the ultimate reckoning, Donne’s wit may be regarded not only symbolic of his spirit of interrogation and discovery but also the embodiment of introspection and intellectualism, the rebellion and conflict in the mind of Donne.

**Donne’s Contribution to English Style and Language**

Donne has made a remarkable contribution to English poetic diction and versification. In this respect his status is like that of Dryden, Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot. We understand
that the English language became too poetic in the age of Wordsworth, and in that of T.S. Eliot. It lost its touch with the language of everyday life, with the result that it became weak and enervated. Donne endeavoured to re-vitalise and invigorate English language by making it flexible. He imparted to it sinewy strength, energy and vigour.

Donne’s poetry is based on an individual technique. His poetic diction and style is unconventional. The ‘Donne-poem’ is an argument in which a mind living in analogy exploits a chosen situation with a new and elaborate set of inter-connected images. His poems are like voyages of discovery, exploring new worlds of life, love and spirits. They are voyages of the mind which

Cerates, transcending these, and other seas.
Matter more important than words

To Donne, matter was more important than words and the management of the thoughts dictated the form of the poem. De Quincey thought that Donne laid principal stress on the management of thought and secondly on the ornaments of style. Here is a poet who argues in verse accompanied by music. As T.S. Eliot puts it, “A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.”

His love-poems are explorations of the types of love and friendship, from the man’s point of view. They are not so obviously “poetic”, as those of Marvell and Herrick. Excess of intellectual satires and complexity prevent the luminosity and certainty of statement. This partly accounts for his occasional inequality, violence and obscurity. His style stands in a class by itself. Cazamian writes: “Donne will have nothing to do with the easy and familiar, the mythological imagery. At the risk of being enigmatic, he takes pleasure only in the subtle. Passion, feeling, sensuousness—all are subjected to wit. This play of wit sometimes results in astounding hyperbole; sometimes he ingeniously brings together ideas as remote from each other as the antipodes, mingling the lofty and the mean, the sublime and the trivial. He often prefers to a smoothly flowering line, the lines that are freely divided, and in which he accents have an effect of shock, and pull the reader up and awaken his attention”.

Donne’s world of ideas: - The basis of the ‘Donne-poem’ is neither music nor imagery but the idea. There is a basic idea underlying each poem. The idea may be real or fantastic but it is never artificial or affected. Donne is modern in his psychological realism; he believed in the realism of a world of ideas. Donne told his friends that he described “the idea of a woman and not as she was.” He rejected the courtly idea of woman as an angel or a goddess. To him, woman was essentially fickle and inconstant in love. The song beginning, “Go and catch a falling star” is based on the faithlessness of women in love. Nowhere can you find a woman who is faithful to her lover—“Fraility, thy name is woman.” His important poem—The Anniversary—is a record of domestic bliss. The love of Donne and his wife is eternal and immortal and is not subject to decay or death:

All other things, to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday....

His poem—The Sun Rising—is a stern warning to the sun not to disturb the lovers in their bed-chamber. The proper duty of the sun is to call on schoolboys, apprentices and courtiers who must attend to their work in time. His song—“Sweetest Love”—is based on the idea that parting is no doubt sad and painful, but those who love each other sincerely and deeply can never be really parted. This poem was addressed by Donne to his wife when he wanted to go to foreign countries for about six months. He bids her farewell cheerfully, till he meets her again.
Both structural and decorative peculiarities of Donne’s poems: - The ‘Donne-poem’ possesses both structural and decorative peculiarities. Firstly, the metre is not a matter of chance but of choice. The metre is a part and parcel of the fused whole; it is not an ornament super-added. S.T. Coleridge writes: “To read Dryden and Pope, you need only count syllables; but to read Donne you must measure Time and discover Time of each word by the sense of Passion.” You must hear his silences and his eloquence. Examine the following lines of the poem The Relic:

When my grave is broke up again
Some second ghost to entertain,
(For graves have learned that woman-head
To be more than one a bed)
And he that digs it, spies
A bracelet of bright hair about the bone
Will not he let us alone,
And think that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way,
To make their souls, at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

Donne’s interest in music: - Moreover, the greatest metrical variety in the form of syllables and stanzas shows not only the fertility of his genius but also his interest in and ear for music. Let us analyse The Relic and study its metrical effects. The Relic, a love poem, contains three stanzas. Let us read loudly the first stanza to grasp the movement. Each stanza contains eleven lines, of which the first four are octosyllabic or four-footed lines, the fifth and seventh are three footed, and the remainder of the length are—of the blank verse line i.e. decasyllabic. “In reading the first stanza aloud, one sees that the first two lines, regular and equal, broach the theme with a typical Donnian startlingness and boldness, lines three and four have the same length as one and two but their being enclosed in brackets and the dig at woman’s inconstancy which they offer, the meaning is, graves have learnt the feminine trick of being a bed to more than one person; old graves were often dug up to make room for new tenants.”

Donne’s use of simple and colloquial language: - Dryden appreciated Donne for fusing and combining complexity of substance with simplicity of expression. According to Legouis, he did not feel any necessity of mentioning gods and goddesses in his poetry. He rejected all the conventional and traditional poetic devices. He used the different vocabulary and imagery which was quite popular among the masses of his time. In his time, medieval scholastic learning and science was quite popular, although it appears very dull and boring to the modern reader. Donne used all the current phrases and diction of his age. He even expresses complex emotions by means of simple and colloquial diction and phraseology. Thus, he revolted against the Petrarchan, Spenserian and pastoral poetry. The poet expressed “Petrarchan sighs in Petrarchan language”. The language, diction and imagery of poets had become too poetic, hackneyed and stereotyped. The conceits and images, metaphors and similes bear resemblance to one poet or another. Donne’s constitution is considered remarkable because of infusing into English language energy and sinewy strength. Due to the invigorating influence of his poetic diction, his language brought new lustre to English literature.

Harmony of English verse: - Donne tries to lend metrical pattern to the rhetoric of utterance. Yet his verse has no note of jarring disharmony; on the contrary, it has a haunting harmony of its own. He is successful in finding the rhythm that will express his passionate argument, and his mood: that is why his verses are as startling as his phrasing.
Donne master of poetic rhetoric: - What Jonson called the ‘wrenching of accent’ in Donne, can be amply justified. He plays with rhythm as he plays with conceits and phrases. Fletcher Melton has analysed his verse to show two metrical effects, the “troubling of the regular fall of verse-stress by the intrusion of rhetorical stress on syllables which the metrical pattern leaves unstressed, and secondly, an echoing and re-echoing of similar sounds parallel to his fondness for resemblances in thoughts and things.” He apparently uses an individual poetic diction, in the same way, he chooses metrical effects which are new and original. Prof. Grierson writes: “Donne is perhaps our first great master of poetic rhetoric, of poetry used, as Dryden and Pope were to use it, for effects of oratory rather than of song, and the advance which Dryden achieved was secured by subordinating to oratory the more passionate and imaginative qualities which troubled the balance and movement of Donne’s packed out imaginative rhetoric.”

Bold, original and startling use of figures of speech: - The other important feature of his poetry is the bold, original and startling use of figures of speech. Comparisons are useful in communicating sensations, feelings and states of mind. Donne relies on his scholasticism for new and far-fetched comparisons, and yet they are real, credible and meaningful. Donne, in Love’s Progress, draws on geography and science of navigation in praising his mistress. The simile refers to the beloved’s eyes as sun, and the nose as the meridian.

The nose (like to the first meridian runs)
Not ‘twixt an East and West but ‘twixt two suns

The tears of lovers are always of great poetic account but Donne handles them in different ways. In A Valediction of Weeping, he calls his tears coins; they bear her stamp because they reflect her image; the tear acts as a mirror. Then be compares the tear to a blank globe before a cartographer. In Witchcraft by a Picture, the poet’s eye is reflected in his beloved’s eye. As his tears fall, her image also falls and so her love. In another poem, Donne compares a good man to a telescope because just as a telescope enables us to see distant things nearer and clearer, in the same way a good man exemplifies virtue in his life in a practical manner. A highly developed simile is found in A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning written on the poet’s temporary separation from his wife. The leave-taking should be quiet and peaceful as the dying of virtuous men. During absence, the lovers’ two souls are not separated but undergo,

An expansion
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

Then the poet remarks that the two souls are like the two legs of a compasses:

If they be two, are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul the fix’d foot makes no show
To move but doth if th’ other do.

The wife’s soul is the fixed foot of the compass, the foot with the pin that remains in the centre of the circle. It moves only when the other foot—the husband’s soul—moves and then only by leaning in the direction of the return to the centre—symbolically—the journey to Europe and return—are accomplished because the other foot—the wife’s soul—remains fixed. The journey is realised in terms of the completion of the circle.

Contribution of conceits to English versification style: - Donne’s conceits are peculiar and novel. A conceit means a strained or far-fetched comparison or literary figure. The Elizabethan conceits were decorative and ornamental, while metaphysical conceits were the products of the intellectual process of thinking in figures. Donne’s poems abound in conceits. Here are a few examples:
The spider lover, which unsubstantiates all
And can convert manna to gall,
Love, all alike, no reason knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.
If, as in water stir’d more circles be
Produc’d by one love such additions take,
Those like so many spheres but one heaven make
For they are all concentric unto thee

For Donne, the flea who has sucked their blood is the blessed go-between who has united the lovers.

This flea is you and I and this
Our marriage bed and marriage temple is

In Twicknam Garden, Donne desires to measure the love of other lovers by the taste of his own tears:

Hither with crystal vials, lovers come,
And take my tears which are love’s wine
And try your mistress tears at home
For all are false that taste not just like mine.

Donne combines two figures of speech in The Sun Rising; here is apostrophe coupled with personification:

Busy old fool unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus
Through windows and through curtains, call on us?

Here is a hyperbole in Song to describe the speed of a lover’s journey:

Yestemight the sun went hence,
And yet is here today,
He hath no desire nor sense,
Nor half so short a way;
Then fear not me,
But believe that I shall make
Speedier journeys, since I take
More wings and spurs than he.

Donne’s irony: -  Donne is fond of irony. A faithful woman will be false even while you inform others of her virtue:

Yet she
Will be
False, ere I come, to two or there.

In Woman’s Constancy, Donne shifts irony from the beloved to himself:

Now thou hast lov’d me one whole day
Tomorrow when thou leav’st what will thou say?
Will thou then antedate soon new made vow?
Or say that now.
We are not just those persons which we were?
For by tomorrow I may think so too.

The poet is afraid that the beloved will break off their relationship in one way or another. He changes his own idea, and thinks that even if she does nothing, he himself may end their relationship. Donne does not spare himself when he engages in pun.

In A Hymn to God the Father, he writes, “When thou hast done, thou has not done, For, I have more.”
Donne is fond of paradox. Here is one from A Burnt Ship with all its grim humour:

**Out of a fired ship which by no way rescued**
**But drowning could be rescued from the flame**
**Some men leap’d forth and even as they came**
**Near the foe’s ships did by their shot decay**
**So all were lost which in the ship were found,**
**They in the sea being burnt they in the burnt ship drowned.**

The abundant use of poetic devices and metres shows that Donne is intellectual to the finger-tip. He plays not only with words but also with ideas. His mind is full of medieval theology, science, mathematics and jurisprudence. His imagination is as complex as his intellect. His ingenuity finds expression in hyperbole, wit and conceit. His poetry may not be harmonious or musical at times, but we cannot deny that it always poses both sincerity and strength—elements necessary for greatness in poetry. The strength of Donne lies in his being an inimitable poet, one whom it is very difficult to emulate. Donne in the Holy Sonets writes: “Show me dear Christ, thy spouse so bright and clear.” The Church is certainly the bride but she is open to most men which is hardly complimentary to any married woman. Here he is both paradoxical and ironical.

**Donne’s use of Diction in a Peculiar Manner: -** Simple words are used in unexpected way. Although diction is simple, yet simple words are combined in unexpected ways and thus strange compounds are formed. For example:

(i) A she-sigh from my mistress’ heart....
(ii) No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;...

Donne, sometimes, uses puns which are simple but effective; for example son/sun; done/Donne. Thus his use of words is often subtle and suggestive. He suggests much more than he narrates or describes.

**Tone generally colloquial and flexible: -** Love-songs are highly admired because of the general tone of the language which are usually colloquial. They have liveliness of spoken language and thus they are flexible. The first lines are often colloquial in tone. They immediately startle the readers and capture their attention. For example, note the opening of The Canonization.

**Donne’s symbols are intellectual: -** Helen Gardner commends the verbal craftsmanship of Donne which has an attraction and magic of its own. It arouses memories and associations in the minds of the readers. Such associations have an intellectual, not an emotional content. Though Donne deals with love, yet he borrows ideas from geometry and hydraulics to explain a gamut of emotions. In this connection, Helen Gardner writes: “Donne’s words bring with them the memory of abstract ideas. The magical lines in his poetry are those which evoke such conceptions as those of space, time, nothingness, and eternity. The words which strike the keynote of a poem are circles, spheres, concentrique, etc. They are the symbols of that infinity in love which underlies the human ebb and flow. The circle occurs again and again in Donne’s verse and in his prose as the symbol of infinity, insensibility to such intellectual symbolism has caused not only Dr. Johnson but even so modern a critic as Miss Sackville-West to cite the compass image in A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning, as an example of metaphysical inaptitude.”

**Variety of versification: -** Donne is a great experimenter in verse. He uses a large number of metres and different types of forms. However, he sees to it that his versification suits the subject matter and is in harmony with the ideas expressed in the poems. In this connection, Redpath remarks: “Some of the stanzas forms are very attractive in themselves. Much play is made with variations of lines length. Stanzas of
more than six lines seem to give Donne the scope he so often needs to develop the complex interplay of thought and feeling which is so typical of him. With exceptions, the poems in shorter stanzas tend to be thin or slight.”

In the song, Go and Catch a Falling Star, the short lines offer a contrast to the long line at the tail of each stanza. Similarly, the change of line length in A Valediction: of Weeping, echoes the turbulent passion expressed in the poem.

**Donne’s ruggedness:** - His ruggedness has been condemned by Ben Jonson who said that for not keeping of accent, Donne deserved hanging. It is true that Donne disregarded the simple rhythms of Elizabethan Age and introduced complicated rhythm patterns in order to convey the intellectual gymnastic and metaphysical conceits. One critic observes that every twist and turn of the sound pattern corresponds with the twist and turn of thought process. In the satire specially, his language is harsh and coarse. In this connection, Grierson remarks: “If there is one thing more distinctive than another of Donne’s best work it is the closeness with which the verse echoes the sense and soul of the poem. And so it is in the satires. Their abrupt and harsh verse reflects the spirit in which they are written. Horace, quite as much as Persius, is Donne’s teacher in satire and it is Horace he believes himself to be following in adopting a verse in harmony with the unpoetic temper of his work.”

**Grierson points out:** “Donne was no conscious reviver of Dante’s mataphysics, but to the game of elaborating fantastic conceits and hyperboles which was the fashion throughout Europe, he brought not only a full-blooded temperament and acute mind, but a vast and growing store of the same scholastic learning, the same Catholic theology, as controlled Dante’s thoughts, but jostling already with the new learning of Copernicus and Paracleus.”

“His vivid, simple, and realistic touches are too quickly merged in, learned and fantastic elaborations and the final effect of almost every poem of Donne’s is bizarre, if it be the expression of a strangely blended temperament, an intense emotion, a vivid imagination.”

Donne is bizarre and wayward in his style. He is “a maker of conceits for their own sake, a grafter of tasteless and irrelevant ornaments upon the body of his thought. There are poems which undoubtedly support these accusations, and I shall be the last to deny that Donne relished the play of “wit’ for its own sake; but I am convinced that in general his style is admirably fitted to express his own thought and temperament, and in all probability grew out of the need of such expression. The element of dissonance is no exception. No doubt, it expresses his spirit of revolt against poetic custom…..in this case the poetic ideal of harmony. But the expression of revolt is only a superficial function. With its union of disparate suggestions dissonance is most serviceable instrument, in fact a prime necessity of expressing Donne’s multiple sensibility, his complex modes, and the discords of his temperament. In short, the dissonance; of style reflects a dissonance inwardly experienced.”

“What is true”, writes Grierson, “of Donne’s imagery is true of the other disconcerting element in his poetry, its harsh and rugged verse. It, is an outcome of the same double motive, the desire to startle and the desire to approximate poetic to direct, and unconventional colloquial speech.”

“Donne’s verse has a powerful harmony of its own, for he is striving to find a rhythm that will express the passionate fulness of his mind, the fluxes and refluxes of his moods, and the felicities of his verse are as frequent and startling as those of his phrasing. He is one of the first, perhaps the first, writers, of the elaborate stanza or paragraph in which
the discords of individual lines or phrases are resolved in the complex and rhetorically effective harmony of the whole group of lines...”

“Donne secures two effects; firstly the trebling of the regular fall of the verse stresses by the introduction of rhetorical stresses on syllables which the metrical pattern leaves unstressed; and secondly, an echoing and re-echoing of similar sounds parallel to his fondness for resemblances in thoughts and things apparently the most remote from one another.”

“He writes as one who will say what he has to say with regard to conventions of poetic diction or smooth verse; but what he has to say is subtle and surprising and so are the metrical effects with which it is presented...It was not indeed in lyrical verse that Dryden followed and developed Donne, but in his eulogistic satirical and epistolary poems.”

**Donne’s dramatic flexibility, rhetorical touches and poetic rhythms:**

- Donne is quite dramatic in offering catchy opening lines. He almost catches the reader by his arms and give him a jolt. This dramatic rhythm gives the illusion of talk in a state of excitement. Donne is original in his innovation of poetic rhythm. As Legouis asserts: “John Donne is perhaps the most singular of English poets. His verses offer examples of everything castigated by classical writers as bad taste and eccentricity, all pushed to such an extreme that the critic’s head swims as he condemns...At the outset of Donne’s career, Spenser had already won his glory, and the Petrarchan sonneteers were producing collection upon collection. The independent young poet reacted against these schools. He despised highly regular metres and monotonous and harmonious cadences. He violated the rhythm in his Satires, Songs and Sonets and in hisElegies. His friend and admirer Ben Jonson said of him that he esteemed him ‘the first poet in the world for some things’ but also that, ‘Donne, for not keeping of accent deserved hanging’. Closely examined, this crime, for such it is, derives from his subordination of melody to meaning, his refusal to submit to the reigning hierarchy of words, sometimes from his lapses into the expressive spoken tongue, in defiance of the convention of poetic rhythm.”

Helen Gardner further remarks: “Donne deliberately deprived himself of the hypnotic power with which a regularly recurring beat plays upon the nerves. He needed rhythm for another purpose; his rhythms arrest and goad the reader, never quite fulfilling his expectations but forcing him to pause here and to rush on there, governing pace and emphasis so as to bring out the full force of the meaning. Traditional imagery and traditional rhythms are associated with traditional attitudes; but Donne wanted to express the complexity of his own moods, rude or subtle, harmonious or discordant. He had to find a more personal imagery and a more flexible rhythm. He made demands on his reader that no lyric poet had hitherto made.”

**Conclusion:**

The memorable nature of Donne’s verses will strike any casual reader. Such verses haunt our memory and return to us again and again. Grierson has beautifully summed up the salient characteristics of John Donne’s style and versification. As he remarks: “Donne’s verse has a powerful and haunting harmony of its own. For Donne is not simply, no poet could be, willing to force his accent, to strain and crack a prescribed pattern; he is striving to find a rhythm that will express the passionate fulness of his mind, the fluxes and refluxes of his moods; and the felicities of verse are as frequent and startling as those of phrasing. He is one of the first masters, perhaps the first, of the elaborate stanza or paragraph in which the discords of individual lines or phrases are resolved in the complex and rhetorically effective harmony of the whole group of lines...The wrenching of accent which Jonson complained of is not entirely due to carelessness or indifference. It has often both a rhetorical and a harmonious justification. Donne plays with rhythmical effects as with conceits and words and often in
much the same way...There is, that is to say, in his verse the same blend as in his diction of the colloquial and the bizarre. He writes as one who will say what he has to say without regard to conventions of poetic diction or smooth verse, but what he has to say is subtle and surprising, and so are the metrical effects with which it is presented. There is nothing of unconscious or merely careless harshness in his poetry. Donne is perhaps our first great master of poetic rhetoric, of poetry used, as Dryden and Pope were to use it, for effects of oratory rather than of song, and the advance which Dryden achieved was secured by subordinating to oratory the more passionate and imaginative qualities which troubled the balance and movement of Donne's packed, but imaginative rhetoric."
**BATTER MY HEART, THREE-PERSONED GOD**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

As the very title of the sonnet suggests, it is a passionate and forceful appeal to God to take possession of the poet's heart. The intensity of the poet's feeling is conveyed by the word 'batter'. To batter means to pound repeatedly, to deal heavy repeated blows, to beat persistently and hard.

The poet vehemently prays to the Christian Trinity—God the Father, God the Son (Christ) and God the Holy Ghost to take possession of his heart by force. According to Leishman, it reveals the poet's "agonised striving" to be possessed by God and gives expression to it through the analogy of an usurped town during war and then of a beloved under the forcible possession of the adversary of the lover. "Any mild and persuasive action will not help in the transformation of the poet. The poet is a confirmed sinner and only drastic action against him will change him. A total regeneration is not possible without a powerful and violent action of God." According to F.W. Payne, the sonnet expresses adequately "in its striking metaphor and its forceful diction, his burning desire for an assurance of forgiveness” R.G. Cox feels that in the ‘Holy Sonnets’ of which this poem is one, the method of expression and style is the same as that of love poems. “As in love poetry here too, is a considerable variety of tone and method ranging from mere casuistry and debating tricks to a profound urgency and conviction and sometimes both may be found together.” In this sonnet, the poet treats God as a conqueror or a ravisher. This is rather an unusual comparison. The plea of the poet is that unless God acts with force and vigour, He will not mend his ways. The way down-hill is quick and easy, the way uphill is difficult and strenuous. Only God’s might may push him up on the spiritual path.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

The poet appeals to God to transform his inner being. As he is a great sinner, mild methods will not succeed with him. God the Tinker, need not use gentle methods like ‘knock, breathe, shine and seek to amend’. He must use harsh and rough methods. Just as the tinker, in order to reshape the pot, must ‘break, blow and burn’ the metal to give it a new shape, in the same way God must overpower him and use violent methods to reshape and remould him.

**Usurped town:** The poet compares himself to a usurped town. His soul belongs to God, but has been taken away by the Devil. He himself is willing to pay his homage to God, but he cannot do so because he is under the power of the Devil. Reason is God’s Viceroy, but even Reason is unable to oppose the might of the Devil. Therefore, God should use force and release him from the horrible clutches of evil forces. Thus alone he can be saved from damnation.

**Usurped beloved:** The poet clarifies his position through the metaphor of lover-beloved relationship. The poet is the beloved while God is the lover. According to tradition, God is the man, while human beings are all females. The poet’s soul loves God and desires to be united with Him. However, she has been forcibly betrothed to the Devil. He is a slave of the Devil and God alone can rescue him. God should sever his connection with evil and redeem him from wickedness. God should accept him as a beloved and take him into His arms. Now he is a slave of the Devil but let God make a slave of him. The poet feels that he can never be purified till God consummates his union with him. Then alone he will be free from sin and evil.

**CRITICAL COMMENTS**
This use of sensual relationship for holy transformation need not be objected to: ‘Imprison me, enthral me, ravish me’ only show the intensity of the poet’s feeling who wishes to be totally owned and possessed by God. There is a great use of paradox in the poem. Donne’s relation with God is expressed through several paradoxes. Donne can only rise if he is once thrown by God; he can be free only if he is imprisoned by God and he can be chaste only if he is ravished by the Almighty. Another paradox is based on the maxim: preparedness for war is the best guarantee of peace. The poet can gain peace of mind only when God uses violence and snatches him away from the Devil. The tinker must use harsh and violent methods to break the vessel and then reshape it. Similarly, God should burn the impurities in him through the fire of the bellows. The metaphor of the usurped town to be taken by the lawful owner is quite appropriate. Similarly, the usurped body who is in the possession of the Devil should be rescued by God. Freedom and purity can come only through divine consummation.

The idea of violence runs throughout the poem like an undercurrent. The hammering of the tinker or the blacksmith is followed by the siege and capture of the besieged town. The marriage is followed by ravishment. There is a continuous comparison of secular love to divine love. Donne’s artistry is evident in his expression of physical love which is used to advantage in portraying holy love. The use of sensual imagery cannot be regarded as incongruous because in the final analysis, it conveys the sincerity and confessional frankness of the poet as a true slave of God.

DEATH BE NOT PROUD

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The poem is included as Sonnet X in the volume of Holy Sonnets: Divine Meditations. Donne demolishes two popular concepts: firstly death is dreadful and secondly death is mighty. He personifies Death and addresses him directly. Death has a certain power over man and it gives temporary sleep. If death and sleep are like brothers, greater rest and relaxation must come from death.

Death releases the soul from the body’s prison. Opium and narcotics can induce sleep like death. Why then should death boast of its great power? The poet therefore calls it “poor death”. Moreover, man does not die; his soul lives forever; it is, therefore, death which becomes superfluous and meaningless. The victory of Christian resurrection over death is the last nail in the coffin of death. The poem proves the thesis that death is neither terrible nor powerful.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The poet argues that death is not dreadful because those whom death claims to have killed have a long and peaceful sleep. Sleep resembles death, but just as sleep resembles and invigorates, similarly death would provide more comfort and pleasure. This is the reason for the virtuous dying young. Death brings rest and peace and therefore it is not dreadful.

Death: a slave: - Death is not powerful, as men think. It is not a powerful king but a miserable slave. It is an agent of fate, chance, and actions of wicked people, poison, wars and sickness. Death is a servant of sickness and old age. It induces sleep, but there are various other means like opium and drugs which give a better and gentler sleep. Death has no reason to be proud. It can only make people sleep for some time. After sleep in the grave, people shall wake up on the day of resurrection and live forever. Then death will have absolutely no power over human beings. Thus death’s jurisdiction comes to an end. In fact, death does not kill human beings; it is death which itself dies.
The immortality of the soul ensures the survival of man. So, the poem ends on a paradox: Man is immortal; death is mortal.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

Apart from the debating skill and the plausible argument of the poet, there is a lurking fear of death. The allusion to resurrection and immortality does not in any way reduce the fear of death. One is reminded of Bacon's words: "Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark". The comparisons are common—death as sleep, death as opium, body as prison of the soul. This poem is similar to the sonnet entitled. At the round earth’s imagined corners where Donne speaks of death’s woé, and the triumph of souls over death on Doomsday. Here Donne emphasizes the impotence of Death.

The structure of the poem facilitates the division of the theme into two parts. The octet proves that death is neither dreadful nor mighty.-The sestet brings the argument to a personal level and regards death as a slave and a door through which the soul passes to immortality. The last line hits the nail on the head. It is not the poet who dies. The poet declares happily: "Death, thou shall die”.

TWICKNAM GARDEN

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

"Twicknam Garden" is a sonorous (resonant; high-sounding) and thoughtful lyric. It was most probably addressed to the Countess Lucy of Bedford for whom Donne had a profound admiration. The lyric is distinguished by highly condensed feelings of sadness. The poet is obviously in a mood of dejection. He gives vent to the anguish of his heart which neither nature can soothe nor poetry. Only Donne’s emotion is the subject of this lyric. There is a sort of sting in the tail or in the last two lines. Donne calls the fair sex as the perverted sex but excepting this no scornful or bitter comments are made on women.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

It is remarkable that the lady to whom the poem is addressed was never in love with Donne. The poet probably mistook her friendly regard for him for love. The poet feels irresistibly drawn toward this “one of the most accomplished and cultured ladies” of the seventeenth century. Her truth kills him, because he is deeply involved in her charm and personality.

The most distinguishing feature of the poem is the atmosphere of sombre desolation that pervades it. This cold, bleak and cheerless atmosphere is in perfect harmony with the anguish of the poet. The poem reminds us of Keats’s La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Shelley’s song, A Widow Bird Sat Mourning. We find the same bleakness, loneliness, and dry unrelenting aspect of a leaden skyed winter. The poem is steeped in grim and overwhelming despair. The poet strikes a piercing note of sadness with the very first line.

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears, the well defined and concrete images drive home the utter despair and incurable pain of a love-lorn heart. For example the cold hardness of a “stone fountain weeping out my tears” and “crystal phials” leave on the mind an unforgettable impression of poignant sorrow. The frigid expression of tears gives a unifying effect to the poem. The poet refers to tears in all the three stanzas. Tears, in fact, control the diversity of imagery that we find in the poem.

The poem contains some of most marvellous of Donne’s “conceits”. In the first stanza we have the startling conceit of “spider love”: 
The spider Love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert manna to gall.

Again, we have an equally brilliant conceit when Donne compares sad and poignant memories of love to the serpent in the garden of Eden:

And that this place may thoroughly be thought,
True paradise, I have the serpent brought.

In the second stanza, the love-lorn poet yearns to be converted into the stone fountain which would be shedding tears throughout the year. In the last stanza, ‘tears’ are called “Love’s wine”. All these ‘conceits’ lend a peculiar charm to the lyric.

“Twicknam Garden” is a short poem, but it is one of the greatest expressions in literature of poignant sorrow and piercing sadness.

Inspired by Lucy: - This poem was perhaps inspired by Donne’s passion for the Countess Lucy of Bedford, a highly cultured and accomplished lady who did not feel anything stronger than friendship for the poet. The poet has given a most powerful expression to his frustrated (baffled) passion. His art which we can analyse to some extent, deserves admiration.

An expression of disappointed love: - He comes to Twicknam garden in order that the beautiful sights and sounds around him, might ease his anguish. But no, he finds that his bleak and desolate mood does not yield to the soothing influence of the atmosphere. On the contrary, the trees seemed to be laughing and mocking him to his face. If the garden were as beautiful as the garden of Eden, the thought of love within him was like the serpent to spoil the beauty of the place.

Contrast between the natural atmosphere and the poet’s mood: - Donne expresses his mental state in a series of attractive conceits. He is a self-traitor, as he cherishes in his bosom the spider love, which transforms everything, even the heavenly manna can be turned into poison by it. If the garden is paradise, then his passion is the serpent. He wishes to be a mandrake and grow there in the garden (for the mandrake is a plant that feels pain) or a stone fountain, for he is always weeping,

Donne’s intellectual contempt for women: - In the third stanza, his intellectual contempt for women is expressed in an intricate series of images. He is the stone fountain and his tears are the true tears of love. Lovers should come and take away in crystal phials these tears and compare them with those shed by their mistresses at home. If those do not taste as Donne’s do, then they are not true tears of love. Thus he implores lovers not to be misled by the tears their mistresses shed, for you can no more judge woman’s thoughts by their tears than you can judge their dresses by their shadow.

Paradoxical thought in the closing lines: - Donne ends his poem with a paradox (anything that goes against the accepted opinion). The woman, he loves, is true and chaste; she is quite honest, that is why Donne cannot enjoy her love. And it is the perversity of the female sex that the only woman who is honest and true should be the one whose honesty and truth kill the poet, otherwise, perhaps she would not be so chaste and true. In Donne’s view, woman is a kind of plague devised by God for man.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

This poem was addressed to the Countess Lucy of Bedford—a cultured and accomplished lady of the seventeenth century. She entertained a friendly affection for Donne the poet, which could hardly be given the name of "love". The poet, a sad and forlorn lover, finds himself in a mood of dejection. Even nature fails to soothe his tormented soul. It is a
song of sorrow pervaded by nothing except the bleakness of despair. It expresses the anguish of a lover’s heart who has fallen a prey to sorrow and who cannot drown it even in nature. For its sombre atmosphere and intensity of grief, the poem has not been surpassed by any lyric in English poetry. It is a passionate outburst of sorrow expressing yearnings of unfulfilled love. The lady to whom it is addressed was never in love with Donne. It is possible that Donne misconstrued her friendly regard for him. In its poignancy of sorrow, the poem reminds us of Keats’s La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Shelley’s lyric, A Widow Bird Sat Mourning.

**SONG—SWEETEST LOVE**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

This lyric was addressed by the poet to his wife Anne More when he had to take leave of her on the occasion of his undertaking a journey to a foreign country. It is brilliant and unconventional love-lyric which stands out in the entire love-poetry of Donne. It is written in a tripping metre. There, is a freshness and naturalness about this poem which is missing from the honeyed verses of the Elizabethan lyricists and song writers.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

It is a singularly frank, realistic and sincere song of parting. The reason is obvious. There is a perfect equality of love between the lover—and the sweet-heart. The lover takes for granted his love for his beloved and vice versa. The artificial fears and sighs of the lover are after the fashion of the poet Petrarch. They are kept at bay because they are so cheap, boring and tiresome. Donne’s love-song expresses mutual human, love. Both the lover and his lady-love are grieved at the parting, but the lover being a mail and scholar can deduce some higher thoughts from even this experience, which soothe and calm both of them. Though it is a, simple love-song, there is the development of an intellectual design. The lover feels the sorrow of parting, and even grows some-what pessimistic in stanzas I and III. But abruptly he turns away from thoughts of death and pessimism and begins to dwell upon their mutual relationship. She must not grieve, for that would hurt him, since he is a part of her. In the last stanza sorrow is cast away, and the very idea of parting is dismissed as something irrelevant, since

They who one another keep
Alive, ne’er parted be.

**CRITICAL COMMENTS**

Love triumphs over the idea of parting. The final stanza is a typical example of Donne’s habit to charge emotions with thought Deane is at his best when he allows fullest scope to love, so that it embraces both the body and the spirit.

The lyric contains two beautiful conceits in the last but one stanza, viz.

When thou sigh’st them sigh’st not wind,
But sigh’st my soul away;
When thou weep’st, unkindly kind,
My life’s blood doth decay.

**AIR AND ANGELS**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

This is a poem of love and has little to do with air and angels. The poet is fed up with the Platonic idea of love—love as something holy and spiritual. He is also not happy with the worship of the beloved and the admiration of her beauty which the Petrarchan poets did.
He realizes the hollowness and hypocrisy of the idealization of love. Love demands something concrete. It must have a physical base. Love can grow only by mutuality and co-operation.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

The poet discusses the soul-body relationship. Just as the angels manifest themselves in the air by a voice or light, in the same way love which is something idealistic, must express itself through some concrete medium. In the beginning he thought love was like a spirit or an angel, but subsequently he realised that love must be expressed through a medium, namely the human body. The beloved is the body of the soul of love. Love has now been concretized in the beloved and as such she has become the cynosure of his eyes. He appreciates the beauty of her lips, eyes and brow.

**The steadiness of love:** - Love cannot exist in a vacuum. It must have a concrete expression. Just as a ballast (heavy load) is necessary to steady the movement of a ship, in the same way, something more important than the appreciation of the bodily beauty is necessary to stabilise love. Mere admiration of her hair or some aspect of her beamy is not enough. There must be a substantial and objective expression of love. What Donne wants is physical union which can give both continuity and stability to man-woman relationship.

**Man’s active love:** - Just as angels need the cover of air in order to be recognisable, so the lover must have the love of the beloved as a sphere for his love. There is, however, a difference between man’s love, and woman’s love. Man’s love may be compared to an angel and woman’s love to air. This implies that man is generally more active than woman in the game of love-making. The traditional concept of woman’s coyness and modesty does make one feel that she plays the second fiddle in the orchestra of love. But just as there is harmony in the angel-air relationship, there should be mutuality and response in man-woman relationship.

**CRITICAL COMMENTS**

This is one of the ‘highly intellectualised’ of Donne’s love poems. The title does not suggest the subject of love. Even so, the poet describes divine love in terms of the flesh. He borrows images and concepts from metaphysics, navigation and scholasticism in order to prove the point that both physical base and mutuality are essential for the experience of love. The idea of using ballast to the ship of love for its smooth sailing is original and so is the concept of the disparity between man’s passion and woman’s response. That man’s love is an angel and woman’s love the air, and the harmony of the two is necessary for the concretization and consummation of love provides a sane and fitting conclusion to the poem.

**SONG: (GO AND CATCH A FALLING STAR)**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

This song was posthumously published in 1633 in the volume entitled ‘Songs and Sonnets’. It was written by Donne in his youth when he saw a good deal of London life. The subject of woman’s inconstancy was a stock subject but Donne enlivened it with his personal experience. His gay life in London and his association with different women in London only confirmed his view about woman’s faithlessness.

In this poem, the poet, through a series of images, shows the impossibility of discovering a true and faithful woman. While the poets following the Petrarchan tradition made of woman a heroine and a goddess, worthy of love and admiration, the
metaphysical poets poked fun at woman’s fashions, weakness and faithlessness. Shakespeare’s maxim—“Froth thy name is woman”—was quite popular in the age of Donne. The fickleness of woman could be more easily experienced than described. The cynical attitude to the fair sex in the early poems of Donne, is in contrast with the rational attitude to love and sex to be found in his later poems.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

According to Donne, it is impossible to find a loyal and chaste woman. Woman’s inconstancy proved a popular subject with the Elizabethan and the Metaphysical poets. The poet, through irony and exaggeration suggests the impossibility of the undertaking to discover a true and fair woman. Fair women will have lovers and therefore it is not possible for them to be faithful to any of them. (Faithfulness on the part of an ugly and uninviting woman can be a possibility because she will not be able to attract lovers). The poet mentions a number of impossible tasks—catching a falling star or meteor, begetting a child on a mandrake root, memory of past years, finding the name of the person who clove the Devil’s foot, listening to the music of the fabulous mermaids, changing human nature so as to make it indifferent to envy and jealousy or finding out the climate which would promote man’s honesty. Just as it is impossible to do these jobs, in the same way it is impossible to find a faithful woman. Even if a man were to travel throughout the world for ten thousand days and nights—this would cover more than twenty-seven years—till his hair grew grey, he would not come across a faithful woman. He might have seen many wonderful scenes and sights, but he would not have seen the most wonderful sight of all—that of a true and fair woman.

**A real pilgrimage:** The poet is very keen on discovering a true and fair woman if there be any such in the world. If any one tells the poet that there is such a woman, he would go on a pilgrimage to see her. She would really deserve his admiration and worship. The poet, however, feels that the journey will be futile, for even such woman’s faithfulness will be temporary. By the time one writes a letter to her, she would have enjoyed with two or three lovers. Hence the poet despairs about seeing any constant woman.

**CRITICAL COMMENTS**

Though technically the poem is a ‘song’ which should have sweetness, lilt and smoothness, it has a lot of argument. The colloquial form of the poem—the speaking voice in a real situation—deserves attention. The rhythm is similar to that of speech rhythm which changes according to the needs of the argument. “The breaking of the tetrameter form in lines seven and eight (with two syllables each) is a dramatic device that projects tension rather than irregularity, and indicates the stress that one would use in a dramatic reading. “The poet constantly indulges in dislocating the accepted rhythms, dropping his lines most unexpectedly (though always giving us pleasant surprises) but the final impression is not one of confession but of an inner logic of the poet’s experience”. The use of hyperbole is understandable: “Ten thousand days and nights till age snow white hairs on thee”. The witty ironic reversal in the last stanza is a device commonly used by Donne. All his journey and trouble in finding a true and fair woman would result in ‘love’s labour lost’. The poet draws images from a wide field of knowledge—mythology, Christianity and legendary love. He proves his thesis with a masculine gusto and youthful vivacity.

**A VALEDICTION: OF WEEPING**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**
The poem A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning was written practically at the same time, when the poet was about to leave for a visit to a foreign country. The poet wants to tell his wife to take this temporary separation in her stride and neither to lament or weep, for after all, this will only disturb the peace of mind of both staying at different places. How to take a separation with tears or sighs or with patience and resignation, this is the theme of the poem. Playing on the image of floods and tides, the poet ultimately comes to the conclusion that mutual understanding and forebearance are necessary, for romantic lamenting and sighing will only increase their sorrow and frustration.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

In the beginning, the poet wants to weep out his heart—just to give an outlet to his pent-up feeling for his wife—because he is going out and this separation is intolerable. Of course, the poet’s wife is as unhappy as the poet himself at the prospect of separation and loneliness. The poet’s tears are worth something because they bear his wife’s stamp—“thy face coins, them,” but with copious tears, the two are reduced to nothing. It is therefore better that they should weep no more.

The poet compares the tear to a globe and the tears shed by his wife will overflow the world. His tears combined with hers, will cause a deluge and much unhappiness. In fact, the deluge will destroy both of them though they never intended that both of them should die thus.

**Tides and storms:** - The poet’s wife, like the moon, is capable of causing high tides capable of drowning the poet. Similarly, her sighs are powerful enough to cause sea-storms which may hasten his death. So at the end, the poet suggests that they should desist from sighing ‘one another’s death’ because it would be mutually destructive. The poet feels that weeping at the time of separation is natural, but it has to be reduced to the minimum because it will destroy the peace of mind of both of them.

**CRITICAL COMMENTS**

There is an organic development of imagery. One image leads to the other. For example the tear is first compared to a coin and this leads to the ‘stamp’, and the ‘mint’ and the ‘sovereign’ and the ‘worth’. The tear is round like a globe; the globe has a number of continents; their profuse tears will drown the creation, the universe and thereby destroy it like the Deluge. The beloved is like the moon. She will cause ‘tides’ and ‘storms’ and subsequent ‘death’. All these images are interlinked, and convey a sense of unified sensibility. There is another image of round and ‘pregnant’ tears. The tears are round and large like pregnancy, because they hold a reflection of the beloved inside them. Similarly, the falling of tears indicates the falling of the beloved, and thus being reduced to ‘nothing’. The poet draws images from geography, theology and astronomy. Even so he does not lose his grip on reality. The situation of the impending separation is faced boldly and the need of poise and patience is stressed. William Empson writes in this connection: “Its passion exhausts itself; it achieves at the end the sense of reality he was looking for, and for some calm of mind.”

**A VALEDICATION: FORBIDDING MOURNING**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

This is a personal poem showing the pure love and devotion of the poet to his beloved. Some persons feel that the poem is addressed to his wife Anne More.

The poet is about to leave in the end of 1611 for a short visit to France but this absence of a few weeks may not be taken as an occasion of separation and lamentation. The
poet’s wife was in a bad state of health. The poet shows the uniqueness of true love and that it can stand separation on account of mutual confidence and affection. This separation may be deemed like death, but as good men are not afraid of death, true lovers are not afraid of separation. This is not a farewell to love, but an exposition of true and devoted love which can stand the shock of temporary separation, because it is not based on sex or physical attraction.

The critics differ about the quality and type of argument used by Donne to console his partner. Helen Gardner thinks that this is ‘not an argument to use to a wife who has no need to hide her grief at her husband’s absence’, and therefore the poem may be regarded as an address of a lover to his lady friend. Coleridge, however, remarked: “It is an admirable poem which none but Donne could have written. Nothing was ever more admirably made than the figure of the compass” Dr. Johnson disliked the image of the compass and observed: “To the comparsion of a man that travels and his wife stays at home with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim”. Grierson, however, admired it as ‘the tenderest of Donne’s love poems’. In spite of the differences of opinion there is no doubt that the love mentioned in the poem is pure and realistic.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The poet addresses his beloved to offer her consolation for his short absence. Just as virtuous men are not afraid of death, in the same way true lovers are not afraid of separation. Separation only tests their loyalty and devotion. Ordinary lovers who are addicted to sex may not be able to stand separation. Therefore, his beloved should neither shed tears nor heave sighs. This absence is a sort of touchstone to test their mutual love.

Men are afraid of earthquakes and the damage caused by them. However, the movement of the heavenly bodies, though much greater and more violent, is quiet and harmless. Similarly, ordinary lovers may lament a separation but their love is so holy and pure that in spite of separation, they have no feeling of loneliness. Their love is so chaste and refined that physical absence does not matter to them at all. Their love is not based on physical enjoyment.

Pure love: - The lovers cannot define the nature and essence of their pure love. It is a refined love of the mind and has nothing to do with the joys of sex. Their souls are one. Temporary separation cannot cause a breach of love. Absence extends the domain and expanse of love. Just as gold is beaten to thinness and its purity is in no way affected, in the same way their pure love will expand and in no way lose its essence. The lovers are like a lump of gold and the quality of their love cannot change. The frontiers of their love will extend and their mutual confidence and loyalty will in no way be affected.

A pair of compasses: - Donne employs the concept of ‘twin compasses’. Their souls may be two but they are united at a centre like the two sides of a compass. The soul of the beloved is like the fixed foot of the compass as she stays at home. The poet’s soul is like the other foot of the compass which moves, so to say in a circle. The fixed foot leans towards the moving foot, and afterwards, the moving foot rejoins the fixed foot. The rejoining of the encircling foot suggests the return of the poet to his beloved and their union—in spite of their separate identities—is the very consummation and joy of love. The poet proves that in spite of separation, the lovers are united in mutual affection and loyalty. James Reeves writes in this connection: “We are like the two legs of a pair of compasses, you are the fixed one in the centre. Further my soul goes from yours, the more yours leans towards mine; and as mine comes home, so yours revives. Your soul is the centre of my being, and keeps mine constant as it circles round you.”
CRITICAL COMMENTS

The poem consists of nine quatrains and is quite smooth in its rhythm. However, its images and conceits enrich its significance. The comparison of separation to death is obvious. Just as good people face death patiently and quietly, in the same way, true lovers face separation willingly. Ordinary lovers may view separation as an earthquake because their love is based on the physical relationship. True lovers are like the heavenly bodies, the movement of which is greater and violent but causes no injury or harm. Holy love is not affected by movement or change of environment. There is another conceit of the gold beaten to thinness. The quality of the gold remains unaffected though its area and its dimensions increase. In the same way, the quality of love remains constant in spite of the extension of the gambit of love. The best conceit of the stiff twin compasses is extremely appropriate and fits the theme like a glove. The individuality of the lover is maintained while their basic unity, is symbolised by the screw which fixes the two sides of the compass. This fixed foot rotates while the moving foot revolves in a circle and then gets rejoined to the fixed foot. While moving foot circumscribes, the fixed foot leaves it, showing the mutuality and interdependence of the two. In this connection A. J. Smith writes:

“The subject of this poem is a metaphysical problem; that of the union of the lovers even when they are separated...It is in the very respect in which they are separated, that he wishes to show his lovers are united. The souls are one substance, which has the invisibility of air, but also the obvious unity of a lump of gold. It is to stress this last point that the compasses are brought in. For gold, though originally solid enough, falls under suspicion of being likely to vanish away, once it has been compared to air. Compasses do not vanish; they have not the remotest connection either with physical or metaphysical subtlety. Hence, once the needful subtlety has been expanded, they close the poem and symbolize it—not, however, by their oddity.”

The strength of the poem lies in its argument and the use of appropriate conceits and images. Sometimes hyperbole is used to emphasise a point that “tears” are floods and ’sighs’ are tempests. The poet has been able to prove his point that his absence is no cause for mourning for his beloved because their love is pure and constant.

THE RELIC

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

This is one of the important poems addressed to Mrs. Magdelen Herbert who was the poet’s friend and benefactor. It would be difficult to imagine as some people feel that this poem might refer to some other woman whom Donne knew in his youth.

Moreover, some other poems also connected with Herbert, like The Blossom, and The Funeral, make one feel that this poem too refers to the poet’s same friend. There was nothing wrong in writing about a married woman. One of the Petrarchan ways of courtship was the poet’s addressing and worshipping the lady from a distance and deriving a sort of vicious satisfaction from holy love. His Platonic love for the lady is reflected in the poem ‘Relic’ means a part or momento of some holy person or some souvenir or keep-sake worshipped after his death and which is supposed to have miraculous powers. The lover has got a relic—a bracelet of bright hair from his beloved and he keeps it tied round his wrist. After his death, this relic will continue to remain on his body and this will be an object of adoration or worship for the later generation of lovers. It is not only a symbol of love but also a sort of miracle because it shows that love is independent of physical wish. This sort of holy or sex-less love is indeed a miracle. It represents a mirror of souls where even the difference of sex is obliterated.
Moreover, in this kind of pure love, the lovers did not know what they loved and why they loved. This nuptial and Platonic love defies description and is beyond the powers of language and communication.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The poem begins with a horrible situation—some persons are digging the poet’s grave in order to bury some other dead body. There is a dig at woman’s constancy because a grave can accommodate more than one corpse at a time. The person digging his grave will find a ‘bracelet of bright hair about the bone’. How it is possible to find ‘bright hair’ when the grave is full of dust and insects, is not explained by the poet. The digger will think that it is the grave of a loving couple and the bracelet of hair is a device to make the souls meet at the grave on the Day of Judgement and stay for a little while together.

Wishful adoration: - If the grave is dug in some heathen age or land, the bracelet will be brought to the king or the Bishop to be blessed and recognized as a Relic. The hair shall perhaps be regarded as a relic of Mary Magdalen and the poet’s bones as those of Christ or some other saint. Such relics will be worshipped by the lovers for its miraculous powers. The later lovers will feel that their love will be rewarded with success if they worship the relic.

Miracles of love: - The poet and his beloved were engaged in a sort of Platonic love relationship. They did not know what they loved in each other and why, though they loved ‘well and faithfully’. Moreover, their love was not dependent on sexual relationship. Their love was ‘independent of the difference of sex just as the love of guardian angels is not physical but spiritual. Their love was based on a close affinity between the two souls. The lovers may have exchanged formal courtesies of kissing at the time of meeting or separation, but there was nothing more than that Donne seems to suggest that the state of nature permitted free physical sex while our human laws have restricted sexual freedom. This may have a reference to the marriage of his lady-friend to Mr. Herbert. His love has been restricted by the lady’s marriage and as such his love can now only be ‘Platonic’, such a love cannot be described in words. The greatest miracle is that this was a sexless and pure love arid the beauty of the beloved is almost unsurpassed. She is a miracle of beauty and object of holy devotion.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

In spite of the poet’s adoration of his beloved in a mood of Platonic love, he cannot help satirising the sex in general. In the lines three and four he has a fling at the inconstancy of woman because his beloved, like any woman, can have more than one man in her bed. Secondly, he lashes at women for their superstition in worshipping the bracelet of bright hair as a relic—“All women shall adore us.” He thinks that men are not so foolish or superstitious as women. Therefore, the relic will be adored by ‘some men’.

Three-fold theme: - The poem deals with love, death and religion. Pure love, as presented in this poem defies death. At the same time, this love lives through a momento or souvenir—‘the bracelet of bright hair’. There is a kind of contradiction as this pure love is dependent on a small bit of hair. If it were a true union of souls it would not need such a flimsy token. The idea of death is emphasised by the grave and the Day of Judgment. Religion is brought in through the Bishop, “the last busy day’, ‘Mary Magdalen’ and ‘guardian angels’. The worship of the poet and his beloved as saints of love alter their death is a great tribute to their holy love. In fact, love becomes as sacred as religion. The three topics are intimately related to one another.
Philosophy of love: - Here, the poet deals with a higher and spiritual love. It is based on ‘feelings’ and mutual understanding. This kind of spiritual love is seldom found in the world. This sort of holy love is a sort of miracle both for man and woman.

Style: - The poem consists of three stanzas, each of eleven lines. The fifth and seventh lines are shorter than the rest. This is a poem of fancy where the miracle of hair in the grave sets the ball rolling. The unusual comparisons—grave and woman, lovers and guardian-angels, the beloved and Mary Magdalen add to the charm of the poem. The laws injuring the otherwise seals of nature set free is also a fanciful figure of speech. All in all, we must admire the originality of the poem and the fancies which are enriched by Donne’s sallies against woman.

THE FLEA

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The flea has been the subject of love-poetry. The argument used by the poet is that the flea has a free access to the body of the beloved which is denied to the lover. Donne, however, makes a plea for physical union, which is necessary for spiritual love. Donne’s originality and intensity makes it a powerful lyric. Grierson observes: “It is a strange choice to our mind, but apparently the poem was greatly admired as a masterpiece.” Coleridge paid a tribute in a poem:

Thrice-honoured fleas; great you all as Donne
In Phoebus archives registered are ye,
And this your patent of nobility.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The flea is a symbol of the poet’s passionate plea for physical and sensuous love. The lover speaks to his beloved as he points to the flea which has sucked her blood. The flea has also sucked his blood and therefore the bloods of the lover and the beloved have mixed in its body. It has brought about a union of two bloods. The flea has enjoyed union with the beloved without any courtship or marriage. This is not considered as a matter of sin or shame or loss of virginity. The flea is superior to the lover because it can enjoy physical union without the formality of marriage.

Triple murder: - Donne goes a step further. He compares the flea to a temple and to a marriage bed. Just as the two lovers are united in the temple in a bond of marriage, so the two bloods have been united in the body of the flea. Its body is a sacred temple where their marriage has taken place. Similarly, their blood has mingled in the body of the flea and so its (flea’s) body is like their marriage bed. The two have mixed up in the body of the flea in spite of her objections and those of her parents. Her killing the flea would be an act of triple murder—murder of the flea, murder of the lover and her own murder. This is a sin and so she must spare the flea.

No loss of honour: - The beloved kills the flea and the poet feels unhappy. He chides her for her cruelty. What, after all, was the crime of the flea? She sucked the blood of both. Sucking a drop of her blood has not made her weak; she has also not lost her honour or chastity. Just as she has felt no weaker and lost no honour by the sucking of the blood by the flea, in the same way, her physical union with the lover will not affect either her health or her honour. She should, therefore, willingly surrender herself to her lover. The poet has rejected the notions of honour or chastity which are generally held out as arguments against sexual indulgence. Even spiritual love has its prelude in physical love. Why should his beloved object to his overtures?

CRITICAL COMMENTS
Donne uses new images and conceits to advantage through the flea-bite. First, the mingling of the bloods of the lover and the beloved in the body of the flea is no matter of sin or shame. The flea has brought about the mingling of the blood of the two and therefore there should be no objection to their sex-relationship. The conceit of the flea as a temple and as a marriage-bed is original, so also the sin of triple-murder by the proposed crushing of the flea by the beloved. When the beloved has killed the flea with her nails, the poet regards it as shedding blood of innocence. Her victory over the flea is imaginary rather than real. She will lose as much honour by sexual relationship with the poet as the honour lost by the flea-bite.

Donne believes in physical relationship between the lovers. Sex is above fear or shame. The world of the lovers is different from the ordinary world. However, critics differ about the justification of sex-relationship. James Keeve calls the poem “cynical and unpleasant”, while A.J. Smith regards it anti-courtly and anti-Petrarchan. There is no doubt that the poet’s plea for physical union is both personal and original. The poem is remarkable for its emotional intensity and vigour.

**THE GOOD MORROW**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

This is one of the finest poems of Donne explaining the complex nature of love. Initially, love has an element of fun and sex. It is like the dark night—an experience which is hot quite clear. But with the dawn, the true nature of things is revealed. The title suggests the dawn of the true love, its essential quality and the mutual understanding and confidence between the souls of the lover and the beloved. This kind of pure love provides a complete world to the lovers—a world without coldness, fear and decay. It is much better than the physical world. This perfect love is neither subject to time nor death.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

In the beginning, the poet examines the nature of the first experiences of love. The first set of experiences is childish—the physical joys of love. The second set of experiences is much richer—it is the experience of spiritual love in which the voices of one soul are echoed by the other soul. The mature experiences of love make one disregard the first foolish acts of love, when so to say, the souls were asleep in the den of seven sleepers. The poet can only dream of true love in the first stage. The atmosphere of sleep, stupor and dream shows the fleeting and unstable nature of this kind of immature love.

**The dawn of true love:** The past life spent in childish love was a sort of dream and blank. The night of oblivion and unreality is about to end. The dawn of true love is imminent and it awakens the soul of lovers to the meaning of true love. This true love makes them open out their hearts to each other, without any fear or inhibition. Their love for each other is all-absorbing and all-satisfying. They have no delight in other scenes or places. Each is like a world to the other. This world of love is everywhere. The poet is happy with the world of love. Let sailors discover new worlds and make charts and maps of the lands they have discovered. On the other hand, the lovers are content in their own worlds. Each of them has a world, but the two worlds of the two lovers put together, make one world of love.

**The two hemispheres:** As the lovers look at each other, each of them sees his own image in the other’s eyes. Their looks reflect the simplicity, purity and honesty of their hearts. Their two faces may be compared to two hemispheres which together make up a whole world. The two hemispheres of the faces of lovers are better than the geographical
hemispheres, because they do not have the 'sharp North' and the 'declining West'. The 'sharp North' implies coldness and indifference—to which their love is not subject—and the 'declining West' symbolises decay and death from which the lovers are free. According to certain philosophers, when different elements, which go into the making of a thing, are not harmoniously mixed, the thing is liable to decay and death. This is not true of their love because their love is harmonious, and is sweet-blooded. As such their love is immortal and beyond the vagaries of time and clime.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

In his inimitable way, Donne begins the poem with a question—what thou and I did till we loved? This rhetoric easily captures the attention of the reader. The poet compares the first stage of love—sex and enjoyment—with the mature type of love, the harmonious relationship of two souls. There is a lot of difference between the two types of love. The poet's wit is seen in his contrast between the two worlds—the worlds of the lovers and the geographical world. There is no 'sharp North' or 'declining West' in the world of lovers. It is a mutual love equal in quality and spirit—balanced and harmonised in such a manner that it is not subject to time or decay. The poet proceeds from the night-scene and the experience of sleepy love to the morning of pure love which gives him a new life and makes him discover a world in their little room. No navigator has ever found a world as wonderful as the world of love. This discovery of true love is as welcome as the greeting of a new day.

Donne's manner is that of 'concentration' advancing the argument in stages, reasoning till he is able to prove his point and drive it home to the reader. Like an able lawyer he presses his point in such a manner that it is very hard to refute it. Moreover, he marshalls his images from different sources in such a way that the cumulative effect is irresistible. Grierson rightly points out that the imagery has been drawn from a variety of sources, i.e. myths of everyday life, e.g. 'the seven sleepers' den, 'suck'd on country pleasures' and 'wishing in the morning', 'one-little room'; the geographical world, 'sea-discoveries', 'Maps', 'hemispheres'; and lastly, the scholastic philosophy 'what-ever dyes, was not mixt equally'. The relation between one object and the other is made intellectually rather than verbally.

Donne’s method in spite of his scholarly references is not pedantic and appeals to the lay reader by its sincerity and sharp reasoning.

THE CANONIZATION

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Love has been an object of fun and hair-splitting with the metaphysical poets. Donne has also dealt with different moods of love and has played with its several fancies and visions. In this poem, however, he has taken a positive and serious view of love. It is a selfless and saintly affection as worthy of respect as worship. Here we find his great devotion to Anne Moore—his beloved—though the marriage marred his career and brought him into disrepute. The main idea is that his love does not interfere with the lives of others and so why should they take exception to it. Donne’s passion is physical and the lovers really believe in sexual indulgence. Their bodies become one and so do their souls, as in a religious mystery.’

The paradox: - Donne treats physical love as if it were divine love. Saints are canonized for their renunciation of the world and its comforts. In the same way, the lovers have renounced the material world. The love of Donne for his beloved causes no damage or injury to the society or to the world. Other people continue to carry on their
normal daily chores and duties. The lovers have lost the world but gained more in the world of each other. They have, therefore, deserved the status of saints. They are the saints whose blessings other lovers will invoke. The lovers are devoted to each other as a saint is devoted to God. Some people may regard it as paradox of Christian Canonization, but there is no doubt that the tone of the poem is both serious and convincing.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The debate: - Donne begins his argument with a friend who dissuades him from love-making. He tells him to stop his nonsensical talk and allow him to love. Let his friend regard his love as a natural or hereditary disease. Let his friend mind his own business and look after his own career and fortune.

Love is harmless: - After all, the poet’s love does not cause any harm or damage to anyone. It does not disturb the even flow of social life. His sighs and tears have caused no offence to anyone. People are busy in their own affairs. His profession is love and so why should anyone take objection to it.

Secret of love: - The poet deals with the secret of love. Love is an association or union of two persons. Human isolation is awful; the lovers find mutual satisfaction in love. They are like flies and tapers which enjoy being consumed to extinction. Like the Phoenix, the lovers are resurrected from their ashes. Both are consumed by the fire of passion and out of this consummation emanates their resurrection. Physical love is elevated to the plane of spiritual love.

Life beyond death: - The poet and his beloved are prepared to die for love if they cannot live by love. The tale of their death will form the subject of love poets. Their love will be commemorated in lyric and sonnets. They will attain the status of saints of love. People will copy their love and regard it as a model.

Martyr-saints: - Lovers will worship the poet and his beloved as the martyrs to love. Lovers will invoke the blessings of these martyr saints. Love will bring them both peace and solace. Like them other lovers will devote themselves entirely to their respective beloveds. Each will find in his beloved the whole soul of the world. The lovers will pray to God to grant them the same kind of true love which the poet and the beloved enjoyed while living in the world.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

Mark the sudden and dramatic opening line of the poem. The first two stanzas are rhetorical full of contempt and rebuff for those who argue against love. There is a lot of hyperbole. Can ‘sighs’ turn into ‘sea storms’ or ‘tears’ cause floods or the ‘heat of passion’ cause plagues. Donne uses these metaphors to laugh at the Petrarchan paraphernalia of love. Donne also laughs at two good professions—soldiering and litigation which make fun of love.

Organic imagery is a strong point of the poem. The two lovers moving round each other like flies or again consuming themselves like tapers; or again the images of the eagle and the dove—the violent one preying on the weak, and ultimately the riddle of the Phoenix indicate the whole process of love from courtship to consummation of love. Though they are two, they are one, of the neutral sex like the Phoenix. As the Phoenix is reborn from its ashes, the lovers are reborn (revitalised) after sexual indulgence. In fact, Donne treats physical love like divine love. The canonization which leads to the lovers being regarded as the martyr saints of love will make them a model of love. The ‘rage’ of love will be transformed into peace. The lovers need no mention in history-books or any
monuments or inscriptions. Donne’s wit is seen in his mention of the King’s face—the real one in the court, the fake one stamped on coins. The lovers’ eyes are the mirrors in which each sees the reflection or the image of the other. Each eye contains the whole world with its countries, towns and courts. In short, the poem shows the craftsmanship of Donne at its best.

THE FUNERAL

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

This poem is a mixture of light-heartedness and seriousness. The poet has been rejected by his beloved. In sheer desperation and agony he wishes to sacrifice his life as a martyr on the altar of the god of love.

But in the meantime, he has secured a token of love from his beloved. This is a lock of her hair which he has worn round his arm. He thinks that the beloved’s hair will preserve his dead body and prevent it from decay and disintegration. It is a kind of charm or rather an embodiment of the outward soul which will give him immortality. The poet ultimately wishes to die as a martyr but fearing that the hair may be worshipped as a relic, he wants it to be buried in the grave along with him. This will be a sort of revenge on the cruel beloved, because some part of her body will be in the grave while she is still alive.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The idea of the bracelet of the beloved's hair worn by the poet is the central theme of another poem called The Relic. There the poet mentions that the hair is a sort of device which will make the souls of the lover and the beloved meet at the grave and spend some time together before the Day of Judgment. The bracelet of hair will also be regarded as a relic, sought by all men and women in need of love. This relic will be expected to perform miracles and bring success to lovers. In this poem, however, the hair is supposed to save the lover's dead body from disintegration. Secondly, the hair is a sort of a hand-cuff or fetter for causing pain to lover. The poet wants the hair buried with him as a sort of revenge on his beloved for his rejection. So, the bracelet of hair worn by the lover leads to an entirely different situation in this poem.

The poet wants no one to take away or destroy the bracelet of hair on his arm because it is a kind of charm which will preserve the limbs of the body. Just as the brain controls all the parts of the body, in the same way, her hair will hold together the limbs of his body in an organic whole. Perhaps the beloved never thought of this. She thought that her hair was a kind of charm or manacle to cause suffering to the lover. The poet, however, feels that he must punish the beloved for rejecting his love. He will commit suicide and thereby become love’s martyr. He will have the satisfaction of carrying a part of the beloved to the grave. If she could not save him from dying, he could not help burying a part of her body.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

The poem contains three stanzas of eight lines each. Lines two, five and seven are comparatively short. This is a typical poem which uses the conceit of the hair which first causes some satisfaction and then some justification and anguish. The poet uses the image of the soul and the brain for the function performed by the hair. Then he compares the hair to manacles and as such a source of pain and suffering. Finally, the hair may become a relic and a piece of idolatry. All these fanciful images are used by the poet in order to express his anger and frustration. All in all, the poem records a series of
moods or attitudes of the rejected lover centred on the subtle wreath of the beloved’s hair on his arm.

**THE SUN RISING**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

“The Sun Rising” is a typical poem by Donne, characterised by his usual vigour, sprightliness and freshness. It is a “saucy, muscular poem”. It expresses a lover’s vexation against sun-rising. The dawn is regarded as an impertinence which comes to disturb the lovers. The poet is delightfully out-spoken and defiant. He ridicules the sun as a “saucy pedantic wretch” and calls in question his right to peep through windows and curtains of a lover’s bed-room. There is defiance, contempt, perfect love and the deftly moving shuttle of metaphysical conceit. The supremacy of love which transcends both time and space, for it knows ‘no season and no climes’ is established with a daring jugglery of words.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

This poem, like most of Donne’s love-poems is inspired by the poet’s love for his wife, Anne Moore. Donne’s love amounts to a passion. It is a perfect synthesis of the spiritual and physical love. There are brilliant metaphysical conceits in the second and third stanzas of the poem. For example, the beloved is supposed to be combining in herself all the fragrance and the gold of East and West Indies:

> Look and to-morrow late tell me,
> Whether both th’ Indias of spice and mine,
> Be where thou left’st them, or lie here with me.

The lover and the beloved are compared to all the states and all the princes of the world, rolled into one:

> She’s all slates, and all princes I;
> Nothing else is;

The lover’s bed room is considered to be the epitome of the whole world.

> Shine here on us and thou art everywhere.

The poem is singularly free from the conventional and sentimental clap trap of love that was such a marked feature of Elizabethan love poetry. Donne’s beloved rises superior to all the Elizabethan sweet-hearts in-as-much as she is an exalted being—she is all the states of the world rolled into one, she combines in herself all the fragrance of spices and all the gold of rich mine.

**CRITICAL COMMENTS**

A successful love poem: - The Sun Rising is one of the most successful love—poems of Donne. As a poet of love he can be an extreme realist and deals with the physical side of it as also its spiritual side. Here he treats of a situation very significant for wedded lovers, but unusual in the poetry of love—two lovers in bed who refuse to get up when the sun shines on them in the morning.

Language—bold and extravagant: - The poet chides the sun in language which for its boldness is unmatched in lyric poetry. The sun is a busy, and old fool; it is a saucy, and pedantic wretch. It can go and chide late school boys and apprentices, but has no jurisdiction over the poet and his wife. Lover’s seasons do not run to the motions of the sun:

> Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

**Full or metaphysical conceits:** - In expressing his contempt for the sun, the poet displays all his learning and metaphysical wit, and extravagant conceit and employed in glorifying his beloved. Recent geographical discoveries supply him with the image of “both the Indias of spice and mine” (India and the West Indies and America). His wife is to him these two Indias in one.

**Extravagant fancy:** - The poet’s extravagant fancy discovers that he and his beloved in their secure possession of each other, are like all states and princes to each other. Princes only imitate them. She is all the world contracted into one feminine form and hence, by shining on her, the sun performs his duty towards the whole earth. Following up this conceit, the poet says that if the sun shines on him and his wife, it is, in a sense, shining everywhere—the bed becomes its centre and the walls of the bed room its sphere.

**Conclusion:** - The poem is remarkable for its boldness of thought and originality of execution. The way in which the sun is made to appear as an unwelcome guest and the way in which he is finally allowed to stay in the bedroom of the lovers, are the most striking examples of Donne’s poetic inventiveness and ingenuity. The poet after establishing the supremacy of love, permits the sun, (in a very patronising manner, of course) to stay in his bed-room.

In this poem, the lover chides (rebukes) sun-rising because it disturbs the lovers. Love is above the sense of time. It knows no hours, days or months. The sun should not call on lovers; it should call on school apprentices, courtiers and country ants. Love knows no season nor clime. The whole world has contracted into the lover’s bed-room. Thus the sun need not go round the earth, it should only pay a visit to the lover’s bedroom and it would meet the whole world there.

**THE ECSTASY**

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

It is a complex and metaphysical poem dealing with the twin aspects of love—physical and spiritual. Some critics like Legouis find in it a plan for seduction with emphasis on the physical nature of love, while others like Helen Gardner find in it an affirmation of spiritual love. In fact, it deals with the relationship of the body and the soul in love.

**What is ‘extasie’?** - ‘Extasie’ is essentially a religious experience in which the individual soul, ignoring the body, holds converse with Divinity. It is a feeling of trance, of spiritual exaltation, and of Samadhi where the individual has a vision of the divine. Donne applies the feeling to the experience of the lovers and finds that the essence of love is not sex but an overpowering feeling of unity in diversity. In fact, true love is an activity of the soul. A new soul emanates from the two individual souls and makes the lover realise that love is, in its pure essence, spiritual. Donne has also interpreted love in a philosophic way. Love is an idea or a concept concretized through physical enjoyment of sex. He has also interpreted it according to the Platonic concept the desire of the moth for the star, longing of one soul to seek communication with another. Another idea introduced in the poem has been borrowed from astronomy. Just as heavenly bodies are moved by “intelligences” i.e., angelic spirits, in the same way souls are the motivating forces in human love, though they have no existence of their own. They are linked with the body, which is the overt and apparent machinery for love-making. The soul expresses itself through the body. In other words, the body is a medium used by the soul to achieve the consummation of love. Thus the poem uses a religious and mystical experience to interpret the complexity and depth of secular love.
DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The physical setting: - The first stanza provides the physical setting of the two lovers. On the bank of a river overgrown with violet flowers, the lovers sit quiet, looking into each other’s eyes and holding hands firmly. This physical closeness offers a romantic and pastoral setting—their hands cemented in mutual confidence and the eyes as if strung on a thread. This sensually exciting scene is a forerunner to the actual physical union.

The poet compares the two lovers to the two armies. The souls are like the negotiators. They are not committed to either side. Only those who are gifted can understand the dialogue of the two souls, and realize the true nature of love.

True nature of love: - The communication of the souls of lovers reveals the true essence of love. Love is not sex-experience. It is rather a union of two souls. Each soul appears to keep its identity and as in horticulture, by transplantation the plant grows stronger and better, the new soul has a great strength and vitality. The fusion of the two souls is the real consummation of love. The new soul is composed of ‘atoms’ which are beyond decay. Just as the essence of the individual is not the body but the soul, in the same way, the essence of love is not sex but mutual dependence and affection. The body is no dross, but an alloy necessary for pure metals to become stronger. The body is the channel for the souls to inter-communicate with each other.

Is love physical or spiritual? : - To this old and complex question, Donne has a satisfactory answer. Love is dependent both on the soul and body. Love has to be concretized. This is possible only through the physical play of love. Donne feels that physical love is enriched by the mutual understanding of the souls of the two lovers. Spiritual love is not possible in a vacuum. Like heavenly beings who influence the actions of men through manifestation, the souls must express themselves through the bodies. The poet feels that an isolated soul is like a captive prince. Souls must return to the bodies and manifest the mystery of love. As from the blood comes strength and vigour which acts as an agent of the soul and binds together elements which go into the making of man, so the body and the sense organs are at the disposal and service of the lovers’ souls, otherwise the soul cannot express themselves. The body is the book of the love. Great mystics have also pleaded for the evolution of physical love towards holy or divine love.

Finally, the poet feels that love ripens in the soul. As such, physical love and holy love are complementary. If some lover observes the poet and his beloved, he will hardly find any change in their behaviour when the lovers return to their bodies.

CRITICAL REMARKS

The poet employs an unusual desire through ‘extasie’ which means ‘to stand out’. The souls of the poet and his beloved as it were, stand out of their respective bodies and hold a dialogue revealing the true nature of their love. In a religious ‘extasie’ the soul holds a communication with God. Here the conversation is not between the soul and God but between two souls. Donne has artistically explained the religious and philosophical belief to throw light on physical and sensuous love. The greatness of the poem lies in reconciling the opposites—physical love with spiritual love, metaphysical belief with the scientific, the abstract with the concrete, the human element with the non-human. The images and the conceits are carefully selected to support the poet’s views. The romantic setting in the beginning of the poem sets the mood of physical love—the violet flowers, the holding of hands and the cementing of the balms and the threading of the eye beams. The physical aspect of love must precede the spiritual union. Then comes the image of two armies and the soul acting as negotiator. Then, there are the images of the
new soul—emanating out of the two souls — stronger and abler because it is made out of ‘atoms’. The inter-dependence of the body and the soul is expressed through metaphors. The souls are moving spirits, while the bodies are the ‘sphere’ in which the ‘intelligences’ move. Just as the stars and planets give rise to natural phenomena which affect the fortunes of human beings, in the same way the soul must find expression through the body. Just as the spirits of blood unite the physical and metaphysical in love, so souls express themselves through the five senses in the body. The image of the body as lovers, is very vivid and convincing.

The poet shifts quickly from the physical to the spiritual and therefore this poem has an edge over other metaphysical poems. The very fact that critics disagree about the objective of the poem—seduction or spiritual transport—shows the complexity and the diversity of possible interpretations. On the whole, the critics praise the poet for his excellent performance. Coleridge said: “I would never find fault with metaphysical poems, were they all like this(Extasie) or just half as excellent.” James Smith commended the poem in the following words: “Donne does not write about many things; he is content with the identity of lovers as lovers, and their diversity as the human beings in which love manifests itself, the stability and self sufficiency of love, contrasted with the mutability and dependence of human beings; with the presence of lovers to each other, their physical unity, though they are separated by travel and death, the spirit demanding the succour of the flesh hampering the spirit, the shortcoming of this life, summarised by decay and death, contrasted with the divine to which it aspires.”

For reconciling the dichotomy between the flesh and the sensuous and the sublime, particularly in this poem, Donne deserves credit.