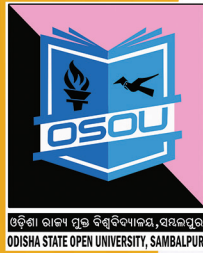


**BEG-2**  
**Block-2**



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**Odisha State Open University**  
**Sambalpur**

# **BAEG**

*BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) IN*  
**ENGLISH**

**BRITISH POETRY AND DRAMA:  
17TH AND 18TH CENTURY**

***17TH & 18TH CENTURY POEMS***

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Part of the materials used in this block is drawn from self-learning materials developed by IGNOU, New Delhi and few other Open Education Resources duly acknowledge in the reference section at the end of the unit.



ଓଡ଼ିଶା ରାଜ୍ୟ ମୁକ୍ତ ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ, ସମ୍ବଲପୁର, ଓଡ଼ିଶା  
Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Odisha  
Established by an Act of Government of Odisha.

# **BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) IN ENGLISH (BAEG)**

**BEG-2**

**British Poetry and Drama: 17<sup>th</sup> And 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

## **BLOCK-2**

### **17<sup>TH</sup> & 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY POEMS**

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**UNIT 1     JOHN MILTON: LYCIDAS**

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**UNIT 2     ANDREW MARWELL: TO HIS COY MISTRESS**

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**UNIT 3     ALEXANDER POPE: ODE ON SOLITUDE**

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**UNIT 4     APHRA BEHN: I LED MY SILVIA TO A GROVE**

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**UNIT 5     ROBERT HERRICK: HIS RETURN TO LONDON**

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## **UNIT 1 JOHN MILTON: LYCIDAS**

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### **Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 John Milton: The Poet
  - 1.2.1 His Life
  - 1.2.2 His Works
- 1.3 Introduction to Lycidas
  - 1.3.1 The anxieties of Lycidas
- 1.4 Lycidas, The Poem
  - 1.4.1 History of the name Lycidas
  - 1.4.2 Lycidas as a Pastoral Elegy
  - 1.4.3 The Uncouth Swan
  - 1.4.4 The Pilot
  - 1.4.5 The Conclusion
- 1.5 Interpretation of the Poem
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Exercises
- 1.8 Suggested Readings

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### **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit you will be able to gain an account of the life of John Milton. We also discuss few of his unforgettable works and appreciate his power in writing Epic Poetry. After that we also learn about his most talked about poem 'Lycidas' and try elaborate and explain it in our own words for the Learners to have an in-depth knowledge about the poem. We also discuss the type in which the poem is employed and interpret it accordingly.

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### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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This unit will introduce you to the English poet John Milton by providing you with a detailed idea on the life and works of the great poet. Have you come across the term of 'epic'? An epic or a heroic poem is a long narrative  
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Poem dealing with the exploits of one or more heroic individuals, historical or legendary, usually in an exalted style and involving a moral tone. The two major epic poems in the Western tradition are *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of the Greek Homer. Greek and later criticism, which considered the Homeric epic the highest form of poetry, produced the genre of Secondary epic such as the *Aeneid* by Virgil, Tasso's *Jerusalem*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* - which attempted to emulate Homer, often for a patron or a political cause. Thus, Milton is known to us as one of the greatest epic poets. The term "epic" is also applied to narrative poems of other traditions: the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, Indian *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

"*Lycidas*" (/ˈlɪsɪdəs/) is a poem by John Milton, written in 1637 as a pastoral elegy. It first appeared in a 1638 collection of elegies, entitled *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago*, dedicated to the memory of Edward King, friend of Milton's at Cambridge who drowned when his ship sank in the Irish Sea off the coast of Wales in August 1637. The poem is 193 lines in length, and is irregularly rhymed. While many of the other poems in the compilation are in Greek and Latin, "*Lycidas*" is one of the poems written in English.[1] Milton republished the poem in 1645.

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## 1.2 JOHN MILTON: THE POET

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With the exception of William Shakespeare has been, so highly and continuously, admired, and no other writings, except those of Milton, have been so devoutly revered by many generations. Let us now look into his eventual life and his works that have engendered such lasting popularity.

### 1.2.1. His Life

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608 in Cheapside, London. His father, John Milton, Sr. came from a Roman Catholic family that disinherited him because of his conversion to Protestantism. The intense religious fervour of the Miltons may be traced to their sense of sacrifice in renouncing the ancient faith. John Milton, Sr. became a wealthy scrivener and moneylender in London. He struck to his books, giving his eldest son the education of a scholar and a gentleman: St. Paul's School; Christ's College Cambridge; five years of private study; a grand tour of Italian Literary Patrons. Education moulded the life and work of England's most influential writer. In 1641-42 Milton entered the realm of clamorous public controversy establishing himself by the anti-Episcopal pamphlets as a great voice of Puritanism. Shortly after the Civil War, he married Mary Powell, a girl half his age who soon went back to her Royalist

John Milton: Invocation To *Paradise Lost*, Book I Unit-5

English Poetry from Medieval to Modern (Block 1) 59 family. Milton wrote four tracts on divorce (because of estrangement from his wife); then on defence of regicide. He also wrote on education and freedom of speech. In 1645, reconciliation with his wife took place, and seven years later his wife died, leaving him with three small daughters. In 1649, after the execution of King Charles I, he was appointed Latin Secretary to the Council of State by the new Commonwealth Government under Oliver Cromwell. In

that capacity he had to draft Latin documents for transmission to foreign Powers. In addition, he wrote numerous pamphlets in support of the republican cause. By 1652 his eye sight began to fail perhaps from glaucoma and he soon became blind. In 1656 he married Katherine Woodcock, who died the following year. When in 1660 Restoration came, Milton was arrested, but was released with fine because of his blindness. He retired to an obscure village in Buckinghamshire and lived quietly and wrote poetry. In 1663 he again married Elizabeth, who was more a nurse for the blind man than a wife. *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* published in 1667 and 1671 respectively. Milton died on November 8, 1674.

Let us first know that in British history the conflict in the middle years of the 17th century between King Charles I and his supporters (Royalists or Cavaliers) and of Parliament (called Roundheads) is known as Civil War. This conflict was the culmination of Parliaments' attempt to limit Kings' power. The parliamentarians under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell dealt a series of defeats to Charles I, executing him in 1649 and established a protectorate which he ruled as Lord Protector until the re-establishment of monarchy (called Restoration) in 1660. The term Restoration applies to the entire period of the reign of Charles II.

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### 1.2.2 His Works

John Milton's literary life can be divided into three distinct periods. His shorter poems are almost entirely (except for a few great sonnets) works of his early period (from 1625 to 1637). They display all the tendencies of a young, experimenting poet seeking his own voice. There are several, however, that are among the finest lyrics in the language, even the least of them manifest and individualistic expression and a remarkably high caliber of poetic achievement. They include "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity" and the poems "On Shakespeare" and "On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three", "L Allegro and Il" "Penseroso" belong perhaps to the late University days. These two lyrics are a diptych, or, better perhaps, the two sides of a coin. "L' Allegro" offers the life of gay sociability, bright and joyous, while "L'Penseroso" counters it with pensive thought. The pieces are decorative rather than descriptive, artificial rather than descriptive, artificial rather than natural, but they are full of scholarly fancy and adroit poetical phrasing. *Comus* (1634) were Milton's first printed work except for the lines to Shakespeare in the Second Folio. It is a masque for a noble family. It owes something to Jonson's masque. "Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue" (1618), but Milton's virtuous Lady the Pleasure eloquently urged by *Comus*, the 'bouncing belly' of Jonson's masque. Virtue is Chastity (that is, obedience to divine Reason). The earnest argument of *Comus* shows its author's ambition. *Lycidas* (1637) is an ambitious pastoral elegy for a Cambridge contemporary, a priest and poet who drowned in the Irish Sea. *Lycidas* is the longest poem in a collection otherwise in Latin and Greek. Milton weaves into the design of the poem not only pastoral scenes but mythology, Christian belief and contemporary controversy within the Church of England. In style

the poem follows no poetic rule, but Milton's own. As one critic has said: "The only rule is that of the poets' exquisite ear."

John Milton: Invocation To Paradise Lost, Book I Unit–5  
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In the second period, from 1637 to 1659, Milton became involved in the burning topic of the day, the struggle between King and Parliament. Milton now turned from poetry to reforming prose, and toughened his argumentative power. In 1641-42, as has already been mentioned, he published five anti-episcopal tracts and shortly afterwards four tracts in favour of divorce. At Cromwell's death, Milton called again for a republic and liberty of conscience, publishing, *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* as Charles II returned. But the best of all the tracts he wrote was *Areopagitica* (1644), called after Areopagus, the hill of Ares where the Athenian Parliament met. This "Speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing to the Parliament of England" is couched in the form of classical oration, beginning with a quotation from Euripides, *Areopagitica*, however, defends not free speech, but a free press. Among his other prose, "Of Education" is still read. A Latin "On Christian Doctrine" found in censor's office in 1823, translated and published in 1825, makes his unorthodoxy, darkly visible in *Paradise Lost*, crystal clear. More than in the verse, the prose of Milton reveals what Cromwell termed a 'Seeker'. Otherwise forgotten quarrels have been immortalised in Milton's pamphlets, each bearing the powerful stamp of a vigorous personality and a master of language. After the Restoration and amnesty, he turned again to poetry and devoted his whole mind and soul to the great work he had so long contemplated. It was an epic on the Biblical story of the 'Fall of Man'. He would retell the story of 'Man's first disobedience' so as to show the justice of Providence. The result is, in its art, power and scope, one of the greatest of English poems. Dr. Johnson, no lover of Milton's religion, politics or personality concluded his work on Milton on Life thus: "His great works were performed under discountenance, and in blindness, but difficulties vanished at his touch; he was born for whatever arduous,

Unit–5 John Milton: Invocation to Paradise Lost, Book I

English Poetry from Medieval to Modern (Block 1)62 and his work is not greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first." *Paradise Lost* is a work of grandeur and energy, and of intricate design. It includes in its sweep most of what was worth knowing of the universe and of history. The blind poet balanced details occurring six books apart. *Paradise Lost* begins with the fall of the angels; Satan's plan to capture God's newly created species, and Heavenly foresight of the future. In Book IV we meet Adam and Eve in the Garden. Raphael tells Adam of Satan's Rebellion, the war in Heaven, the fall of the angels, the creation of the universe, and of Man and of his requested mate, and warns him of the temper. In Book IX Satan deceives Eve, and Adam resolves to die with her; the Son conveys God's doom and promises redemption. In Book X, Satan boasts of his success, but he and his angels are transformed to serpents. In Book XI and XII Raphael shows the miseries of mankind until the Redemption, where after Adam will have 'a paradise within thee, happier far.' In conception the poem is spacious and commanding; it is sumptuously adorned with all the details that Milton's rich



imagination, fed with classical and Biblical lore, can suggest. The characters especially that of Lucifer is drawn on a gigantic scale, and do not lack a certain tragic immensity; and the blank verse in which the work is composed is new and wonderful. This type of blank verse has founded a tradition in English; it has often been imitated and modified, but never paralleled. In 1671 Milton published his last volume of poetry which contained *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The former poem is not about the redemption but about the temptation in the desert. It lacks the exalted imagination, the adornment, and the ornate rhythms of *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes* is a tragedy to be read, not acted. Its form is Greek, with protagonist and chorus; its subject the fate of Israel's champion, 'eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves.' In *Paradise*  
John Milton: Invocation to *Paradise Lost*, Book I Unit–5  
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*Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* Milton left examples to English poets of dedication to his art, but also of passionate self-assertion.

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### 1.3 INTRODUCTION TO LYCIDAS

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*Lycidas* is a poem by John Milton written in 1637 as a pastoral elegy. [1] It first appeared in 1638 in a collection of elegies entitled *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago* that the memory of Edward King, a friend of Milton in Cambridge was dedicated. Edward King had drowned when his ship sank in August 1637 in the Irish Sea off the coast of Wales. The poem is 193 verses long; it follows an irregular rhyme scheme. While many other poems of the collection in Greek and Latin *Lycidas* is one of the poems written in English. In 1645 Milton re-published the poem.  
([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycidas\\_\(Gedicht\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycidas_(Gedicht)))

Milton's *Lycidas* was condemned by Samuel Johnson as insincere. "Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief. When Cowley [a poet contemporary with Milton] tells of Hervey that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labors, and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines? [Johnson then quotes ll. 26-29.] We know that they never drove (sheep) a-field, and that they had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be symbolic of something, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought because it cannot be known when found." Right or wrong in his judgment, Johnson raises important points. The death of Edward King is the occasion of the poem, but is the loss of King to Milton its real subject? The poem is a form of pastoral elegy, in which, in ancient Greek and Roman examples poet-shepherds spent their time while watching over their sheep by singing about his loves and the landscape, and their songs also involved serious subjects—the nature of leadership, politics, the course of empire, as well as the seasonal character of life, the inevitability of death. In the early Italian renaissance and it much of the English poetry that took its works for models, the shepherds stuck to love and landscape, and whiling away time as the sheep browsed. (Perhaps you can see why such a form was congenial to courtiers, whose real trade—the fighting of wars—was an intermittent occupation.)

What use does Milton make of the Shepherd metaphor? What is the relation of the apparently degressive passages (concerning Apollo and St Peter, ll 64-84 and ll. 103-131) to the theme? An important feature of pastoral was its commitment as a form of fiction to the idea that simple people, like shepherds, had a purer relationship to Nature than more complicated types and that Nature was a beneficial power. Note that in *Lycidas* the speaker acknowledges difficulty in maintaining the pastoral note, which is interrupted by verses about Apollo and St Peter; when the note is finally resumed (l. 132) it leads to a suggestion that the pastoral fiction of Nature in mourning for the dead shepherd as “false surmise.” For all Johnson’s criticism, then, Milton seems himself to be quarreling with his pastoral machinery. Again, what is the role of Nature in the poem? Some of the poem is about premature endings; a lot of it is about water. What can the image of “drowning” stand for, besides drowning? The poem is divided into something like paragraphs; how does this division function? Discuss the shifts in tone in this poem. How are they marked? What do the last eight lines do for the tone of the whole? Another difficulty— careful reading will show that it is not always clear who is speaking. Various mythological figures appear who speak of King in the third person, but one voice (e.g., ll 100-102: It was that fatal and perfidious bark . . .) addresses King directly. Whose voice is it? Note that we have a third-person ending, though the poem begins in the first person, with the shepherd speaking. How do you account for this lack of symmetry? Johnson also objected to the mixture of pagan and Christian materials in this poem. Is there evidence that the poet mixed them consciously and for a purpose?

2. On his blindness, if properly punctuated, turns out to be one sentence. Does this matter to the understanding of the poem? What is the parable of the talents to which it refers? How can Patience prevent a murmur that has already been murmured? Or has it? What is the force of the final word, wait? How does it fit in with the parable of the talents alluded to earlier in the poem?

3. The sonnet *Me thought I saw* has the familiar ambiguity of dividing up into both quatrains/couplet and octet/sestet. What is the force of the division with regard to the content of the units in either case? What is the meaning of “fancied sight”? (We must recall that Milton was blind at the time.) Does “fancied” refer to the fact that in the dream, his wife is veiled and he cannot see her face or to the fact that he has been given sight in the dream and can see her face? Are there problems with either interpretation? (<https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/211-004-major-poets-fall-2001/study/topic4.pdf>)

### 1.3.1 The anxieties of ‘*Lycidas*’

We move on to a poem which has a crucial role in Milton’s development, another crossroads in his career, so much so that he would quit writing poetry in English for a considerable time. Before discussing to which extent the poem is a culmination of previous motifs, and specifically for our purposes, of how the poet represents himself, and how he employs the pastoral genre for confessional ends, a general consideration of the poem is useful.

“*Lycidas*” is perhaps the most important elegy in the English language. Previous to it, as expected from the career that Milton had foreshadowed or rather pre-ordained for himself, the poet had explored the possibilities of pursuing virtue within a pastoral

setting. In this Arcadian world, the pursuer of virtue is assisted by the *genii loci* or the “attendant spirits” who inhabit nature and are, in C. F. Stone’s words, “traditional pastoral forms of divine manifestation” (869). However, in “Lycidas” Milton arrives at the critical moment (in the original sense of “crisis”) of his career as an apprentice shepherd-poet, as he starts to question the validity of pastoral imagery and the trustworthiness of the inspiration it affords. “‘Lycidas’ is aligned with ‘Arcades’ and Comus, but its subject calls for a repudiation of their pastoral visions” (Stone 869). If in the Nativity Ode Milton rejects pagan oracular models, in *Lycidas* he confronts the need to also abandon the pastoral mode.

The pastoral as a mode or even genre can be traced back to Theocritus in Ancient Greece (Arcadia, for instance, refers to a region in the Peloponnese). At the core of its conventions is the depiction of the lives of herdsmen in the countryside, even though critics are divided as to whether the genre is specifically about the landscape, and the yearning for a lost Golden Age, or the psychological state of the shepherds. Paul Alders, for one, says that “we will have a far truer idea of pastoral if we take its representative anecdote to be herdsmen and their lives, rather than landscape and idealized nature” (22). In Milton’s specific case, the reinterpretation of the pastoral that Virgil makes in the *Eclogues* is of special importance. The Roman poet is the first to introduce an element of tension in the peaceful, atemporal landscape of the fellow shepherds (who are metaphorical poets). For instance, in the first eclogue “the idyllic landscape represents a fantasy that is dissipated by the recognition of political and social realities” (24). This introduction of the political world into the reality of the pastoral, as we are going to see, is essential to “*Lycidas*.”

The occasion for Milton’s re-examination of the role of pastoral in his work from the period that spans between the Nativity Ode and “*Lycidas*” is the death of Edward King, one of Milton’s colleagues at Cambridge who died at a shipwreck, and who, more importantly, was also an aspiring poet. In the elegy, Milton, as part of a rhetorical act, demands of the nymphs, the wood spirits and the *genii* of the shores why they let King (*Lycidas*) be drowned, only to realize the limitation of these pastoral formulas. “*Lycidas*’s death showed that the pastoral world is not linked to the divine realm as pictured in... Comus” (Stone 873).

The Nativity Ode leaves us with the poet announcing his birth through a dramatization that arises out of his anxieties towards his “immature” condition, and Milton opens his elegy for Edward King with the same motif of unreadiness. Though the “sad occasion dear” compels him “yet once more... to pluck berries harsh and crude” of the laurels and the myrtles, that is, forces him to reap the fruits of his poetic vocation (laurel is a symbol of poetic fame, as in “poet laureate”), his fingers nonetheless are “rude” and untrained. And in “*Lycidas*” this unreadiness proves to be threatening, as the poet confronts the possibility of having an ending similar to that of Edward King, a poet who died “in his prime,” before he could achieve recognition. Moreover, for Milton, the dead body of his comrade becomes a warning of the fate that might befall him if he continues to prolong his dependence on classical inspiration.

In terms of self-figuration, the elegy becomes a potent vehicle for the writer to explore his anxiety in displaced form. As in the Nativity Ode, the poet's subjectivity does not impress the text in an explicit manner (a more Romantic practice), but only through the medium of highly conventionalized genres, forms or modes, as the confession or in our case the elegy. As Northrop Frye explains, "in pastoral elegy the poet who laments the death is often so closely associated with the dead man as to make him a kind of double or shadow of himself" (27), or in Stone's words, "[Milton's] identification with Lycidas becomes a metaphor for the confrontation with his own self" (875).

Milton grapples with the possibility of poetic failure especially in two deeply charged passages. The first has to do with the fate of the classically inspired poet which, as C. F. Stone shows, is syncretized in the dismembered dead body of Orpheus, the legendary poet (as well as musician and prophet) known for his enchanting powers over nature, who nonetheless could not be saved from his death in the hands of the fierce Bacchae. The so-called Orpheus passage (ll. 57-63) is the darkest in the poem and shows Milton's terror-struck confrontation with the "gory visage" (the decapitated head) of the mythical poet.<sup>8</sup> The fact that the muse Calliope, Orpheus's mother, could not do anything to save her son when his head "down the stream was sent / [from] the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore" (l. 63), becomes an emblem for the limitation of classical mediation. In Stone's words:

Because she is a muse, her failure also represents the failure of inspiration and Milton's awareness of a similar failure in the earlier poetry. Moreover, this awareness also extends into the future because Calliope is the muse of heroic and epic poetry. Thus, the Orphean image represents Milton's sense of danger when threatened by a failure of inspiration. (870)

Every poet that does not or cannot express the word of God must necessarily drown. Therefore, in the course of the poem, the shepherds of the pastoral tradition that runs from Theocritus to Virgil and beyond are contrasted with the "pastors" of the Christian tradition. The last voice to appear in the poem, "last came and last did go" (l. 109), is that of St. Peter, the "rock" over which the church was built. Meaningfully, he is not referred by his name but as "the pilot of the Galilean lake." This verse of euphonic alliteration reminds the reader that "Peter would have drowned too without the help of Christ" (Frye 26), as in the famous passage of the Gospels in which Christ walks on the waters.

Peter warns the readers of the fact that many priests are actually corrupt and no different from their forerunners, in a stanza which disrupts the deeply fictional atmosphere of the pastoral poem and gives place to a keen political attack. Milton has been trying on different guises in search for a true inspiration and in the moment that Peter bursts into the scene, it is clear that he has achieved a more elevated mood in the "dread voice" (l. 132) of the apostle, and in some ways begins to leave the pastoral behind. Now he is going to be a shepherd only in the sense of a priest who tends his flock. As a poet of prophetic aspirations, Milton observed with pleasure that with the years his anticipation of the downfall of the clergy proved to be true. Some years later, when he republished

“Lycidas” he added an introductory note that remarks that the poem “by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupt clergy then in its height.”

Another piece of evidence that “Lycidas” stages Milton’s anxieties concerning himself as a poet appears in a cancelled passage. As shown in Stone’s analysis of the manuscript, the “great roll-call of flowers” towards the end of the poem was a later interpolation. In an exuberant passage, the poetic voice describes the flower that hypothetically would adorn Lycidas’s coffin. However, Milton represses a very meaningful flower, the Narcissus. The verse “next adde Narcissus ye still weeps in vain” was not included in the final version. Conjecturing possible causes, Stone says: Like Narcissus’ image before he knew it was his, the figure of Lycidas mediates Milton’s self-love by disguising it as love for another... The poem acts like the pool when Narcissus believed his image to be another, reflecting another whom Milton unwittingly loves as himself. (879-880)

The appearance of the narcissus implies a confrontation with the poet’s own mortality (and “Lycidas” has often been read as response to Milton’s fear of death). Although throughout the poem he speaks of Lycidas as if of another, as the flower passage draws near he seems to come closer to the awareness that he is mourning his own subjection to death. This would disrupt the imagery of the poem which finishes on a happier note, as the dead is supposed to resurrect with the sun which always sinks in the horizon to rise again. In a complicated twist, unawareness that the poet loves Lycidas as himself means that he can also identify with Lycidas’s future resurrection, making the rhetoric of the poem successful. However, the fact that he realizes his narcissistic predicament exactly when he envisions Lycidas’s coffin foreshadows his death, as Narcissus similarly declines into death after he becomes conscious that it is his image in the pool. As Stone points out, all this is overwhelming and Milton must repress it.

The motif of chastity also takes a new turn. Before Peter appears, the poet traces the vacillation in his resolution, the doubts that arise out of the fellow shepherd’s untimely death. Faced with the possibility that in spite of his strenuous self-restraint (the precondition for virtue) the poet might still die unrecognized, he asks what avails to “tend the homely slighted Shepherd’s trade:”

Were it not better done as others use,

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade, Or with the tangles of Neaera’s hair? (ll. 67-69)

As we saw, in the Nativity Ode the poet contemplates with pity the broken tresses of the nymphs as they are led to hell. Here in “Lycidas” we find him questioning the use of giving up the sexual pleasure associated with the nymphs, if he continues to be denied divine inspiration. In this dramatic moment Apollo bursts into the scene and affirms that “Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil” (l. 78). Yet at times it seems that it is Milton’s, so to say, “pagan” attachment to earthly fulfilment and the body that proves to be the driving force of the poem and the cause of its ambivalences. Towards its closing moment, in the flower passage we have been talking about (ll. 133-164), Milton shows that he can only imagine a heavenly recompense for Lycidas’s suffering in terms of a sexual climax, as the passage abounds in erotic innuendo, making

reference to “wanton winds,” “fresh laps” and “the green turf suck[ing] the honied showers.” The bastion of virginity and self-denial increasingly becomes the radical of Paradise Lost, who claims that what distinguishes the fallen condition from the unfallen is sexual plenitude. ([http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S2175-80262019000100071&lng=en&nrm=iso&tlng=en](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2175-80262019000100071&lng=en&nrm=iso&tlng=en))

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#### 1.4 LYCIDAS, THE POEM

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In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown'd in his Passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion fortels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more  
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,  
I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,  
And with forc'd fingers rude,  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,  
Compels me to disturb your season due:  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not flote upon his watry bear  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of som melodious tear.  
Begin, then, Sisters of the sacred well,  
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,  
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.  
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,  
So may som gentle Muse  
With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,  
And as he passes turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.  
For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,  
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.  
Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd  
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,  
We drove a-field, and both together heard  
What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright  
Toward Heav'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.  
Mean while the Rural ditties were not mute,

Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,  
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,  
 And old Damætas lov'd to hear our song.  
 But O the heavy change, now thou art gon,  
 Now thou art gon, and never must return!  
 Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,  
 With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,  
 And all their echoes mourn.  
 The Willows, and the Hazle Copses green,  
 Shall now no more be seen,  
 Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft layes.  
 As killing as the Canker to the Rose,  
 Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,  
 Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrop wear,  
 When first the White thorn blows;  
 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherds ear.  
 Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep  
 Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd Lycidas?  
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,  
 Where your old Bards, the famous Druids ly,  
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,  
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream:  
 Ay me, I fondly dream!  
 Had ye bin there—for what could that have don?  
 What could the Muse her self that Orpheus bore,  
 The Muse her self, for her enchanting son  
 Whom Universal nature did lament,  
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,  
 His goary visage down the stream was sent,  
 Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore.  
 Alas! What boots it with uncessant care  
 To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,  
 And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,  
 Were it not better don as others use,  
 To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
 Or with the tangles of Næra's hair?  
 Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
 (That last infirmity of Noble mind)  
 To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;  
 But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,  
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
 Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,  
 And slits the thin-spun life. But not the praise,  
 Phœbus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;  
 Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,

Nor in the glistering foil  
 Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumour lies,  
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,  
 And perfet witnes of all judging Jove;  
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.  
 O fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd floud,  
 Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocall reeds,  
 That strain I heard was of a higher mood:  
 But now my Oate proceeds,  
 And listens to the Herald of the Sea  
 That came in Neptune's plea,  
 He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Fellon winds,  
 What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?  
 And question'd every gust of rugged wings  
 That blows from off each beaked Promontory,  
 They knew not of his story,  
 And sage Hippotades their answer brings,  
 That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,  
 The Ayr was calm, and on the level brine,  
 Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.  
 It was that fatall and perfidious Bark  
 Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,  
 That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.  
 Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,  
 His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,  
 Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge  
 Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.  
 Ah! Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?  
 Last came, and last did go,  
 The Pilot of the Galilean lake,  
 Two massy Keyes he bore of metals twain,  
 (The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain)  
 He shook his Miter'd locks, and stern bespake,  
 How well could I have spar'd for thee young swain,  
 Anow of such as for their bellies sake,  
 Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?  
 Of other care they little reck'ning make,  
 Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,  
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.  
 Blind mouthes! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
 A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least  
 That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs!  
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
 And when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
 Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw,



The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,  
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,  
Rot inwardly and foul contagian spread:  
Besides what the grim Wolf with privy paw  
Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,  
But that two-handed engine at the door,  
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.  
Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past,  
That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,  
And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast  
Their Bels, and Flourets of a thousand hues.  
Ye valleys low where the milde whispers use,  
Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,  
On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,  
Throw hither all your quaint enameled eyes,  
That on the green terf suck the honied showres,  
And purple all the ground with vernal flowres.  
Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies.  
The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Gessamine,  
The white Pink, and the Pansie freakt with jeat,  
The glowing Violet.  
The Musk-rose, and the well attir'd Woodbine,  
With Cowslips wan that hang the pensive hed,  
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:  
Bid Amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
To strew the Laureat Herse where Lycid lies.  
For so to interpose a little ease,  
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.  
Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas  
Wash far away, where ere they bones are hurld,  
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;  
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,  
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;  
Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth.  
And, O ye Dolphins, waft the haples youth.  
Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more,  
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar,  
So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,

Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
 So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
 Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves,  
 Where other groves, and other streams along,  
 With Nectar pure his oozy Lock's he laves,  
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,  
 In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
 There entertain him all the Saints above,  
 In solemn troops, and sweet Societies  
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.  
 Now Lycidas the Shepherds weep no more;  
 Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore,  
 In thy large recompense, and shalt be good  
 To all that wander in that perilous flood.  
 Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Okes and rills,  
 While the still morn went out with Sandals gray,  
 He touch'd the tender stops of various Quills,  
 With eager thought warbling his Dorick lay:  
 And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills,  
 And now was dropt into the Western bay;  
 At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:  
 Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

(<https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lycidas>)

<https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/211-004-major-poets-fall-2001/study-materials/topic4.pdf>

[https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/211-004-major-poets-fall-2001/readings/john\\_milton.pdf](https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/211-004-major-poets-fall-2001/readings/john_milton.pdf)

#### 1.4.1 History of the name Lycidas

Herodotus in his Book IX (written in the 5th century BCE) mentions an Athenian councilor in Salamis, "a man named Lycidas" (Λυκίδαας), who proposed to his fellow citizens that they submit to a compromise offered by their enemy, Persian King Xerxes I, with whom they were at war. Suspected of collusion with the enemy for suggesting the compromise, Lycidas was stoned to death by "those in the council and those outside, [who] were so enraged.... [W]ith all the uproar in Salamis over Lycidas, the Athenian women soon found out what had happened; whereupon, without a word from the men, they got together, and, each one urging on her neighbor and taking her along with the crowd, flocked to Lycidas' house and stoned his wife and children."<sup>[2]</sup>

The name later occurs in Theocritus's *Idylls*, where Lycidas is most prominently a poet-goatherd encountered on the trip of "Idyll vii." The name appears several times

in Virgil and is a typically Doric shepherd's name, appropriate for the pastoral mode. A Lycidas appears in Ovid's Metamorphoses as a centaur.

Lycidas also occurs in Lucan's Pharsalia, where in iii.636 a sailor named Lycidas is ripped by an iron hook from the deck of a ship.

## 1.4.2 "Lycidas" as pastoral elegy

By naming Edward King "Lycidas," Milton follows "the tradition of memorializing a loved one through Pastoral poetry, a practice that may be traced from ancient Greek Sicily through Roman culture and into the Christian Middle Ages and early Renaissance."<sup>[1]</sup> Milton describes King as "selfless," even though he was of the clergy – a statement both bold and, at the time, controversial among lay people: "Through allegory, the speaker accuses God of unjustly punishing the young, selfless King, whose premature death ended a career that would have unfolded in stark contrast to the majority of the ministers and bishops of the Church of England, whom the speaker condemns as depraved, materialistic, and selfish."<sup>[1]</sup>

Authors and poets in the Renaissance used the pastoral mode in order to represent an ideal of life in a simple, rural landscape. Literary critics have emphasized the artificial character of pastoral nature: "The pastoral was in its very origin a sort of toy, literature of make-believe."<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Milton himself "recognized the pastoral as one of the natural modes of literary expression," employing it throughout "Lycidas" in order to achieve a strange juxtaposition between death and the remembrance of a loved one.<sup>[3]</sup> The poem itself begins with a pastoral image of laurels and myrtles, "symbols of poetic fame; as their berries are not yet ripe, the poet is not yet ready to take up his pen."<sup>[4]</sup> However, the speaker is so filled with sorrow for the death of Lycidas that he finally begins to write an elegy. "Yet the untimely death of young Lycidas requires equally untimely verses from the poet. Invoking the muses of poetic inspiration, the shepherd-poet takes up the task, partly, he says, in hope that his own death will not go unlamented."<sup>[4]</sup> The speaker continues by recalling the life of the young shepherds together "in the 'pastures' of Cambridge." Milton uses the pastoral idiom to allegorize experiences he and King shared as fellow students at Christ's College, Cambridge. The university is represented as the "self-same hill" upon which the speaker and Lycidas were "nurst"; their studies are likened to the shepherds' work of "dr[iving] a field" and "Batt'ning... flocks"; classmates are "Rough satyrs" and "fauns with clov'n heel" and the dramatic and comedic pastimes they pursued are "Rural ditties... / Temper'ed to th' oaten flute"; a Cambridge professor is "old Damoetas [who] lov'd to hear our song." The poet then notes the "heavy change" suffered by nature now that Lycidas is gone—a 'pathetic fallacy' in which the willows, hazel groves, woods, and caves lament Lycidas's death."<sup>[4]</sup> In the next section of the poem, "The shepherd-poet reflects... that thoughts of how Lycidas might have been saved are futile... turning from lamenting Lycidas's death to lamenting the futility of all human labor." This section is followed by an interruption in the swain's monologue by the voice of Phoebus, "the sun-god, an

image drawn out of the mythology of classical Roman poetry, [who] replies that fame is not mortal but eternal, witnessed by Jove (God) himself on judgment day." At the end of the poem, King/Lycidas appears as a resurrected figure, being delivered, through the resurrecting power of Christ, by the waters that lead to his death: "Burnished by the sun's rays at dawn, King resplendently ascends heavenward to his eternal reward."<sup>[1]</sup> Although on its surface "Lycidas" reads like a straightforward pastoral elegy, a closer reading reveals its complexity. "Lycidas" has been called "'probably the most perfect piece of pure literature in existence...' [Employing] patterns of structure, prosody, and imagery to maintain a dynamic coherence. The syntax of the poem is full of 'impertinent auxiliary assertions' that contribute valuably to the experience of the poem."<sup>[5]</sup> The piece itself is remarkably dynamic, enabling many different styles and patterns to overlap, so that "the loose ends of any one pattern disappear into the interweaving of the others."<sup>[5]</sup>

"Lycidas" also has its detractors, including 18th-century literary critic and polymath Samuel Johnson, who infamously called the pastoral form "easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting," and said of Milton's elegy:

It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough satyrs and fauns with cloven heel. Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.<sup>[6]</sup>

Johnson was reacting to what he saw as the irrelevance of the pastoral idiom in Milton's age and his own, and to its ineffectiveness at conveying genuine emotion. Johnson said that conventional pastoral images—for instance, the representation of the speaker and the deceased as shepherds—were "long ago exhausted," and so improbable that they "always force dissatisfaction on the mind." Johnson also criticized the blending of Christian and pagan images and themes in "Lycidas," which he saw as the poem's "grosser fault." He said "Lycidas" positions the "trifling fictions" of "heathen deities—Jove and Phoebus, Neptune and Æolus" alongside "the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverend combinations."<sup>[6]</sup>

Johnson concluded: "Surely no man could have fancied that he read Lycidas with pleasure had he not known its author."

### 1.4.3 The Uncouth Swain

Though commonly considered to be a monody, 'Lycidas' in fact features two distinct voices, the first of which belongs to the uncouth swain (or shepherd). The work opens with the swain, who finds himself grieving for the death of his friend, Lycidas, in an idyllic pastoral world. In his article entitled "Belief and Disbelief in Lycidas," Lawrence W. Hyman states that the swain is experiencing a "loss of faith in a world order that allows death to strike a young man."<sup>[7]</sup> Similarly, Lauren Shohet asserts that the swain is projecting his grief upon the classical images of the pastoral setting at this point in the elegy.<sup>[8]</sup>

Throughout the poem, the swain uses both Christian and Pagan concepts, and mentally locates Lycidas' body in both settings, according to Russel Fraser.<sup>[10]</sup> Examples of this are the mention of Death as an animate being, the "Sisters of the Sacred Well," Orpheus, the blind Fury that struck Lycidas down, and the scene in which Lycidas is imagined to have become a regional deity (a "genius of the shore") after drowning. Since Lycidas, like King, drowned, there is no body to be found, and the absence of the corpse is of great concern to the swain.<sup>[9]</sup>

Ultimately, the swain's grief and loss of faith are conquered by a "belief in immortality."<sup>[10]</sup> Many scholars have pointed out that there is very little logical basis within the poem for this conclusion, but that a reasonable process is not necessary for 'Lycidas' to be effective.<sup>[11]</sup> Fraser will argue that Milton's voice intrudes briefly upon the swain's to tell a crowd of fellow swains that Lycidas is not in fact dead (here one sees belief in immortality). This knowledge is inconsistent with the speaker's "uncouth" character.<sup>[12]</sup>

#### **1.4.4 The Pilot**

Upon entering the poem at line 109, the voice of the "Pilot of the Galilean lake," generally believed to represent St. Peter, serves as a judge, condemning the multitude of unworthy members found among the clergy of the Church of England. Similarly, St. Peter fills the position of Old Testament prophet when he speaks of the clergy's "moral decay" and the grave consequences of their leadership. He then compares these immoral church leaders to wolves among sheep and warns of the "two-handed engine." According to E. S. de Beer, this "two-handed engine" is thought to be a powerful weapon and an allusion to a portion of the Book of Zechariah.<sup>[13]</sup>

Concerning St. Peter's role as a "prophet," the term is meant in the Biblical sense, de Beer claims, and not in the more modern sense of the word. Since Biblical prophets more often served as God's messengers than as seers, de Beer states that Milton was not attempting to foretell the likely future of the church via St. Peter.<sup>[14]</sup>

De Beer continues on to note that St. Peter's appearance in "Lycidas" is likely unrelated to his position as head of the Roman Catholic Church. Neither was St. Peter ascribed any particular position within the Church of England. Instead, de Beer argues that St. Peter appears simply as an apostolic authority, through whom Milton might express his frustration with unworthy members of the English clergy.<sup>[15]</sup> Fraser also agrees that St. Peter, indeed, serves as a vehicle for Milton's voice to enter the poem.<sup>[16]</sup>

The Church was so thrown off by the poem that they banned it for nearly twenty years after Milton's death.

#### **1.4.5 The conclusion**

Several interpretations of the ending have been proposed.<sup>[17]</sup> Jonathan Post claims the poem ends with a sort of retrospective picture of the poet having "sung" the poem into

being.<sup>[18]</sup> According to critic Lauren Shohet, Lycidas is transcendently leaving the earth, becoming immortal, rising from the pastoral plane in which he is too involved or tangled from the objects that made him.<sup>[8]</sup> She claims that "he is diffused into, and animates, the last location of his corpse—his experience of body-as-object... neither fully immanent (since his body is lost) nor fully transcendent (since he remains on earth)."<sup>[19]</sup>

With an ambiguous ending, the poem does not just end with a death, but instead, it just begins.<sup>[20]</sup> The monody clearly ends with a death and an absolute end but also moves forward and comes full circle because it takes a look back at the pastoral world left behind making the ambivalence of the end a mixture of creation and destruction.<sup>[21]</sup> Nonetheless "thy large recompense" also has a double meaning. As Paul Alpers states, Lycidas' gratitude in heaven is a payment for his loss.<sup>[22]</sup> The word "thy" is both an object and mediator of "large recompense." Thus, the meaning also maintains the literal meaning which is that of a sacred higher being or the pagan genius.<sup>[23]</sup>

"Lycidas" was originally published in a poetic miscellany alongside thirty-five other poems elegizing the death of Edward King. Collected at Cambridge, most of the poems were written by academics at the university who were committed to the conservative church politics of Archbishop Laud. Among the poets were John Cleveland, Joseph Beaumont, and Henry More.<sup>[24]</sup> Milton, on the other hand, who reported that he had been "Church-outed by the prelates,"<sup>[25]</sup> had failed to achieve a position at Cambridge after his graduation, and his religious views were becoming more radical. The style and form of his poem also strongly contrasts from the other texts in the collection. While most of the poetry adopts a baroque aesthetic linked to the Laudian ceremonialism that was in vogue in the 1630s, Milton wrote "Lycidas" in the outmoded pastoral style.<sup>[26]</sup> "Lycidas" may actually be satirizing the poetic work featured throughout the *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago*.<sup>[27]</sup>

Milton republished the poem in his 1645 collection *Poems of Mr. John Milton*. To this version is added a brief prose preface:

In this MONODY the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas, 1637. And by occasion foretells the ruine of our corrupted clergy, then in their height.<sup>[28]</sup>

When Milton published this version, in 1645, the Long Parliament, to which Milton held allegiance, was in power; thus Milton could add the prophetic note—in hindsight—about the destruction of the "corrupted clergy," the "blind mouths" (119) of the poem. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycidas>

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## 1.5 INTRERPRETATION OF THE POEM

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This poem first appeared in a 1638 collection of elegies entitled *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago*, commemorating the death of Edward King, a college-mate of Milton's at

Cambridge who drowned in a shipwreck in 1637. Milton, who had not been very close to King, volunteered or was asked to make a contribution to the collection, and used the occasion to reflect on his own current emotional conflicts, specifically about poetry. King, who like Milton, had apparently devoted his short life to poetry, becomes the basis for Milton's searching questions on the width of such a life, in the face of the unpredictability of death. The two poets are imagined as shepherds in the poem, following the conventions of the classical pastoral, tending the arts of poetry, and Milton's lament is that such a profession is futile if the muses of poetry cannot guard their shepherds.

What boots it with uncessant care  
To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,  
And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,  
Were it not better don as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair? (11. 64-9)

This lament goes on to line 76, when Phoebus interprets the lament to console the poet, that fame achieved through poet-ry lingers beyond the mortal life of the poet.

Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;  
Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
Nor in the glistering foil  
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies,  
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,  
And perfel witnes of all judging Jove;  
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed. (11. 77-84)

This then becomes the basis for consolation, which ends with the poet's celebration of Lycidas' life and fame. What is significant about the consolation is that it shifts registers, from classical allusions to Christian mythology - as if Milton deliberately used the former in the preceding part of the poem to discuss the death and the sorrow that it brings, but finds life only in the latter:

Weep no more, woeful Shepherds weep no more,  
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar,  
o sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves.. . (11. 165-73)

The last line here is of course an allusion to the Biblical story of the miracle of Jesus walking on water. The Poem goes on to describe the heavenly bliss that is Lycidas' fortune after death. Again here we see how Milton is clearly turning to Christianity as

the superior and more convincing form of belief, for the rewards of the afterlife, yet even this turn to Christianity is tightly interwoven with classical elements and allusions. It is important that the inclination of genuine consolation comes only when St. Peter ('The Pilot' of l. 109) speaks in wrath at the indulging ways of those who live life without either religion or poetry. Milton is here drawing on two traditions of allegorization of the shepherd: the classical, in which shepherds are poets, and the Christian, in which shepherds are spiritual and religious leaders. The shepherds in the poem thus represent both poets and religious guides, and it is in envisioning the poet as a combination of these roles that Milton is ill at ease. There is nevertheless a tension between the two allegorical frames, arising from their different discursive and cultural histories. Milton uses this tension between the two cultures very fruitfully, as an index of the tension between worldly, sensual life and a spiritual after-life in the poem, contrasting the values of a transient worldly existence with that of the immortality and fame achieved through poetry.

Milton's old preoccupation with fails and the rewards of a poetic vocation are evident here. This must be understood as a concern, even a struggle, with the possibilities of a poetic vocation itself, even as it signals Milton's intensifying ambitions. The poem thus weaves several themes together: mortality as inevitable, the futility of poetic ambitions and the transience of worldly pleasures in the face, the guarantee of spiritual immortality within Christianity, and the need to promote this as a superior form of immortality to that offered by classical thought and literature; and yet the persistent impulse in the poem is to marry the two traditions, as if Milton's struggle between the attractions of each was a perpetually unfinished one. This tension is manifest formally as well, and helps explain the layered and complex narrative style of the poem.

The complex themes and narrative involvement of the poem render its structure somewhat mysterious. There are two ways of understanding the movements in the poem: one, as being comprised of two movements with six sections each that seem to mirror each other; and two, as composed of three movements that run parallel in pattern. We must remember however that in neither way do we see any clear separation of the Christian and classical. Their elements are too intertwined to be distinguished as individual structures or even structural movements in the poem. Yet, some discernible distinctiveness is evident. Each movement begins with an invocation, then explores the conventions of the classical pastoral, and ends with a more or less comprehensively Christian conclusion to the emotional problem that Milton negotiates in the poem.

#### 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' and 'Lycidas'

Milton's epigram labels Lycidas 'monody': a lyrical lament for one voice. But the poem has several voices or personae, including the 'uncouth swain' (the main narrator), who is 'interrupted' first by Phoebus (Apollo), then Calmus (the river Cam, or Cambridge University personified), and the 'Pilot of the Galilean lake' (St. Peter). Finally, a second narrator appears for only the last eight lines to bring a conclusion in ottava rima (a sestet + a couplet). The poem till this point is almost in free verse: the lengths of the lines vary, the rhymes follow no fixed order, indeed the poem seems to rely heavily on internal rhymes within the same line or set of lines, as for instance in the repetition of



the '-ier' sound in the first few lines of the poem. Additionally, there are neither couplets nor stanzas. In other words, the poem contains the irregular rhyme and meter characteristic of the Italian canzone form. Canzone is essentially a polyphonic lyrical form, hence creating a serious conflict with the 'monody'. Yet, this formal conflict does not detract from the poem; rather, it enhances the complex elaboration of its equally complex themes. Further, the sense of sorrow and bewilderment is intensified by the lines that are confined to consistent lengths and specific rhyme patterns. By referring to the poem as monadic then, Milton may have meant that the poem should be regarded more as a story told completely by one person. This person would presumably be the final narrator, who had apparently masked himself as the "uncouth swain" in the poem. This concept of story-telling ties *Lycidas* closer to the genre of pastoral elegy.

The pastoral elegy is a genre initiated by Theocritus, also put to famous use by Virgil and Spenser. It employs the irregular rhyme and meter of an Italian canzone. *Lycidas* also exhibits the influence of Pindaric odes, especially in its allusions to Orpheus, Alpheus, and Arethusa. The poem's arrangement in verse paragraphs and its introduction of various voices and personae are also features that anticipate epic structures. Like the font, structure, and voice of *Lycidas* and its genre that is deeply complex.

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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A question that must occur after we have examined both the poems and their implications is, why is Milton so intent on maintaining the superiority of the Christian over the classical? The obvious answer is that he was a deeply Christian, and living as he did in times of politico-religious controversy and conflict, perhaps it was inevitable that he would espouse his own vision of Christianity in his writings. However, this answer has to be supplemented by another set of factors. For Milton, it was not sufficient to just emphasize the Christian over the classical; paradoxically he wanted to also celebrate the classical heritage as a powerfully influential and attractive cultural discourse, extremely accomplished in its poetic and literary achievements. Milton negotiated these dual and divergent impulses by inventing a poetic style that was rich with classical allusions, tropes and formal and generic elements, yet fundamentally English and Christian in sensibility. He cast the language in a sonorous musicality that was appropriate to his weighty themes, deliberate and measured in its cadences, and rich with the imagery of rural England. The effect is poetry that measures itself against the classical greats, with an eye to transcending them in both quality of form and scale of content. Evidently Milton was writing, even in his shorter literary works, in the nationalistic shadow of Spenser.

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## 1.7 EXERCISES

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1. In the 'Nativity Ode', the effect of Milton's use of classical and pagan mythology is more distracting than enhancing of the poem's themes. Do you agree? Discuss with reference to the poem.

2. The 'Nativity Ode' is less about the celebration of Christ and more about the superiority of a Protestant English spirit. Analyse the poem in the light of this statement.
3. What in your opinion is explored in 'Lycidas', a psychological conflict about the vocation of poetry or a personal lament for a dead friend? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Analyse with reference to the poem some of the personifications the poet employs in 'Lycidas'. Do they add to the sense of lament or serve another purpose altogether?
5. Both the 'Nativity Ode' and 'Lycidas' are poems that struggle to reconcile themes that are posed as reconcilable. Identify some of these in each. Which poem is more successful in its attempts to do so?
6. What is an epic or a heroic poem? Is Paradise Lost an epic?
7. When was John Milton imprisoned? How and why was he released?
8. Of all the prose-tracts Milton wrote, which one is regarded as his best?
9. John Milton's Lycidas is? (Fill up with the correct choice: masque/epic/pastoral elegy)

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## 1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **UNIT 2      ANDREW MARVELL: TO HIS COY MISTRESS**

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### **Structure**

- 2.0    Objective
- 2.1    Introduction
  - 2.1.1    Introduction to the Poet
  - 2.1.2    The Poem, To His Coy Mistress
- 2.2    Interpretation of the Poem, Carpe Diem being the Motif
- 2.3    Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 2.4    Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5    Exercises

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### **2.1    OBJECTIVE**

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The prime objective of the following poem is to elaborate the Learner's about the beauty in this love poetry written by Andrew Marvell. This poem stands different because it holds the simplest of emotions on this earth 'Love' amalgamated with the ideas of this complex world. 'Carpe Diem' stands as a clear motif for this poem. The lovers want to cherish their innocent love while sitting by the side of River Ganga but then there is also the uncertainty and fear of not being together mixed with the fear of death and disruption of youth when the beauty and love both might hide behind the walls of time, even the sexual desires may vanish with the passage of time. The gates if life might just close at any point of time and the lovers might not get enough of each other. This is the reason why the poet wants to love and be loved in the present without actually bothering himself about the future.

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### **2.2    INTRODUCTION**

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#### **2.2.1    Introduction to the Poet**

The works of Andrew Marvell exercise biographer and critic alike for it is evident that conflicting demands of self and the world which in One guise or another inform many of his celebrated poems need to be seen not only in relation to his own enigmatic personality, but also in the context of what one historian has dubbed the 'Century of Revolutions',

The facts of Marvell's life can be quickly rehearsed. He was born on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1621 in Yorkshire where his father was a rector but later moved to Hull in 1624. He graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1633, after some years spent in business and in travelling, he entered public life in 1659 when he was elected M.P. for Hull, a position he was to retain till 1661. During his long career in the House of Commons he sat on various committees and also supported Charles II's attempts to extend toleration

towards religious dissenters in the work for which he was the most renowned in his own lifetime, 'The Rehearsal Transpros'd'.

Marvell grew up in an age which Abraham Cowley was later to describe as 'a warlike, various and a tragic age'. It was an age which saw radical changes in the institutions of the Church and the State and the questioning of many fundamental beliefs about the nature of man and society and the universe he inhabits.

Neither the Church of England nor the Monarchy survived the revolutionary decade of the 1640s. Already the conviction was gaining ground that the process of reformation had not gone far enough, which was strengthened by the ecclesiastical policy of Charles I and ruthlessly implemented by William Laud, first as Bishop of London and then as Archbishop of Canterbury. The Long Parliament of 1640 imprisoned Laud and he was eventually tried and beheaded in 1645. The grievances against the King now burst upon him and given the obstinacy of his character and the zeal of his opponents, an armed conflict was inevitable. The civil war which began in 1642 culminated in victory for Parliament in 1645 under Fairfax and Cromwell. The King was tried and executed on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1649. Monarchy and the House of Lords were abolished in March and a new Commonwealth was established of which Cromwell became the Protector in 1653. After his death in September 1658 followed by a period of confusion caused by the abdication of the new Protector, his son Richard Cromwell, order was restored in the person of Charles II who landed at Dover in May 1660.

The protracted battles for power between the supporters of uniformity and freedom of conscience in the Church and between absolutism and constitutional parliamentary governance in the State were naturally accompanied by an ideological war of words and ideas. Thomas Hobbes's systematic analysis of the nature of man and state - *The Leviathan* - swept aside older notions of natural or divine rights. Advances in physical sciences and the growing spirit of scepticism promoted fundamental change in man's conception of the universe and his place in it through the works of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Newton. But while seventeenth century inventions of telescope and microscope were extending the range of human perception and knowledge, they were also underlining the deceptiveness of appearances and elusiveness of truth. Both the life and writings of Andrew Marvell can be interpreted as the responses of an intelligent and sceptical mind to the need to find new bearings amid the confusions and challenges to inherited assumptions of a period of revolutionary change.

*To His Coy Mistress* is a poem by the English poet and Puritan statesman Andrew Marvell (1621 - 1678). It is not known when the poem was written, nor was it published during Marvell's life. This love poem, actually a seduction poem, is still one of the very popular poems from English literary history. The poet tries to persuade his shy, timid ('coy') lover to share the bed with him in the short term. He does this through a short and very logical argumentation, using humour and irony. Marvell is counted among the 'group' of Metaphysical poets, and he does indeed apply the conceits they use in the poem. The poem is divided into three parts, in which the poet concisely builds his reasoning: "Suppose that ...", "But that's not how it is ...", "And so ...". The poem opens

with the famous words "If we only had world enough and time", stating that if one had eternal life, one would have all the time to make love bloom and not have to hurry achieve the ultimate goal. The second part, however, shows the raw reality: life is short and if you don't enjoy it now, it's too late. Your virginity is no longer useful in the grave (The grave's a fine and private place, But none, I think, do there embrace.) In the third part the poet aims to reach his goal as quickly as possible: now we are still young and we have to enjoy life as long as we can. In his later poem *The Garden*, the poet returns to the same theme. Everything can be a right setting for loved ones, everything except time. The Australian poet and satirist AD Hope wrote an astute and witty 'answer' from the *Coy Mistress to Mr Marvell* (see external links). The poem is written in iambic pentameter and rhymes arranged in couplets. The first part from "Had we ..." is 20 verses long, the second part from "But ..." consists of 12 verses and the last third from "Now therefore ..." from 14 verses.

### 2.2.2 The Poem, To His Coy Mistress

Had we but world enough and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down, and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day.  
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the flood,  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
Till the conversion of the Jews.  
My vegetable love should grow  
Vaster than empires and more slow;  
An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;  
Two hundred to adore each breast,  
But thirty thousand to the rest;  
An age at least to every part,  
And the last age should show your heart.  
For, lady, you deserve this state,  
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found;  
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song; then worms shall try  
That long-preserved virginity,  
And your quaint honour turn to dust,  
And into ashes all my lust;

The grave's a fine and private place,  
But none, I think, do there embrace.  
Now therefore, while the youthful hue  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may,  
And now, like amorous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour  
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.  
Let us roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Through the iron gates of life:  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

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### 2.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM, CARPE DIEM BEING THE MOTIF

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Carpe diem poetry, a tradition dating back to the Augustan era in Rome, presents a worldview that seems filled with a sense of the fragility and shortness of life; but at its essence, it is concerned with individual choice in a world that often attempts to circumscribe, or even eliminate, the possibility of such choice. It takes its name from a phrase by the “Latin poet Horace, who in Ode, I. xi, tells his mistress that [...] life is short, so they must ‘enjoy the day,’ for they do not know if there will be a tomorrow” (Glancy 2002, p. 43). Horace lives and works in an increasingly authoritarian Rome in which the passing of such laws as the *Lex Iulia de Maritandis Ordinibus* and the *Lex Iulia de Adulteriis Coercendis* (of 18 and 17 BCE) represented an ongoing attempt to use the power of government to “reform Roman private morality.” In such an environment, Horace’s line, “carpe diem quam minimum credula postero” (Horace 1998, p. 39)—“Seize the day, trusting as little in the next as possible”<sup>2</sup>—has a political resonance, as it tells Leuconoe, and all who have followed since, to live now, and love now, despite the demands of authority, because each second of scruple, doubt, and delay brings men and women closer to a death that is non-negotiable, non-delayable, and everlasting. The carpe diem ethos informs works as diverse as the fourth-century (CE) Latin poetry of Ausonius,<sup>3</sup> to the troubadour poems of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to the plays of Shakespeare and the poetry of John Donne and Robert Herrick. It appears, perhaps most powerfully and famously in Andrew Marvell’s 1681 poem, “To His Coy Mistress,”<sup>4</sup> where the idea of death becomes life’s and love’s greatest ally in the battle against the demands of authority, convention, and law. No less powerfully, if less famously, carpe diem plays a central role in Elizabeth Cary’s 1613 drama, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, in the context of a radical assertion of female

freedom that insists on the necessity of choice in love and desire as resistance to authority.

A Fine and Private Place: Andrew Marvell and His Coy Mistress Perhaps after Robert Herrick's "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," the single line of carpe diem poetry most recognizable to English language readers is "If we had but world enough and time." It is a line, like "To be or not to be, that is the question," or "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven," that elicits a shock of recognition, each line an example of that "work of genius" Emerson describes, in which "we recognize our own rejected thoughts" coming back to us "with a certain alienated majesty" (Emerson 2002, p. 175). We know, all of us at some level, that we have neither world enough nor time, despite the countless tasks with which we busy ourselves, the deadlines at work, the striving for success, the pursuits of love or knowledge (for academics, that latest paper that must be written), all of the hundreds and thousands of little ways we distract ourselves from the onrush of our mortality. Still, we know, and a line like that which opens Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" brings that knowledge right up close, forcing us to pay attention. We all have our coynesses, our defensive refusals to deal with the reality of the absurd and ultimately fatal disease from which all of us suffer; we wish to think (or more precisely "not-think") that we have, if not endless tomorrows, at least so many as allow us to indulge in the time-wasting and death-hastening scruples of our island and tribe and time<sup>6</sup>, throwing off until tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow the choices necessary to live as fully as possible in worlds that will, if we let them, lead us like fools to dusty death, worlds that would deny us the chance ever to discover who we really were, and who we might have become. This perhaps most powerful of all the English carpe diem poems, reminds its readers that it is a kind of crime to be quite so coy in the face of the fine and private place to which we are all bound. Marvell himself was a complicated man, one whom Nigel Smith has recently described as "a poet who denied [...] poetic egotism by a form of studied imitation" through which, as in the present poem, he often exceeded his models (Smith 2010, p. 9). On the other hand, Marvell was also possessed of "a very hot temper" and seems to have been a man "who did not suffer fools gladly [...] and reacted with excessive violence or agitation when frustrated. Contemporaries, albeit hostile critics, saw man with a sneer. He enjoyed snide laughter at those who deserved to be treated with contempt" (Smith 2010, p. 9). Yet Marvell was also "the most effective political and religious satirist of his day, one of the greatest lyrical and political poets in the English language, and in his time, one of the most advanced thinkers in respect of toleration and free thinking" (Smith 2010, p. 11), and this in an especially authoritarian and unstable mid-seventeenth century in England. The poet, the politician, the man, was (and is) not easy to pin down, not easy to pack tidily away onto one's ideological shelves. As complicated as the man could be, his poetry is perhaps even more complicated, often at odds with itself, moving from voice to contradictory voice with the ease of an observer whose point of view allows him to see all sides of a question at once—as can be seen, for instance, in the Mower poems, which Linda Anderson has described in terms of their split point of view: all four poems [present] a single individual who defines himself in a special relationship with nature while at the same time hinting that the reader should question that definition. For while the Mower defines himself as a demigod like figure in an unfallen

Eden, Marvell presents him as a childlike figure, unable or unwilling to distinguish between his own desires and reality. (Anderson 1991, p. 131) This ability to shade perspectives to the point that two different points of view seem possible, even though one standpoint seems the one common sense would have us choose, is evident in “To His Coy Mistress.” The speaker of this poem, like Marvell’s Mower, “uses his considerable mental powers to recreate an unsatisfactory natural world” (Anderson 1991, p. 131), but the power and urgency with which he expresses his desire and frustration has left some readers, like Nigel Smith, wondering if the poem is “almost [...] self-parodic” (Smith 2010, p. 103), while other readers like Joseph Moldenhauer, have described “To His Coy Mistress” as a work that walks a fine line between seriousness and comedy: “for all its seriousness it is a comic poem, while for all its levity it is deeply serious” (Moldenhauer 1968, p. 205). Marvell’s first stanza captures that blend of seriousness and (exaggerated, though purposeful) humor:

Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down, and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love’s day.  
Thou by the Indian Ganges’ side  
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the flood:  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
Till the conversion of the Jews.  
My vegetable love should grow  
Vaster than empires, and more slow.  
An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze.  
Two hundred to adore each breast:  
But thirty thousand to the rest.  
An age at least to every part,  
And the last age should show your heart.  
For Lady you deserve this state;  
Nor would I love at lower rate.  
(Marvell 2003, pp. 81–82, ll. 1–20)  
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The obvious purpose for the speaker in these lines is to overcome the “coyness” of the lady. As Moldenhauer observes, “the poem presents a distinct dramatic and rhetorical situation. Its central agon pits the speaker’s desire for erotic fulfillment against the hesitancy of his lady” (Moldenhauer 1968, p. 193). Thus, the conceit behind the first line—as most readers seem almost instinctively to recognize—is that we do not have world enough and time, if “world enough” is conceived as a space “Vaster than empires” and time enough is defined as the hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of years the first stanza describes. If we had such vast stretches of world and time, the speaker argues, then the lady’s coyness, her noncommittal delay, would be just fine



(though one senses that it really wouldn't be fine with the speaker, but at least there would be sufficient time to praise and persuade). In a situation of endless time and space, the speaker and his lady could wander the world separately, she by the exotic Ganges river in India, while he was stuck with the rather more prosaic Humber river in England. He can even imagine stretching time backward and forward, so elastic, relaxed, and unurgent is the quality of time within a span of all-but-eternity. His love for her could then be extended back into the ancient past ("ten years before the flood") and off into the unchartable future (in which case she could "refuse/Till the conversion of the Jews"—an event, that as Nigel Smith points out, was associated in the mid-seventeenth century with the millennium to come after the end of the world (Smith 2010, pp. 104–5). With such temporal plenitude on their hands, the speaker could (or so he claims) spend "An hundred years" on praising the lady's eyes (though it seems that fifty years per eye would eventually leave even so poetic a speaker as Marvell's at a loss for words, and both he and his lady suffering from a massive case of boredom). Even more spectacularly (or horrifyingly, depending on your point of view), the speaker claims that he would spend two hundred years praising each of his lady's breasts, and thirty thousand years on the unspecified "rest" (undoubtedly including The very regions he hopes to have access to at some point before the end of the world). But—and a sensitive reader has been waiting for that shoe to drop since the very first line—we do not have eternity, and we do not have "the world" as Shakespeare's Richard III says, "to bustle in" (Richard III, 1.1.160.).<sup>7</sup> Life is short, and with each year, each day, each breath, death is closer than ever before:

But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found;  
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song: then worms shall try  
That long-preserved virginity:  
And your quaint honour turn to dust;  
And into ashes all my lust.  
The grave's a fine and private place,  
But none I think do there embrace.  
(Marvell 2003, pp. 82–83, ll. 21–32)

Time is both relentless and violent—the "wingèd chariot" references the Merkabah, the winged chariot-throne of Yahweh from Ezekiel chapter 1, and the chariot with which the sun-god Apollo drags the sun across the sky, as well as the familiar battle chariots of the Biblical Egyptians and Philistines, and even the anger of Yahweh against his own people:

For behold, Yahweh will come in fire, like a raging storm with his chariots, to render with fury his anger and his rebuke in flames of fire.

Once that chariot catches up with us, the speaker says, all that waits for us is the nothing and never of King Lear, the “Deserts of vast eternity.” And despite the claims of a poem like Shakespeare’s sonnet 15, in which the poet fights a “war with Time” (line 13) to preserve the beauty of the young man being addressed, Marvell’s poem will promise no such warfare and no such preservation: “Thy beauty shall no more be found,” either in the world, or in “My echoing song,” which you, lady, will not be able to hear anyway, sealed away in “thy marble vault.” And then, the poem turns almost ghastly, forcing our attention—and presumably the lady’s attention—to the physical details of death and decay. We will be, as Hamlet says, “at supper,” where “a certain convocation of politic worms” (Hamlet 4.3.18–20) will be at us like famine victims at a banquet table. Let the worms “try/That long-preserved virginity” says the speaker, in what seems a suddenly bitter tone. You’d rather have them inside you than me? Because you will have them inside of you one day, soon, and without your permission. Coyness may work with me, but it won’t work with the worms. It seems almost as if the speaker has here, rather like Hamlet in the scene with Ophelia right after the famous “To be or not to be” speech of 3.1, allowed himself to get so frustrated and even angry that he has forgotten to play his role—madness for Hamlet, smooth persuasive charm for Marvell’s speaker. The focus on the undeniably grotesque details of decomposition knocks the speaker off track here, as he seems almost to denounce the lady he would persuade. He rails at her, telling her that her “quaint honor” (honor that is both old-fashioned, and concerned with the body part Chaucer refers to as the “queynt”) will turn to dust, or whatever might be the term for the waste product that emerges from the alimentary canals of worms, while his lust—desire, life—will end up as nothing more than ashes. The powerful final couplet, however, is the payoff for the anger and grotesquery that precedes it—in the grave, where speaker, lady, readers, everyone ends up, no one any longer has world enough or time enough for love: “The grave’s a fine and private place, /But none, I think, do there embrace.” The wry, ironic, perhaps even sarcastic “I think” seems to say to the lady (and any reader on the path of asceticism, denial, or even delay) what are you thinking? The time for life and love is now, because we have eternity to be alone, and chaste, in our graves.

The final stanza returns to gentler persuasion, but this time with an enhanced urgency. The time is now:

Now, therefore, while the youthful glew  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may;  
And now, like am’rous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our Time devour,  
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.  
Let us roll all our strength, and all  
Our sweetness, up into one ball:  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,  
Through the iron gates of life.

Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.  
(Marvell 2003, pp. 83–84, ll. 33–47)

Now, while you are young, and while you are both willing and able (as your “willing soul transpires” or emits “instant fires” from “every pore”—either the speaker is trying to persuade the lady here, or she is more willing, even aroused, than she has so far let on), now let us “sport us” and like “amorous birds of prey” tear into the meat of life and love, devour Time itself rather than passively waiting for it to devour us. Let us not be kept out, barred, and excluded by the iron gates of life—gates of the kind meant, not to keep people in but to keep them out, in this case, the kinds of laws, customs, and social restrictions designed to keep them, and other lovers, out of the realms of pleasure and delight, limitations akin to what William Blake calls the “mind forg’d manacles” (Blake 1893, p. 56), the internalized rules that keep us from living fully, rules that exist only in the minds of all those who refuse, or are too terrified to say no to their arbitrary demands. If we are to live so, we will have to “tear our pleasures with rough strife/Through the iron gates of life,” because as Frederick Douglass observes “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will” (Douglass 2000, p. 367). The gods and kings of the world, with their theological, legal, and economic demands, will keep those “iron gates of life” barred at all costs, and the only resistance that has any chance at all of being effective is love. And even that resistance is ultimately futile, for “we cannot make our sun/Stand still.” We cannot stop the relentless march of time and the rapid approach of death. But we can “make him run.” We can live life as fully as possible, and dare the sun, dare Time, dare Death to catch us. It should go without remarking that the lady does not respond, so we have no clear sense of what, if anything, the coy lady addressed by the speaker thinks of his persuasions. And the critical reaction reflects a wide range of viewpoints. Thomas Wheeler argues that “To His Coy Mistress” is “the least Marvellian of all his poems” (Wheeler 1996, p. 90). He grounds this contention in the idea that Marvell’s most famous poem “fits perfectly into an identifiable poetic tradition. The *carpe diem* theme received memorable treatment from Marlowe, Donne, Jonson, Herrick, and Carew. Marvell’s poem only stands out because of its grim vision of the grave and its passionate urging of the lovers’ case. In other words, it does what a typical *carpe diem* poem does, but it does so with unparalleled power” (Wheeler 1996, p. 90). Wheeler seems to think that “To His Coy Mistress” is un-Marvellian because it is, in its genre and form, unoriginal. But a critic like Nigel Smith argues that such “imitation” is a Marvellian trait, since the poet “made a virtue and indeed a highly creative resource of being other men’s (and women’s) mirrors” (Smith 2010, p. 9). A rather more radical response to “His Coy Mistress” is found in Bernard Duyfhuizen, who insists that the poem has been read through the terms of “Masculine Criticism” for far too long, and describes Marvell’s poem as a “demeaning seduction” that depends on its “metaphysical conceit” to raise it “to the level of high seriousness as a universal construct of man’s desire to conquer his own mortality” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 418). Duyfhuizen identifies what he calls “a phallic causality” in the poem, one that “merely rewrites, rather than frees the Coy Mistress” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 418), and argues for a “feminist reading” which highlights the “non-capitulation of the Coy Mistress to her

ardent Cavalier” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 421). But in positing a “plot of her refusal of love [and] her conviction to love only on her terms” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 419), Duyfhuizen rewrites the poem according to his own ideological commitments, providing a response that Marvell’s poem does not contain. In the process, Duyfhuizen tells us more about himself than about the poem. Duyfhuizen’s reading is driven by near-constant negative framings of anything he associates with the “male” or the “masculine”—for example, the “male theme and plot of conquest” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 413) is assumed to be both pervasive in poetry, and unsurprisingly, akin to “rape” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 413). For Duyfhuizen, the “‘iron gates of life’ represent the hymenal barrier the speaker seeks to break, but it [sic] also represents the birth canal [ . . . ]. In the male plot the gates are thrown open to welcome lust and life, but in the female plot the gates may be slamming shut” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 421) If “iron gates” are to be taken seriously as a “vaginal metaphor” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 419) one wonders exactly how any human reproduction ever takes place. Iron vaginas do not sound like particularly welcoming places, either for adult visitors or for fatal travelers. The critic then goes on to express his Humanities 2018, 7, 61 7 of 17 grave concern that “the female reader” (as if there is an easy, universal definition thereof) must resist being seduced into “reading like a man” (Duyfhuizen 1988, p. 416), which raises the amusing question of whether such a “female reader” (as defined by a man named Duyfhuizen) must resist his masculine definition of them as females and as readers, at which point the entire argument threatens to reveal itself as parody. A more helpful perspective on the poem is offered by Catherine Belsey, who suggests a political context and purpose for the poem when she argues that “To his Coy Mistress” may have been “drafted in 1649, the year when the execution of Charles I emblematically established the end of the old order of sovereignty and subjection” (Belsey 1987, p. 105). Belsey goes on to argue that “[i]n innumerable Renaissance poems, daffodils, roses, dew, snow, spring and all of nature conspire to demonstrate the worth of things that perish. The imminence and the eternity of death makes sex more urgent, its pleasures more intense. The body is precious because it dies” (Belsey 1987, p. 112). And it is the very worthiness and value of the mortal, the soon-to-die, which gives Marvell’s poem its power: “It is chastity, not lechery, which is punished after death by worms. [...] To choose love rather than asceticism is to defy eternity and choose the world. [It is] to repudiate the values which promise eternal life; to choose the pleasures of the body is thus to reject immortality” (Belsey 1987, p. 112). Such a choice rejects the demands of gods who offer immortality at the price of submission, a defiant stance we see taken on the epic scale both by Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, and by Adam and Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. But perhaps the most useful point about “To His Coy Mistress” is made in a fifty-year-old article that now seems like a remnant from an entirely different academic era. Rather than attempt to “reveal” or “unveil” anything about Marvell’s most famous work, Joseph Moldenhauer simply reminds us not to stray too far from the literary context within which the poem came into being: Over the exuberance of Elizabethan and seventeenth-century poetry the pall of death continually hovers, and the lyrics of the age would supply a handbook of strategies for the circumvention of decay. The birth of an heir, the preservative balm of memory, the refuge of Christian resignation or Platonic ecstasy—these are some solutions which the poets offer. Another is the artist’s ability to immortalize the world’s values by means

of his verse. [...] The carpe diem lyric proposes are more direct and immediate, if also more temporary, solution to this overwhelming problem [:] the “harmless folly” of sensual enjoyment. (Moldenhauer 1968, pp. 190–91) For Moldenhauer, what makes the carpe diem mode is “it’s advocacy for a physical, rather than an aesthetic, solution to the problem of time” (Moldenhauer 1968, p. 204). Finally, what “To His Coy Mistress” asks its readers to see is that the wages of life are death, and no amount of trying to recuse oneself from the pleasures and pains of life will alter or diminish the payment of those wages by even a jot. Death is coming, and that is the primary reason not to obey the will of another (whether a god or a human ruler), but to choose for oneself whom to love and how to live before that life ends. The poem has undeniable power, and perhaps a great part of that power lies in its call for the lady to make up her mind about life, and its parallel call for its readers to make up their minds about life. The dilemma described by Marvell’s poem is remarkably similar in its terms (and its power) to that faced by the narrator of Friedrich Schiller’s 1786 poem, “Resignation.” Faced with the choice between the pleasures of life now, or the hope of a life to come, Schiller’s narrator makes the pious and obedient choice that Marvell’s narrator hopes his Coy Mistress will reject. Speaking to der Vergelterin (the Rewarder—the poem’s term for God), Schiller’s narrator obeys the command to reject the joys of life:

“To His Coy Mistress” poses a simple choice, and insists on the necessity of choice. Will you live now, will you choose for yourself, as you would if there were no laws—either human or divine, secular or theological—against the joys of life and love? Or will you submit to the will, the laws, the customs, even the whims of authority, as you patiently and obediently wait for death?

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## 2.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have tried to offer an analysis of Andrew Marvell’s much anticipated work, ‘To His Coy Mistress’. This poem deals with the ambiguities of love and relationships and strive to keep it away from the greedy world. The speaker is a staunch believer of ‘Carpe Diem’, hence he wants to love his beloved with the fear of tomorrow. He claims that his love for his beloved is pure and unadulterated. The lovers are at the peak of their burning youth and they want to distance themselves from this world that is filled with all enmity for the people who fall in love. Despite loving each other, the two lovers don’t have much time to spend, as a result of which the strive more for their companionship and togetherness. The poet’s wishes is as innocent as his love for his beloved, he wants to sit with his beloved by the side of the Holy River Ganga and would love her from ten years back and forth. This unit will help us know about Marvell’s imagination and his belief in loving his beloved in the most innocent and purest possible ways.

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## 2.5 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT TERMS

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- COYNESS- The quality (especially in a woman) of feigning shyness or modesty in an attempt to seem alluring.

- GANGES- The Holy River of Ganga.
- HUMBER- The name of an estuary.
- GAZE- To look steadily and intently, especially in admiration, surprise, or thought.
- VEGETABLE LOVE- Innocent love.
- QUAIN- Old-fashioned or unusual.
- TRANSPIRE- To reveal the hidden.
- AMOROUS- Relating to sexual desires.
- LANGUISH- To lose strength or to lack vitality.
- STRIFE- angry or bitter disagreement over fundamental issues.

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## 2.6 EXERCISES

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1. What did you understand by the term 'Carpe Diem'? Elaborate in your own words.
2. Which crime is the poet talking about in the second line of the poem?
3. Why does the poet need a safe private place?
4. What idea do you get from the first stanza of the poem?
5. What according to you is the poet trying to convey to his Coy Mistress?
6. Elaborate the meaning of the phrase "iron gates of life"? Elaborate within 100 words
7. Why does the poet use the expression "Love you Ten years before the flood"?
8. Wrap the poem in your words and elaborate your interpretation within 150 words.

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## UNIT 3      ALEXANDER POPE: ODE ON SOLITUDE

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
  - 3.1.1 Introduction to the Poet
  - 3.1.2 Heroic Couplet
  - 3.1.3 Mock Epic
- 3.2 The Poem, Ode on Solitude
- 3.3 Interpretation of the Poem
- 3.4 Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Exercises

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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The prime objective of the following poem is to elaborate the Learner's about the mastery of Pope in poetry. Alexander Pope was famous for his mock heroic and epic poetry. He made an independent place for himself in the Literary World during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. His poems are read and appreciated until this date. '*The Rape of the Lock*' was considered to be Pope's masterpiece. The way he portrayed the Elite class and their lifestyle in the epic is appreciated in the present days. 'Ode on Solitude' is a poem that revolves around a man who is self-sufficient and happy in his own world. He is totally out of the worldly disruptions and disturbances. He has a life that the poet considers to be 'Blessed' but also puts forth a question whether the man is actually blessed or he is just ignorant?

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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#### 3.1.1 Introduction to the Poet

After the Great Fire of London aroused anti-Catholic feeling that had simmered since the reign of James II, Parliament passed the first of two Test Acts, laws that banned Roman Catholics and nonconformists (Protestants not members of the Church of England, such as Puritans) from holding public office, serving in the military, attending universities, or essentially having any part in public life. Born into a Roman Catholic family, Alexander Pope's education was limited to occasional tutoring from priests and his own regimen of study. Pope suffered from what many experts now believe to be tuberculosis of the bone, resulting in a deformity in his back and stunted growth. Both his religion and his physical disabilities barred him from the kind of participation in court life that resulted in patronage that other poets enjoyed. With his family's financial security from his father's business, Pope was able to devote enough time to his writing,

translating, and editing to begin earning a comfortable living. He soon established himself as one of the prominent neoclassic writers.

### 3.1.2 Heroic Couplet

A heroic couplet is two lines of poetry in iambic pentameter that rhyme. Neoclassical writers favored this structured, symmetrical verse form. Pope uses the highly complex closed heroic couplet, a rigidly structured verse form consisting of two lines, each iambic pentameter, which rhyme and which form a complete thought.

### 3.1.3 Mock Epic

“The Rape of the Lock” is a mock epic, a poem which uses the characteristics and conventions of an epic but for a humorous and satirical purpose rather than a serious purpose. Even the title ironically suggests a serious crime when the offense is actually cutting a lock of hair.

- An epic states the *theme* at the beginning of the poem. The first two lines of Canto 1 follow the convention: “What dire offense from amorous causes springs, / What mighty contests rise from trivial things, / I sing...” The word *trivial* epitomizes the theme, and the theme in turn leads to the choice of form, the mock epic which treats a trivial subject as if it were of epic importance. In contrast to the epic *Paradise Lost*, in which the theme is nothing less than the creation and fall of the human race, Pope’s mock epic highlights human superficiality and vanity.
- An epic invokes a *muse*: Pope’s muse is not a Greek god or the Holy Spirit, Milton’s muse; his muse is another human, John Caryll who asked him to write the poem.
- The *supernatural forces* are not God, angels, and demons of *Paradise Lost* but the sylphs whose duties are to guard Belinda’s hair and jewellery.
- The *epic battles* are reduced to card games. The preparation for battle takes place at Belinda’s dressing table and is presented in diction suggestive of religious rites (see Canto 1 lines 121–148). The Baron also prepares for battle by praying at his altar to love (see Canto 2 lines 35–46).

The valiant *feats of courage* become clipping a lock of hair, threatening the Baron with a hairpin, and making him sneeze with a pinch of snuff.

[\(Alexander Pope \(1688–1744\) - 2012 Book Archive https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/british-literature-through-history\)](https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/british-literature-through-history)

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## 3.2 THE POEM, ODE ON SOLITUDE

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Happy the man, whose wish and care,  
A few paternal acres bound,



Content to breathe his native air  
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,  
Whose flocks supply him with attire;  
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,  
In winter fire.

Blest who can unconcernedly find  
Horn's, days, and years slide soft away  
In health of body peace of mind,  
Quiet by day

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,  
Together mix'd; sweet recreation,  
And innocence which most doth please,  
With meditation.  
Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;  
Thus unlamented, let me die.  
Steal from the world, and not a stone  
Tell where I lie.

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### 3.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

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This first stanza of *Ode on Solitude* begins with a correlation that carries throughout the poem, seen through the life of a nameless man who is shown as he is an epitome of happiness. The narrator notices that the man's deepest desires and wishes extend a few acres of his own land where he is contented and fairly earning a living. The word "parental" puts forth the idea that the land that he owns is his ancestral property, and hence it belongs to him through them. The line "Content to breathe his native air" could be a note on the man's happiness with whatever little he has, despite of venting for more and frowning every now and then (although this might not have been quite a significant idea back then in the 1700s, when the poem was written, as it may be interpreted in the present day scenario).

The verse structure and rhyming pattern that is used here is; three lines of eight syllables each, followed by one line of four syllables, rhyming in ABAB pattern. This is carried on till the final two stanzas, where the final line lengthens to five syllables.

The second verse is a clear indication that the man is self-sufficient. It gives the readers a fair idea that his land is enough to fulfil all his needs, added to it, he is able to bake his own bread and has his herds providing him milk and milk products. He is saved from the scorching heat of the sun under the shade of his trees during summers, the woods from the same tress are then lit during the winters to give him warmth and comfort and to protect him from the cold chilly winters, the wool he derives from his

cattle is a lot to provide him a woollen attire to endure the winters. The man has no asset other than his land and he is more than happy in whatever he has.

The narrator has a strong feeling that the farmer is really blessed! The little world around him fulfils all his needs. Days, hours and years pass by and the man continues being happy and satisfied in his own little world. The man's contentment is the prime reason for his sound health that persists from the beginning to the end of this poem. There is nothing that can trouble him, how can his peace of mind be hampered in any way? It seems as if, in a world of war and strife, there is absolutely nothing that could disrupt the life of this farmer, and the narrator considers it to be an exalted feeling.

The idea of innocence is introduced in the last stanza, it describes the life of a man who lives in sheer isolation and solitude, yet he is always happy and satisfied. He has no fear of loss or gain. This could be interpreted in two ways, either he is living a life of sheer isolation, without knowing enough about the world or maybe he is leading an ideal life away from the world that is filled with meanness from the crust to the core. The man could either be too ignorant or he could be too innocent for living a life far away from all the worldly disruptions. This man can be appreciated as well as criticized by many readers but he is just too happy and contented to even brood upon the fact.

The narrator of the poem clearly agrees with the latter of the above sentiments — here he wishes for escapism, and begs for an unseen life, one where he may live in solitude until his dying days, which will come and go, unnoticed, unremarked, and unadorned, a perfect life of solitude and peace.

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### **3.4 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT TERMS**

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- PATERNAL- Related to one's father or his family.
- NATIVE- A person born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth, whether subsequently resident there or not.
- ATTIRE- Clothed/Dressed in a particular manner.
- DOTH- archaic third person singular present of do.
- UNLAMENTED- Without mourning or regretting.

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### **3.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have tried to offer an analysis of Pope's famous poem 'Ode on Solitude'. The poem centres on the prime character who is a farmer by profession. He has an ancestral land that nearly provides all his needs and requirements. He is happy in this little world that he has created in his farm. He is self-sufficient, contented and happy, he doesn't require anybody or anything to be a part of his life. His huge trees protect him from the scorching rays of the summer sun. The dry wood from the same trees are

lit in the winters so that he is saved from the winter chills and the vegetables and fruits that he grows in the land fill his stomach whenever he is hungry. He doesn't have a connection with the outside world nor does he need to connect with the outside world because he is happy in his own little world. The poet says that he is a 'Blessed Man'. Now the question rises, was he really a blessed man? Or was he an escapist who wanted to ignore the rest of the world? The readers are supposed to answer this question according to their interpretation.

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### **3.6 EXERCISES**

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- Why is the man in the poem considered to be a Happy Man?
- Where does the happiness of the Happy Man lie?
- From where did the man get the piece of land from? How does he spend his days and seasons there?
- Was the 'Blessed Man' really blessed or was he ignorant? What are your views as a reader?
- In which stanza is the idea of innocence introduced and how?
- Describe the farmer's little world where he was happy & satisfied.
- How do you see the little world of the man? Elaborate with suitable examples.

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## **UNIT 4      APHRA BEHN: I LED MY SILVIA TO A GROVE**

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### **Structure**

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
  - 4.1.1 About the Author
  - 4.1.2 About the poet's famous works
- 4.2 I Led my Silvia to a Grove
- 4.3 Interpretation of the poem
- 4.4 Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 4.4 Let us Sum up
- 4.5 Exercises

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### **4.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After analysing the poem, the students will be able to:

- Know about Aphra Behn as an important literary figure of the Restoration Era.
- Gather a few information on Aphra Behn's personal life
- Critically examine the poem and its themes.
- Know about the budding women writers of the Restoration Era.

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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#### **4.1.1 About the Poet:**

Aphra Behn was a prominent English translator, poet, playwright and fiction writer who made an independent place for herself in the world of Literature during the Restoration era. She made an extensive impact on her contemporaries as well as successors because she was one of those first English women who earned a living by writing plays and poetry. Behn broke all the cultural barriers that stopped the English women from living an independent and liberal life. She ended up being an idol for the later born women authors and writers. It was this gallant spirit of her that she came to the notice of Charles II, who appointed Behn as a spy at Antwerp. On returning back to London, she stayed in the Debtor's Prison for a short span and there she began writing for the stage. She took her place amongst a few famous Literary Libertines and poets like Lord Rochester and John Wilmot. Just like Mary Ann Evans who wrote under the pseudonym "George Eliot", Behn also wrote under a pseudonym "Astrea" (The Greek virgin God of purity, justice, innocence and precision, she was the daughter of Astraeus and Eos)

[*Note- Do not confuse 'Astrea' with 'Asteria', who was the daughter of Coeus and Phoebe*]

Behn's history is very scarce and confusing, this might be an intentional attempt on the part of Behn herself. There are a few sources which say that Behn was born to a barber and her wife named John and Amy, whereas there are a few other sources which say that Behn was the biological daughter of a couple named "The Coopers". 'The Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs Behn' tells a different story all together, it throws light on the fact that Behn was born to Bartholomew Johnson, who was a barber and Elizabeth Denham, who was a nurse. While the then Governor of the Isle of Wight "Thomas Colepeper" was the last person who could be traced to know Behn during her childhood and he had a totally different story mentioned in his work "Adversaria". He claimed that she (Behn) was born at 'Sturry or Canterbury' to Mr Johnson and that she had a daughter named 'Frances'. This added to the ambiguity regarding Behn's history. Anne Finch, another contemporary of Behn claimed that Behn was born in Wye at Kent, as a daughter to a barber. All these information sums up to the fact that the history of Behn was filled with obscurity. Whatever little information we have about her life, career and works are mere probabilities having a lot of 'mays', 'mights' and 'perhaps'.

There are probabilities of Behn getting married to Johan Behn who was perhaps a merchant of German or Dutch lineage and he possibly was a resident of Hamburg. There has been quite a loud buzz raising the question that whether Behn's husband died or they got separated. Anyways, whatever may be the scenario, Behn used her husband's last name and published her works under the name 'Mrs Behn'. Behn evidently supported Catholicism, hence, she once declared that she was designed to become a nun. Added to it, Behn also had a lot of Catholic connections like Henry Neville and many more.

Behn was considered as one of the most efficient writers after John Dryden in the English Restoration Period. This was the time of significant change for the Restoration England, this was the time when the liberation of womanhood took its highest pace and Behn gave her full-fledged contribution. As mentioned previously, Behn was the role model for many of her contemporaries and successors. She was also remembered in many works written by her succeeding women writers. A prominent example is Behn's mention in Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of one's own' where she said "All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds".

#### **4.1.2 About the Poet's famous works:**

- THE FAIR JILT- A 50 paged novella written by Aphra Behn that elaborates a list of absurd incidents that are involved with the fatal protagonist "Miranda" who had a peculiar tendency of bringing ravage and destruction upon her admirers.

- OROONOKO- This work of Behn couldn't reach its desired fame when Behn was alive, but was later considered to be a masterpiece posthumously.
- THE ROVER- Also known as "The Banish't Cavaliers", it was one of the most read and enacted plays written by Behn. It was first performed at the Duke's Company at the Dorset Garden and was later published anonymously.
- SONG ('ON HER LOVING TWO EQUALLY')- This was originally seen under the title of 'How Strongly Does my Passion Grow' and was a part of the play 'False Count' that was published in 1681.
- ON THE DEATH OF THE LATE EARL OF ROCHESTER- The poem has a central motif 'Mourn' that is repeated time and again. This was also one of the very noted works of Behn that she wrote after the death of the Earl of Rochester, John Wilmot in the year 1680.

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## 4.2 I LED MY SILVIA TO A GROVE

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I led my Silvia to a Grove,  
 Where all the Boughs did shade us  
 The Sun itself, though it had strove  
 It could not have betray'd us.  
 The place secur'd from humane eyes  
 No other fear allows,  
 But when the Winds do gently rise;  
 And kiss the yielding Boughs.

Down there we state upon the Moss,  
 And did begin to play,  
 A thousand wanton tricks to pass,  
 The heat of all the day.  
 A many kisses I did give,  
 And she return'd the same,  
 Which made her willing to receive;  
 That which I dare not name.

My greedy eyes no ayds requir'd,  
 To tell their amorous Tale,  
 On her that was already fir'd:  
 'Twas easie to prevail.  
 I did but kiss and claspe her round,  
 [Whilst] they my thoughts exprest,  
 And laid her gently on the ground:  
 Oh! Who can guess the rest.

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### 4.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

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This poem of Aphra Behn is a clear portrait of the depiction of Love. The word ‘My’ on the first place, sets the chord of love, possession and passion. The title has a tinge of romance that is easy to trace when the speaker says ‘I led my Silvia to a Grove’. The first stanza depicts that the two lovers have managed to sneak out from the eyes of the world and could successfully find a personal space amidst a grove (a small group of trees), they are free of guilt and are fearless in sharing their passion with each other. The first stanza is soft and light at heart where the lovers have the freedom of living their guilty pleasures.

The time when this poem was written, was the time when 17<sup>th</sup> Century poetry was in an evolving state but it was just the starting phase. This was the time when a few writers like John Donne, John Wilmot and Aphra Behn took the charge of introducing a new genre of love that was ‘Homosexuality’ and ‘Bisexuality’. Where on the one hand John Donne was quite an extrovert and bluntly raised topics on bisexuality and homosexuality, Behn on the other hand was subtler and softer in her expression. Now at this point, a question raises in our minds which asks, “Is the poem ‘I Led my Silvia to a Grove’ intends any kind of bisexual/homosexual motif? As a reader, we all know that the poem is written by a woman (Aphra Behn) for another woman ‘Silvia’. This might be a clear indication that the poem definitely coincides with homosexual themes (*Homosexuality: getting attracted to the people of the same sex*). May be the fact that they have to hide behind the grove might hint that ‘Homosexuality’ could possibly be the central theme of the poem. The two lovers are hiding from the world (The place secur’d from humane eyes) may be because they don’t want to become culprits in the eyes of a world that defies homosexuality. In those days, when these relationships were considered to be illicit and unlawful, women writers like Behn tried to foil these themes in the best possible ways, so that the poem comes out as a subtle love song rather than a provocative and bawdy interpretation of homosexual urge.

In the first stanza, the speaker took her beloved Silvia towards a group of trees (grove) where they can be themselves, away from the mean world that would judge and accuse them for falling in love. A limb of one of those trees hid them as they took shelter under the grove. The sun rays were choked by the canopies formed in the trees, though it didn’t completely betray the lovers. The lovers were far away from the dodgy eyes of humans that would just indict them for falling in love. No fear was allowed to enter the grove and ruin their confidentiality, they could be themselves... a pair of two innocent lovers, madly in love. The wind also showed its presence by slowly kissing the limbs of the trees but without intruding the couple’s privacy.

The second stanza gives us a clear view of the physical intimacy that the two lovers shared, away from the world, though the tone of this depiction is subtle and soft. The lovers are sitting upon a moss, enjoying their privacy, living a free life amidst a group of trees that shielded them from the whole wide world. This is a moment of sheer privacy and physical and emotional warmth between the two lovers. The lines clearly

portrays the lover's carnal desires for each other. There is a tone of immense happiness and satisfaction because the lovers can freely put forth their libidinous urges freely without being apprehensive or fearful. The speaker planted a kiss on Silvia's face and she reciprocated with the same fervour. The speaker further gives a hint of a lot more carnal activities that the two lovers indulged themselves in, but she doesn't want to reveal it.

The third stanza starts with a transferred epithet. The speaker is greedy, full of appetite for physical pleasure which gets reflected in the eyes. The eyes fully capture the speaker's emotions and hence, they require no aids. They communicate an amorous tale. 'Tale' here is personified with a capital 'T'. It is therefore understood that the eyes do not just tell a lifeless story but also declare the germination and growth of a vigorous and vivacious activity with her who is already an epitome of burning desire. This fulfilled desire is not just a 'tale', it is an entity which is full of life, energy and satisfaction. The culmination of the expression of love is so satisfying that it gives birth to something that is an embodiment of soothing but ecstatic experience. In that moment of bliss, the speaker kissed her and clasped her tightly to express the thoughts bubbling up in the heart. Then the speaker 'gently' laid her on the ground, so that she would not experience any pain, injury or turmoil. It would be a moment of bliss for both of them. What happens next needn't be described for it is the climactic experience of two emancipated individuals who have loved each other whole-heartedly and expressed their emotions in a tangible/palpable manner. It is as if they have been transported to a different world where there is no fear of unwanted interference. Where there are no rules only poise, gentleness, equanimity, acceptance and comfort. The atmosphere that they were a part of was just pure bliss.

The poem then delicately but forcefully advocates the creation of a world order where fulfilment of life's intrinsic desires are nourished with acceptance, away from the threatening eyes of the so called predators of this world who not only sit in the seat of judgement but are always ready to pounce upon others to frustrate consummation of these desires.

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#### **4.4 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT WORDS**

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- GROVE- a small wood or other group of trees.
- BOUGHS- a main branch of a tree.
- STROVE- (Past of Strive) make great efforts to achieve or obtain something.
- WANTON- Deliberate and unprovoked.
- CLASP- Hold (something or someone) tightly with one's hand.



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## 4.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, the students are able to examine Behn's greatness in knitting such complex emotions like homosexuality. This poem is evident of the fact that Behn chooses her words carefully so that the end product doesn't look bawdy or lascivious. The poem is an amalgamation of a number of emotions, be it the fear of getting accused by the outside world or the excitement of meeting the lover, or the subtle mischief that comes along, or the contentment of finally being able to express the hidden love for each other, every single emotion is presented with utmost poise and grace. Attempts have been made to make this unit interesting and understandable for the learners.

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## 4.6 EXERCISES

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1. What according to you is the main theme of the poem? Elaborate it with suitable examples from the poem.
2. Why does the poet take the beloved 'Silvia' to a grove?
3. How did the environment or the surrounding under that grove support the two lovers?
4. What is the importance of the word 'Tale'?
5. What idea does the last paragraph of the 'interpretation of the poem' give you as a reader?

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## **UNIT 5      ROBERT HERRICK: HIS RETURN TO LONDON**

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### **Structure**

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
  - 5.1.1 Cavalier Poets
  - 5.1.2 Robert Herrick
- 5.2 His Return to London, Poem
- 5.3 Interpretation of the Poem
- 5.4 Glossary of Difficult words
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Exercises

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### **5.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit reveals about patriotism and love for one's native country. The poet is puts forth his feelings and emotions and also reveals the sudden gush of emotions and nostalgia, the moment he puts his footsteps on the ground of his country. The poem reveals the feeling of the narrator that is very intimate and personal. Still the poet decides to put it on the fore front. The only wish of being buried in his native shows how the narrator is desperate to mix his body and soul in the soil of his motherland. This unit also gives us a description about Cavalier Poets and their nature of writing poetry.

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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#### **5.1.1 Introduction to Cavalier Poets**

“Though the Cavalier Poets only occasionally imitated the strict intellectual conceits of Donne, and his followers, and were fervent admirers of Jonson's elegance, they took care to learn from both parties. Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, Richard Lovelace, Lord Herbert, Aurelian Townshend, William Cartwright, Thomas Randolph, William Habington, Sir Richard Fanshawe, Edmund Waller, and the Marquis of Montrose, it's easy to see that they each owe something to both styles. In fact the common factor that binds the cavaliers together is their use of direct and collective language expressive or a highly individual personality, and their enjoyment of the casual, the amateur, the affectionate poem written by the way. They are 'cavalier' in the sense, not only of being Royalists (although Waller changed sides twice), but in the sense that they distrust the over-earnest, the too intense. They accept the ideal of the Renaissance Gentleman who is at once lover, soldier, white, man of affairs, musician, and poet, but abandon the notion of his being also a pattern of Christian chivalry. They avoid the subject of

religion, apart from making one or two graceful speeches. They attempt no plumbing of the depths of the soul. They treat life cavalierly, indeed, and sometimes they treat poetic convention cavalierly too. For them life is far too enjoyable for much of it to be spent sweating about verses in a study. The poems must be written in the intervals of living, and are celebratory of things that are much livelier than more philosophy or art. To put it in a nutshell, the Mistress is no longer an impossibly chaste Goddess to be mad with sighs, but a woman who may be haunted in a forthright fashion. Though the poems written to her may be more important to the writer than she is herself, there is no pretence that this is not the case. Poetry need not be a matter of earnest emotion or public concern.

It may all sound rather trivial, and much of it is no doubt; but the Cavaliers made one great contribution to the English Lyrical Tradition. They showed us that it was possible for poetry to celebrate the minor pleasures and sadnesses of life in such a way as to impress us with a sense of ordinary day-to-day humanity, busy about its affairs, and on the whole, enjoying them very much." ([www.luminarium.org](http://www.luminarium.org))

Cavalier poets is the name for a group of English poets from the circles that supported King Charles I in the period before and during the English Civil War. Many of them were courtiers. They distinguished themselves in subject and tone from another poetry school from the 17th century, that of the Metaphysical poets, with John Donne as the best known representative. While the latter group often chose philosophical and religious themes, the Cavaliers used more light-hearted and worldly subjects, although there are exceptions in both groups. Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Thomas Carew and John Suckling are among the best known representatives. The early work of the metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell is also sometimes included. The term 'cavalier' was introduced as a name for the royalists by Charles's opponents in parliament, but subsequently became a name for gossip. ([https://nl.wikipedia.org > wiki > Cavalier poets](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cavalier_poets))

### 5.1.2 Introduction to the poet, Robert Herrick

Robert Herrick is considered a cavalier poet, one of the followers of Charles I. In fact, coming from a middle class background, he enjoyed the patronage of several noblemen and was thus welcomed into court gatherings. As was common in England since the time of Chaucer, poets circulated their poetry in manuscript form for the amusement of the court. Poems written in honour of a specific nobleman or at the request of a nobleman as a memorial for a special occasion were often rewarded monetarily. Herrick's poetry not only provided him with needed income from his patrons, it also made him a part of the courtly social and literary circles. After becoming an Anglican clergyman, Herrick served as chaplain to a high-ranking courtier. Soon after, however, King Charles I appointed him vicar of a church in Exeter, far from the social and literary life Herrick loved in London. After the execution of Charles I, Herrick lost his position as vicar under Cromwell's rule and returned to London where he concentrated on publishing his poems. When Charles II was restored to the throne, Herrick's job was also restored, and he spent the rest of his life as a vicar in Exeter.

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## 5.2 THE POEM, HIS RETURN TO LONDON

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From the dull confines of the drooping west  
To see the day spring from the pregnant east,  
Ravish'd in spirit, I come, nay more, I fly  
To thee, blest place of my nativity!  
Thus, thus with hallow'd foot I touch the ground,  
With thousand blessings by thy fortune crown'd.  
O fruitful genius! that bestowest here  
An everlasting plenty, year by year.  
O place! O people! Manners! fram'd to please  
All nations, customs, kindreds, languages!  
I am a free-born Roman; suffer then  
That I amongst you live a citizen.  
London my home is, though by hard fate sent  
Into a long and irksome banishment;  
Yet since call'd back, henceforward let me be,  
O native country, repossess'd by thee!  
For, rather than I'll to the west return,  
I'll beg of thee first here to have mine urn.  
Weak I am grown, and must in short time fall;  
Give thou my sacred relics burial.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47289/his-return-to-london>

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## 5.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

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“Hesperides” is a book of poetry published in 1648 by the English Cavalier Poet “Robert Herrick”. This collection has 1200 of his lyrical poems. His “Magnum Opus” was published under his direction, establishing his reputation. It has the prime motif of “Carpe Diem” or it deals with the Carpe Diem sentiments. The title refers to the Hesperides, the nymphs of the evening in Greek Mythology. Hesperides includes “To the Virgins to make much of time” when features the famous lines.

The poem presumably establishes a scene in between the morning to the evening. The poet is filled (Ravish'd) with all spirit and soul to fly towards his native city (London). The poet's foot becomes exalted when it touches his native ground. He also talks about the blessings that his native of his has poured upon him through his ancestors. He claims his native London to be the hub of genius that who had been bred up in this place and it is also about the bounty that the place has and will have every year and it shall go on in an everlasting manner. He praises the people, the place and the manners that the place, his proud native has pleased the entire world. London is a decent home for a lot of people who belong to different nations, customs and language. The poet considers himself to be a free born Roman (The one who doesn't deserve to be a

prisoner in the Rome) and suffer there rather, the poet says that he deserves to stay amongst the citizens of his native place (London). The poet then exposes about his banishment and after returning back from such a prison, he wants to stay at London and doesn't want to replace himself at any cost.

Lastly, the final message that the poet wants to convey in the last lines of the poem is his wish to be buried in his native after his death. The poet is nostalgic of the fact that he is eventually aging and might enter the doors of death very soon. Therefore he places a request at the end of this poem to bury him in the place where he was born and bred.

The feeling of returning back to one's own motherland after years of prison. That feeling of contentment and satisfaction is what the poet is feeling and want to cherish this feeling till the end of his life. The poet is overwhelmed as soon as he places his foot on the soil of his motherland and immediately becomes nostalgic of the times when he was a part of his motherland London before he was sent to Prison. It is seemingly possible that the Poet's physical distance from his motherland must have added to his desperateness to come back and cherish it.

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#### **5.4 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT WORDS**

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- 1- DROOPING WEST- Evening time
- 2- RAVISH'D SPIRIT- Broken Spirit
- 3- NATIVITY- His Native land London
- 4- HALLOW'D- Highly Blessed
- 5- CROWN'D- The fortune of the Land crowns the poet with blessings and goodwill
- 6- BESTOWEST- To give something as an honour
- 7- FRAM'D TO PLEASE- The City that pleases everyone
- 8- KINDREDS- A group of people or things that belong together or have some shared quality.
- 9- REPOSSESS'D- Reclaim or to get back (Like London got back the poet)
- 10- RELICS- an object surviving from an earlier time, especially one of historical interest.

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#### **5.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have tried to offer an analysis of Robert Herrick's poem, 'His Return to London'. This poem unleashes the feeling of nostalgia and love for one's country. It seems like the poet has returned to his country after a long time. The feeling of stepping into one's motherland after so many years is a feeling that cannot be expressed with mere words. The narrator is going through a feeling of happiness amalgamated with sheer passion, love and modesty. The narrator is dumbfounded and emotionally broken

for being away from his nation for so long and the expression is presented beautifully by the poet. Words like Ravish'd Soul, Hallow'd etc tells us the feeling that the poet is going through. As the poem proceeds, we can well relate with the fact that the gush of nostalgia and patriotism becomes the motif of the poem.

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## **5.6 EXERCISES**

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1. What according to you is the motif of this poem? Explain with suitable examples taken from the text.
2. Why does the poet has ravish'd spirit? Elaborate within 100 words.
3. How does the poet praise his country, London?
4. What is the last message or the last wish that the poet reveals in this poem?
5. What has the poet learn when he was away from his motherland?

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