



INSTITUTE  
OF DISTANCE  
EDUCATION **IDE**  
Rajiv Gandhi University

# BAENC201 ENGLISH COMPULSORY-III

(ADVANCED GRAMMAR AND APPLIED LANGUAGE SKILLS-I)



**BA (ENGLISH  
COMPULSORY)**  
**3<sup>RD</sup> SEMESTER**

**Rajiv Gandhi University**

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# **Advanced Grammar and Applied Language Skills I**

**(English Compulsory III)**

**BAENC201**

**BA**

**III Semester**



**RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY**

**Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112**

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## About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

## About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as “Institute of Distance Education (IDE).”

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

### **Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:**

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

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# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## English Compulsory-I

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### Syllabi

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#### UNIT I: Explanation from starred Texts

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#### UNIT II: Poetry I

Phillip Sidney- *The Nightingale*

George Herbert- *The Pulley*

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#### UNIT III: Poetry II

John Milton: *On His Blindness* & *And Did those Feet*

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#### UNIT IV: Poetry III

William Wordsworth- *London 1802*

Robert Browning- *Porphyria's Lover*

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#### UNIT V: Poetry IV

Thomas Hardy-*The Darkling Thrush*

W. H. Auden= *The Unknown Citizen*

## UNIT I & II: EXPLANATION FROM TEXT & POETRY I

### 1.1. Introduction

In this unit the all the poems prescribed in the syllabus will be deal with in detail. This unit will help the learners in them analyse the poets writing style, themes, reference to context and the genre of the poems in question.

### 1.2. Philip Sidney

#### Biography

Sir Philip Sidney was born on November 30, 1554, to Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley. His mother was the daughter of John Dudley, the 1st Duke of Northumberland, and the sister of Robert Dudley, the 1st Earl of Leicester. Sidney was named after his godfather, King Philip II of Spain. Sidney was the eldest of three children. He attended the Shrewsbury School beginning in 1564 at the age of ten. There, he met his longtime best friend and future biographer, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. From 1568 to 1571, Sidney studied at Christ Church, Oxford, but he left without taking a degree in order to travel the continent and complete his education in that alternative way. He traveled through France (narrowly escaping the horrors of the Saint Bartholomew Massacre in Paris), Germany, Italy, and Austria.

Upon his return to England on May 31, 1575, Sidney took on the position of a popular and highly respected courtier. At this point, Sidney first made the acquaintance of Penelope Devereux, the eldest daughter of Lord Essex—a girl of only twelve years old. Lord Essex greatly desired a marriage between Sidney and Lady Penelope and, on his deathbed in 1576, allegedly proclaimed of Sidney, "Oh that good gentleman, have me commended unto him. And tell him I sent him nothing, but I wish him well—so well, that if God do move their hearts, I wish that he might match with my daughter. I call him son—he so wise, virtuous, and godly." In 1576, in the midst of his early courtship with Penelope, Sidney first began writing his famous sonnet sequence, *Astrophel and Stella* (now spelled as *Astrophil and Stella*).

In 1577, Sidney was sent as ambassador to the German Emperor and the Prince of Orange. Officially, he was to console the princes on the death of their father, and unofficially he was to explore the possibility of creating a Protestant league. In 1579, the projected marriage of Queen Elizabeth to the Duke of Anjou—the Roman Catholic heir to the French throne—roused Sidney to take action. He wrote an extremely bold letter to the Queen expressing his opposition to the match and, as a result, swiftly became the object of her severe displeasure. Retiring from court to avoid the Queen's wrath, Sidney spent several months living on the estate of his sister, Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and writing the pastoral romance *Arcadia*.

With the marriage of his wealthy uncle, the Earl of Leicester, in 1578 and the following birth of a cousin, Sidney's fortunes swiftly changed. As the nephew and heir to the childless and unmarried Earl of Leicester, Sidney could be matched in marriage to the wealthiest woman in England. But simply as Sir Henry Sidney's son, without the prospective fortune of his uncle, Sidney was nothing more than a poor gentleman. This change in fortunes ensured that Sidney would no longer be an appropriate match for Penelope Devereux, despite the dying wishes of her father.

In 1581, Penelope was married to Lord Rich. Although she did not indicate any affection for Sidney before her wedding, her marriage to Lord Rich was recognized as unhappy. According to a letter written by the Earl of Devonshire to James I, Penelope never accepted Lord Rich as a husband but, "being in the power of her friends, she was by them married against her will unto one against whom she did protest at the very solemnity and ever after," who instead of being her "comforter did strive in all things to torment her," and with whom she lived in "continual discord" (Rowse).

In 1583 Sidney was knighted, and soon afterward, he married Frances, the

daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham. In 1584, he took up a position in Parliament. A year later, he was appointed to the Governorship of Flushing in the Netherlands. On September 22, 1586, Sidney led a military body of two hundred English horsemen on an attack against a Spanish convoy on its way to the town of Zutphen. According to legend, as he was leaving the camp, Sidney met the camp's marshal, Sir William Pelham, wearing only light armor, and in an effort to emulate this nobility, Sidney threw aside his own armor and rode into battle unprotected. This anecdote was meant to emphasize Sidney's courage and similarity to the knight-errants in Arthurian legend. During the battle, Sidney's thighbone was shattered by a musket shot, and he died twenty-two days later. He was not yet thirty-two years old.

While lying injured, Sidney allegedly gave his water bottle to another wounded soldier, declaring, "Thy need is greater than mine." This demonstration of self-sacrifice and nobility made this episode one of the most famous stories about Sir Philip Sidney. As English bibliographer Alfred W. Pollard (1859-1944) remarks, "the story of Philip Sidney and the cup of cold water [is] among the best known anecdotes in English history."

Sidney's body was interred in St. Paul's Cathedral on February 16, 1587. His death was the cause of much mourning in England, with the Queen and her subjects grieving for the man who was the consummate courtier.

List of Important Works

- *Arcadia* (1590)
- *Astrophel and Stella* (1591)
- *The Defense of Poesy* (1595)
- *The Nightingale*

### 1.3. *The Nightingale* (The Poem)

The nightingale, as soon as April bringeth  
Unto her rested sense a perfect waking,  
While late bare earth, proud of new clothing, springeth,  
Sings out her woes, a thorn her song-book making,  
And mournfully bewailing,  
Her throat in tunes expresseth  
What grief her breast oppreseth,  
For Tereus' force on her chaste will prevailing.  
O Philomela fair, O take some gladness,  
That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness :  
Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth ;  
Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth.

Alas, she hath no other cause of anguish  
But Tereus' love, on her by strong hand wroken,  
Wherein she suffering, all her spirits languish ;  
Full womanlike complains her will was broken.  
But I, who daily craving,  
Cannot have to content me,  
Have more cause to lament me,  
Since wanting is more woe than too much having.  
O Philomela fair, O take some gladness,  
That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness :  
Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth ;  
Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth.

Genre of the poem: Sonnet

What is a sonnet?

The sonnet is a popular classical form that has compelled poets for centuries.



Traditionally, the sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes, and adhering to a tightly structured thematic organization. The name is taken from the Italian *sonetto*, which means “a little sound or song.” Types of Sonnets

Two sonnet forms provide the models from which all other sonnets are formed: the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean.

#### *Petrarchan Sonnet*

The first and most common sonnet is the Petrarchan, or Italian. Named after one of its greatest practitioners, the Italian poet Petrarch, the Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two stanzas, the octave (the first eight lines) followed by the answering sestet (the final six lines). The tightly woven rhyme scheme, *abba, abba, cdecde*, or *cdcdcd*, is suited for the rhyme-rich Italian language, though there are many fine examples in English. Since the Petrarchan presents an argument, observation, question, or some other answerable charge in the octave, a turn, or volta, occurs between the eighth and ninth lines. This turn marks a shift in the direction of the foregoing argument or narrative, turning the sestet into the vehicle for the counterargument, clarification, or whatever answer the octave demands.

Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the Petrarchan sonnet to England in the early sixteenth century. His famed translations of Petrarch’s sonnets, as well as his own sonnets, drew fast attention to the form. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, a contemporary of Wyatt’s, whose own translations of Petrarch are considered more faithful to the original though less fine to the ear, modified the Petrarchan, thus establishing the structure that became known as the Shakespearean sonnet. This structure has been noted to lend itself much better to the comparatively rhyme-poor English language.

#### *Shakespearean Sonnet*

The second major type of sonnet, the Shakespearean, or English sonnet, follows a different set of rules. Here, three quatrains and a couplet follow this rhyme scheme: *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*. The couplet plays a pivotal role, usually arriving in the form of a conclusion, amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas, often creating an epiphanic quality to the end. In Sonnet 130 of William Shakespeare’s epic sonnet cycle, the first twelve lines compare the speaker’s mistress unfavorably with nature’s beauties, but the concluding couplet swerves in a surprising direction.

#### *Variations on the Sonnet Form*

John Milton’s Italian-patterned sonnets (later known as “Miltonic” sonnets) added several important refinements to the form. Milton freed the sonnet from its typical incarnation in a sequence of sonnets, writing the occasional sonnet that often expressed interior, self-directed concerns. He also took liberties with the turn, allowing the octave to run into the sestet as needed. Both of these qualities can be seen in “When I Consider How My Light is Spent.”

The Spenserian sonnet, invented by sixteenth-century English poet Edmund Spenser, cribs its structure from the Shakespearean—three quatrains and a couplet—but employs a series of “couplet links” between quatrains, as revealed in the rhyme scheme: *abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee*. The Spenserian sonnet, through the interweaving of the quatrains, implicitly reorganized the Shakespearean sonnet into couplets, reminiscent of the Petrarchan. One reason was to reduce the often excessive final couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet, putting less pressure on it to resolve the foregoing argument, observation, or question.

Lines 1-5

Sir Philip Sidney’s poem “The Nightingale” begins with a reference to the

month of spring. Sidney personifies the bird and captures its reaction in April. The chilling winter made its senses numb. In the cajoling heat of spring, its senses rejuvenate. It is described as a “perfect waking” for the nightingale. So, its inactivity during winter is compared to sleeping.

While the earth that became bare in winter is now proud of her new clothing of vegetation. Nature also springs alongside the nightingale. It seems to the speaker as if nature sings out the woes of the bird.

In the next part of this line, Sidney uses the term “thorn” as a symbol. It represents the pain of the nightingale. Philomela, a figure in Greek mythology, was turned into a nightingale by Olympian Gods. Sidney alludes to this mythical character through the reference to the nightingale.

Philomela sings her woeful story through her song. Her heartache acts as an inspiration in her “song-book”. Here, the “song-book” is a metaphor of the bird’s sad songs. Those songs mournfully bewail her tragic destiny.

Lines 6-8

Sidney describes how Philomela (depicted as a nightingale) expresses her grief through her tunes in the following lines. Her songs portray the grief that oppresses her heart. By listening to her songs, the poet thinks Tereus’ force still prevails on her “chaste will”. In the quoted phrase, the poet uses a transferred epithet. The adjective “chaste” applies to the pronoun “her” instead of her “will”. Through this reference, the poet depicts Philomela’s chastity.

In these lines, Sidney hints at the rape of Philomela by her sister’s husband Tereus. Later, she obtained her revenge of him and was incidentally turned into a nightingale. Tereus’s cruelty had such an impression on her will that it still pains deep. She expresses this pain through her monotonous melodies.

Lines 9-12

The last four lines of the first stanza are directly addressed to fair Philomela. Sidney’s speaker says her to be glad as he is in more distress than her. He describes his pain as “juster” than the cause of her “plaintful sadness”. The phrase “plaintful sadness” refers to Philomela’s complaining and sad songs. According to the speaker, his case is more grave and pathetic than Philomela’s story. She can express her pain in the rejuvenating spring.

In his case, everything around him is starting to fade even though nature is filled with springing with colors. This juxtaposition of two contrasting ideas is meant for emphasizing the speaker’s pain. In the last line, he reiterates the fact that Philomela is relieved of the “thorn” by avenging the misdeed caused to her chaste will. Whereas, the “thorn” of his life inserted into his heart. It now aches and makes his mind wearier. Here, the “thorn” of the speaker stands for loneliness, hopelessness, and pain of unrequited love.

Lines 13-16

In the following section of “The Nightingale”, Sidney’s persona ironically comments on Philomela’s cause of anguish. According to him, she has no other cause to lament but Tereus’ lustful love for her body. Indeed, his strong hands had wreaked havoc on her mind and body. It resulted in her suffering. Gradually, her spirits languished. At one point, her will was totally broken as none heard her “Full womanlike complains”.

In this section, Sidney presents an important idea concerning the nature of his speaker’s pain and that of Philomela. The hurts of Philomela was somehow originated from love. It can be physical yet it is a desire that originates from the darker side of the heart. In her case, her pain is caused by this darker kind of love. No matter what, the essence of love is present in her tragedy. While, in the speaker’s case, he suffers for the complete absence of love, be it physical or mental.

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Lines 17-20

The speaker daily craves love. He does not have any source of hope to satiate her lonely, aching heart. Therefore, he has more causes to lament his own condition instead of Philomela's tragedy.

In the following line, the poet uses an epigram that is going to stick with the readers for a long time. Here, he says that the strong desire for a thing makes one sadder than having too much. What does it mean?

When one has "too much" with him, it comes up with several challenges. Having more than the needs creates tension in a person's life and increases the burden. On the other hand, the idea of craving is more woeful than a luxury. The desire to have a thing that is either difficult to achieve or impossible to get only increases the heartache.

Lines 21-24

The last four lines of this stanza are repeated for the sake of emphasis. They are also used as a refrain. Through these lines, Sidney points at the fact that his speaker needs special attention. The pain of Philomela is in no way similar to that of the speaker. He has already lost hope that is depicted through the term "fadeth". Alongside that, he cannot get rid of the pain caused by the "thorn" of love. However, Philomela gets rid of it through her songs.

### **Form, Rhyme Scheme, & Meter**

Sidney's "The Nightingale" has a song-like structure. It contains two stanzas ending with a four-line refrain. Each section of the poem consists of twelve lines. The rhyme scheme of the poem ABABCDDCEEFF. So, the first four lines contain an alternative rhyme scheme. The following four lines have a closed rhyming pattern. While the last four lines form two rhyming couplets. The following stanza has the same rhyming pattern.

Sidney composed this poem in iambic pentameter and iambic trimeter alternatively with hypermetrical lines. The lines having eleven syllables contain five iambs and those having seven syllables contain three iambs. The unstressed syllable at the end of a line is considered a hypermetrical foot.

### **Poetic Devices & Figurative Language**

Sidney makes use of the following poetic devices in "The Nightingale."

- Personification: In this poem, Sidney personifies the nightingale as a singer of woeful songs. Besides, in "While late bare earth, proud of new clothing, springeth," the earth is personified.
- Allusion: There is an allusion to the myth of Philomela and Tereus in this poem.
- Metaphor: In the phrase "a thorn her song-book making", the poet uses the terms "thorn" and "song-book" as metaphors. Readers can also find a number of personal metaphors in this piece.
- Apostrophe: It occurs in "O Philomela fair, O take some gladness".
- Refrain: The last four lines are used as a refrain. It reiterates the main idea of this poem.
- Antithesis: In the lines, "Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth;/ Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth", Sidney uses this device. Here, the juxtaposition of two contrasting ideas emphasizes the speaker's mental state.

Power of Women

The Nightingale proved that women have a great power and they can do what men can do and more. The story debunks the idea of women being weak to join the war. Isabelle and Vianne were very strong examples of what women can do. From

Isabelle hiding soldiers and helping them cross the Pyrenees mountains from France to Spain, to Vianne rescuing the Jewish children and putting them in an orphanage instead of being put in concentration camps and eventually dying. These two women were a symbol of the power of women. Also, the story highlighted that even if women didn't physically fight in war, they fight in their own houses by being patient that their husbands are gone, making sure there is enough food and the children are safe and maintaining a stable shelter for their children in spite of what the war holds outside the house and the dangers they face.

#### War and Destruction

This story highlights that war is not only fighting off soldiers among each other and victory and defeat. The reality is that no country wins, rather, they both suffer great losses, not only of souls but of buildings and roads and towns as a whole. After the war, most people are mentally and physically destroyed, whether they fought in the war or not, which affects the country's economy and state. Moreover, many buildings are destroyed by bombs and likewise, which will require a lot of time and money to rebuild it. Also, a whole generation is lost because of the decimation of the young soldiers who are taken in war. Basically, war is not the destruction of the leaders and their countries, rather, it affects the civilians and innocent soldiers who did nothing to be dragged into a war that destroyed their lives.

### Historical Context

According to scholars, "The Nightingale" is a song of the *Stella* series. It appears in the 1598 edition of *Arcadia*. The poem was written in the tune of "Non credo giàche piu infelice amante." In this poem, Sir Philip Sidney alludes to the Greek sisters' tragedy.

#### The Myth of Philomela, Procne, & Tereus

##### Philomela, Procne, and Tereus

The mythical story can be found in Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The sisters, Philomela and Procne were daughters of Pandion I, King of Athens and Zeuxippe. Procne was married to Tereus of Thrace. However, Tereus was lustful for Procne's sister Philomela. Later, in the story, Tereus raped Philomela, mutilated her tongue, and abandoned her in the cabin.

As she could not tell of her physical and mental injuries, she wove a tapestry depicting her story and had it sent to Procne. Procne, being incensed in revenge, killed her son by Tereus, Itys. She served her son as a meal to her husband. It made Tereus angry and he was after the sisters' lives. But, all three were transformed into birds by Olympian Gods.

- Tereus became a hoopoe. In some versions of the myth, he was turned into a hawk.
- Procne became a swallow.
- Philomela became the nightingale. However, the female nightingale could not sing.

#### Analysis

"The Nightingale" begins with a 12-line stanza that can be understood as an octet followed by a quartet. The first eight lines comprise one sentence and introduce the nightingale's song. For the first seven lines, the poem seems to be entirely about a literal nightingale who sings a sad song at the beginning of

spring. After the “rest” of winter, she wakes up to an earth “proud of new clothing,” the green shoots and blossoms of spring. Amidst this beauty, she makes her “thorn” or pain into a “song-book,” a repertoire of sad tunes. The first four lines of this octave feature a mostly regular iambic pentameter (with an extra unstressed syllable at the end of each line) and an ABAB rhyme scheme, thus mirroring the beauty of the nightingale’s song.

Lines 5-8 break from the pentameter meter, featuring three lines of tetrameter (also with an extra unstressed syllable at the end of each line), followed by line 8, which features irregular hexameter. Furthermore, the rhyme scheme switches to BAAB. These lines metrically and topically break from the regular beauty of spring, more fully expressing the anguish of the nightingale’s “mournful,” grief-filled song as well as revealing its cause: rape by Tereus. Line 8 thus reveals that the nightingale in this poem is not any ordinary nightingale, but the mythical character Philomela, who was raped by her brother-in-law Tereus.

While the first octave of the stanza focuses entirely on the nightingale/Philomela, the final quartet compares her plight to the speaker’s. The speaker uses apostrophe to directly address Philomela, instructing her to “take gladness” that it could be worse: her world is brightening, and she is able to express herself, whereas the speaker’s world is growing more desolate, and worse, he is unable to turn his grief outward. The speaker uses the symbol of the thorn to represent pain and grief: Philomela’s is outwardly visible, while the poet’s is internal. Lines 9-12 are metrically irregular, alternating between pentameter and hexameter, as well as featuring a third new rhyme scheme, CCAA. Their metrical form mirrors the poet’s inner turmoil.

The second stanza is similar in form to the first, featuring twelve lines; in fact, the first four lines have the same meter and rhyme scheme as those of the first stanza. While it builds on stanza one, it also has variations in meter and rhyme that mark a turn, especially a greater focus on the speaker than on the nightingale/Philomela. Like lines 1-4, lines 13-16 make up one sentence, and feature an irregular pentameter rhythm and ABAB rhyme scheme. They return to the myth of Philomela, in particular stating that Tereus’ forced “love” is the only cause of her grief. The rape has caused her to suffer and her spirits to “languish” and grow weak. He considers this response “womanlike,” implying that a man would bear his suffering differently.

In lines 17-20, the speaker returns to the same meter as lines 3-8, moving from tetrameter to hexameter. They feature a CDDC rhyme scheme, and do not share any end rhymes with lines 13-16. They thus emphasize the speaker’s internal discord, as well as the difference in character between his pain and Philomela’s. Here, the speaker describes the source of his pain in the most detail: he daily “craves” and “wants” something that Philomela has had too much of—“love” as he calls it, or sex. He is unable to find satisfaction, which he considers worse than Philomela’s experience of rape.

Lines 21-24 repeat lines 9-12 word-for-word. Repeating these lines has two effects. First, it echoes their message once again: the speaker’s fate is worse than Philomela’s, and she should take solace in the knowledge that she could have it worse. However, by repeating them once again, the speaker also emphasizes that

his poem itself is a kind of song, complete with a refrain. Although he complains that he is unable to sing out his woes as does Philomela/the Nightingale, he seems to be doing just that. As the female nightingale in actuality has no song, the speaker has revealed himself to be both hypocritical and callous.

### The Nightingale (Philip Sidney poem) Symbols, Allegory and Motifs

#### The Nightingale (symbol)

The titular nightingale refers to the story of Tereus and Philomela that was featured in *Metamorphoses* by the Latin poet Ovid. Ovid's story recalls the rape of Philomela by Tereus, and her eventual transformation into a nightingale. This is represented in Sidney's poem in the line "for Tereus' force on her chaste will prevailing." Sidney documents her laments and cries of pain. These cries are symbolic of the wrongs that were done against her by Tereus.

#### April (symbol)

April is traditionally seen as the first month of Spring. With Spring comes new life, greenery, and an escape from winter's pains. In "The Nightingale," the titular character arrives "as soon as April bringeth." For the nightingale, spring also marks the beginning of the healing process; the speaker tells her that her "earth now springs" as the world around her bursts into bloom. Spring, however, does not bring a cure for the speaker's woes; his earth "fadeth." This suggests that his pain is beyond the healing and restorative powers of the natural world.

#### The Thorn (symbol)

The thorn is the representation of both the speaker and the nightingale's sorrow. It is first mentioned in the third line of the poem, when speaking of the cries of the nightingale and "a thorn of her song-book making." It is then repeated in the final line of both stanzas, "thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth." Here the speaker expresses his belief that the nightingale is able to express and show her pain, as her thorn is "without" (outside). In contrast, he is unable to express his pain; his thorn is "within," where it hurts all the more. He goes on to say that in fact invades his heart. The thorn also falls in line with the spring-time setting, as thorn-bearing plants grow in spring. In other words, the speaker's pains only expand in the spring.

#### Singing (motif)

As a nightingale, Philomela is only able to express herself through song ("her throat in tune expresseth"). Singing is typically associated with beauty and purity, but in the case of the nightingale it is a representation of pain, suffering, "and mournful bewailing." Yet because she can only express herself through (wordless) song, she is not able to truly impart the horrible nature of her situation. She was raped by Tereus and turned into a bird, and her only outlet is singing. Nonetheless, the speaker suggests "that here is juster cause of plaintful sadness" his own *inability* to express himself in song. Here another gendered reading can be taken. While women are offered more latitude to express their emotions, these emotions are often belittled and ignored.

#### Tereus (symbol)

Tereus is representative of the source and suffering. Yet he holds a dynamic position in the poem. In the first stanza it is written, "for Tereus' force on her chaste will prevailing." This directly suggests the rape ("force") committed against Philomela. In the second stanza, however, the sentiment shifts. The speaker claims, "but Tereus' love, on her by strong hand wroken." Phrasing Tereus' rape of Philomela as "love" is peculiar and problematic. By doing so, the speaker is able to prioritize his own worries above Philomela's. In this sense, he uses Tereus to reduce the plight of Philomela so as to aggrandize his own position.

### 1.4. George Herbert Biography

1593–1633

*Engraving, 18th century. Colored. (Photo by: PHAS/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)*

Nestled in the age of Shakespeare and Milton is the literary stalwart George Herbert, poet and Church of England clergyman. Herbert's poetry would influence fellow poets such as Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Thomas Traherne, and then in later centuries Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Anthony Hecht, and, perhaps Robert Frost—although these later poets are more abstract in their devotion to Herbert than were his 17th-century followers. Herbert's poetry, although often formally experimental, is always passionate, searching, and elegant.

Much of his early popularity—there were at least 11 editions of *The Temple* in the 17th century—no doubt owes something to the carefully crafted persona of "holy Mr. Herbert" put forth by the custodians of his literary works and reputation. In the preface to the first edition of *The Temple*, published in 1633, shortly after Herbert died, his close friend Nicholas Ferrar established the contours of Herbert's exemplary life story, a story that not only validated but was also presumably told in the poems of the volume. In a few short pages Ferrar indelibly sketches Herbert as one who exchanged the advantages of noble birth and worldly preferment for the strains of serving at "Gods Altar," one whose "obedience and conformitie to the Church and the discipline thereof was singularly remarkable," and whose "faithfull discharge" of the holy duties to which he was called "make him justly a companion to the primitive Saints, and a pattern or more for the age he lived in." This is not only high praise, but praise with political as well as religious implications: in 1633 the church was a place of contention as well as worship, and Ferrar helped establish Herbert as a model of harmonious, orderly, noncontroversial devotion for whom faith brought answers and commitment to the social establishment, not divisive questions and social fragmentation.

By 1652, the time of the next major biographical statement about Herbert, the tensions of the 1630s had erupted into a devastating civil war: the army of King Charles I had been decisively defeated, and the king himself executed; the bishops had been disenfranchised from their high place in both church and state government; and the maintenance of peace depended on a coalition of parties — old and new landowners, merchants, religious enthusiasts, army commanders, and soldiers—with conflicting interests. Little wonder, then, that Barnabas Oley, a Royalist divine, envisioned Herbert as a "primitive ... holy and heavenly soul" who could instruct a later generation living in much-deserved chastisement and exile. Herbert seemed to be a fit subject for nostalgia, one who lived and died in peace. In Oley's introduction to *Herbert's Remains* (1652), containing among other works *A Priest to the Temple: Or, The Country Parson*, Herbert's prose description of the ideal way a priest would serve his country parish (written during the last years of his life when he was a country parson at Bemerton), Oley pictures Herbert as one who embodies traits that the current age has left behind: a person of charity, a lover of traditional, time-honored worship, church music and ceremonies, and a master of "*modest, grave and Christian reproof*" Oley's preface is apocalyptic throughout, and he frames Herbert's image in such a way that it may lead midcentury England to holiness and repentance, "Recovery, and Profit."

Izaak Walton, who wrote the first extensive biography of Herbert, follows the lead of Ferrar and Oley in shaping Herbert's life. Walton's *Life of Mr. George Herbert*, first published in 1670 and then revised in 1674 and 1675, does not have Ferrar's austerity nor Oley's urgency: by 1670 the king had been restored, the Anglican church was reestablished as the official religious institution of the country, and—despite inevitable exceptions—there seemed to be a growing respect for the advantages of toleration and accommodation rather than

confrontation. Herbert was still needed, but not so much for reproof in perilous times as for gentle guidance in times of relative calm. For Walton, Herbert was not only a "primitive Saint"—that is, a throwback to the church of a simpler era—but a prefiguration of the ideal Restoration clergyman: wellborn but socially responsible, educated but devout, experienced in the ways of the world but fully committed to the ways of the church, and knowledgeable about both the pains and joys of spiritual life. In Walton's hands Herbert comes alive, but it is safest to approach Walton's biography as one of the great works of 17th-century prose fiction.

### 1.5. *The Pulley* (Poem)

When God at first made man,  
Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.  
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,  
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;  
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,  
Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,  
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
So both should losers be.

“Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to my breast.”

Genre of : Metaphysical Poem

#### **Metaphysical Poetry**

Metaphysical poetry was at its peak during the seventeenth century in England and continental Europe. The movement explored everything from irony to philosophy and conceits. It is for its complex and original conceits that most metaphysical poems are noted. During this period, poets relaxed their previously strict use of meter and explored new ideas. John Donne is the best-known of the metaphysical poets.

The word “metaphysical” was used by writers such as John Dryden and Samuel Johnson in regards to the poets of the seventeenth century. These poets are noted for their “unnaturalness”. Johnson wrote in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* in the late 1700s, that a “race of writers” had appeared that might be termed “metaphysical poets”. The term was likely taken from Dryden who had described John Donne as affecting “metaphysics” in his “satires” and his “amorous verses”. It was not until the twentieth century that many of these poets were adequately recognized for their talent and originality.

T.S. Eliot is one of the many twentieth-century literary critics who helped to establish the well-deserved reputation that writers such as John Donne and Andrew Marvell now hold. He applied many of their techniques to his own



writing.

The best known of the metaphysical poets is John Donne. He is followed by others such as Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and George Herbert. Donne is most often cited as the best of this shortlist of writers and the originator of the basic tenants of the genre. It is because of his writing that many writers who came after took on some or all of the features of metaphysical writing.

One of the most prominent characteristics of this movement is the spoken quality of the poetry, something that many other writers of that time did not approve of. Other common features include the use of colloquial diction, philosophical exploration, new and original conceits, irony, and the relaxed use of meter. Poets whose works have been categorized as “metaphysical” often seek out the answers to questions such as, does God exist? Or, does humankind really have free choice? Or, what is the nature of reality?

Stanza I

In the opening verse of ‘The Pulley’, George Herbert discusses the origin of humanity (first made man). Herbert attempts to retell the Christian story of creation with a few additions. He expresses the feelings of God, when He chose to create humanity. When God saw what He had created, He decided to gift humanity with “a glass of blessings.”

Stanza 2

Strength was the first of the blessings that flowed to humanity in ‘The Pulley.’ It “made way.” Then there was beauty, followed by wisdom, honour, and finally pleasure. All of these are critical elements of the human existence. After showering man with blessings so abundantly, God decided to retain rest. In this poem, rest is the treasure that stays at the bottom of God’s cup. The word ‘rest’ is a pun here, since it may refer to both physical rest and the feeling of being abandoned.

Stanza 3

In the next five lines, the poet states that God chose not to grant humans “rest.” He was well aware that if he did, “He (humankind) would adore my gifts rather than me.” God, according to Herbert, made this decision because he didn’t want humans to spend their days adoring and worshipping nature. They should be adoring “the God of Nature” instead. In simpler words, if man worships the gifts rather than God, (So both should losers be) then both man and God have failed in their intention.

Stanza 4

God commands that the man keep the gifts, but he is dissatisfied in every part of his life as a result of his hasty decisions. God determined that the man might remain rich but weary. Because God’s compassion could not persuade man to adore him, let these trials and tribulations lead humanity back to God. As a result, we are back to talking about the pulley that was mentioned earlier in the poem.

Man has been denied the blessing of rest by God on purpose. God is well aware that his other goods would eventually cause spiritual unrest and exhaustion in man. After all, man will become bored of the material gifts he has received. Humans will soon turn to God in desperation and weariness (tiredness). God is unquestionably omniscient (all-knowing) and prophetic. Because God created them, Herbert prays that people might be given the powers to choose the right path and obey God.

### **Analysis**

Pulleys and hoists are mechanical devices aimed at assisting us with moving heavy loads through a system of ropes and wheels (pulleys) to gain advantage. We should not be surprised at the use of a pulley as a central conceit since the domain of physics and imagery from that discipline would have felt quite comfortable to most of the metaphysical poets. God is the most important character in “The Pulley”, and the only one whose name is given except the poet narrator. In the beginning of the poem, he is excited by the ringing of the truth

while He and his creations, i. e. the human being are having a conversation while in imaginations through the poet's conversation with the God. Herbert sees a perfect design of our psychology in Christian ideological terms explained through his God's eyes, but he longs to join the religious journey.

God opened a glass of blessings and poured it on man. The glass refers to the material world. Strength, beauty, wisdom, honour and pleasure were the specific riches that God poured on man. God considers rest to be the most precious of all the blessings as all the material blessings will ultimately lead to longing for peace of mind. The pursuit of materialism will lead to longing for peace of mind. It is to explain this philosophy that rest was placed at the bottom of the glass:

“When God at first made man,  
Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.  
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,  
Contract into a span.” ”

If God gave man rest also then Man will think only of the worldly blessings God has granted him and forget God who has given him those blessings. In such an arrangement, man would forget God and God would lose Man. The poem starts out with God creating man. He wants to pour all of His blessings into man. He knows that man is a beautiful, strong creation, and He wants to reward him. The one thing he doesn't want to give to man is His rest. God gives these blessings to man by pouring them out of a "glass of blessings." The only blessing that God leaves in the bottle is "Rest." This gift is so precious that God does not want to give it to man; if man would have it, he would worship "Nature, not the God of Nature." Rest is seen as kind of a Pandora's Box. God knows that if he gives rest to man, then man will come to worship all the things in nature, instead of worshipping God.

“For if I should,” said he,  
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
So both should losers be.

God has to withhold the gift of rest from man as he knew all his other treasures would one day result in spiritual restlessness and fatigue in man- ‘repining restlessness’- that moment when God would lift with his pulley. We can say that the withholding of Rest by God is the leverage that will draw mankind towards God when other means would make that task difficult. A pulley thus signifies a method God adopts to lift human beings to Himself.

God does not have faith in man which is why he has withheld the blessing of rest until man seeks it. God had full knowledge that His treasures would tire man and make him exhausted. He wanted man to find true rest only in Him. He wants all of us to come to Him, for He alone can truly give us the rest we so desperately seek. It is in his weariness, then, that man will realize his imperfections and his need for God and the spiritual life. Then, he will reach for God's "pulley" and seek heaven. When men are separated from godly blessing,

they encounter horrible stories about the cruelty of strength, beauty, wisdom, honour and pleasure. They become confused when these things do not harm them and seem to trust him if used the pulley to reach the creator.

“Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to my breast.”

When God made man, he poured all his blessings on him including strength, beauty, wisdom, honour and pleasure. However, as in Pandora's Box, one element remained. We are told that God after a second thought withheld 'rest'. We might in modern parlance call this God's ace. God is aware that if He were to bestow this 'jewel'- REST on man, man would adore his gift instead of God who gave those gifts. God has to withhold the gift of rest from man knowing full well that His other treasures would one day result in spiritual restlessness and fatigue in man. The material gifts would tire him and he eventually would turn to God in exhaustion. God prefers that man should be "rich and weary," so that weariness may toss him to God's breast. In other words, if man will at least be tired, he will have reason to fear God. If God bestow this jewel also on creature, He would adore his gifts instead of God, and rest in Nature, not the God of Nature; thus, both are losers. God is concerned that man will rest in Nature, and not in Him. God both fears and admires the Human being before this battle of life. The Human being is important because his actions force God to question his definition of the prayer and creator. Finally, the Human being ends up in a situation where they have to trust the God when they discover a pulley is set up as design. They turn out to be worthy of God's trust and says a prayer for them in their hearts. This confuses the Human being even more because they now see this materiality as lures rather than just as bouquets.

The Pulley is a good example of Herbert's simplicity that only a great artist can attain. He gives this story a delightful twist. The poem, "The Pulley," is one of those poems, that is deep in meaning. It is a comforting sort of poem. God is shown as a God who knows everything and how everything will turn out. God needs to toss man to his breast. In the context of the mechanical operation of a pulley, the kind of leverage and force applied makes the difference for the weight being lifted. Applied to man in this poem, we can say that the withholding of Rest by God is the leverage that will draw mankind towards God when other means would make that task difficult.

Two literary devices that Herbert uses to establish theme and tone are titling the poem's brief stanzas by the dialogue form and giving identities of us a generic the Human being. Both techniques establish the alienation that we experience during our day at living. Herbert suggests the impersonality of living without God. People are pawns with designated functions; search for peace of mind forces them to give up their individual identities and their capacity to form human honours. George Herbert's "The Pulley" can be considered the first modern peace of mind poem, incorporates a very essence of metaphysical poem. Herbert's protagonists are the human race who envisions feats of glory as a glorious adventure only to be disillusioned by ultimate reality of peace of mind-the God.

#### Structure and Form

'The Pulley' by George Herbert is a four stanza poem that is separated into sets of five lines or quintains. Each of these quintains follows a structured rhyme scheme. They conform to a pattern of ABABA, alternating end sounds as the poet saw fit. The consistent repetition in the rhyme helps to give the poem an overwhelming feeling of unity. This makes sense as the entirety of this piece is

dialogue spoken by God or about God.

A reader should also take note of the moments of repetition in the starting words of 'The Pulley.' There are a few moments in which these words rhyme. One notable instance in stanza two with the words "Then" and "When" at the beginning of lines two and three. There is also an example in stanza three with "So" and "Bestow" in lines two and five.

In regards to the meter, the lines are also very consistent. The first and fifth lines of each stanza conform to a pattern of iambic trimeter. This means that there are three sets of two beats per line. The first of these is unstressed and the second stressed.

The stresses remain the same in lines two, three, and four, but they mostly contain five sets of two beats. This means they are written in iambic pentameter. The regularity of the rhyme scheme, in tandem with the meter, gives the poem a very structured feeling. A reader learns what to expect from line to line, and at least in regards to structure, there are no surprises.

#### Literary Devices

In 'The Pulley' Herbert makes use of several literary devices. These include but are not limited to alliteration, metaphor, and imagery. The latter is seen through the creative images that Herbert describes of the lightly personified forces making their way out of God's belonging and into humankind. The last, rest, lay on the bottom when all the rest of the treasures had departed.

Alliteration is a common technique that helps to increase the overall rhyme and rhythm of a poem. For example, "Let" and "lie" in line four of the first stanza as well as the repetition of "nature" in stanza three.

Throughout this poem, as stated in the introduction, Herbert makes use of a metaphysical conceit. This technique is comparable to a metaphor but is much more complex and original in nature. In this case, Herbert uses a pulley to describe the relationship between humanity and God/religion.

As George Herbert was a priest in England, he wrote many religious poems with metaphysical concepts. The reflection of devotion, divinity and adoration towards God can be easily seen in his poems.

The poem "The Pulley" is also one such metaphysical poem written in the imagination and devotion of the poet in which he establishes a two-way relationship between God and his creation(human being).

In the Poem, God wants to dedicate all precious attributes to the humans whom he is creating, but at the same time, he divests humans from rest. The title "The pulley" also justifies from here that the restlessness of humans will pull them to the harbour of God. And in return, whether they have done some good or not, their restlessness will toss them in the hands of God. So, in return for all the blessings that God has given, he wants that humans keep their hand in the hand of God.

God holds "rest" with him so that mankind confines their horizon with nature to accomplish all their desires and ultimate peace of mind. Humans should contemplate God and take shelter in the feet of God.

The poem's main idea can be interpreted as humans are the creation of God, so we must not forget our creator, God, in our entire life. True peace and happiness exist at the feet of God.

## UNIT III: POETRY II

### 2.1 Introduction

This unit will analyze the poetry of John Milton who is one of the most important writers of all time, as far as British writing is concerned.

### 2.2 John Milton Biography

#### Early Years

John Milton was born in London on December 9, 1608. His parents were John Milton, Sr. and Sarah Jeffery, who lived in a prosperous neighborhood of merchants. John Milton, Sr. was a successful scrivener or copyist who also dabbled in real estate and was noted as a composer of liturgical church music. The Miltons were prosperous enough that eventually they owned a second house in the country.

Milton seems to have had a happy childhood. He spoke of his mother's "esteem, and the alms she bestowed." Of his father, Milton said that he "destined me from a child to the pursuits of Literature, . . . and had me daily instructed in the grammar school, and by other masters at home." Though the senior Milton came from a Catholic family, he was a Puritan himself. Milton's religion, therefore, was an outgrowth of family life and not something he chose at a later period in his maturity.

#### Education

Sometime, as early as age seven but perhaps later, Milton became a student at St. Paul's school, which was attached to the great cathedral of the same name. St. Paul's was a prestigious English public school — what would be called a "private school" in the U.S. Milton spent eight years as a "Pigeon at Paules," as the students were known, and came out a rather advanced scholar. He had studied the Trivium of Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic and had probably been exposed to the Quadrivium of Mathematics, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music. He had also learned Latin well, was competent in Greek and Hebrew, had a smattering of French, and knew Italian well enough to write sonnets in it. The one language he did not study was English. Some of his language acquisition — Italian — came from private tutors hired by his father.

Also at St. Paul's, the young Milton made a friendship that was among the closest of his life with Charles Diodati. After leaving St. Paul's, the two young men would write each other in Latin. Through his friendship with Diodati, Milton came into contact with many of the foreign residents of London.

In 1625, Milton matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, intending to become a minister. Instead, Milton's facility with language and his abilities as a poet soon made the ministry a secondary consideration. Also, Milton was not pleased with the medieval scholastic curriculum that still existed at Christ's College. This displeasure caused him to become involved in frequent disputes, including some with his tutor William Chappell. In 1626, perhaps because of this dispute or perhaps because of some other minor infraction, Milton was "rusticated" or suspended for a brief period. Whatever the reason, Milton did not seem to mind the respite from Christ's, nor did the rustication impede his progression through the school in any significant way.

In March of 1629, Milton received his BA and three years later, in July 1632, completed work on his MA. In completing these degrees, Milton had already become an accomplished poet. His first significant effort was the Christmas ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." Evidence also exists that he completed *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* ("The Cheerful Man" and "The Pensive Man") while in college. These works had not achieved any notoriety for Milton, but they do demonstrate the genius that was within him.

#### Early Literary Work

After Milton's graduation, he did not consider the ministry. Instead, he began a six-year stay at his father's recently purchased country estate of Horton with the stated intention of becoming a poet. Milton made his move to Horton, a village of about 300 people, in 1632, saying that God had called him to be a poet. One

of his first great works, *Comus, a Masque*, was written around this time.

In 1637, Milton's mother died, possibly of the plague. That same year, one of his Cambridge friends, Edward King, a young minister, was drowned in a boating accident. Classmates at Cambridge decided to create a memorial volume of poetry for their dead friend. Milton's poem, untitled in the volume but later called *Lycidas*, was the final poem, possibly because the editors recognized it as the artistic climax of the volume. Whatever the reasoning, the poem, signed simply J. M., has become one of the most recognized elegiac poems in English.

#### Influences Abroad

Having been through the years at Cambridge and six more at Horton, Milton took the Grand Tour, an extended visit to continental Europe. Such a tour was viewed as the culmination of the education of a cultivated young man. Milton as a true scholar and poet wanted more from this tour than just a good time away from home. He wanted to visit France and especially Italy. In Paris, in May of 1638, he met the famed Dutch legal scholar and theologian Hugo Grotius. Grotius' ideas on natural and positive law worked their way into many of Milton's political writings.

In Italy, Milton met a number of important men who would have influence on his writing. In Florence, he most likely met Galileo, who was under house arrest by the Inquisition for his heliocentric views of the solar system. Milton had a lifelong fascination with science and scientific discovery. Book VIII of *Paradise Lost* mentions the telescope and deals with planetary motions. Also in Italy, Milton attended an operatic performance in the company of Cardinal Francesco Barberino. The actual opera is not known but may have been one by Museo Clemente, who was popular at the time. Milton's own knowledge of and love for music shows up in much of his poetry, and, in some ways, *Paradise Lost* is operatic poetry. Finally, in Italy, Milton met Giovanni Batista, Marquis of Manso, who was the biographer of the great Italian epic poet, Torquato Tasso. Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* was obviously an influence on Milton's own epic poetry. To what extent Batista was also an influence is difficult to determine, but Milton did write the poem, *Mansus*, in his honor.

At this point in his journey, Milton planned to go to Greece but had to cut his tour short. Civil war was simmering in England; in addition, Milton learned that his old friend Charles Diodati had died. Late in 1638, Milton returned to London, where in 1639, he settled down as a schoolmaster for his nephews and other children from aristocratic families. For the first time in his life, Milton was on his own, earning his own way in the world.

#### Writing Career and Marriage

At this time, Milton began writing prose pamphlets on current church controversies. The political climate was charged as Charles I invaded Scotland, and the Long Parliament was convened. Milton wrote pamphlets entitled *Of Reformation, Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, and *Animadversions* in 1641, and *The Reason for Church Government* in 1642. For the young poet, the Puritan aspect of his work, at least in the public eye, began to take precedence over his poetry. Milton more and more sided with the idea that the church needed "purification" and that that sort of reform could not come from a church so closely connected to the king.

In 1642, the Civil War began, and its effects touched Milton directly. That same year, he married Mary Powell, daughter of a Royalist family from Oxford. A month after the marriage, Mary returned to Oxford to live with her family. The precise reasons for her leaving Milton are not known. Personal problems, political differences, or simple safety (Oxford was the headquarters for the Royalist army) may have motivated her. Milton's brother, Christopher, also announced as a Royalist at about this same time.

Whatever the reason for Mary Powell's desertion of Milton, he published the pamphlet *On the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* in 1643, followed by *On Education* and *Areopagitica* in 1644. Each of these works centered on the need

for individual liberty. The ideas that Milton expressed in these writings are commonplace values today, but in the 1640s, they were so radical that Milton acquired the nickname, "Milton the divorcer."

Around 1645, Mary Powell returned to Milton. Once again, the reasons for her return are unclear. Charles I had lost the Battle of Naseby and any hope for military victory. The Powell family, avowed Royalists, were now in danger. They were ejected from their home in Oxford as Charles' power waned. Within a year of Mary's return to Milton, her entire family had moved in with the couple. With the return of Mary and the arrival of her family, Milton was suddenly the head of a large household. His first collection of poetry, entitled *Poems*, was published in 1646. The volume included *Lycidas*, *Comus*, and "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." In July, seven months after *Poems* was published, Milton's first daughter, Anne, was born. The marriage that had begun inauspiciously now seemed, if not perfect, at least sound.

Shortly after the reunion of Milton with his wife and the birth of his first child, both his father-in-law, Richard Powell, and his own father died. Milton was left with a moderate estate. He complained at this point that he was surrounded by "uncongenial people," a problem that was resolved a few months later when all the Powell relatives moved back to Oxford. Milton and his wife and daughter then moved into a smaller house in High Holborn. For the first time, the couple had a reasonably normal life and family. In 1648, a second daughter, Mary, was born.

The year 1649 marked a decisive change in Milton's life. Charles I was executed, with Milton probably in attendance. The murder of a king was shocking to the people of a country that had always lived under a monarchy and for whom the king had an aura of divinity. Milton attempted to justify the situation with his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*.

This pamphlet, along with Milton's other work for the Puritans, resulted in his being offered the position of Secretary for the Foreign Tongues. Milton now assumed full-time political office, corresponding with heads of states or their secretaries in Latin, the lingua franca of the day. Among other duties, he also responded to political attacks on the new Cromwellian government, particularly those attacking the philosophy and morality behind the violent overthrow of the monarchy. To this end, Milton wrote *Eikonoklastes* in response to *Eikon Basilike*, supposedly written by Charles the night before his execution, and *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* in response to Salmatius' *Defensio Regia*. During this period, Milton worked out of official lodgings in Scotland Yard.

#### Later Years

During 1652, Milton suffered a number of traumatic events. First, his eyesight, which had been growing weaker, gave out completely, probably because of glaucoma. By 1652, Milton was totally blind. Second, his young son, John, (b. 1651) died under mysterious circumstances. Third, his wife died from complications in giving birth to the Milton's third daughter, Deborah. And fourth, Pierre du Moulin published the pamphlet *Regii Sanguinis Clamor* (Outcry of the King's Blood), a pro-Charles pamphlet to which Milton was ordered to reply. Milton's reply was entitled *Defensio Secunda*, which was published in 1654. By that time, Andrew Marvell, Milton's friend and fellow poet, was working as his assistant. Milton was also allowed to cut back on his official labors and to use an amanuensis (akin to a secretary) as an aide.

Even with his personal and physical problems, Milton continued to write. His major personal project in the 1650s was *De Doctrina Christiana*, a work in which he tried to state formally all of his religious views. In 1656, he married Katherine Woodcock, who died two years later. He would marry for the third time in 1663 to Elizabeth Minshull, who became his nurse as his health declined in his later years.

With the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, Milton's political fortunes were reversed. As Royalists gained power, Milton went into hiding at the home of a

friend. During this time, his *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* and *Eikonoklastes* were publicly burned. Milton stayed in hiding until Parliament passed the Acts of Oblivion, pardoning most of those who had opposed Charles II. Even so, Parliament considered arresting Milton, an act which was carried out in October 1659. Fortunately for Milton, neither Charles nor his cohorts were especially bloodthirsty or vindictive, and Milton was released in December.

By the time of the actual restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Milton was hard at work on *Paradise Lost*. Milton had long considered writing a major work on the grand themes of Christianity. His familiarity with the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Jerusalem Delivered* inclined him to the epic format. His preparations for the ministry as well as the natural bent of his Puritanism led him toward the subject of Man's fall. During much of the early 1660s, he worked on his epic and, in 1667, finally published *Paradise Lost*, an epic in ten books. He followed up his masterpiece with *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* in 1671. Milton is thus one of a relatively small group of creative geniuses whose greatest works were written after they turned 50. The years of essay and pamphlet writing did not diminish his creative spark.

In 1674, Milton published the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, revising it to make a total of twelve books. Mostly he rearranged rather than rewrote. For example, he made what had been Book X into Books XI and XII. After the publication of the second edition, his health deteriorated, and on November 9, 1674, Milton died of complications from a gout attack. He was 66 years old. He was survived by his third wife and two of his daughters by Mary Powell. He was buried near his father's grave in Cripplegate. By 1700, *Paradise Lost* was recognized as one of the classics of English

### 2.3. *On His Blindness* (Poem)

Sonnet 19: When I consider how my light is spent

BY JOHN MILTON

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one Talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
“Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”  
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Genre of the poem: Sonnet

### 2.4. Detailed Analysis

Lines 1 – 2:

In these lines, the poet says that the light has left his eyes even before half his life is over, that is, just when he is about to reach his middle age.”

Lines 3 – 6:

In these lines, the poet says that God has given him the talent of poetic composition, and if he cannot produce something worthwhile using that talent, he deserves to die. However, his talent has been rendered useless by the loss of his eyesight. Even so, he wishes to serve God by using his talent. He wants to tell the true story of his life in his poetry, which is perhaps why he is writing this sonnet on his blindness. He is writing this poet so that God does not become angry at him and think that he is wasting the talent that has been given to him.

Lines 7 -11:



In these lines, the poet is prompted to ask God a question directly. He asks God whether he would be cruel enough to expect something productive from a blind man as the price for providing him with the talent that has helped him earn his bread and butter thus far. However, the poet is a patient man by nature, and this component of patience in his personality stops him from posing the above-mentioned question to God. His patience tells him that God does not ask for anything from a man. He does not ask for his gifts to be returned, nor does He expect every man to make use of those gifts. The ones who want to serve God in the best way possible only accept the hand they have been dealt gracefully and without any bitterness.

Lines 12 – 14:

In these lines, the element of patience within the poet proffers him some advice to deal with the supposedly harsh ordeal of his going blind. His patience tells him that God is akin to a king who has many kingdoms under his dominion and countless subjects to do as he asks. There are similarly thousand of men on earth who follow God's every instruction to the letter and who hurry over lands and seas without a moment of rest in the fulfillment of the duties allotted to them. However, these are not the only people who serve God. There are also others who merely stand and wait for God to decide how their lives will go. Their only service to God is to accept whatever trial God puts on their path and deal with such trials with courage and resilience. These people also serve God to the best of their ability, and God loves everyone equally.

### **Significance of the Title**

This sonnet first appeared in Milton's 1673 collection of *Poems* simply as the nineteenth sonnet in the collection, or Sonnet XIX. Many readers, including us, refer to it by the first line, "When I consider how my light is spent." Identifying a poem by the first line is standard practice in the poetry world.

*But*, many more readers refer to the poem as, "On His Blindness." The problem with this title is that it didn't come from Milton. It was given almost a hundred years later by Bishop Newton, a writer and clergyman. Now, almost everyone agrees that the poem is most likely about Milton's blindness, but Milton never says so up front, leaving the door open for some interesting ambiguity. If Milton had wanted to say, "Hey, guys, this poem is about my blindness!" he could easily have done so. Newton's invented title changes the way you read the poem, which is why we prefer to use the first line of the poem.

### **Setting**

The poem reminds us of those scenes from horror movies where the hero is walking through some dark and dangerous place – chased by monsters or something – and his flashlight/torch/lamp suddenly flickers and goes out. You hear heavy breathing and...what's that?! Did you hear a branch break?!

The speaker is not in mortal danger, but he feels like his soul is endangered. He is left to navigate a "dark" and "wide" world without his vision. What's more, his demanding "Maker" has gone on a trip, and he worries he will be cast into further darkness if he can't make use of his "Talent." That "Talent" is buried deep within him, like a gold coin that has been thrown in a hole and covered up with soil.

In the second half of the poem, "patience" presents a different view of the world. In this view, the world is a huge kingdom with thousands and thousands of servants working to achieve God's will. Some of them speed from continent to continent like the characters in an *Indiana Jones* movie. Others just stand around until the king calls for them.

### **Form and Meter**

Italian (Petrarchan) Sonnet in Iambic Pentameter

Milton loved the classics, and in the 17th century, "classic" meant anything

associated with Ancient Greece or Rome. The heart of the Roman Empire was located in what is now modern-day Italy, and the sonnet was invented in Italy, so it was not a surprise that Milton would favor the original Italian form of the sonnet. This form is divided up into two sections, one with eight lines and one with six. Shakespeare, on the other hand, used a sonnet form that ended with a rhyming two-line couplet. The Italian sonnet form was made popular by the Italian poet Petrarch, who was to the literary Renaissance what The Temptations were to Motown.

The rhyme scheme of this sonnet is ABBAABBAC CDECDE. So, you can see that lines 1, 4, 5, and 8 all rhyme with each other. Unlike a classic Italian sonnet, "When I consider how my light is spent" does not divide cleanly into eight lines and six lines, however. The first section of the poem consists of the speaker trying to frame his foolish question, and the second consists of the response to the question by a figure named "patience." Most Italian sonnets have a sharp thematic turn or "volta" between the two sections, but in this poem the turn is a bit muddled between lines 8 and 9. If you think about it, the confusion makes perfect sense, as it conveys the awkwardness of someone (patience) interrupting someone else (the speaker) before the speaker can say something stupid.

The meter of the poem is classic iambic pentameter, with five iambs (an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable). Some of the lines do not fit the pattern exactly, but the pattern itself is clear:

"Doth God ex-act day-la-bor, light de-nied?"

Finally, this poem features a lot of enjambment, which is when one line runs over into the next without a pause. Just check out the end of each line, and you'll find that over half lack punctuation markers like periods or semi-colons.

## **Themes**

### **Guilt and Blame**

The speaker's mind is a big ball of guilt and confusion. He takes pride in his vast intelligence, but worries that he failed to use his "light" when he had it. You can imagine him saying, "How could I have known my vision was going to run out?!" His soul "bends" toward service of God like a flower bends toward the sun, but he is no longer fit for the kinds of intensive work that he might have done. He hopes that God does not blame him like the angry lord from the "Parable of the Talents" in the Bible.

### **Dreams, Hopes, and Plans**

Before going blind, the speaker has high hopes for what he might accomplish in the future. He says he would have been a supremely useful servant of God. But we can't know if his motives are truly selfless, or if he is an ambitious guy who now struggles to come to terms with a personal upheaval. As he looks to the future, he compares his situation to the third servant from the New Testament "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25. Because he has not increased his master's wealth, this servant is cast into the darkness. Considering that the speaker already feels he lives in the darkness, what further punishment does he expect? At the end of the poem, patience gives him a new plan: he should wait until God calls on him to serve.

### **Principles**

We've all heard the homespun wisdom "Patience is a virtue," which sounds almost mystical but is really like saying, "Blue is a color." The more interesting question is, what's a virtue? A virtue is a character trait that helps you achieve some desired good or outcome. Virtues are central to Christian theology. The speaker desires to serve God, but his impatience and sense of wounded pride

threaten to get in his way by leading him to rashly criticize his "Maker." The virtue of patience helps him to remember that it's not all about him. Just because he thinks he has something to offer doesn't mean that God needs him to act right away.

### Religion

John Milton was a Puritan who supported Oliver Cromwell's republican commonwealth after the execution of King Charles I of England. During this period, politics and religion were tied closely together, so that being "useful" to the government meant being "useful" to God, at least for Milton. The poem displays Milton's encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible but also his reforming instincts. Milton is not afraid to challenge the supposed moral of the New Testament "Parable of the Talents" by pointing out the difference between God and the lord from the story. The sonnet gives expression to intense religious emotions, but its rational and rhetorical qualities are equally important.

### Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay

#### Vision, Light, and Darkness

This poem is sometimes called "On His Blindness," but the speaker might respond, "Blindness? What blindness? I'm not the one who's blind. It's the world that has run out of light." This argument is like saying that you aren't really running – it's the world that is rolling beneath you like a treadmill. As you can see, Milton uses complicated wordplay to describe why the speaker has a hard time serving God. His "blindness" is like a lamp that runs out of fuel, like the daylight that turns to night, and like a currency that hasn't been used to maximum effect.

Line 1: Vision is not same thing as "light," although vision requires light. So, we can't just substitute one word for the other. Milton is using a metaphor to compare his vision to a light source that could run out, like an old-fashioned lamp that burns through its oil.

Line 2: "Ere half my days" is a way of saying, "Before my life is through." But "days" also introduces the idea of daylight. The speaker's "days" are now more like nights. He uses another metaphor to compare his lack of vision to an imagined world that does not have light. The phrase "this dark world and wide" is also an example of alliteration.

Line 7: The speaker compares God – again using metaphor – to a master who makes his servants work in darkness. He "denies" them light, which sounds heartless.

### The Parable of the Talents

The poem hinges on a pun on "talent" in the sense of "skill" and "talent" as a unit of monetary measurement in Biblical times. The parable of talents occurs in chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, and it tells the story of two servants improving their own lot by increasing the bounty of their master. In the first section, the speaker compares God to the "lord" in the parable who goes away on a trip and returns to ask what his servants have done with their money. In the second section of the poem, "patience" explains that God is more like a king who does not need all his servants to actively work for him.

Line 1: The word "spent" becomes a pun when we read it in light of the discussion of money and currency in the next few lines. The speaker's ability to see is like a currency, and he has unfortunately burned through it too soon. That "light" was supposed to last him all the way through his retirement!

Lines 3-5: The word "Talent" has a double meaning, as described above. The whole Biblical parable about hiding the talent and not turning the master's currency into a profit is used as an extended metaphor in which God is compared to the lord, while the speaker is the third servant who has buried the

money.

Line 6: The word "account" is also a double-entendre that works on both sides of the extended metaphor. In one sense, "account" is a story of justification for how the speaker has used his time on earth. In another sense, the "account" is the amount of money the servant in the parable is able to show to his lord. The servant must give this account after his lord has "returned" from traveling.

Lines 11-12: We think that the observation that God's "state is Kingly" is meant to contrast God with the lord from the parable.

Patience

"Patience" is an important virtue in Christianity. It allows people to work toward other "theological" virtues like hope and faith. When the speaker begins to question whether God might be kind of a cruel figure for demanding work from people who can't perform it, patience steps in to correct him. The twist, of course, is that the speaker must already have patience in order for the personified figure called "patience" to come on the scene.

Line 7: The speaker is about to ask a rhetorical question about God's justice before patience interrupts him.

Line 8: The virtue of patience is personified as "patience," the amazing advice giver. In the second half of the poem, patience replies to the speaker's question.

Line 11: The metaphor in the first half of this line compares God's rule over men to the wooden yoke that guides farm animals.

Lines 12-13: These lines present an image of servants rushing all over the world, by land and by sea, to serve God. These "servants" are Christian soldiers, merchants, politicians, clergy, etc. Lines 11-14 form an extended metaphor comparing service to God with service to the most powerful king in the world.

Line 14: The word "wait" is a pun. It means "wait" in the sense that the speaker will wait until the end of his life to meet his ultimate fate, and also in the sense that a person "waits" on a more powerful person simply by standing there until he is needed.

#### **2.4. William Blake Biography**

William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757 to James, a hosier, and Catherine Blake. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke of having visions—at four he saw God “put his head to the window”; around age nine, while walking through the countryside, he saw a tree filled with angels. Although his parents tried to discourage him from “lying,” they did observe that he was different from his peers and did not force him to attend a conventional school. Instead, he learned to read and write at home. At age ten, Blake expressed a wish to become a painter; so, his parents sent him to drawing school. Two years later, Blake began writing poetry. When he turned fourteen, he apprenticed with an engraver because art school proved too costly. One of Blake’s assignments as apprentice was to sketch the tombs at Westminster Abbey, exposing him to a variety of Gothic styles from which he would draw inspiration throughout his career. After his seven-year term ended, he studied briefly at the Royal Academy.

In 1782, Blake married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship. Later, she helped him print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today; the couple had no children. In 1784, Blake set up a print shop with friend and former fellow apprentice, James Parker; but this venture failed after several years. For the remainder of his life, Blake made a meager living as an engraver and illustrator for books and magazines. In addition to his wife, Blake also began training his younger brother, Robert, in drawing, painting, and engraving. Robert fell ill during the winter of 1787, having probably succumbed to consumption. As Robert died, Blake saw his brother’s spirit rise up through the ceiling, “clapping its hands for joy.” He believed that Robert’s spirit continued

to visit him and later claimed that in a dream Robert taught him the printing method that he used in *Songs of Innocence* and other “illuminated” works.

Blake’s first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III’s treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it, in 1794, with *Songs of Experience*. Some readers interpret *Songs of Innocence* in a straightforward fashion, considering it primarily a children’s book, but others have found hints at parody or critique in its seemingly naive and simple lyrics. Both books of *Songs* were printed in an illustrated format reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts. The text and illustrations were printed from copper plates, and each picture was finished by hand in watercolors.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, including Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of eighteenth-century Neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. He declared in one poem, “I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s.” Works such as “The French Revolution” (1791), “America, a Prophecy” (1793), “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” (1793), and “Europe, a Prophecy” (1794) express his opposition to the English monarchy, and to eighteenth-century political and social tyranny in general. Theological tyranny is the subject of *The Book of Urizen* (1794). In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93), he satirized the oppressive authority of both church and state, as well as the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted his interest.

In 1800, Blake moved to the seacoast town of Felpham, where he lived and worked until 1803 under the patronage of William Hayley. He taught himself Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian, so that he could read classical works in their original language. In Felpham, Blake experienced profound spiritual insights that prepared him for his mature work, the great visionary epics written and etched between about 1804 and 1820. *Milton* (1804–08); *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1797; rewritten after 1800); and *Jerusalem* (1804–20) have neither traditional plot, characters, rhyme, nor meter. They envision a new and higher kind of innocence—the human spirit triumphing over reason.

Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by common people, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. In 1808, he exhibited some of his watercolors at the Royal Academy and, in May 1809, he exhibited his works at his brother James’s house. Some of those who saw the exhibit praised Blake’s artistry, but others thought the paintings “hideous” and more than a few called him insane. Blake’s poetry was not well known by the general public, but he was mentioned in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1816. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had been lent a copy of *Songs of Innocence* and of *Experience*, considered Blake a “man of Genius,” and William Wordsworth made his own copies of several songs. Charles Lamb sent a copy of “The Chimney Sweeper” from *Songs of Innocence* to James Montgomery for his *Chimney-Sweeper’s Friend*, and *Climbing Boys’ Album* (1824), and Robert Southey (who, like Wordsworth, considered Blake insane) attended Blake’s exhibition and included the “Mad Song” from *Poetical Sketches* in his miscellany, *The Doctor* (1834–37).

Blake’s final years, spent in great poverty, were cheered by the admiring

friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves “the Ancients.” In 1818, he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. It was Linnell who, in 1825, commissioned him to design illustrations for Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

*Jerusalem* [“*And did those feet in ancient time*”] (*The Poem*)

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon Englands mountains green:  
And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On Englands pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:  
Bring me my arrows of desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In Englands green & pleasant Land.

#### Detailed Analysis

##### Lines 1–2

Blake asks an age-old question if the divine feet ever walked on English shores. He is in an interrogation mood when he contemplates if Christ ever walked on English lands once. A small amount of historic context here—the primary sources of information held on the life of Jesus of Nazareth are the writings of the disciples who recorded his Ministry, today found in the New Testament of the Catholic Bible. These writings record the birth, early childhood, and preachings of Jesus (cited in the Gospel of Luke to be in His thirties), but leave out the entirety of time between the two periods. According to medieval belief, Jesus had, at one point, visited England during those unknown years.

##### Lines 3–4

The “Lamb of God” is an allusion to Jesus Christ. This verse is open-ended, but given William Blake’s affinity with Christianity, the answer is unquestionably Jesus Christ. As with his poem, ‘The Tyger,’ the readers ultimately feel the poem’s central theme is god as opposed to the jungle’s tiger, the “Lamb of God” allusion is present. It also contains an echo to Blake’s ‘The Lamb’.

The “Lamb of God” also appears in the Gospel of John. It is mentioned with reference to sacrificial lamb as Jesus died for our sins, atoning mankind on the whole, as Christianity hypothesizes. To fill the gaps here for the readers, “the lost years” refers to the years (12-30) when Jesus is said to have disappeared from writings. As per legend, he may have arrived on British shores with Joseph of Arimathea. Blake wants to explore all terrains as is the case here, even entertaining this wishful legend.

##### Lines 5–6

The “Countenance Divine” is an expression used to refer to the Face of God, a sight that—according to the Book of Exodus—no one can see and live. But did, he wonders, the idyllic countryside of England once exist in the presence of that miracle? A long time ago, well before the world as it would have been when ‘*Jerusalem*’ was published in 1808 existed.

Moreover, the “Countenance Divine” alludes to the light as in bringing a change in terms of reforms. As a matter of fact, Jesus of Nazareth for all intents and purposes may have been black complexioned. In these passages, he notes the need of light to cleanse the darkness, indicating the presence of Jesus.

Lines 7–8

The final two lines of this stanza are a little vague. The “dark Satanic Mills” and Jerusalem are popular terms appearing in William Blake’s poems constantly. Blake refers to the promised biblical Jerusalem alluded to in the Bible, Book of Revelation. As Christian theology hypothesizes, after the earth is destroyed, a new haven will emerge in the form of New Jerusalem. The true believers of Christ will live in it for eternity. As for Blake, Jerusalem represents the perfect city with no discord, equality, and in essence, a utopia.

The phrases “Jerusalem” and “dark Satanic Mills” can each take on a wide array of meanings. Because of the strength of the latter phrase, “Jerusalem” is a metaphor for an ideal place, a utopia; one that fits with the natural splendor of the first stanza, and sharply contrasts with the metaphor of the “Satanic Mills”.

A mill could be used as a word to refer to a factory—because of this, it makes sense to think of “Satanic Mills” to be the present-day for the poem when factories and industrialization were a sweeping force in England. The narrator compares the idyllic heaven that might have existed in the presence of Jesus to his present-day life, surrounded by pollution, noise, and exploitation. And if the latter is the exact opposite of God’s heaven, it must be satanic in nature.

For Blake, the mills clearly have satanic origins since it has increased child labor, unhealthy work conditions, coal-burning, pollution, and mechanized lives. In conclusion, the poet wonders whether he walked on these lands, a time long past.

Lines 9–10

There is a lot of anger in these lines of the third stanza: “Bow”, “arrows”, “spear”; “burning gold” and flaming chariot; commanding the clouds, and a lot of exclamation points. These are marks of anger, of war, of burning frustration. If the revolution in England is satanic in nature, then it makes sense to call for holy war and to imagine that God would want the influence of this anti-heaven removed from the world.

Lines 11–12

The “Chariot of fire” is often used as an analogy for divine energy and was cited in the Bible as being part of the prophet Elijah’s ascent into heaven. Here, Blake alludes to the biblical verses from Kings. It’s the story of Elijah, one of the biggest prophets of the Old Testament. In this story, the prophet Elijah is taken on a heavenly ride on a chariot of fire. He ascends to heaven in this godly vehicle created during the normative image of the time to justify god’s divine message. He wants to reincarnate the similitude of this fantasy tale written in the Bible.

The events get doubly interesting since Elijah brings divine wrath upon those who deserved it. As the fictional legend goes, he orders divine fire from the skies in order to neutralize a group of people. In essence, he intends to destroy these imminent heresies known as mills destroying the very essence of natural existence bringing mechanization into its fold. William Blake is intensely connected to the Bible and its fictional legends, bringing them into play as his poems progress to render a dramatic sound and grandness.

Lines 13–14

Blake isn’t much for violence, and so are the grandiose characters in his poems. Weapons are mostly used to denote action metaphorically, though with vigor. The poet is averse to burnings, deaths, and all things kafkaesque. As a result, the term, “Mental Fight” is an allusion to a non-violent struggle to emerge from the ashes of a cleansed nation. The French Revolution was still fresh in Blake’s mind. According to him, the doors of perceptions need to be revisited once in a while.

As per Martin Luther King, people should judge people as per their character, not by their skin color. He inserts the idea of a societal revolution very cleverly, readily apparent to those capable of reading between the lines. The “Sword” indicates the strength and will to fight constantly as the night is darkest before dawn. The battle between yin and yang will continue as always.

Lines 15–16

In these lines, he isn't asserting to create a New Jerusalem by leading a battle against the monarchy. It's simply a metaphor to recreate a changed world altogether in a reformed manner. The “green & pleasant Land” has become a universally quoted line, found in limitless books and articles.

Plain and simplistic living is the ideal life for Blake, doing away with the fast industrialization for good. The world is fast changing in front of Blake's eyes as he contemplates reverting to old lifestyle and steering away from recreating a “1984-Esque” world in the near future.

And did those feet in ancient time" is a poem by William Blake from the preface to his epic Milton: A Poem in Two Books, one of a collection of writings known as the Prophetic Books. The date of 1804 on the title page is probably when the plates were begun, but the poem was printed c. 1808.[1] Today it is best known as the hymn "Jerusalem", with music written by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916. The famous orchestration was written by Sir Edward Elgar. It is not to be confused with another poem, much longer and larger in scope and also by Blake, called Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion.

It is often assumed that the poem was inspired by the apocryphal story that a young Jesus, accompanied by Joseph of Arimathea, a tin merchant, travelled to what is now England and visited Glastonbury during his unknown years.<sup>[2]</sup> Most scholars reject the historical authenticity of this story out of hand, and according to British folklore scholar A. W. Smith, "there was little reason to believe that an oral tradition concerning a visit made by Jesus to Britain existed before the early part of the twentieth century".<sup>[3]</sup> Blake does not name the walker on "Englands green and pleasant land"; according to a story available at the time of Blake's writing, in Milton's History of Britain, Joseph of Arimathea, alone, travelled after the death of Jesus, and first preached to the ancient Britons.<sup>[4]</sup> The poem's theme is linked to the Book of Revelation (3:12 and 21:2) describing a Second Coming, wherein Jesus establishes a New Jerusalem. Churches in general, and the Church of England in particular, have long used Jerusalem as a metaphor for Heaven, a place of universal love and peace.<sup>[a]</sup>

In the most common interpretation of the poem, Blake asks whether a visit by Jesus briefly created heaven in England, in contrast to the "dark Satanic Mills" of the Industrial Revolution. Blake's poem asks four questions rather than asserting the historical truth of Christ's visit.<sup>[5][6]</sup> The second verse is interpreted as an exhortation to create an ideal society in England, whether or not there was a divine visit.

### **Historical Context**

'*Jerusalem*' was written during the rise of industrialization in England, a process that was considered dark and evil by a great many farmers who would be put out of business by it. The poem alludes to an event steeped in the history of Albion town. The first factory Albion Flour Mills was opposed by native inhabitants, ultimately incinerating it in 1791, due to increased monetary loss to local producers. The poem struck a chord with the masses as a result since it was an attempt to capitalize on flour business and stamping on the bourgeois class.

It was the earliest factory in London, where William Blake was living at the time, was one that could produce thousands of bushels of flour per week, something that would significantly undermine the ability of local agriculture to remain a healthy business. It was ultimately destroyed in a fire, but it was only the first of its kind, as industrialization swept through England, and ultimately, much of the world.



Needless to say, the Industrial Revolution won that particular struggle, and the idyllic dream of the English countryside was quickly overtaken by a vast array of efficiency, production, and, of course, money, the other kind of pleasant greenery that keeps the world spinning.

As for the peaceful countryside that Jesus once may have walked upon—well, it is still there. If there's any silver lining to this poem, it's that two hundred years later, industrialism may still be dominant, but it definitely isn't almighty, and there's still plenty of peaceful nature to go around. Hopefully, Blake would also consider that to be a small victory for England's pleasant green.

### **Structure**

Each stanza of Blake's '*Jerusalem*' consists of four verses, which are known as quatrains. It works within the iambic tetrameter. Each quatrain consists of four (tetra) iambs. For instance, the following line contains four iambic feet:

And did/ those feet/ in an-/cient time,

The regular meter is disturbed in a few places, for most cases, there's a regular rhyme scheme consisting of ABCB, as every letter is placed for ending with a rhyme. As a result, the 2nd and 4th lines rhyme intrinsically while other verses may not.

In the case of the 3rd stanza, the poet digresses from the usual meter and rhyme conventions. He uses two spondees and two iambis to work with his verses. For example:

Bring me/ my Bow/ of bur-/ning gold:

The 3rd stanza works with the rhyme scheme of ABAB. It is much more compact as a result. As with the convention of ABCB, the ending is a bit looser as opposed to ABAB.

### **Literary Devices**

The poetic devices used in Blake's poem are as follows:

- Alliteration: It occurs in "pleasant pastures", "Bring me my Bow of burning gold", and "Sword sleep".
- Anaphora: All the lines of the third stanza begin with the phrase "Bring me my...". It is an example of anaphora.
- Metaphor: This device is present in the phrases such as "Lamb of God", "dark Satanic Mills", etc.
- Allusion: It can be found throughout the poem in the references to Christ's coming to England, "Satanic Mills", "Arrows of desire", etc.
- Ambiguity: "And did the Countenance Divine,/ Shine forth upon our clouded hills?"

### **Themes**

#### **Memory and the Past**

The speaker of "Jerusalem" looks forward to a new era, but also backwards to an "ancient time." He wonders if Jesus ever visited England, and if Jerusalem was once built there. While the speaker isn't quite sure if this ever actually happened (the "past" he imagines is more legend than anything), it's almost like he wants to imagine that it did. That way he can imagine a future that repeats the past (if you can follow that logic). The past the speaker talks about is peaceful, holy, and magical proof that England's "clouded hills" were once full of divine light and grace. Far out.

#### **Change**

In "Jerusalem," the speaker is obsessed with a potentially legendary past, when Jesus visited England. Man, those were the days. All this reflection on that past gets him thinking that things really need to change in England. The New

Jerusalem, the speaker's symbol of a reborn, holy, pure, and better England, must be built again. In other words, the time is ripe for revolution, only it doesn't have to be a huge, bloody mess like the 1789 French Revolution. While the speaker doesn't go into a whole lot of detail about just how to bring the changes that are necessary, he does clearly state that England is full of "Satanic mills" (evil, dirty factories and other bad things) and some weaponry will be necessary (a bow and arrow, for example). At the same time, he does also imply that some type of mental action will be necessary to bring about the changes he thinks are necessary.

Perseverance

"Jerusalem" is a poem about perseverance if there ever was one. Think about it. In the poem's third and fourth stanzas, the speaker is essentially getting ready for battle (bring me my bow, bring me my spear, etc.). The goal is to build Jerusalem, and the speaker isn't going to stop until that happens. He wants to believe that it's already been built once before (in England), so at least there's some hope. Nevertheless, it's not an easy task, and the speaker flat out says that his word will not sleep, and he will not cease, until that task is done.

## **UNIT IV POETRY III**

### **4.1. William Wordsworth Biography**

#### **William Wordsworth**

William Wordsworth was a well-known English poet heavily involved in the English Romantic works. In a joint effort with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William published the 'Lyrical Ballads' in 1798. William Wordsworth is most widely recognized for bringing off the Romantic era in English literature. He was born in the Lake District, famed for its magnificent lakes, mountains, and woods in North West England. And thus, he had profound affection and regard for nature when he was a child. His love of nature had a massive effect on his attitude and work. Read the article to know more aspects of his life.

Early Life

William Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth, Cumbria, on April 7, 1770. His father worked as an attorney. Wordsworth's parents both passed before he turned 15, leaving him and his four other siblings in the supervision of various relatives. Wordsworth had a love of nature as a young man, which is expressed in much of his poetry.

While studying at Cambridge University, Wordsworth spent his summer vacation on a walking tour of Switzerland and France. He became a supporter of the French Revolution's beliefs. He began writing poetry while still in school, but none of his works was printed until 1793.

Career

Young William discovered his passion for poetry while attending Hawkshead Grammar School. In 1787, he began his career as a poet with the publishing of a sonnet in The European Magazine.

In 1793, he released 'An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketch,' a poetry collection that boosted his career. In 1795, he met author Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Soon after meeting him, the most important work of the English Romantic Movement, 'Lyrical Ballads,' was published in 1798 due to their teamwork. In 1807, at the peak of his career, he wrote 'Poems, in two volumes.' In 1810, he released 'Guide to Lakes,' then 'The Excursion,' in 1814, and 'Laodamia,' in 1815.

Major Works of William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was one of the earliest English Romantic poets, and his

collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge to release "Lyrical Ballads" set off a trend of romanticism in English literature. It would be best to read the following William Wordsworth's most renowned poems.

1. Composed Upon Westminster Bridge: The poem was published in 1802 to reflect the glory of England in the early morning sunlight. The writer appreciates the early morning peacefulness of his surroundings while resting on the Westminster Bridge, which industrial operations would later ruin during the day.
2. Lyrical Ballad: Coleridge collaborated in its publication. It contains 23 poems, 19 of which were written by Wordsworth. The first lyric published in this collection was "Lines Written a Few Miles Above the Tintern Abbey." Wordsworth explains his poetic concepts in the preface to the second edition. Wordsworth stated that his primary purpose in terms of subject matter was to "select events and situations from everyday reality, and language understood by men."
3. The Prelude: It was composed between the years 1799 and 1805. It is a 14-book descriptive epic poem written in blank verse. The poet's emotional growth is evaluated in this poem. This poem might be seen as a chronicle of the poet's mental evolution."
4. The Excursion: This poem was written and published in blank verse and is divided into nine books. It was first printed in 1814. The poem is part of a larger philosophical poem titled "On Man," "On Nature," and "On Human Life," which was written in three sections by the author, but only this one was completed.
5. Michael: It's beautiful poetry on the sadness of an elderly shepherd's shattered dreams. It's written in a straightforward, uncomplicated tone full of sadness and truthfulness.
6. Lucy Poem: In Germany, Wordsworth authored five short poems. It accomplishes unique compassion and elegant clarity of expression for Wordsworth. However, Lucy's details of origin and identity remain unrevealed.
7. Sonnets: About 500 sonnets were written by Wordsworth. He is regarded as one of English literature's best sonneteers. Some of his greatest works are the sonnet 'On Milton', 'The World is Too Much with Us on Westminster Bridge', and 'Late and soon'.
8. Tintern Abbey: "Tintern Abbey" was published in 1798. The poem is based on a little location near the Monmouthshire settlement of Tintern, on the Welsh side of the River Wye. Wordsworth explains his beliefs about nature and its beauty to his readers through this poem. It's conversational poetry with components of an Ode and a theatrical presentation.
9. Ode: Intimations Of Immortality: The poem discusses the author's heavenly connection to nature and is regarded as Wordsworth's best ode. The poem contrasts a kid's strong relationship with the environment to that which is lost when the child gets older and loses his heavenly perspective. The narrator's memories of the past, on the other hand, permit him to experience his connection with nature.
10. The Solitary Reaper: "Solitary Reaper," released in 1807, is a lovely poem about a little girl harvesting on the farms whose singing grabs the

11. author's heart. He's so taken aback by the song's tone, emotion, and lyrical structure that he invites passers-by to hold their horses and listen to the reaper's singing.
12. Daffodils: "Daffodils," one of the masterpieces of English Romantic literature, describes the story of a poet walking around the countryside and encountering a field of lovely flowers. Wordsworth's experience with the large group of daffodils while walking with his sister Dorothy in April 1802 influenced the poem published in 1807.
13. Ode to Duty: "Ode to Duty," one of Wordsworth's odes, is about the poet's approach and understanding of the concept of responsibility. As much as he respects love and joy, he believes that the essence of responsibility has greater elegance and meaning. He believes that, while harsh may also be charming and stunningly gorgeous when carried out with a bigger purpose.
14. London 1802: The poem, written in 1802 itself, is a driver for Wordsworth criticizing his fellow citizens for being greedy and ethically sluggish. He praises seventeenth-century writer John Milton and discusses how Milton might improve England's current position if he were still alive. Wordsworth's poem "London 1802," while paying respect to Milton, cast light on the decaying realities of English society.

### **Personal Life**

While on a student trip to France, William Wordsworth fell in love with Annette Vallon, a French lady he met. She had a daughter with her, Caroline, so he did not marry her. He did everything he could to care for her daughter. Later, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson, a longtime friend, in 1802. Wordsworth's personal life became quite tough during the following few years as two of his children died, and his brother was lost at sea. Wordsworth relocated from Grasmere to Ambleside. Although it was never quite as good as his earlier efforts, he kept writing poetry. He didn't write much after 1835. He received a government pension in 1842 and was named poet laureate the following year.

### **Few Other Facts**

1. He witnessed the American and French Revolutions develop during his infancy and early adulthood. These events undoubtedly had an impact on his thinking.
2. He had a close relationship with his siblings and family. His mother passed away when he was eight years old, and his father died too soon afterward, leaving the children orphaned. The siblings were split up and sent to close relatives.
3. In 1802, he married Hutchinson, a lifelong old friend. They were married for a long time and enjoyed a good life united. They welcomed five kids, two of whom died at an early age.
4. An English poet, Samuel Coleridge, became a colleague of Wordsworth. They collaborated to form a collection of poetry.
5. Wordsworth was a great admirer of nature. He used to go for walks late at night. He would frequently go on short walks, following which he would compose poetry thoughts on pieces of paper. Due to his strange

6. behavior, many in his neighborhood suspected he was a spy for the French government.

#### 4.2. *London 1802* (Poem)

##### London, 1802

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.  
Genre of the poem: Petrarchan Sonnet

#### 4.3. Detailed Analysis of the Poem

Line 1  
The poet calls out to Milton, and wishes that he was still alive in the present day.

Line 2-3

Apparently, the speaker thinks that Milton could help England on the whole out; he sees the country as a "fen" (2) – a kind of swamp – full of gross standing water. You know, the kind of gross marshy pond that's covered in algae and slime and warty toads...*nice*.  
Lines 3-6

He's concerned with his perception that these things are no longer tied to the "inner happiness" of the English people; in former days, they were fundamentally linked to the rightful success of the nation – this is the "dower" (a kind of gift) that the speaker refers to – but now these institutions have lost their meaning.

Lines 6-7

These lines are pretty clear; the speaker declares that "we" (the English people of his time) are selfish and debased, and he begs Milton to help them get out of their slump.  
Line 8-9

The speaker thinks that Milton could inspire the English to be better all around – nicer, more virtuous, and more powerful. Milton was a very special guy (according to the speaker, at least). The poet compares the older writer to a star, something removed from the mass of humanity, and superior to the rest of us.

Line 10-11

Here, the speaker's not actually talking about Milton's speaking voice – instead, he's referring to his poetic voice. Basically, he claims that Milton's poetry was as powerful and amazing as the forces of the natural world, like the sea and the sky.

Line 12-13

Instead of continuing to rave about Milton's hyperbolic virtues as a poet, the speaker takes the last few lines to let us know that Milton was a good guy, too. Instead of getting all up on himself, he followed "life's common way" (12) just like the rest of us, and lived his life happily and virtuously. Line 13-14

Milton, according to the speaker, didn't just rest upon his laurels and get all arrogant about how awesome he was; the closing lines of the poem emphasize his humble nature. Instead of taking it easy, Milton took on "the lowliest duties" (14) – that is, he didn't avoid unglamorous tasks. We wonder what exactly the speaker is thinking of here. Perhaps he's referring to Milton's intense and unflinching observations of human nature.

### Short Summary

The poem begins with a plaintive call to John Milton (1608-1674), a much-loved and respected English poet, and one of Wordsworth's great influences. The speaker laments the fact that Milton isn't around anymore, since, as he sees it, England needs a guiding voice. The speaker flat-out condemns the state of the nation, saying that it's a stagnant swamp (gross!), and that the English people have forgotten all the things that used to make them so glorious, including religion, military might, and literature. The speaker worries that the Englishmen of his day are too selfish and debased, and wishes Milton could return and give the nation a good old-fashioned pep talk. The poet is certain that Milton could inspire England to greatness once again, and mold its inhabitants into more noble creatures.

### Setting

Poet Laureate

The title may declare the setting of this poem to be "London, 1802," but we don't envision a big, bustling, dirty city when we read it – instead, the mental space created by the poem is the "fen of stagnant waters" (2-3) that Wordsworth summons up to represent the state of the English character. This is not a happy little pond; instead, it's gross and green and covered in algae, and it probably doesn't smell all that great. Imagine the poet disdainfully picking out a path around this mess, trying not to get mired in the mud – the foul mud of a depraved society, that is! Sorry, all this wilderness imagery is making us unusually dramatic.

Anyway, Wordsworth is unhappily squelching around in the metaphorical fen, thinking of how great England *used* to be. To continue with the whole body of water thing, the country and its people were previously clear, clean, and pure. In contrast to the current swampy and unhealthy state of the nation, Wordsworth creates another imaginary space, that of the open sea (Ah! Finally, a breath of fresh air.) and the clear, broad expanse of the sky, both of which represent the spiritual and poetic greatness of Milton, who in turn represents England's former splendor.

The second half of the poem dwells on Milton's high points; the speaker gets all swoony about Milton's writing, and uses celestial imagery to show us just how divine it is. Not only is Milton's *writing* admirable, apparently, so was his character. The man could do no wrong. The speaker goes gaga over the all-around loveliness that was Milton, and ends the poem by praising the deceased poet's humility.

### Themes

Patriotism

We don't know about you guys, but we're all too familiar with those

uncomfortable conversations that start with "I'm only saying this because I love you..." You know, the ones in which your best friend/significant other/parent tell you everything that's wrong with you, but try to frame it all in the perspective of life lessons. Well, Wordsworth kind of pulls that trick on his country in "London, 1802." The poem may come off as a harsh judgment of England at first, but if we take a closer look at Wordsworth's sonnet, we can see why – because he actually loves his country to bits. He may sound way harsh, but hey, he's only saying it because he cares.

**Admiration**  
Poets just love other poets. The tradition of writing elegies for great writers of the past is a long and illustrious one; since reading is a fundamental part of writing, it's natural for poets to reflect fondly upon earlier poets whose work they find inspirational. In "London, 1802," Wordsworth invokes the noble spirit of Milton, who he sees as an incredibly powerful moral and poetic force. However, this poem isn't only concerned with Milton's prowess as a writer; there's also a profound admiration expressed for the man's character. Wordsworth piles praise upon the earlier writer for his goodness of heart and moral superiority, and raises him up as an example to all of the depraved people of contemporary England.

#### **Morality and Ethics**

Goodness, as a concept, can be a little confusing to deal with. To be "good" – what does that even mean, anyway? You can be good *at* something, good *to* someone, but *good* in general? It's a mystery. In "London, 1802," Wordsworth laments the lack of goodness – one might even say, he laments the *badness* – of his fellow countrymen. When he addresses this matter, "goodness" gets wrapped up not only in the morality of individual people, but in the overall success of the nation. On the individual level, he takes a look at the example of John Milton, whose greatness as a poet was rivaled only by his greatness as a human being – suggesting to readers that perhaps the better we are as people, the better we'll be at everything.

#### **Tradition and Customs**

William Wordsworth had many reasons to be proud of his country, but in "London, 1802," he instead focuses on its shortcomings. The poet points out many of the great traditions of England's past that he thinks his modern day compatriots have left by the wayside; the point of this is not to tell his fellow countrymen how much they suck, but to remind them of the greatness of their country's former glories. By highlighting what he saw as the flaws of his society, he also reminds readers of how great England (and the English) can be.

#### **Critical Summary**

The speaker of this poem, which takes the form of a dramatic outburst, literally cries out to the soul of John Milton in anger and frustration. (The poem begins with the cry: "Milton!") In the octave, the speaker articulates his wish that Milton would return to earth, and lists the vices ruining the current era. Every venerable institution—the altar (representing religion), the sword (representing the military), the pen (representing literature), and the fireside (representing the home)—has lost touch with "inward happiness," which the speaker identifies as a specifically English birthright, just as Milton is a specifically English poet. (This is one of Wordsworth's few explicitly nationalistic verses—shades, perhaps, of the conservatism that took hold in his old age.)

In the sestet, the speaker describes Milton's character, explaining why he thinks Milton would be well suited to correct England's current waywardness. His soul was as bright as a star, and stood apart from the crowd: he did not need the approval or company of others in order to live his life as he pleased. His voice was as powerful and influential as the sea itself, and though he possessed a kind of moral perfection, he never ceased to act humbly. These virtues are precisely what Wordsworth saw as lacking in the English men and women of his day.

It is important to remember that for all its emphasis on feeling and passion,

Wordsworth's poetry is equally concerned with goodness and morality. Unlike later Romantic rebels and sensualists, Wordsworth was concerned that his ideas communicate natural morality to his readers, and he did not oppose his philosophy to society. Wordsworth's ideal vision of life was such that he believed anyone could participate in it, and that everyone would be happier for doing so. The angry moral sonnets of 1802 come from this ethical impulse, and indicate how frustrating it was for Wordsworth to see his poems exerting more aesthetic influence than social or psychological influence.

#### **4.4. Robert Browning Biography**

Robert Browning was born on May 7, 1812, in Camberwell, England. His mother was an accomplished pianist and a devout evangelical Christian. His father, who worked as a bank clerk, was also an artist, scholar, antiquarian, and collector of books and pictures. His rare book collection of more than 6,000 volumes included works in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. Much of Browning's education came from his well-read father. It is believed that he was already proficient at reading and writing by the age of five. A bright and anxious student, Browning learned Latin, Greek, and French by the time he was fourteen. From fourteen to sixteen he was educated at home, attended to by various tutors in music, drawing, dancing, and horsemanship. At the age of twelve he wrote a volume of Byronic verse entitled *Incondita*, which his parents attempted, unsuccessfully, to have published. In 1825, a cousin gave Browning a collection of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry; Browning was so taken with the book that he asked for the rest of Shelley's works for his thirteenth birthday, and declared himself a vegetarian and an atheist in emulation of the poet. Despite this early passion, he apparently wrote no poems between the ages of thirteen and twenty. In 1828, Browning enrolled at the University of London, but he soon left, anxious to read and learn at his own pace. The random nature of his education later surfaced in his writing, leading to criticism of his poems' obscurities.

In 1833, Browning anonymously published his first major published work, *Pauline*, and in 1840 he published *Sordello*, which was widely regarded as a failure. He also tried his hand at drama, but his plays, including *Strafford*, which ran for five nights in 1837, and the *Bells and Pomegranates* series, were for the most part unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the techniques he developed through his dramatic monologues—especially his use of diction, rhythm, and symbol—are regarded as his most important contribution to poetry, influencing such major poets of the twentieth century as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Robert Frost.

After reading Elizabeth Barrett's *Poems* (1844) and corresponding with her for a few months, Browning met her in 1845. They were married in 1846, against the wishes of Barrett's father. The couple moved to Pisa and then Florence, where they continued to write. They had a son, Robert "Pen" Browning, in 1849, the same year his *Collected Poems* was published. Elizabeth inspired Robert's collection of poems *Men and Women* (1855), which he dedicated to her. Now regarded as one of Browning's best works, the book was received with little notice at the time; its author was then primarily known as Elizabeth Barrett's husband.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861, and Robert and Pen Browning soon moved to London. Browning went on to publish *Dramatis Personae* (1864), and *The Ring and the Book* (1868–1869). The latter, based on a seventeenth-century Italian murder trial, received wide critical acclaim, finally earning a twilight of reknown and respect in Browning's career. The Browning Society was founded while he still lived, in 1881, and he was awarded honorary degrees by Oxford



University in 1882 and the University of Edinburgh in 1884. Robert Browning died on the same day that his final volume of verse, *Asolando: Fancies and Facts*, was published, in 1889.

#### **4.5. *Porphyria's Lover* (Poem)**

The rain set early in to-night,  
The sullen wind was soon awake,  
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
And did its worst to vex the lake:  
I listened with heart fit to break.  
When glided in Porphyria; straight  
She shut the cold out and the storm,  
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
Which done, she rose, and from her form  
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
And, last, she sat down by my side  
And called me. When no voice replied,  
She put my arm about her waist,  
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
And all her yellow hair displaced,  
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,  
Murmuring how she loved me — she  
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,  
To set its struggling passion free  
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,  
And give herself to me for ever.  
But passion sometimes would prevail,  
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain  
A sudden thought of one so pale  
For love of her, and all in vain:  
So, she was come through wind and rain.  
Be sure I looked up at her eyes  
Happy and proud; at last I knew  
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise  
Made my heart swell, and still it grew  
While I debated what to do.  
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,  
Perfectly pure and good: I found  
A thing to do, and all her hair  
In one long yellow string I wound  
Three times her little throat around,  
And strangled her. No pain felt she;  
I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
I warily oped her lids: again;  
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.  
And I untightened next the tress  
About her neck; her cheek once more  
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
I propped her head up as before,  
Only, this time my shoulder bore  
Her head, which droops upon it still:  
The smiling rosy little head,  
So glad it has its utmost will,

That all it scorned at once is fled,  
And I, its love, am gained instead!  
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how  
Her darling one wish would be heard.  
And thus we sit together now,  
And all night long we have not stirred,  
And yet God has not said a word!  
Genre of the Poem: Dramatic Monologue

#### 4.6. Detailed Analysis

##### Lines 1-5

- It's a dark and stormy night. Isn't that the way all thrillers are supposed to start?
- Browning introduces a bit of a twist, though: he uses words like "sullen" and "spite" to describe the weather, so that it seems as though the weather is bad on purpose, just to be mean or "spiteful."
- The first four lines just describe the weather, not the speaker.
- The unnamed speaker of the poem isn't introduced at all until line 5: "I listened with heart fit to break."
- This is the first hint that the speaker might not be mentally stable: why should a storm make him feel heartbroken? Or is something else wrong?

##### Lines 6-9

- Porphyria enters the house and starts a fire in the fireplace, to make the place more cheery and warm.
- She is neither introduced nor described as she enters – Porphyria just walks into the poem without any explanation.
- She doesn't *walk* in, actually – she "glides" in, like a ghost. Do her feet not touch the ground?
- And the way the speaker describes her making the fire is strange, too. He skips steps, like putting wood into the grate and lighting a match, even though he details her other movements in the poem. Porphyria is somehow able to "ma[k]e the cheerless grate/ Blaze up" without taking all those necessary preliminary steps. Is she magic? Or does she just seem magical to the speaker?

##### Lines 10-13

- After setting the fire, Porphyria takes off her wet "cloak" and "gloves," and lets her wet hair down.
- OK, so sounds like she's probably *not* some kind of magical fairy-lady. She might be handy with fireplaces, but if she were magical, she wouldn't have gotten wet in the rainstorm.
- She's done all this – walked in, made a fire in the fireplace, taken off her coat and hat – all without saying anything? What's the speaker doing this whole time?

#### Lines 14-15

- After taking care of all the preliminaries, like setting a fire and taking off her coat, Porphyria sits down next to the speaker and addresses him.
- We don't get to hear what she said, though.
- We don't get to hear what the speaker said in response, either. In fact, he didn't respond to her at all.
- He phrases it passively, too: instead of saying "I didn't reply," he says, "When no voice replied." This makes him seem very distant from Porphyria and from what's going on around him.

#### Lines 16-20

- Porphyria's not one to be discouraged, though. Her boyfriend might be giving her the cold shoulder, but she snuggles up to him anyway.
- She takes his arm and pulls it around her waist, uncovers her shoulder, and pulls his head down to rest on her bare shoulder.
- Is he made out of silly putty? Is he a Ken doll that she's playing with? She just moves his arms and head around and arranges him as she likes.
- After pulling his head down to rest on her shoulder, she spreads her "yellow hair" across them both.

#### Lines 21-25

- Porphyria "murmur[s]" that she loves him. Is she "murmuring" because she's hesitant? Or because she's shy? Or is she whispering in a flirtatious manner? It's not clear.
- Porphyria tells the speaker that she loves him, but he cuts her off with a dash to criticize her for being "too weak" to cut herself off from "vainer ties" to be with him. Of course, he doesn't say any of that out loud, it's all part of his monologue.
- We're not sure what those "vainer ties" are. Some critics speculate that Porphyria is richer than the speaker, and so those "vainer ties" are her ties to her rich family. Or maybe she has a rich fiancé who she's reluctant to break up with for the speaker. Or maybe she's been hesitating about whether or not to sleep with the speaker, and she's too "vain" to go against Victorian social and sexual codes to have sex before marriage.
- In any case, the speaker seems unimpressed when she tells him that she loves him. After all, she hasn't been willing to break, or "dissever," whatever those "vainer ties" are.

#### Lines 26-30

- Then again, though, the speaker recalls that Porphyria's passion for him was great enough for her to skip out on a fancy party ("gay feast") and to come through the storm just to be with him.
- Just the thought of him, he figures, sitting by himself, all lonely and in love with her, was enough to bring her "through wind and rain."
- She must really love him!

#### Lines 31-35

- At line 31, the speaker finally does something: he "look[s] up" at Porphyria.
- Up until now, the speaker has been passive, allowing Porphyria to make the fire and to rearrange his arms and head. Finally, he does something, even if it's only to look at her.
- It's not clear whether Porphyria's "eye[s]" are "happy and proud," or whether "happy and proud" describes the speaker. It could work either way, but if they describe Porphyria, it's important to remember that it's from the speaker's point of view only.
- He's delighted to realize how much she loves him, and he's "surprise[d]" by it.
- It takes him a few minutes to decide "what to do."

#### Lines 36-37

- In this moment when he looks up at her eyes and realizes that "Porphyria worshipped" him, the speaker decides that she's completely his.
- He repeats the word "mine" twice, in fact, to emphasize his feeling of possession.

#### Lines 37-41

- What do you do with a moment that's so "perfect"? Soak it up and enjoy it so that you'll remember it forever? Take a photo? Not if you're the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover."
- He figures out what to do – he takes her hair and twists it into one "long yellow string."
- He then wraps the "string" around her throat and strangles her.
- Wait, what? Did we just read that right? But the poem sounds so musical and light! He wraps it "three times" around her throat. It sounds almost like a fairy tale or a nursery rhyme. What's up with this guy?

#### Lines 41-45

- on't worry, though: the speaker assures us that Porphyria didn't feel any pain. He's certain of it.
- The speaker then carefully opens ("oped") Porphyria's eyelids.
- He compares this to opening a flower bud that might enclose a bee. (Go to "Symbolism, Imagery, Wordplay" for more on that weird metaphor.)
- Once he gets her eyes open again, Porphyria's pretty blue peepers "laugh" again.
- Creepy! How can a dead woman's eyes "laugh"? Obviously the speaker is out of his gourd. And if he's assuming he can tell that her eyes are "laugh[ing]" now, should we believe what he said earlier, about Porphyria's eyes looking "happy and proud" (line 32)? Do we need to rethink everything the speaker has told us?
- He also says that her eyes are now "without a stain." What's that about? Is he referring to a metaphorical "stain" on her honor? Or does the metaphor of the "stain" refer to her unwillingness to be with him

- exclusively? It's not clear. But somehow, now that she's dead, there's no more stain.

#### Lines 46-48

- Now the speaker unwraps Porphyria's hair from around her neck.
- He says that her face is still rosy as he plants a wet one on her cheek.
- We can't claim to be experts (fortunately), but our many hours of watching *CSI* suggest to us that a strangled woman's face would be unattractively blotchy, rather than pretty and rosy. So, either the speaker is lying, or he's totally delusional. It could easily be either.

#### Lines 49-51

- Now the speaker "prop[s]" Porphyria's head up on his shoulder. This action is a reversal of their positions earlier in the poem, when she moves his head onto her shoulder (check out "Symbolism, Imagery, Wordplay" for more on that reversal).
- He's the active one, now, and Porphyria (who's dead, after all) is the passive one.
- Line 51 ends with a weird and unexpected word: "still." What does he mean, "still"? Is her head "*still*" on his shoulder? Like, as he was writing this? This word introduces a whole new level of creepiness.

#### Lines 52-55

- The speaker didn't mind assuming things about Porphyria's emotions and desires when she was alive, so why should he stop now?
- Porphyria isn't even mentioned by name here: she's just a "smiling rosy little head." She's been reduced to a mere object.
- Calling her head "little" is also a way of infantilizing her, or treating her like a child.
- He says that Porphyria is "glad" that her "utmost will," or greatest desire, has been attained: everything she "scorned," or didn't like, is gone ("fled"), and she gets to be with her lover! Forever!
- Notice that the speaker says "it" instead of "she" in line 54 and "its love" instead of "her love" in line 55. He uses the pronoun "it" to replace "head," treating Porphyria as though isn't even a person anymore. She's an object.
- As an object, she can no longer argue with the speaker's interpretations of her desires and emotions. He can project anything he wants onto her, and imagine what he likes. She'll never complain.

#### Lines 56-57

- The speaker finally refers to her by name again, but it's to refer to himself – he is "Porphyria's love."
- He says that Porphyria could never have guessed how her wish (to be with him forever) would be fulfilled. That's probably the truest thing he's said this whole poem.

## Lines 58-60

- The speaker has been sitting with Porphyria all night now, and he hasn't heard any objections from anyone.
- The speaker switches to the present tense in line 58 – "we sit together now." So the whole poem is what the speaker was thinking as he reclined on the couch, snuggled up to his murdered girlfriend? Wow, just reading it makes us feel gross.
- The final line of the poem sounds triumphant: was the speaker expecting divine intervention? Was he expecting a thunderbolt from the sky to strike him down for murdering his lover? Or is he teasing the reader, who was expecting some kind of retribution at the end of the poem? Or is it Browning himself who's teasing the reader at this point?

## Summary

The narrator of "Porphyria's Lover" is a man who has murdered his lover, Porphyria. He begins by describing the tumultuous weather of the night that has just passed. It has been rainy and windy, and the weather has put the speaker in a melancholy mood as he waits in his remote cabin for Porphyria to arrive.

Finally, she does, having left a society party and transcended her class expectations to visit him. Wet and cold, she tends to the fire and then leans against the narrator, professing quietly her love and assuring him she was not deterred by the storm.

He looks up into her face and realizes that she "worshipp'd" him in this moment, but that she would ultimately return to the embrace of social expectation. Taken by the purity of the moment, he does what comes naturally: he takes her hair and strangles her to death with it. He assures his listener that she died painlessly. After she dies, he unwinds her hair and lays her corpse out in a graceful pose with her eyes opened and her lifeless head on his shoulder.

As he speaks, they sit together in that position, and he is certain he has granted her greatest wish by allowing them to be together without any worries. He ends by remarking that God "has not yet said a word" against him.

## Analysis

"Porphyria's Lover," published in 1836, is one of Browning's first forays into the dramatic monologue form (though he wouldn't use that term for a while). The basic form of his dramatic monologues is a first person narrator who presents a highly subjective perspective on a story, with Browning's message coming out not through the text but through the ironic disconnect of what the speaker justifies and what is obvious to the audience.

In this poem, the irony is abundantly clear: the speaker has committed an atrocious act and yet justifies it as not only acceptable, but as noble. Throughout the poem, the imagery and ideas suggest an overarching conflict of order vs. chaos, with the most obvious manifestation being the way the speaker presents his beastly murder as an act of rationality and love.

The clearest example of the disconnect between order and chaos comes in the poetic form. The poetry follows an extremely regular meter of iambic tetrameter (four iambic feet per line), with a regular rhyme scheme. In other words, Browning, always a precise and meticulous poet, has made certain not to reflect madness or chaos in the rhyme scheme, but instead to mirror the speaker's belief that what he does is rational.

Indeed, the order that the speaker brings to such a chaotic act is explained with rather romantic rationale. Porphyria, it is implied, is a rich lady of high social standing, while the speaker, out in his remote cabin, is not. She has chosen on this night to leave the social order of the world and retreat into the chaos of the storm to quell her tumultuous feelings for this narrator. Thus there is some indication of the theme of class, though it is far less pervasive in the poem than

are the large questions of human nature. When the speaker realizes that Porphyria ultimately will choose to return to the order of society, while simultaneously believing that she wishes to be with him – she "worshipp'd" him, after all – he chooses to immortalize this moment by removing her ability to leave.

In this line of thought lies the key to understanding much of Browning's poetry: his sense of subjective truth. Unlike most poets, whose messages, even when obtuse, are fully formed, Browning believes humans to be full of contradictions and malleable personalities that shift constantly, sometimes moment to moment. Even if we assume the speaker understands the situation correctly when he identifies Porphyria as purely devoted to him at the moment of the murder, we are also to believe that she will soon retreat to a different contradictory personality, one that prizes social acceptance. So what the speaker undertakes is in some ways a fallacious yet heroic goal: to save Porphyria from the tumultuous contradictions of human nature, to preserve her in a moment of pure happiness and contentment with existing in chaos.

It is also interesting how Browning uses so much stock, melodramatic imagery to set his poem up. While the storm certainly suits his ideas as a symbol of chaos (as opposed to the order of society), it is akin to the 'dark and stormy night' setups of traditional stories. However, once Porphyria enters, the poem moves to a more explicitly sexual place – notice the imagery as she undresses and dries herself – that suddenly equates those natural forces with the human forces of sexuality. The speaker, who had "listen'd with heart fit to break" to the storm, seems to recognize in both of these parallel forces the existence of the uncontrollable. Considering the Victorian period in which Browning wrote, this sense of sexual freedom could be expected to prompt a judgment from his audience on Porphyria as an unwed sexual woman, a judgment that is quickly reversed when she becomes the victim of an even darker human impulse than sexuality (though one most certainly tied in with it). It is worth mentioning that the speaker does not take any sexual license with her dead body, but instead tries to maintain a sense of the purity he had glimpsed in her, creating a tableaux with her head on his shoulder that evokes childish affection rather than adult depravity. As with all things, Browning complicates rather than simplifies.

The overarching message of the poem is thus that humans are full of contradictions. We are drawn to both the things we love and the things we hate, and we are eminently capable of rationalizing either choice. Through such measured and considered language, we are invited to approve of the murder even as it disgusts us, and in the murder itself we are to forgive the woman for what we (at least if we were Victorian) might have otherwise judged her. Humans are creatures of transience and chaos, even as we belabor the attempt to convince ourselves that we are rational and that our choices are sound.

## **Themes**

### **Multiple Perspectives on Single Events**

The dramatic monologue verse form allowed Browning to explore and probe the minds of specific characters in specific places struggling with specific sets of circumstances. In *The Ring and the Book*, Browning tells a suspenseful story of murder using multiple voices, which give multiple perspectives and multiple versions of the same story. Dramatic monologues allow readers to enter into the minds of various characters and to see an event from that character's perspective. Understanding the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of a character not only gives readers a sense of sympathy for the characters but also helps readers understand the multiplicity of perspectives that make up the truth. In effect, Browning's work reminds readers that the nature of truth or reality fluctuates, depending on one's perspective or view of the situation. Multiple perspectives illustrate the idea that no one sensibility or perspective sees the whole story and no two people see the same events in the same way. Browning

further illustrated this idea by writing poems that work together as companion pieces, such as “Fra Lippo Lippi” and “Andrea del Sarto.” Poems such as these show how people with different characters respond differently to similar situations, as well as depict how a time, place, and scenario can cause people with similar personalities to develop or change quite dramatically.

#### The Purposes of Art

Browning wrote many poems about artists and poets, including such dramatic monologues as “Pictor Ignotus” (1855) and “Fra Lippo Lippi.” Frequently, Browning would begin by thinking about an artist, an artwork, or a type of art that he admired or disliked. Then he would speculate on the character or artistic philosophy that would lead to such a success or failure. His dramatic monologues about artists attempt to capture some of this philosophizing because his characters speculate on the purposes of art. For instance, the speaker of “Fra Lippo Lippi” proposes that art heightens our powers of observation and helps us notice things about our own lives. According to some of these characters and poems, painting idealizes the beauty found in the real world, such as the radiance of a beloved’s smile. Sculpture and architecture can memorialize famous or important people, as in “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed’s Church” (1845) and “The Statue and the Bust” (1855). But art also helps its creators to make a living, and it thus has a purpose as pecuniary as creative, an idea explored in “Andrea del Sarto.”

#### The Relationship Between Art and Morality

Throughout his work, Browning tried to answer questions about an artist’s responsibilities and to describe the relationship between art and morality. He questioned whether artists had an obligation to be moral and whether artists should pass judgment on their characters and creations. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Browning populated his poems with evil people, who commit crimes and sins ranging from hatred to murder. The dramatic monologue format allowed Browning to maintain a great distance between himself and his creations: by channeling the voice of a character, Browning could explore evil without actually being evil himself. His characters served as Personae that let him adopt different traits and tell stories about horrible situations. In “My Last Duchess,” the speaker gets away with his wife’s murder since neither his audience (in the poem) nor his creator judges or criticizes him. Instead, the responsibility of judging the character’s morality is left to readers, who find the duke of Ferrara a vicious, repugnant person even as he takes us on a tour of his art gallery.

#### Taste

Browning’s interest in culture, including art and architecture, appears throughout his work in depictions of his characters’ aesthetic tastes. His characters’ preferences in art, music, and literature reveal important clues about their natures and moral worth. For instance, the duke of Ferrara, the speaker of “My



Last Duchess,” concludes the poem by pointing out a statue he commissioned of Neptune taming a sea monster. The duke’s preference for this sculpture directly corresponds to the type of man he is—that is, the type of man who would have his wife killed but still stare lovingly and longingly at her portrait. Like Neptune, the duke wants to subdue and command all aspects of life, including his wife. Characters also express their tastes by the manner in which they describe art, people, or landscapes. Andrea del Sarto, the Renaissance artist who speaks the poem “Andrea del Sarto,” repeatedly uses the adjectives *gold* and *silver* in his descriptions of paintings. His choice of words reinforces one of the major themes of the poem: the way he sold himself out. Listening to his monologue, we learn that he now makes commercial paintings to earn a commission, but he no longer creates what he considers to be real art. His desire for money has affected his aesthetic judgment, causing him to use monetary vocabulary to describe art objects.

### Evil and Violence

Synonyms for, images of, and Symbols of evil and violence abound in Browning’s poetry. “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” for example, begins with the speaker trying to articulate the sounds of his “heart’s abhorrence” (1) for a fellow friar. Later in the poem, the speaker invokes images of evil pirates and a man being banished to hell. The diction and images used by the speakers expresses their evil thoughts, as well as indicate their evil natures. “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855) portrays a nightmarish world of dead horses and war-torn landscapes. Yet another example of evil and violence comes in “Porphyria’s Lover,” in which the speaker sits contentedly alongside the corpse of Porphyria, whom he murdered by strangling her with her hair. Symbols of evil and violence allowed Browning to explore all aspects of human psychology, including the base and evil aspects that don’t normally appear in poetry.

## UNIT V: POETRY IV

### 5.1. Thomas Hardy Biography

## **Thomas Hardy Biography**

### **Early Years**

Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, England on June 2, 1840, the eldest son of Thomas Hardy and Jemima (Hand) Hardy. His father was a stonemason and builder; his mother passed on her love of reading and books to her son. Hardy had somewhat of an isolated life on the open fields of the region. He grew up living and examining rural life, which figures prominently in many of his novels. His primary school education lasted until he was sixteen, at which time he was sent to an apprenticeship with John Hicks, a local architect.

### **Early Career**

By 1862, when he was 22, Hardy left for London to work as a draftsman in the office of Arthur Blomfield. While in London, Hardy was influenced by the works of Charles Swinburne, Robert Browning, and Charles Darwin (the author of *Origin of Species*, 1856). Poor health forced Hardy to return to his native region in 1867, where he worked for Hicks again and for another architect, G.R. Crickmay.

Hardy's education was interrupted by his work as an architect. He had wanted to attend the university and become an Anglican minister, but lack of funds and his declining interest in religion swayed Hardy away from that avocation and more toward a self-study of poetry and writing. Hardy tried his hand at writing when he was 17 and wrote for years while he was a practicing architect. His first novel manuscript, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1867-68), was rejected by several publishers, but one editor, George Meredith encouraged him, and so Hardy set out to refine his style. A second story, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), was accepted and published. His next novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), demonstrates a more polished Hardy now coming into his own style.

By 1870, Hardy was sent by his employer to begin a restoration project of the St. Juliot Church in Cornwall. Here he met his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom Hardy married in 1874. Emma encouraged Hardy to write, and by 1872, Hardy left architecture to devote his time to his literary career.

### **Literary Work**

When Hardy left his career as architect, he did so with a contract for 11 monthly installments of a tale, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, in the *Cornhill Magazine*. His reputation as one of England's newer novelists sustained the Hardy family from that time on. The next novel, *Far from the Maddening Crowd* (1874), introduced the Wessex area setting, which also is the setting for *Tess*. The next two novels, *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), established Hardy as a formidable writer.

Hardy published two more novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), which were his last long fiction works. The last novels challenged the sensibilities of Victorian readers with situations that ruffled many a Victorian feather: immoral sex, murder, illegitimate children, and the unmarried living together. Heated debate and criticism over these two books helped Hardy decide that he would rather write poetry. In fact, so stung was he by the criticism of his works that Hardy did not write another novel.

Hardy wrote short stories, poems, and plays for the rest of his life. Two further volumes of poetry and short stories appeared, *The Dynasts: A Drama of the Napoleonic Wars* (1903-08) and *Winter Words* (1928), a volume of verse. Hardy was quite prolific during this period, writing some 900 poems on a variety of subjects. In 1912, Hardy's wife, Emma, died, ending 20 years of "domestic estrangement." In 1914, Hardy married Florence Emily Dugdale, with whom he lived until his death on January 11, 1928.

Hardy's body was buried at Westminster Abbey in Poet's Corner, while his heart was buried in Stinson, England, near the graves of his ancestors and his first wife, Emma. His second wife was later buried near her husband.

## 5.2. *The Darkling Thrush* (Poem)

I leant upon a coppice gate  
    When Frost was spectre-grey,  
And Winter's dregs made desolate  
    The weakening eye of day.  
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky  
    Like strings of broken lyres,  
And all mankind that haunted night  
    Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be  
    The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
    The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
    Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
    Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among  
    The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
    Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
    In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
    Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings  
    Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
    Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through  
    His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
    And I was unaware.

## 5.3. Detailed Analysis

### Line by Line Summary

### The Darkling Thrush: Line by Line Explanation

#### First Stanza

The poet paints a somber picture of the world. The mood feels lonely and meditative, the speaker watching as a silent bystander leaning upon the coppice gate — a gate that opens onto the woods. In his loneliness, the poet has personified Winter and Frost. Frost is described as 'specter-grey' or ghost-like grey. The Winter's dregs — the fallen snow and heavy fog — are making the twilight/ dusk (the weakening eye of day) look desolate. So, as you can see, the Winter and the Frost are bleak company — they cannot arouse any sense of cheerfulness.

Climbing plants, dead for winter, have left behind only their climbing stems or bine stems. They add to the gloominess as the poem compares them to the simile of strings of broken lyres (a musical instrument) notching the sky. This comparison is also important in suggesting the lack of music or happiness for that matter.

Even people seem listless and haunting, instead of living their lives. Then people going home and seeking their household fires add to the image of the gloomy end of the day. There is no vibrancy in life or color.

## Second Stanza

Winter in the Northern Hemisphere is also the end of the year. Here it becomes even more meaningful, as the end of the year in this case also marks the end of the century. This is why the century is personified as a corpse; the harsh winter landscape defining its wasted body. The 'cloudy canopy' or sky covers the century's tomb and the sad wind becomes a song of death.

In winter, Nature is generally at a standstill. Life's vibrancy (ancient pulse of germ and birth) seems to have stopped (shrunken hard and dry). The dormant environment feeds the poet's brooding frame of mind. The scale of his pessimism increases. Dull observations escalate to a despairing mindset and the poet only sees a world without promise or future.

## Third Stanza

Suddenly, like the proverbial silver lining to dark clouds, a joyful song breaks into the poet's despairing outlook from among the frosty twigs overhead. The poet calls the thrush's melody a 'full-hearted evensong' — prayers sung at the end of the day, in the evening. The song was coming out of boundless joy. Look at the use of word 'illimited', suggesting something uncommon.

But who was it singing? It was an old thrush bird — feeble, lean and small, with its feathers disarranged by the wind (blast-beruffled). Though the thrush's appearance does not arouse any hope, heedless of the oppressive environment and the growing darkness — the mark of struggling to survive in winter — the thrush sings. The bird puts his soul into his voice as he belts out a happy tune to no one but the Eternal Listener (Remember the word 'evensong', a prayer?).

Though the title of the poem suggested that it was all about a thrush, it took two and a half stanzas to get to the first mention of the bird. But still, the thrush and its song seem to overcome the initial melancholy that the atmosphere brought even to the readers.

## Fourth Stanza

No one knows what inspires the darkling thrush singing (compared to singing Christmas carols). The 'ecstatic sound' of the thrush is in complete contrast to such a hopeless situation. The poet cannot think of any earthly event or cause, near or far away that could be responsible. The thrush's song is an enigma, and the poet marvels at the blessed Hope or knowledge the bird has. There are no straight answers. Does the thrush sing a song of farewell — a hymn of gratitude for the good things that have been? Or does he sing a song of hope — a reassurance of good things that are to come? Like the poet, we can only wonder, keep our hearts open and just be glad that there is a reason to be happy, after all.

## The Darkling Thrush: A Critical Commentary

Published in December 1900, at the end of the 19th century, 'The Darkling Thrush' by Thomas Hardy symbolically mourns the passing of an era. In that respect, it is an elegy — a mournful poem that deals with death — here, the death of the century. As a matter of fact, the poem was originally called 'The Century's End, 1900'. But it was also the dawn of the 20th century. Probably giving way to his guarded optimism about what the new age would bring, Hardy renamed the piece to the more cheery title as we know today — The Darkling Thrush.

'The Darkling Thrush' is rich in metaphor. 'Darkling' means 'of the darkness', and conveys an 'end of days' metaphor. Here the dusk doesn't just refer to the dimming of light. On a deeper level, we deal with despair and death of the century. Add the winter landscape to this, and things get more dismal.

Thankfully not all is doom and gloom. There is another focal point to this poem — the Thrush. A complete antithesis (contrast) to what everything else in the poem represents, the bird speaks of Hope, Joy and Change. This play of light and shade called chiaroscuro effect is treated equally in the poem. All these are

lofty concepts that go beyond our five senses. Such poems based on abstract ideas are called abstractions.

Change is never easy. More often than not, we do not have a choice but to accept it. 'The Darkling Thrush' is about one person's reaction to this change. It is about hope in the face of despair, about endings and cautious beginnings, about courage when all seems lost, depending on the way you look at it.

Hardy does not bring any drama with the structure and wordplay in the poem. He was seeing enough of that in real life. Rather the poet chose to bring symmetry to the poem. He neatly divides the poem in two halves, allocating 2 of the 4 stanzas for his two main subjects — the winter evening, then the thrush. Each stanza is an octet — i.e. it comprises of 8 lines. Hardy even coined his own words — outleant, blast-beruffled, spectre-grey, contributing to the ordered meter/ rhythm of the poem. These words don't occur anywhere else in the English language and are called nonce words (Have fun coming up with your own).

We have an ababcdcd rhyme scheme; each stanza repeats the same pattern but with a different end rhyme. The other sound devices used in the poem are:

Assonance: Repetition of similar vowel sounds.

At once a voice arose among (O and A sounds- Line 17)

Consonance: Repetition of similar consonant sounds in neighboring words.

And Winter's dregs made desolate  
The weakening eye of day (Lines 4-5)

An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom. (Lines 24-28)

Alliteration: Repetition of initial consonant sounds.

That I could think there trembled through (Line 29)  
His crypt the cloudy canopy, (Line 11)

Alliteration is a type of consonance. Here is an instance where the two overlapped:

In blast-beruffled plume (Line 25)  
Consonance (L sound) + Alliteration (B sound)

#### **5.4. W. H. Auden Biography**

English poet, playwright, critic, and librettist Wystan Hugh Auden exerted a major influence on the poetry of the 20th century. Auden grew up in Birmingham, England and was known for his extraordinary intellect and wit. His first book, *Poems*, was published in 1930 with the help of T.S. Eliot. Just before World War II broke out, Auden emigrated to the United States where he met the poet Chester Kallman, who became his lifelong lover. Auden won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 for *The Age of Anxiety*. Much of his poetry is concerned with moral issues and evidences a strong political, social, and psychological context. While the teachings of Marx and Freud weighed heavily in his early work, they later gave way to religious and spiritual influences. Some critics have called Auden an anti-Romantic—a poet of analytical clarity who sought for order, for universal patterns of human existence. Auden's poetry is considered versatile

and inventive, ranging from the tersely epigrammatic to book-length verse, and incorporating a vast range of scientific knowledge. Throughout his career, he collaborated with Christopher Isherwood and Louis MacNeice, and also frequently joined with Chester Kallman to create libretti for musical works by Benjamin Britten, Igor Stravinsky, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Today he is considered one of the most skilled and creative mid-20th century poets who regularly wrote in traditional rhyme and meter.

Auden was born and raised in a heavily industrial section of northern England. His father, a prominent physician with an extensive knowledge of mythology and folklore, and his mother, a strict Anglican, both exerted strong influences on Auden's poetry. Auden's early interest in science and engineering earned him a scholarship to Oxford University, where his fascination with poetry led him to change his field of study to English. His attraction to science never completely waned, however, and scientific references are frequently found in his poetry. While at Oxford, Auden became familiar with modernist poetry, particularly that of T.S. Eliot. It was also at Oxford that Auden became the pivotal member of a group of writers called the "Oxford Group" or the "Auden Generation," which included Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, and Louis MacNeice. The group adhered to various Marxist and anti-fascist doctrines and addressed social, political, and economic concerns in their writings. Auden's first book of poetry, *Poems*, was privately printed by Stephen Spender in 1928. Critics have noted that Auden's early verse suggests the influences of Thomas Hardy, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Wilfred Owen, and Edward Thomas. Stylistically, the poems are fragmentary and terse, relying on concrete images and colloquial language to convey Auden's political and psychological concerns.

Auden's poems from the second half of the 1930s evidence his many travels during this period of political turmoil. "Spain," one of his most famous and widely anthologized pieces, is based on his experiences in that country during its civil war of 1936 to 1939. *Journey to War*, a book of the period written by Auden with Christopher Isherwood, features Auden's sonnet sequence and verse commentary, "In Time of War." The first half of the sequence recounts the history of humanity's move away from rational thought, while the second half addresses the moral problems faced by humankind on the verge of another world war. It was Auden who characterized the 30s as "the age of anxiety." His 1947 poem by that title, wrote Monroe K. Spears in his *Poetry of W.H. Auden*, was a "sympathetic satire on the attempts of human beings to escape, through their own efforts, the anxiety of our age." Auden struck a chord in readers with his timely treatment of the moral and political issues that directly affected them. Harold Bloom suggested in the *New Republic* that "Auden [was] accepted as not only a great poet but also a Christian humanist sage not because of any conspiracy among moralizing neo-Christian academicians, but because the age require[d] such a figure."

Some critics have suggested that Auden's unusual writing style germinated in the social climate of his childhood. Robert Bloom, writing in *PMLA*, commented that in Auden's writing in 1930, "the omission of articles, demonstrative adjectives, subjects, conjunctions, relative pronouns, auxiliary verbs—form a language of extremity and urgency. Like telegraphese ... it has time and patience only for the most important words." In his *W.H. Auden as a Social Poet*, Frederick Buell identified the roots of this terse style in the private, codified language in which Auden and his circle of schoolboy friends conversed. Buell quoted Christopher Isherwood, one of those friends and later a collaborator with Auden, who described a typical conversation between two members of the group: "We were each other's ideal audience; nothing, not the slightest innuendo or the subtlest shade of meaning, was lost between us. A joke which, if I had

been speaking to a stranger, would have taken five minutes to lead up to and elaborate and explain, could be conveyed by the faintest hint. ... Our conversation would have been hardly intelligible to anyone who had happened to overhear it; it was a rigamarole of private slang, deliberate misquotations, bad puns, bits of parody, and preparatory school smut.” Peter E. Firchow felt that the nature of Auden’s friendships affected not only his style but also his political views. In *PMLA*, Firchow noted that Auden thought of his friends “as a ‘gang’ into which new members were periodically recruited,” pointing out that Auden, “while never a Fascist, came at times remarkably close to accepting some characteristically Fascist ideas, especially those having to do with a mistrust of the intellect, the primacy of the group over the individual, the fascination with a strong leader (who expresses the will of the group), and the worship of youth.”

Auden left England in 1939 and became a citizen of the United States. His first book written in America, *Another Time*, contains some of his best-known poems, among them “September 1, 1939” and “Musée des Beaux Arts,” which was inspired by a Breughel painting. The volume also contains elegies to poets A.E. Housman, Matthew Arnold, and William Butler Yeats, whose careers and aesthetic concerns had influenced the development of Auden’s artistic credo. A famous line from “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” is “Poetry makes nothing happen”—suggesting Auden’s complete rejection of romantic ideals. Some critics have suggested that Auden’s concentration on ethical concerns in *Another Time* was influenced by his reconversion to Christianity, which he had previously abandoned at age 15. Others, such as John G. Blair (author of *The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden*), however, have cautioned against reading Auden’s personal sentiments into his poetry: “In none of his poems can one feel sure that the speaker is Auden himself. In the course of his career he has demonstrated impressive facility in speaking through any sort of dramatic persona; accordingly, the choice of an intimate, personal tone does not imply the direct self-expression of the poet.”

Following several noted publications, *The Double Man*, *For the Time Being*, and *The Sea and the Mirror*, Auden’s next volume of verse, *The Collected Poetry*, helped to solidify his reputation as a major poet. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his following book, *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue*, which features four characters of disparate backgrounds who meet in a New York City bar during World War II. Written in the heavily alliterative style of Old English literature, the poem explores the attempts of the protagonists to comprehend themselves and the world in which they live. Auden’s next major work, *Nones*, includes another widely anthologized piece, “In Praise of Limestone,” which asserts a powerful connection between the landscape depicted and the psychology of Auden’s characters. Auden received a National Book Award in Poetry for *The Shield of Achilles* in 1956.

Auden possessed a formidable technique and an acute ear. In her book, *Auden*, Barbara Everett commented on the poet’s facility: “In his verse, Auden can argue, reflect, joke, gossip, sing, analyze, lecture, hector, and simply talk; he can sound, at will, like a psychologist on a political platform, like a theologian at a party, or like a geologist in love; he can give dignity and authority to nonsensical theories, and make newspaper headlines sound both true and melodious.” Jeremy Robson noted in *Encounter*: “The influence of music on Auden’s verse ... has always been salient: even his worst lines often ‘sound’ impressive.” Everett found that a musical sensibility marked Auden’s work from the very beginning, and she felt that when “he turned more and more, in the latter part of his career, to the kind of literary work that demands free exercise of verbal and rhythmic talent—for instance, to the writing of libretti—[he developed] that side of his artistic nature which was from the beginning the strongest.”

Auden's linguistic innovations, renowned enough to spawn the adjective "Audenesque," were described by Karl Shapiro in *In Defense of Ignorance* as "the modernization of diction, [and] the enlarging of dictional language to permit a more contemporary-sounding speech." As his career progressed, however, Auden was more often chastised than praised for his idiosyncratic use of language. James Fenton wrote in the *New Statesman*: "For years—for over forty years—the technical experimentation started by Auden enlarged and enriched the scope of English verse. He rediscovered and invented more than any other modern poet. ... And yet there grew up ... a number of mannerisms, such as the use of nouns as verbs, or the employment of embarrassingly outdated slang, or the ransacking of the *OED* [Oxford English Dictionary], which became in the end a hindrance to his work."

The extent to which Auden believed in various political theories is still debated; what is clear to some critics, though, is that Auden habitually revised his writing to accommodate any shifts in faith. Hannah Arendt considered Auden's changes of heart to be a natural response to the flux of the times. Arendt wrote in the *New Yorker*: "In the Forties, there were many who turned against their old beliefs. ... They simply changed trains, as it were; the train of Socialism and Communism had been wrong, and they changed to the train of Capitalism or Freudianism or some refined Marxism."

Buell drew a parallel between the political activism of Auden and that of playwright Bertolt Brecht, noting that both men were "attempting to find an artistic voice for a left-wing polemic." Arendt supported Buell's assertion, commenting that "[Auden] once mentioned as a 'disease' his 'early addiction to German usages,' but much more prominent than these, and less easy to get rid of, was the obvious influence of Bertolt Brecht with whom he had more in common than he was ever ready to admit. ... What made this influence possible was that [Auden and Brecht] both belonged to the post-First World War generation, with its curious mixture of despair and *joie de vivre*." Buell found stylistic as well as political similarities. Bernard Bergonzi, writing in *Encounter*, contended that ideologies were only tools to serve Auden's foremost interest: understanding the workings of the world. For Auden, said Bergonzi, Marxism and psychoanalysis alike were "attractive as techniques of explanation." Bergonzi posited that Auden perceived reality as "actually or potentially known and intelligible, without mysteries or uncertainty," and that he considered experience to be a complex entity which could be "reduced to classifiable elements, as a necessary preliminary to diagnosis and prescription." Auden expressed his desire for order in his preface to *Oxford Poetry 1927*: "All genuine poetry is in a sense the formation of private spheres out of a public chaos." Bergonzi was one of many critics who felt that Auden succeeded in giving his readers a feeling of the well-ordered "private sphere." He wrote: "At a time of world economic depression there was something reassuring in Auden's calm demonstration, mediated as much by style as by content, that reality was intelligible, and could be studied like a map or a catalogue, or seen in temporal terms as an inexorable historical process. ... It was the last time that any British poet was to have such a global influence on poetry in English."

In his later years, Auden wrote three major volumes: *City without Walls, and Many Other Poems*, *Epistle to a Godson, and Other Poems*, and the posthumously published *Thank You, Fog: Last Poems*. While all three works are noted for their lexical range and humanitarian content, Auden's later poems often received mixed, and sometimes unenthusiastic, reviews. Commenting on *Thank You, Fog*, Howard Moss in *New York Times Book Review* argued that the collection is "half the ghost of what it might have been. Writers, being human,



are not in a position to choose their monuments. This one is more Audenesque than Auden, hardly fitting as the final words, the summing up of a man who set his mark on an age.”

Since Auden’s death in 1973, numerous anthologies of his works have been published, leading to reevaluations (and in some respects, the critical rehabilitation) of the poet’s career. Edited by Edward Mendelson, *W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman: Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings by W.H. Auden, 1939-1973*, presents a compilation of Auden’s opera libretti, radio plays, film narratives, liturgical dramas, and adaptations of Euripides and Shakespeare, many of which were written in collaboration with Chester Kallman. While the collection points to Auden’s diverse musical and dramatic interests, “the libretti are rightly the focus of the book,” observed J. D. McClatchy in *New Republic*. McClatchy continued: “[The opera libretto] *The Rake’s Progress* remains [Auden and Kallman’s] masterpiece. Simplest verse is the hardest to write, because it is most exposed, and Auden’s spare style here achieves both elegance and speechliness.” Highlighting Auden’s writing partnership with Christopher Isherwood during the early years of their collaboration is Mendelson’s *W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood: Plays and Other Dramatic Writings by W.H. Auden 1928-1938*, which contains plays, scripts for documentary films and a radio play, and a cabaret act. The plays in the volume, such as *The Dance of Death* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, reveal Auden’s early desire to eschew dramatic realism in favor of the more ritualistic and communal dramatic forms that characterized the Mystery plays of the Middle Ages. The subject matter of the plays nevertheless demonstrates their modern orientation, as political and psychological commentary are of central importance.

Edited by Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (cofounders of the W.H. Auden society), *“The Map of All My Youth:” Early Works, Friends and Influences* contains several previously unpublished works by Auden, including six poems from the 1930s and an essay by Auden titled “Writing.” The first in a planned series of scholarly books dedicated “not only to Auden but also [to] his friends and contemporaries, those who influenced him, and those by whom he was influenced,” the volume also contains correspondence between Auden and Stephen Spender and critical essays on Auden by contemporary scholars.

Auden’s milieu is further explored in *A Company of Readers: Uncollected Writings of W.H. Auden, Jacques Barzun, and Lionel Trilling from the Reader’s Subscription and Mid-Century Book Clubs*. The book club in question, the Reader’s Subscription Club, later became the Mid-Century Book Club. It was formed in 1951 in an effort to cultivate a readership for literary novels that would not necessarily appeal to mainstream audiences. Auden, Barzun, and Trilling were the club’s editorial board, and the book collects some of their reviews and articles which originally appeared in the club’s periodicals—the *Griffin* and the *Mid-Century*. 15 of Auden’s essays are included.

Auden’s relevance to literature continues with the publication of *Lectures on Shakespeare*, a collection dating from 1946, when Auden taught a course on Shakespeare at the New School for Social Research in New York City. The lectures were reconstructed from the scrupulous notes taken by Auden’s students, which were then edited by Arthur Kirsch. Auden discusses Shakespeare’s plays with an eye toward their historical and cultural relevance, comparing Richard III to Hitler, for example. William Logan in the *New York Times Book Review* noted that “Auden wrote criticism as if he had better things to do, which made its brilliance the more irritating.” He characterized Auden’s Shakespeare lectures as “rambling and sociable ... at times whimsical and perverse,” and explained that Auden’s criticism is informed both by

psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and Søren Kierkegaard. Auden's more audacious observations about *Hamlet*, for example, include his belief that the title role should be played by someone dragged off the street rather than an actor, and that the plot can be compared to New York's infamous Tammany Hall political machine. Cautioning that the essays are not Auden's exact words and should not be accepted as such, Logan nevertheless concluded that "these flawed and personal lectures tell us more about Auden than his sometimes perfect verses."

Auden's career has undergone much reevaluation in recent decades. While some critics have contended that he wrote his finest work when his political sentiments were less obscured by religion and philosophy, others defend his later material as the work of a highly original and mature intellect. Many critics echo the assessment of Auden's career by the National Book Committee, which awarded him the National Medal for Literature in 1967: "[Auden's poetry] has illuminated our lives and times with grace, wit and vitality. His work, branded by the moral and ideological fires of our age, breathes with eloquence, perception and intellectual power."

### **5.5. *The Unknown Citizen (Poem)***

*(To JS/07 M 378*

*This Marble Monument*

*?Is Erected by the State)*

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be  
One against whom there was no official complaint,  
And all the reports on his conduct agree  
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,  
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.  
Except for the War till the day he retired  
He worked in a factory and never got fired,  
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.  
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,  
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,  
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)  
And our Social Psychology workers found  
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.  
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day  
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.  
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,  
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.  
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare  
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan  
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,  
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.  
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content  
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;  
When there was peace, he was for peace: when there was war, he went.  
He was married and added five children to the population,  
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.  
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.  
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:  
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

### **5.6 Detailed Analysis**

Section I (Epigraph)

The epigraph lets us in on a secret: we're reading a dramatic poem. It's all an act. The poem is pretending to be an official celebration of a dead person: the Unknown Citizen. The words are inscribed on a "marble monument" that was paid for by the State, or government.

- Which government? We don't know. But referring to "the State" makes it sound very ominous, like George Orwell's "Big Brother" from 1984.
- Marble isn't cheap, and most people can't afford to use it as a building material.
- The government, however, has seemingly infinite financial resources to work with, because it takes money from everyone.
- As for "JS/07 M 378," we think Auden is just having fun by stringing a bunch of letters and numbers together in some incomprehensible way.
- It seems that "JS/07 M 378" is how the Unknown Citizen is identified, and the monument is dedicated "To" him. Referring to people in this way is, obviously, very cold and impersonal, but it can also be convenient, so bureaucrats do it all the time.
- To give a chilling but relevant bit of context, at the time this poem was written, the Nazis were already starting to identify Jewish prisoners with numbered tattoos, though this is not something that Auden would have known. But, in retrospect, this grisly parallel makes the "marble monument" seem that much more sinister.
- By the way, the monument is clearly a parody of the Tomb(s) of the Unknown Soldier, found in many different nations and dedicated to soldiers who died anonymously in battle.
- One of the most famous of such tombs lies underneath the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, which *is* a marble monument. You can read more about the Unknown Soldier in "What's Up With the Title?"

Lines 1-2

The poem begins by describing a person referred to as, simply, "He." We take this to be "The Unknown Citizen," which makes sense, because his name isn't known. For simplicity's sake, we're going to refer to him as "The UC." (UC is impersonal, but slightly less impersonal than JS/07 M 378".)

- The Bureau of Statistics has found that "no official complaint" has been made against our guy, the UC.
- Now, this is a strange way to start a poem of celebration. It's a total backhanded compliment. It's like if you asked someone what they thought of your new haircut, and they replied, "Well, it's not hideous." Um, thanks...?
- But here's a question: what on earth is the Bureau of Statistics, and why is it investigating the UC? There isn't any Bureau of Statistics in any country that we know of, but most "bureaus," or government offices, deal with statistics every day.
- The Bureau of Statistics seems to be a parody of such "bureaucracies," which are large, complicated organizations that produce a lot of red tape and official paperwork.
- If the Bureau of Statistics has information about the UC, then it probably has information about everyone, because, in a certain sense, the UC *represents* everyone. He's the average Joe.

- The fact that there was no "official" complaint against the UC doesn't tell us much.
- Were there "unofficial" complaints? We don't know, and from the poem's perspective, it doesn't seem to matter.
- Auden subtly pushes back on the anonymity of the UC in one interesting way, however. The first word of the second line is "One," which produces a minor joke if you stop reading there: The UC was found to be...One, as in he was found to be a single person: an individual. This is funny, because an individual is exactly what the idea of an "Unknown Citizen" is *not*.

#### Lines 3-5

- Get out your highlighters and reading glasses: we're still poring through the paperwork of the lovable Bureau of Statistics.
- Now we have in front of us the "reports on his conduct." Let's see: ah, yes, it appears the man was a saint. But not a saint like St. Francis or Mother Teresa: those are "old-fashioned" saints, who performed miracles and helped feed the hungry and clothe the poor.
- No, the UC is a "modern" saint, which means that he always served the "Greater Community."
- This community could include the poor and the hungry, but somehow we think that's not what the speaker has in mind. And the words "Greater Community" are capitalized as if it were a proper name, though it's not.
- As in the first two lines, these lines raise more questions than they answer. Who issued these "reports"? His friends? Lovers? Co-workers? Some guy in an office somewhere? We don't have an answer.

#### Lines 6-7

- The UC had one of the most boring jobs in the world: factory work. (We're assuming he didn't work in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.)
- Notice how the poem says very few truly nice things about the UC.
- Everything is phrased in the negative. Instead of, "he was great at his job and everybody loved him," we get, "he never got fired." It's another backhanded compliment.
- We should probably assume that he didn't work in the factory during the war because he was fighting as a soldier.
- Formally, these lines sound slightly different than what came before, maybe even a little "off." The formal structure of these two lines differs from the two preceding lines in two ways.
- First, the syntax (the order of the words) is weird because line 6 begins with the phrase "except for the war," which we would normally expect to come at the end of a sentence.
- Secondly, the poem unexpectedly shifts from an ABABA rhyme scheme to a rhyming couplet (retired/fired). This is such a simple and obvious rhyme that it makes the UC's life sound even more awkward and boring.

#### Lines 8-11

- Finally, we get a positive accomplishment. The UC "satisfied his employers."
- Wait a minute, that doesn't sound so impressive after all. "Satisfied" is a lot more neutral than, say, "thrilled" or "wowed."
- But right after this lukewarm praise, we get more negative praise – for *not* being something.
- The UC was not a "scab" and he didn't have unusual opinions around the workplace. (A "scab," by the way, isn't just the thing your mother told you not to pick off your scraped elbow. It's also the word used to describe people who would replace workers who were on strike.)
- Unions aren't nearly as powerful as they used to be, but back in the 1930s, they had the power to cripple major companies through labor strikes – assuming there was no one with whom to replace the workers.
- Although companies were happy to find "scabs," no one really respected the replacements because they were not team players and only looked out for themselves.
- The fact that the UC wasn't a scab is really just another example of his normalcy.
- He was a good union member and "paid his dues." More importantly, the union itself was normal, or "sound."
- The biggest accusation made about unions during this time was that they were secretly socialist or even communist organizations. The speaker confirms that the UC's union is neither of those things.
- In this poem, it seems that everyone is investigating everyone else. Behind all the reassuring clichés, there is a lot of suspicion and paranoia on the part of the State.
- Finally, these lines are the first to really suggest a particular nation or culture, and the giveaway is "Fudge Motors, Inc."
- For one thing, most car manufacturers were located in America in the 1930s. For another, the name of the company sounds a whole lot like Detroit-based "Ford Motors, Inc." the first and largest auto company in the world at the time.
- And, yes, "Fudge" is a very silly name, as we're sure Auden was aware.

#### Lines 12-13

- Now the poem shifts from his employment to his social life. But, don't worry: there are still comically absurd bureaucrats to provide us with unnecessary information.
- Stop the presses! Headline: "Average Joe Enjoys Drinking With Pals."
- Even in his carousing with friends, though, the UC takes things in moderation. He likes "a drink," and the singular form implies that he doesn't drink too much and isn't an alcoholic.
- At the time when Auden wrote the poem, "Social Psychology" was still a relatively new field. Social psychologists study the behavior of humans in groups.
- This sounds good in concept, but in practice, a lot of the early work done in this field simply pointed out things that were so obvious they didn't need to be pointed out.

- (Don't worry, psychology majors, the field has gotten quite a bit more complicated since then.)
- It's like when you read about some scientific study that says that unhappy people are more likely to drink a lot, and you wonder why on earth they needed a study to support such an obvious conclusion.
- Nonetheless, we have to think that the UC might have been flattered to be getting so much attention from all these intellectual types. That is, if he were still alive.

#### Lines 14-15

- This is starting to sound like an infomercial you might see for some exercise machine on cable at 3 a.m. There are testimonials galore.
- Now "The Press," or news media, offers its take. Of course, they don't really care about the UC as a person; they're just glad he seems to have bought a paper every day.
- Or, rather, they are "convinced" that he did . We'd like to know what convinced them.
- Not only that, but he also had "normal" reactions to the advertisements in a paper. ("Hey! An inflatable kayak! I sure could use one of those...")
- In short, he's a good American consumer.

#### Lines 16-17

- We're starting to suspect that the government must have an entire room full of paperwork on this guy.
- Now we are rifling through his health insurance policy, looking for any evidence that he wasn't a totally straightedge, middle-of-the-road personality.
- He was "fully insured," which is sensible. This guy wasn't exactly a risk-taker.
- Even though he had insurance, he only went to the hospital once, which means he wasn't too much of a burden on the health system. He left the hospital "cured".

#### Lines 18-19

- What are "Producers Research" and "High-Grade Living"?
- They sound like organizations intended to help consumers know what stuff to buy.
- In fact, they sound suspiciously like the existing *Consumer Reports* and *Good Housekeeping*, both of which were around when Auden wrote the poem.
- Both of these groups test out new products and provide ratings. *Good Housekeeping*, for example, is known for the famous "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval."
- So Producers Research and High-Grade Living have done a little research and learned that the UC used "installment plans" to buy expensive things.

- This is when you pay for something in small payments over a period of time. Although we don't use the term "installment plans" very much anymore, the practice remains extremely common.
- Our love of buying things and paying for them over time is one of the reasons Americans have a larger debt per household than almost any other country.
- Since installment plan advertising didn't really begin until the 1920s, Auden probably thought it was weird to buy something you couldn't afford ([read more](#)).
- We don't know about you, but we think these are the funniest lines in the poem. The phrase "fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan" is just hilarious, as if being conscious ("sensible") at all required you to know about the Plan.

#### Lines 20-21

- Ever heard the Rolling Stones song, "You Can't Always Get What You Want." The song says, "You can't always get what you want, but you get what you need."
- The point is that we always think we need more than we really do. This is precisely the idea behind these lines.
- Obviously, a person doesn't *need* a phonograph (the 1930s equivalent of an MP3 player), radio, car, and frigidaire (refrigerator) in order to survive.
- But if you want to be a hip, "Modern Man," these things are absolutely "necessary." We get the impression that the UC's greatest accomplishment, in the opinion of the speaker, was buying things.

#### Lines 22-24

- The "researchers into Public Opinion" are like the people nowadays who call your house during dinnertime to ask you who you're voting for and whether your jeans are stone-washed or boot-cut.
- The UC didn't have any weird or "improper" opinions. He was a conformist, which means that he believed what the people around him seemed to believe. He was like a weather vane, going whichever way the wind blew.
- Indeed, the UC's beliefs were partly determined by the seasons or "time of year."
- Line 24 is also pretty funny. We imagine a pause for comic suspense after word "war." "When there was peace, he was for peace: when there was war...(pause)...he went."
- The line leads us to expect that it will end "he was for war," but we actually get something much more hesitant. Because, really, who could be "for war"?

#### Line 25-26

- You'd think that a person's marriage and children would be one of their biggest accomplishments.

- But the State doesn't really care about such intimate concerns, so the bureaucratic speaker only mentions them in passing.
- From the perspective of the State, it's good that the UC had so many children because a growing population usually helps a nation's economy and also ensures that there are enough soldiers just in case (cough, cough) a HUGE WORLD WAR comes along (hint: this poem was written in 1939).
- "Eugenics" is a term from history that you may not have heard before. It refers to a social movement that believed that the human species could be improved by engineering changes in its gene pool.
- Eugenics relied on the relatively new fields of genetics and the theory of evolution.
- This new scientific field was all the rage in the beginning of the twentieth century, until a guy named Adolph Hitler starting adopting its ideas.
- Most people now agree that eugenics was a disastrous concept, although most of its followers were not as evil as Hitler.
- The eugenicist in this poem thinks he can direct the size of the population by telling people how many kids they should have.

The poem begins with an ironic epigraph, "To JS/07 M 378 / This Marble Monument / Is Erected by the State."

The Bureau of Statistics and all other reports show that he will complied with his duties to "the Greater Community." He worked in a factory and paid his union dues. He had no odd views. The Social Psychology investigators found him to be normal, as did the Press: he was popular, "liked a drink," bought the daily paper, and had the "normal" reactions to advertisements. He was fully insured. The Health-card report shows he was in the hospital only once, and left cured.

The Producers Research and High-Grade Living investigators also showed he was normal and "had everything necessary to the Modern Man"—radio, car, etcetera. The Public Opinion researchers found "he held the proper opinions for the time of year," supporting peace in peacetime but serving when there was war. He was married and had the appropriate number of five children, according to the Eugenicist. He never interfered with the public schools.

It is absurd to ask whether he was free or happy, for if anything had been wrong, "we should certainly have heard."

Analysis

"The Unknown Citizen" (1940) is one of Auden's most famous poems. Often anthologized and read by students in high school and college, it is renowned for its wit and irony in complaining about the stultifying and anonymous qualities of bureaucratic, semi-socialist Western societies. Its structure is that of a satiric elegy, as though the boring, unknown citizen was so utterly unremarkable that the state honored him with a poetic monument about how little trouble he caused for anyone. It resembles the "Unknown Soldier" memorials that nations erect to honor the soldiers who fought and died for their countries and whose names have been lost to posterity; Britain's is located in Westminster Abbey and the United States' is located in Arlington, Virginia. This one, in an unnamed location, lists the unknown man as simply "JS/07 M 378."

The rhyme scheme changes a few times throughout the poem. Most frequently the reader notices rhyming couplets. These sometimes use the same number of syllables, but they are not heroic couplets—no, they are not in iambic pentameter—they are often 11 or 13 syllables long, or of differing lengths.



These patterns increase the dry humor of the poem.

Auden's "Unknown Citizen" is not anonymous like the Unknown Soldier, for the bureaucracy knows a great deal about him. The named agencies give the sense, as early as 1940, that a powerful Big Brother kind of bureaucracy watches over its citizens and collects data on them and keeps it throughout one's life. This feeling makes the poem eerie and prescient; one often thinks of the dystopian, totalitarian states found in the writings of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley or the data-driven surveillance state of today. In Auden's context, one might think of the state-focused governments of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini.

The Big Brother perspective begins from the very outset of the poem, with its evocation of a Bureau of Statistics. The man has had every aspect of his life catalogued. He served his community, he held a job, he paid union dues, he did not hold radical views, he reacted normally to advertisements, he had insurance, he possessed the right material goods, he had proper opinions about current events, and he married and had the right amount of children. It does not appear on paper that he did anything wrong or out of place. In fact, "he was a saint" from the state's perspective, having "served the Greater Community." The words used to describe him—"normal," "right," "sensible," "proper," "popular"—indicate that he is considered the ideal citizen. He is praised as "unknown" because there was nothing interesting to know. Consider, in comparison, the completely normalized protagonist Emmet in *The Lego Movie*.

At the end of the poem, the closing couplet asks, "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: / Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard." With these last lines comes the deeper meaning of the poem, the irony that despite all of the bureaucratic data gathering, some aspect of the individual might not have been captured. It becomes clear that the citizen is also "unknown" because in this statistical gathering of data, the man's individuality and identity are lost. This bureaucratic society, focused on its official view of the common good, assesses a person using external, easily-catalogued characteristics rather than respect for one's uniqueness, one's particular thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, and goals.

Interestingly, and ironically, the speaker himself is also unknown. The professionals in the poem—"his employers," "our Social Psychology workers," "our researchers into Public Opinion," "our Eugenicist"—are just as anonymous and devoid of personality. While a person might be persuaded that he is free or happy, the evidence of his life shows that he is just one more cog in the faceless, nameless bureaucratic machine.




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