
Unit -3 □ Shakespeare : W.H. and Dark Lady

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3.1 □ Objectives :

I welcome you to this Unit but not without some hesitation. Some of you, I am afraid, may want to question the relevance as well as the utility of an introduction to William Shakespeare for, generally speaking, neither in your school nor in your college have you been too far away from the Bard of Avon. You could not have been. A student of English Literature cannot perhaps hope to graduate without reading Shakespeare because it will mean studying the human body and not learning about the heart and the circulatory system. Yet I feel that I should introduce or rather re-introduce Shakespeare to make you aware of certain facts/issues/controversies.

3.2 □ Shakespeare : Life and Works

From your study of Shakespeare at the undergraduate level, you know that a great deal

of mystery shrouds the poet-dramatist and his identity itself has been in question for many hundred years now. It has almost turned into a literary detective story, with enthusiasts trying to unveil the truth about a man known to have been born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April 1564 and baptized on the 26th. He had the ambitious John Shakespeare for a father and a mother whose family name you hear of every time the Forest of ARDEN is mentioned in *As You Like It*.

Unfortunately, we know little about the formal education of this poet-dramatist. According to an interesting but controversial anecdote,, he is said to have fled his hometown having written a lampoon on Sir Thomas Lucy who had earlier subjected him to corporal punishment for deer stealing. London was his El Dorado and it was there that he flowered into a poet and a dramatist non-pareil. Will of Stratford-upon-Avon became William Shakespeare only after he settled down in the city of London.

To Shakespeare goes the credit of writing 37 plays, 154 sonnets and 2 long poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* in about twenty-five years time i.e. from 1587-1611. In 1611 he retired voluntarily. In 1616 Shakespeare died, most probably on his birthday. Some of his best-known plays (not in chronological order) are *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *As you Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure* *Richard II* etc. It is believed that Shakespeare has written six other sonnets that do not fit in this cluster. They are part of a collection known as *Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music*. Do you know that some years back it was claimed that Sonnet No. 155 has been found. Just a claim.and the literary world has perhaps chosen to forget it.

Identity

Who is William Shakespeare? Is he the man whose picture we are so familiar with? Or is there another face behind that *familiar* face? Many of us are aware of the old Baconian theory claiming Sir Francis Bacon to be Shakespeare. Thomas Kyd too has been named but the dates of his birth and death have been enough to omit him from the list. In his Ph.D thesis, later published. A.D. Wraight has given the credit to Christopher Marlowe whose pseudonym, according to him, was Shakespeare. In 1975, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (15th edition) commented that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), “became in the 20th century the strongest candidate proposed for the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays.” To refute this claim John Ruskin, obviously a Stratfordian. wonders how a man who had died in 1604 could refer to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 in his plays or write *The Tempest* in 1611. Or, how does one explain the repeated use of the word Will in Sonnets 134, 135, 136, 143 when de Vere was Edward and not William? This is still a live topic. However, for you the safest line to take is to concentrate on what *Shakespeare* has written rather than on who he is.

3.3 □ Shakespeare's Sonnets

The addressee in the first 126 sonnets is a “lovely boy” and in the remaining 28 it is a Dark Lady. This Sonnet Sequence has in it a strong dramatic quality, interesting characters, human relationships, conflicts, confrontation, emotional outbursts, all indicative of the “cross-fertilization” of the lyric and drama inevitable in Shakespeare’s time. Thus while reading Shakespearean Sonnets, you can be prepared for a double treat. You will find yourself enjoying all of poetry and a little of drama almost simultaneously. Do remember that quite a few of Shakespeare’s plays like *Love’s Labours Lost*, *Richard II* etc. do “reverberate with the sonnet poetry”.

Date

Assigning dates-to Shakespeare’s works has not always been easy. However, it is believed that the bulk of Shakespeare’s* Sonnets were written between 1593 and 1597 and the rest by 1600. In fact for the first reference to Shakespeare’s Sonnets we may turn to Francis Meres’ *Palladis Tamia* (1598). But Sonnets 138 and 144 were later additions, included in a collection entitled *The Passionate Pilgrime* [Pilgrim] published by Jaggard in 1599 without Shakespeare’s permission. The others were printed in 1609 by a Thomas Thorpe and perhaps “authorized” by the poet himself. This was followed by the John Benson edition of 1640.

Dedication

New Criticism of the 1930’s may have discouraged a hunt for autobiographical elements in the Shakespearean Sonnets but it has become a literary custom to look for traces of real-life relationships.

3.4 □ The Text : W.H.

A part of Shakespeare’s dedication reads, “To the Onlie (note the Spelling) Begetter Mr. W.H.”. Rarely have two initials created more confusion. To the Baconians W.H. is William Himself. To Oscar Wilde he is the handsome actor Willie Hughes and the claim is that the word “hue/hues” in Sonnets 20, 67, 82, 98, 104 points to him. To a few, W.H. is either the poet’s infant nephew William Hart or his “presumed brother-in-law” William Hathaway. One opinion is that W.H. is a commoner for it was an offence to use a plain Mr. before a nobleman’s name. But the Mr. could also mean Master and may have been used to conceal W.H.’s identity.

One of the strongest claimants you know is Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton (1573-1624). He was a man of such exceptional good looks that around the time Shakespeare was writing his sonnets, John Clapham, the Clerk of Chancery, dedicated a

Latin poem on the story of *Narcissus* to Southampton, flattering the Earl for his beauty and encouraging him to marry and have children. Southampton's 17th birthday was in October 1590 and the gift of 17 sonnets could have been an appropriate gift because in Elizabethan times boys were expected to get married at 17/18. Moreover, Southampton's refusal to marry Elizabeth de Vere is also on record. 'Hews' is considered an acronym of Henry Wriothesley. All these arguments put together give Southampton an edge over most others. But Southampton is after all H.W. and not W.H. and his wife, an angel of virtue, could not have been the Dark Lady. The Earl's claim weakens even further because a man born in 1573 is too old to be called "a lovely boy" at the end of 1590s.

So we are left with William Herbert (W.H.) the Third Earl of Pembroke, son of Mary Pembroke, Philip Sidney's sister. Herbert's reluctance to marry and his rejection of several proposed brides is much like W.H.'s refusal to tie the knot and settle down. It is said (unsupported by documentary evidence) that the Countess had asked Shakespeare to write a few pro-marriage sonnets on the occasion of Herbert's 17th birthday. If true, then the first 17 sonnets at least is poetry made to order like Spenser's *Prvthalamion*. Moreover, Herbert had an illicit relationship with Mary Fitton, and he could easily have been W.H. and the Dark Lady. The fact that both Southampton and Pembroke were Shakespeare's patrons complicate the issue even further.

The Rival Poet

Like W.H. the rival poet also remains a mystery man. It is argued that he is either Samuel Daniel or George Chapman or Ben Jonson or perhaps the lesser known Francis Davison. But who is the Dark Lady? Read on to learn more about her.

3.4.1 Sonnet I

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the ripener should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thy self thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel:
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding:
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

Explanation

All beautiful people and things must reproduce so that their beauty and good qualities can be passed on to their offspring (children, plants, etc.). The aged will move steadily towards their final destination and ultimately die but their memory will not fade if children/offspring are produced. Unfortunately, the narcissistic “fair youth” cannot look beyond his Self. He has turned his own enemy and like a candle “sustains” his beauty using his own body as fuel and in the process destroys himself. As W.H. is young and inexperienced he does not realize how unwise it is to remain unmarried and childless. He is miserly and prefers wasting his good looks and qualities than distributing them generously. The young man will gradually lose the ability to procreate and will ultimately be his own destroyer. Finally, his sterile body, laid to rest in the grave, will be consumed by worms. He should thus heed the warning, “pity the world”, get married and sire children.

Critical Analysis

“This sonnet sets out an eugenic proposition”. Since W.H.’s beauty is exceptional and needs to be copied before it is lost, Shakespeare issues sufficient warnings. Note the balancing of beauty as fresh as the damask rose and the grave where worms will feed on this beauty. Against the freshness of youth is ageing and decay. In his *Beauty, sweet love, is like the morning dew* Daniel warns that Beauty like the morning dew vanishes and “straight tis gone as it had never been”. The Young, it is apparent, require such cautioning for their lack of experience, wisdom and foresight. Shakespeare, older and more experienced, rebukes the youth openly for being miserly and wasting his beauty by not transferring it to his children genetically. The indignant tone of the speaker suggests a kind of desperation at his own inability to make the youth aware of the inevitable and prepare him for what is to come. The use of the word “glutton” is interesting as the youth is accused of consuming his own beauty just as Time engulfs ravenously and hungers for more. Look closely and you will find in these 14 lines the theme of love, time and friendship, all intricately woven.

Readers may disapprove of the poet’s insistence in Sonnet 1,9, 13 etc. because there is no reason to believe that reproduction is an antidote to Time’s deadly blows. Scholars hold that this conventional idea may be traced back to Plautus’ *The Braggart Warrior* (c. 206 B.C.). Another instance of advice conveyed through writing is Calver’s *Passion and Discretion in Youth and Age* wherein Discretion advises the Youth to think of the future and not be seduced by his own beauty. You may be aware that through *Gorboduc*, Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, two of the Queen’s men, urged her to marry and produce an heir to the throne of England. Attention may also be drawn to the Biblical command. “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

Form : Language and Style

Read carefully and you will not miss the admonitory tone in the opening Sonnet

Shakespeare makes it clear that it is not a question of *desiring* ‘increase’ but *demanding* it. This is a farming or agricultural metaphor that Shakespeare has often used. Read how wisely Polixenes instructs Perdita on the science of breeding flowers in *Winter’s Tale* IV. 4.79-103. As the focus is on procreation the internal rhyme “hein.bear” does seem to reinforce “the notion of replication”. “The world’s fresh ornament” is surely a reminder of “the world’s fake ornament” used by Spenser in *Prothalamion*. The youth is nearly likened to a monster feeding on itself and the words “or else glutton be” sound menacing.

In this Shakespearean Sonnet the first quatrain spells out the poet’s command as it were. The second is an open rebuke, as also the third. The couplet contains the warning in no uncertain terms. The rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg.

Conclusion

As this is a procreation Sonnet, the complete absence of romance and softness may come as a surprise. Marriage has been presented as a business deal important and essential for what it ensures—a child, not for adding to a family but for preserving the father’s beauty. The final line of Sonnet 11 is even more business-like. ‘Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.’ The metaphor is a reminder that after 1476 William Caxton had printed more than a 100 books. Shakespeare’s urging may be interpreted as a proof either of genuine earnestness or of obedience to a superior who has commissioned him to urge and advice.

Word Notes

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|-----------------------|--|
| 1. increase | procreation, offspring. |
| 2. beauty’s rose | rose symbolises beauty, also refers to a part of the female body. The Tudor emblem too was a rose. |
| 3. ripe | old, ready for harvesting. Reminds us of the proverb, “Soon ripe, soon rotten”. |
| by time decease | die in the course of time, |
| 4. tender | young, delicate, soft. |
| tender...memory | as an imprint may be taken from a seal so also will the child take on his father’s looks or the wife will bear a child which will replicate him. |
| 5. contracted | under obligation to (in a legal sense), also compressed, curtailed, restricted. Cf. <i>Ham.</i> I.ii.3-4. Pledged to himself, “diminished” to the “self-reflexive scope” of his own bright eyes, narcissistic. |
| 6. Feed’st...flame | provides sustenance and fuel for the flame that gives light. |
| self-substantial fuel | fuel from its own body. |

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| 7. abundance | youth's rich qualities. The scarcity-abundance contrast recurs in Shakespeare. |
| 8. thy self..cruel | inflicting cruelty on himself, polarization of self into both a foe and a victim. |
| 9. world's fresh | the youth's beauty adorns the world and beautifies it. 'Gaudy' ornament does not mean vulgar. |
| 11. bud | young man with potential. |
| content(s) | substance, happiness, pleasure. It also means contents i.e. something contained. |
| 12. churl | boor, rustic; not meant as an insult. The word "tender" makes it a term of endearment. Also suggests miserliness. |
| niggarding | being miserly.. |
| 13. glutton | one who consumes everything greedily. |
| 14. by the grave
and thee. | consumed by both the young man as well as the grave. |

3.4.2 Sonnet LV (55)

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
 Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
 But you shall shine more bright in these contents
 Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
 When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
 And broils root out the work of masonry,
 Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
 The living record of your memory.
 Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
 Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room,
 Even in the eyes of all posterity
 That wear this world out to the ending doom.
 So, till the judgement that yourself arise,
 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes

Explanation

The poet claims that no man-made monument can "outlive" his "rhyme". Encased in these verses, the youth will outshine all others. Monuments and tombs may fall due to natural calamities or man-made atrocities like war; they may be pulled down or razed to

the ground but neither fire nor war can wipe out the young man from human memory. Rather, by the strength of these lines, the youth can “pace forth” and all following generations will admire and “praise” him till the day on which the world will come to an end and W.H. too will stand before the Seat of God for the Last Judgement. Till that day he will live on and “live in” the “rhyme”.

Critical Analysis

There may be a visual pun at play here via the digits 55 resembling the book’s initials *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. All discussions on the Time theme in Shakespeare’s Sonnets generally include this poem which concerns itself entirely with this issue. Time is a formidable enemy, to be feared, because nothing can stop the “minutes from hastening to their end” (60). But as in Sonnet 18, 19, 54 (the preceding one) etc., here too the poet reiterates that Time too may be challenged, if not defeated. This Sonnet and the next hold up to view two of Time’s greatest foes who, even if they cannot save the human body from its ravages, can make it live on in our ‘memory’ till the Judgement Day. Rather than occupying a grave, W.H. will find lodgings in the eyes of future readers.

This is one of the most challenging sonnets in the Sequence, exhibiting the poet’s unshakeable confidence in his own compositions and perhaps in poetry in general. Art is timeless, beyond Time’s reach (cf. Keats’ *Ode on a Grecian Urn*) and can disarm Time. A monument fixed in time inevitably degenerates from the moment it is built but “poetry is a self-renewing medium.” It becomes “a living record”, its subject “encoded into the minds of successive generations of readers - as though part of their substance”. Thus the poet can assure, “So long lives this and this gives life to thee” (18).

Read this portion carefully. In Spenser’s *Amoretti* Sonnet 75 the poet you know has assured, “my verse your vertues rare shall eternize”. In “*When winter snows upon thy sable hairs*” Daniel asserts that Delia’s picture will neither fade nor age. “They will remain, and so thou canst not die”. The lady in Drayton’s *Idea* (6) will “survive” in his “immortal song”. Do you still think Shakespeare’s claim is original? Definitely not. Shakespeare, like his contemporaries, was just following a convention inherited from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and incorporated into the neoplatonic tradition. Moreover, in the past Roman poets did claim that their powerful lines would make them immortal. Horace’s concluding Ode 3.30 celebrates what he has written by stating “I have built a monument more lasting than bronze”. Shakespeare and his peers use their lines to make their loved ones immortal. But while Spenser and the others eternalize their ladylove, Shakespeare throws himself open to criticism for the attempt to immortalize another *man* and also for what critics call, his “inflated egoism”. H.T.S. Forrest, one of the harshest critics of Sonnet 55, finds it unreadable for its absurd expressions, self-contradictory lines and ungrammatical sentences.

Form : Language and Style

The sonnet begins with a negative asserting the poet's confidence in the power of his lines when placed against Time. 'Marble' suggests hardness and durability and the strength of the lines is indicated by their ability to outlive marble. Lines 4, 5, 9 and 10 exude confidence. Mark how slightly Time has been referred to as "sluttish". Feminists will take objection to Time's tyranny being compared to a woman's slovenliness and wantonness. Classical and Biblical allusions have been evenly balanced in this Sonnet. As always, the rhyming couplet drives the point home. Note the use of the word 'live', in many forms, as though to reiterate that the sonnet hinges on the issue of mortality and immortality. Do read Sonnet 65 along with this poem.

Conclusion

In Sonnet 55 we hear the tone of assurance in place of rebuke or request. This is one of those sonnets where the poet leaves his readers in no doubt about his own superiority in age, experience and talent. In Sonnet I the poet is critical of the youth because of his stubbornness while in Sonnet 55 he himself runs the risk of being criticized for his over-confidence.

Word Notes

1. gilded monuments Memorials in churches would often be decorated with gold leaf.
 Marble was used for monuments of the rich and the important.
2. powerful able to withstand time's onslaughts.
3. in these contents in these verses which have been likened to containers.
4. unswept stone G N neglected stone monument
4. sluttish slovenly. Time is also likened to a negligent housewife.
5. wasteful war war that lays waste and destroys life and property.
6. and broils.. tumult, disturbances, esp. in war. See 1 Henry 6.11.53.
 masonry The victors razed conquered cities to the ground. In the Holy Bible Christ has prophesied total destruction of the city of Jerusalem (Luke. 19.43-4).
7. sword of Mars Mars (Roman) or Ares (Greek) is the God of war.
8. living record perhaps a record more permanent than flimsy paper. Was the poet trying to get his verses published to make them 'permanent'?

9. 'Gainst against
 all oblivious enmity enmity which wants the youth to be erased from memory or fails to assess the youth's worth or enmity that is oblivious to all.
10. pace forth advance or stride confidently, may also mean measures of a verse,
 find room be given time and space, and not be ousted.
11. posterity future/coming generation.
- 11-12. all...out all those coming generations which push the world to the edge. Remember Macbeth's cry, "What, will the line stretch out to the crack of doom!" Mac. IV. 1.117. Also see Donne's *An Anatomy of the World*, 143-4.
12. the ending doom Last Judgement. On this day those who are to be saved will be placed on the right side of God's throne.
14. in this in this verse (either in this sonnet or in the sequence).
 dwell..eyes. young man will be remembered by lovers and others who will love him on reading the poet's verse. See Amoretti LXXV.

3.4.3 Sonnet CXVI (116)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom

If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved

Explanation

The poet is determined not to place obstacles in the path of true love and hinder the union of two minds. Love is not true love if it fails to stand the test of time and changes along with external/internal changes and alters with alterations in circumstances or in the

movements of the beloved like his/her absence/removal/departure. True Love is stable and, like the beacon-showing the way to lost ships, it is a fixed mark. Its true worth is difficult to assess. Love is not at the mercy of Time even though the tyrant can and does deface rosy lips and cheeks. Time's sickle spares none. But Love does not alter with time; it remains stable and endures until the last day of life. If the poet proved wrong and his claim is refuted he will retract all that he has written and will vow that no man has ever loved truly nor has he ever written truly.

Critical Analysis

Time, however, is too formidable an enemy to be defeated only by the power of a writer's pen. There must be another antidote and for that we turn to Sonnet 116, erroneously numbered 119 in one quarto edition. This Sonnet, Fowler claims, is in a way "the climax of the whole splendid series of Shakespeare's sonnets". But Sonnet 116 has caused a ripple in the literary world since it has stirred up controversies over the relationship shared by two men because of the word 'impediment' (singular) which reminds readers of the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer. The emotional exchange between two men does raise question about the normalcy of their relationship.

One may come to Shakespeare's rescue by reminding his critics that the poet was also a highly successful dramatist writing romantic dialogues for stage lovers, both actually male, a male actor and a boy actor, Passionate words thus did come easily from his pen even if the addressee was a male. It is also for us to remember that Shakespeare did have an ally in Richard Barnfield whose 20 sonnets to 'Ganymede' too address a man and the dedicatee is his friend R. L. Here are some of his lines from "*Sighing, and sadly sitting by my love*":

He opened it, and taking off the cover,
He straight perceived himself to be my lover.

Sonnet 116 venerates Love and holds it up as the Victor in the Time/Love tussle. Time admittedly destroys loveliness and lines the face with wrinkles (3) and as Drayton writes in Sonnet 8, takes "pearly teeth" out of a "head so clean" and makes rosy cheeks "sunk and lean". Yet this Vandal cannot destroy Love. Time may be measured in petty hours and weeks but love (and friendship) is indestructible. However, in the couplet Traversi can hear a note of uncertainty. Has Shakespeare been deliberately over-optimistic in his attempt to quell secret fears?

Sonnet 116 presents Time, most conventionally, as a farmer/mower armed with a sickle striking and cutting hours relentlessly. One may argue that the farmer, cruel though his action may seem, is actually using his sickle to preserve. If crops are not harvested in time, standing crops will rot and perish. The mower strikes but not to destroy. But unrelenting Time cuts ruthlessly to usher in decay while the farmer/mower strikes to prevent ugliness and decay.

Form : Language and Style

Mark the commanding tone in the first line. Shakespeare has juggled with words especially in lines 3 and 4. Note carefully the many references to the sea, mariners and voyages which remind us of the maritime activities of the Elizabethan Age. The chief pause in sense is after the twelfth line. Majority of the words used are monosyllables (only three contain more than two syllables) making the poet sound curt and harsh. Inversion, alliteration, metaphor, Biblical allusions have been sparingly used so as not to interfere with the simplicity of style and diction. The use of synecdoche is particularly effective. Rosy lips and cheeks stand for a woman's beauty, her lovely face in particular. There is a possible pun on alter/ altar thereby extending the marriage metaphor. In this sonnet the quatrains carry the central argument that Love is everlasting but the couplet for once suggests uncertainty, imperfectly guised. The rhyme scheme is abab, cdcd, efef, gg.

Conclusion

Sonnet 116 is yet another definite step in Shakespeare's war against Time. He is determined to emerge victorious even if it means putting forth a somewhat illogical claim in the final couplet. Owing to its position in the Sonnet Sequence Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 does stand as an ever-fixed mark.

Word Notes

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|----------------------|--|
| 1. Let me not | I will not concede that etc.; I will not be compelled. Note the defiance in his tone. |
| marriage..minds | suggests a union that is Platonic, |
| 2. admit | allow. |
| impediments | hindrance, obstruction. In <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> the word is used three times in connection with the stopping of a marriage. |
| 3. Alteration | change. |
| 4. bends | is swayed, is not constant. |
| remover to remove | changes with the change or removal of the object of love indicating lack of constancy. See Sonnet 25. Wyatt writes "Though other change, yet will I not remove." |
| 5. ever-fixed mark | permanent and steady as a beacon that acts as a signal for ships |
| 6. looks on tempests | towers over sea-storms. |
| 7. It | beacon, love. |
| star | the pole star, the northern star signifying steadiness. See <i>Julius Caesar</i> III. 1.60-2. |
| wandering bark | a lost ship. |

8. worth's unknown its importance has not been understood or estimated.
 height be taken altitude can be measured. The height of the Pole star was important for assessing the position of a ship. It may also mean assessing the importance, quality, type etc. of someone or something.
9. love's...fool Love is not Time's slave.
 rosy....cheeks stand for physical and external beauty.
10. within...come to come within the range or reach of the crooked blade of a sickle.
 compass come be within range or reach of the arc of the sickle, a nautical metaphor.
11. his time's. Time can be measured by units but Love is eternal, timeless,
12. bears...doom lives on till the Day of Judgement. See word note of Sonnet 55
13. this...error if it is proven that love is not as constant as claimed and that he has been mistaken.
 upon me proved proved against me. A legal term it may also mean proving the charge of heresy. During the inquisition the accused were tortured till they confessed under duress.
14. L.loved If he is proved wrong then let it be taken that neither has he written anything nor has any man ever fallen in love i.e. his claim is irrefutable.

The Text

3.4.4 Sonnet 126

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
 Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle, hour;
 Who hast by waning grown, and therein showest
 Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self growest.
 If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
 As thou goest onwards still will pluck thee back,
 She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
 May time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.
 Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
 She may detain, but not still keep, her treasure:
 Her audit (though delayed) answered must be.
 And her quietus is to render thee.

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Explanation

The poet addresses the youth as “a lovely boy” who gains in beauty as he grows older. He has within him the power to stop Time’s approaching steps for a while with the aid of Nature. The passing of years brings the youth to perfection but according to Time’s dictates, the poet grows older steadily. Nature, the supreme mistress, who has chosen him as her own, will hold him back and keep him out of Time’s reach. But Nature can stall Time and the moving minutes only for a while. It is but a temporary respite. So the young man should be aware of the hard fact that Nature will at some point hand him over to Time and clear all accounts. She cannot and will not come to his rescue always and forever. The poet is thus concerned about the youth’s fate.

Critical Analysis

We began the W.H. Section with Sonnet I and we end with 126, the “Farewell Sonnet” According to Rossetti, this should have been labelled as Epilogue to Part I, Sonnet 125 being the last of the first Part. Some commentators have suggested that the “lovely boy” is Cupid. This may be their attempt to free Shakespeare from charges of holding up a male as the object of his love. But let us not forget that Richard Barnfield had already written in *The Affectionate Shepherd*:

If it be sinne to love a lovely Lad,
Oh then sinne I, for whom my soule is sad.

The other point that requires close attention is the brief reference to the poet gaining in age and the boy gaining in youth and beauty. In Sonnet 22 Shakespeare does suggest that youth is an antidote to his own age. While placing age and youth side by side in this context did Shakespeare remember Marsilio Ficino and his methods of prolonging life? However, in Sonnet 126 there is an open acceptance of old age and the fact that as the youth moves towards perfection he unfortunately limps towards the grave.

Nature is Time’s adversary for a while and like Thetis who had made vain efforts to endow immortality on her son Achilles, she too tries to hold the youth back. But the poet knows fully well that Nature cannot confer eternal youth and beauty on W.H. for it will be unnatural. The poet understands and so accepts mutability and death. Consequently there is neither bitterness nor pessimism to darken the poem. This poem is bereft of any conventional religious overtones. There are no angels, no heaven, no yearning for salvation, no resurrection, only a void.

If you read this sonnet with Sonnet 63 you will marvel at Shakespeare’s mathematical precision and calculation. Note his use of the number 6 “associated with perfection” in this

world. This poem comprises only 6 couplets. If in Sonnet 63 the speaker sees his own end drawing near, Sonnet 126 (63+63) states the inevitable. The open space is the yawning grave which will gladly receive the bodies of the two, our poet and the fair youth.

Form : Language and Style

Note the words “audit” and ‘quietus’. They remind of Elizabethan England’s-economic prosperity and the sharp rise in trade and commerce. “Quietus”, though a single word, combines commerce and theology as it suggests both settling of accounts as well as peace after death. The expression “wretched minute kill” sounds ungrammatical and unpoetic.

Sonnet 126, you can see, is not a sonnet but a 12-lined poem with some empty space which may suggest:

- (a) an abrupt end followed by complete silence. See *Hamlet* V.ii.363.
- (b) marks in an account book suggesting a pay off.
- (c) little moons, suggest waxing and waning or mutability.
- (d) empty hour-glass, sandless, indicating the end of life.
- (e) empty graves, containers to contain bodies of the youth-and the poet.
- (f) single life of the youth as he has failed to marry.

Mark the total change at line 8 and the warning, “yet fear her..” gives a sense of break. Since two whole lines are missing the Sonnet has been written in a series of rhyming couplets and the rhyme scheme is aa bb cc dd ee ff. Such experiments are not uncommon in Shakespeare. His Sonnet 99 has 15 lines. Shakespeare perhaps enjoyed such experimentation.

Conclusion

In this *sonnet* Shakespeare has deliberately made a special mention of closing accounts. Yet the poet has left the poem incomplete. Can it also mean that his love too has no end like his verse? There is no indication here that the poet is about to move into yet another area where the youth will no longer be the focal point of attention.

Word Notes

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. my lovely boy | most probably a term of endearment. May be Cupid. |
| 2. Time’s...glass | Time’s treacherous mirror which does not show changes wrought by Time. In Durer’s engraving Death holds an hour-glass with ‘Tickle’ shifting sand. |
| sickle hour | Time holds a sickle in his hand to strike and claim mortals. Some suggest “fickle hour”. |

hold	restrain time. Nature is holding him back.
3. waning grown	moves towards maturity, growth is a step towards decay. Remember the waning hour-glass and the moon waning into a sickle.
3-4 therein..grow'st	as the youth's beauty increases his lovers' (friends '(?)' vitality decreases.
5. sovereign..wrack	All-powerful Nature rules over wrack (ruin), deciding the time when decay can set in.
6. pluck..back	Nature holds him back and keeps him away from Time's clutches.
7. keeps	preserves, sustains.
Skill	ability to retain the young man's beauty and youth.
8. time disgrace	Time will be put to shame for failing to deface the youth. Time will be ashamed of its own ugliness when placed against the youth.
wretched...kill	Nature will destroy minutes that tick relentlessly taking us to the brink of destruction. See Sonnet 60. Minute may be a pun with French <i>minuit</i> meaning midnight or the hour of death.
9. fear her	be afraid. The youth cannot consider himself indestructible.
minion	darling, favourite; has been used in a derogatory sense in Marlowe's <i>Edward II</i>
10. detain	hold back, preserve
11. audit	account, statement of loss and gain.
her...must be	Nature will have to account for the favours shown to the youth and the profit gained and losses incurred. This accounting may be on the Day of Judgement. The youth should lead a proper life.
12. quietus	clearing of accounts, death. The words <i>quietus est</i> written on a contract indicates settling of account, suggests peace and serenity. See <i>Hamlet</i> III. 170, 74-5.
And...thee	Nature too will pay off her debt to Time by the handing over of the youth. He cannot escape death which will be followed by 'quietus', eternal peace. See Sonnet 125.
13-14	Rarely have blank spaces created so much controversy. See Discussion.

3.5 □ The Text : Dark Lady

Shakespeare's Dark Lady is no less enigmatic than W.H. and the poet's attitude towards her has stirred up a hornet's nest, as it were. Who is the Dark Lady and wherein lies her 'darkness'? There are scholars who believe that the Dark Lady is any one of these three historical women: Mary Fitton, a lady in waiting to Queen Elizabeth; Lucy Morgan, a brothel owner and former maid to Queen Elizabeth; and Emilia Lanier, the mistress of Lord Hunsdon, patron of the arts. Some also consider William Davenant's mother to be the Dark Lady, but only because Davenant claimed to be Shakespeare's illegitimate son. Another candidate is Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway. In his novel Ian Wilson has opted for Lady Penelope Rich, Sidney's Stella as Shakespeare's Dark Lady.

The Dark Lady proves Boccaccio right. She is a young woman "fickle and desirous of many lovers" (*// Filostrato*). In Sonnet 144 she is a "a woman colour'd ill, a "female evil". Yet Shakespeare cannot sever connection with her and the sonnets portray a painful and erotic relationship within which the poet remains attached to his mistress through a combination of love and, at times, lust, proving, as A.L. Rowse said that he was "a red-blooded hetero-sexual" after all.

Is the Dark Lady dark-skinned? Sonnet 131 announces, "In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds". Is she white? Perhaps not. Conclusive evidence of the Dark Lady being a black woman may be found in *Love's Labours Lost*, Act IV, Scene iii, in a remarkable dialogue between the King and Biron. Yet Shakespeare addresses her in his Sonnets thereby exploding the myth that the 'lady' of the Sonnet has to be fair in looks and nature.

Read these lines :

The way she walked was not the way of mortals
but of angelic forms, and when she spoke
more than an earthly voice it was that sang:

This is Petrarch's Laura. For a description of Shakespeare's 'dark' mistress read on :

The Text

3.5.1 Sonnet CXXX (130)

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red, than her lips red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,
As any she belied with false compare.

Explanation

The Lady's eyes are not as bright as the sun nor are her lips coral-red. If snow is white, her skin is the colour of dung i.e. brown. Her hair is stiff like wires, unattractive and rough. The poet has seen peaches and cream-complexioned women but his mistress' cheeks cannot lay claim to such colouring. Perfumes please the nostrils but not the lady's foul breath. The poet finds her voice tolerable though he knows that it is not melodious. The poet has never seen a goddess walk but his mistress he knows moves heavily and clumsily. Yet the poet cannot but accept her and consider his love to be as "rare" and special as any woman who has had a poet lying about her.

Critical Analysis

Apparently an anti-Petrarchan sonnet, this poem highlights the mistress' ugliness that seems but an outward expression of inner wickedness. Twelve lines out of the fourteen mock this coarse woman who is so different from the golden-haired beauties like Stella whose faces are "Queen Virtues Court" (96). It is futile to look for erotic suggestions of the kind so blatantly apparent in Sonnet 128. Shakespeare barely conceals his sarcasm/laughter compelling us to read the final couplet of 126 and the Sonnets 127 and 132 as "conceited" exercises "in mock-encomium". Or is this Shakespeare's way of stating the harsh fact that looks do not actually matter, it is a woman's willingness and availability that counts? Remember Touchstone's Audrey in *As You Like It*?

The zeal with which Shakespeare counters all conventional descriptions of the Lady of the Sonnet is worth noting. Lively "sparks" issue from the eyes of Wyatt's" lady (20), Spenser's mistress' eyes are incomparable (9) and when Campion's beloved "her eyes encloseth, blindness doth appeare". But the Dark Lady's eyes are no more than ordinary but necessary sense organs. John Wootton's lady's lips are "like scarlet of the finest dye," and Shakespeare's own Lucrece has "coral lips". But not the Dark Lady. Stella's "clear voice" fills the air, when Drayton's lady "speaketh" most "delightful balm/from her lips breaketh". Not so with Shakespeare's evil angel. Shakespeare is determined to be different; this is how one may account for this studied subversive tone.

Do not fail to notice how in the closing couplet, the poet cannot but laugh at other poets' attempts at beautifying their mistresses and in the process indulging in hypocrisy and

flattery as well. His mistress is presented as one quite unattractive and clumsy and with foul breath, but the complete absence of either indignation, or grievance or sorrow makes one wonder whether or not Shakespeare has been enjoying his readers' discomfort. He knows for certain that he has succeeded in shocking regular readers of Elizabethan Sonnets by opting for a mistress whose 'dark' colour extends from her face to her soul.

Form : Language and Style

Like Spenser's Sonnet LXXXI in particular, this sonnet is based on comparisons. Note the emphatic tone of the first line which sets the mood and prepares us for a list of negative qualities. Look at the abundance of colour but not one is used to compliment the lady. In this sonnet Shakespeare deliberately undermines typical love-poetry metaphors. Each quatrain refers to the mistress but it is the mistress' gentle mockery that runs through the three quatrains with the abab, cdc, efef, rhyme scheme but in a manner suggesting light-heartedness. The 'my love' makes a sudden entry in the couplet (gg) as through after an equally sudden decision.

Conclusion

This is the Sonnet most scholars refer to in their discussions on Shakespeare's Sonnets in general because this, along with 138 and 144, register Shakespeare's determination to break away from the accepted convention of equating sonnets with eulogy, female glorification and idealization. However, in his attempt to establish his stand Shakespeare has been unduly harsh. Moreover, if the Dark Lady is Mary Fitton this is a deliberate misrepresentation for she was indeed attractive, to men at least.

Word Notes

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. My mistress...sun | The mistress' eyes are not bright and beautiful |
| 2. coral...red | lips are not ruby - red. |
| 3. dun | dull greyish brown. |
| 4. hairs be wires | suggesting Negroid blood. Also suggests hair covered with ornamental wires much in fashion in those days. |
| 5. damasked, red and white | White, red and damasked are three varieties of roses. The demask rose is pinkish. |
| 7-8 in some...reeks | sweet-smelling breath perfume the air See <i>Cymbeline</i> II.2.13-23 But the lady has bad breath. |
| 10. music...sound | music is sweeter than the lady's voice. Some commentators read that the lady's voice is musical. |

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 11. goddess go | deities walk. Goddesses like Thetis, Athene could be recognized by their gait as Venus in <i>Aeneid I. 405</i> |
| 12. treads the ground | walks on the earth, perhaps heavily |
| 13. rare | special, uncommon. |
| 14. belied | falsely portrayed |
| As...compare | As any woman who has had poetic untruths told about her. |

The Text

3.5.2 Sonnet CXXXVIII (138)

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
 I do believe her though I know she lies,
 That she might think me some untutored youth,
 Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
 Although she knows my days are past the best.
 Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
 On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed:
 But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
 And wherefore say not I that I am old?
 O! love's best habit is in seeming trust,
 And age in love, loves not to have years told:
 Therefore I lie with her, and she with me.
 And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

Explanation

The poet states that when his mistress swears that she is honest and her fidelity is beyond doubt, he accepts her statements knowing fully well that she lies. His acceptance may mislead her into thinking that he is naive and inexperienced, unaware of the crooked ways of the world and of falsehood and treachery rampant therein. This will at least make her think that he is still untutored and young even though she knows that he is past his prime. The poet does not hold her guilty of lying, rather he gives her credit because the two of them are playing a game at suppressing truths. He wonders why is it not possible for them to be open with each other and honestly admit that one is false and the other old. Perhaps pretence is required in love and lovers do not wish their age to be pronounced. Hence each lies to the other and the relationship limps forward on the crutches of flattery and falsehood, keeping the two satisfied in a strange manner.

Critical Analysis

Another version of this sonnet appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599 with little change in theme and tone. I have already explained that in Petrarchan sonnets the speaker is usually a male lover who, in spite of his lady's cruelty, cannot but love, sigh and suffer. Sonnet 138 has no space or tolerance for such feelings. Rather in this apparently anti-Petrarchan and anti-Sidneian sonnet the poet seems to take pleasure in stating shocking truths both about himself and the lady, about their age and integrity and about pretence forming the backbone of their relationship. Do remember Shakespeare's Sonnet 138 when you hear Bernard Shaw's Bluntschli tell Raina in Act III of *Arms and the Man* that though she speaks in a "thrilling voice" he does not believe a single word she says.

Age in the W.H. Sonnets is welcome as and when it gives the poet the authority to admonish/advise, shower tenderness and affection. But Age is a burden in most Dark Lady sonnets as it loosens his grip on this lady of questionable character who eyes younger men like W.H with growing interest (144j). In *Amoretti* LXXVI Spenser may claim that his love's "fair bosom" is "fraught with virtue's richest treasure" and Drayton may confirm that it is only "virtue that proceeds from thee", Shakespeare's Dark Lady can only turn an angel into a devil. Theirs is a relationship based on hypocrisy, mutual mistrust and carnal desires and "therefore" writes the poet, ".I lie with her, and she with me". They lie to each other and yet co-habit. Nothing Platonic here nor in Sonnet 132 where in return for her physical surrender, Shakespeare vows to proclaim that "beauty herself is black".

This is one of the very few Elizabethan Sonnets where the words "my love" seem more a mockery or perhaps an insult. Slighting comments, open admission of their relationship resting on mistrust and falsehood, do, as intended, shock readers into attention. Love too has received rather harsh treatment. Moreover, though the poet has acknowledged that trust is a binding force, you can feel for yourself that the poet, in this sonnet, is not unhappy with this relationship which is far from stable. Once again, as in Sonnet 130, the purpose it is apparent, is to stand out as a sonneteer with a difference. Shakespeare's contemporaries have yearned for a long-lasting, if not a permanent, relationship but he is quite content, so it seems, with the arrangement that keeps him and his lady together, with each satisfying the other's physical needs.

Form : Language and Style

The opening lines are powerful enough to shock readers into attention. This is what one may call an 'unadorned' sonnet whose strength lies in its bareness. The only word play and punning is confined to the couplet. The use of 'we' suggests a strange togetherness. Mark the balancing of euphemistic utterances such as "my days are past the best" with harsh expressions like "her false-speaking tongue". Read the couplet aloud, especially line 13 and hear the see-saw rhythm that finds itself repeated in the incantation "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (*Macbeth* I i 11-12).

As in most of the sonnets in this Unit the three quatrains witness the step-by-step unfolding of the poet's problems and worries while the couplet with which the sonnet ends records his acceptance and resignation. The rhyme scheme is that of a Shakespearean sonnet—at ->b cdcd efef gg.

Conclusion

The Dark lady is Shakespeare's mystery woman disturbing the poet just as much as she disturbs her critics. A siren, she arouses dark desires in men who come in contact with her and it is her open promiscuity that makes it easy for an Elizabethan sonneteer to focus on female wildness and wickedness. She is as unattractive in looks as in deeds; yet like Lechery she tempts and lures men. What makes the two Dark Lady Sonnets, which do not idealize a mistress, academically interesting is Shakespeare's attitude, his refusal to be shattered either by her betrayal or by her falsehood at a time when Wyatt renounces love; Drayton spells out an ultimatum, "make her love, or, Cupid, be thou damned" or decides to kiss and part; and Campion implores "Thou are not sweet, unless thou pity me."

Comments

Shakespeare has been targetted both by readers of de-colonized countries like South Africa and by feminists, irrespective of creed and colour, for his portrayal of both W.H. and the infamous Dark Lady. Read the excerpts given below carefully.

Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,
"To put fair truth upon so foul a face?"

(Sonnet 137)

For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as *black* as hell, as dark as night.

(my emphasis. 147)

The colour black is here synonymous with depravity and baseness. A black face can match only a black soul. With Edward Said one may hold that to these English poets all good lies in Europe; the East and Africa seat wickedness and house men and women of questionable character, suspicion further raised by the colour of their skin and the absence of *whiteness*. Sonnet 127 with its apparent claim that "now is black beauty's successive heir" sounds too hollow to pacify Africa, nettled beyond endurance by constant insinuations, both insulting and unjust. The Dark Lady, as her name, description and nature imply, is the 'Other', the representative of an alien culture to be derided and scorned. Not for nothing have scholars accused Shakespeare of being a racist and after Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* in particular, it is *whiteness* that is now open to probes and analysis.

Feminists brand Shakespeare a misogynist, a sexist for the unflattering picture of the

lady and the glorification of the young man. Note this brand of ‘othering’. See how even when the issue is ‘fairness’, the youth’s colour is superior to a woman’s whose whiteness, enhanced by cosmetics, may strongly suggest duplicity and deceit (20, 21). The youth is admonished only for small offences such as not transferring his beauty to his children, for patronizing a rival poet and a corrupt lady (144) whereas the *dark* lady can hope for no redemption for her tainted spirit and dark soul. Had it been difficult for Shakespeare, we wonder, to accept female superiority evident from the dark lady’s power of enticing men who come in contact with her?

Word Notes

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. made of truth | honest; faithful in love; unable to lie. With a pun also on ‘maid of truth’, a true virgin. |
| 1 -2 When my...she lies | the poet pretends to believe her lies. Is there a religious implication that it is possible to believe the impossible only on the basis of faith? |
| 3. untutored youth | inexperienced young man. |
| 4. Unlearned...
subtleties. | unaware of the ways of the world and falsehood. See Sonnet 66. |
| 5. Thus..young | The poet’s vanity is fed when he thinks that the mistress considers him young. |
| 6. days are past
the best | past his prime, no longer young. |
| 7. simply...tongue | like a simpleton he accepts her lies. This may also refer to the glib lying of the fork-tongued Serpent to tempt Eve. |
| 8. On both-
suppressed: | both the parties lie, one about his age and the other about her fidelity. Both pretend to believe each other. |
| 9-10 But wherefore
old | Why can’t she confess her untruthful ness and he his age? |
| 11. love’s best habit
seeming trust | the best thing to do or the best adornment for lovers.
to appear loyal or seem trustworthy and pretend to be devoted. |
| 12. and age...told | one who is old and still in love need not have his age pointed >>ut. ‘Age’ has been personified in this line. |
| 13. therefore...with
me | A compromise has been struck and we tell lies easily or we cohabit in spite of being aware of each other’s falsehoods. |

14. in our faults with our shortcomings, her false nature and his old age.
 and...flattered be through the lies that we utter we console ourselves and come to
 an understanding. Our needs are satisfied.

3.6 □ Conclusion

As stated earlier, the Shakespearean Sonnet Sequence is a class by itself following no pattern and refusing to be compared/slotted with others of the Age. But do not treat the Sequence as a separate entity within the canon for they do team up with his plays. Read the more mellow verses and seek parallels in his comedies but for female frailty and betrayal turn to *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida* and the later plays. Mark the attitude of the poet-speaker in his Sonnets. Sidney stoops before a Stella, Daniel before a Delia but Shakespeare pleads for a young man's favour at the risk of jeopardizing his own reputation. In *Between Men* Eve Sedgwick does come to the poet's rescue by christening this longing as "homosociai". But suspicion lingers, for while others woo their ladies with honeyed words, Shakespeare, with eyes only for his 'lovely boy', is strongly critical of his mistress whom he denigrates with relish and delight.

This Sonnet Sequence, as you must have realized, has been so designed by the creator that, with its mysterious dedicatee and addressees of both genders and the poet's attitude towards them, it stands apart from its contemporaries. And William Shakespeare's experiment has yielded results, for no scholarly work on English sonnets, even now, can be considered quite complete without a mention of these "sugr'd sonnets" with which Shakespeare has redefined sonneteering and which even after four centuries continue to satisfy most palates with its marked difference in flavour and taste.

3.7 □ Questions

1. Write a brief note on the Elizabethan Sonnet.
2. Make a comparative study of Shakespeare's W.H. and the Dark Lady.
3. Comment on Shakespeare's use of the Love and Time theme in the six sonnets prescribed for your study.
4. What idea do you form of W.H. and the poet's attitude towards him from your reading of the four W.H. Sonnets?
5. "The Dark lady continues to baffle readers for she stands alone, different from her counterparts." Do you agree? Justify your answer.
6. Critically analyse any one sonnet of your choice.
7. Attempt a comparative study of Shakespeare and Spenser as Sonneteers.

8. Write a note on Shakespeare's language, style and the Shakespearean Sonnet form.
9. The Sonnets help us to look into Shakespeare's life and mind." Discuss.
10. Evaluate Shakespeare as a Sonneteer of Renaissance England. Do you think that new light can be cast on these poems written more than four hundred years ago?

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Unit -1 □ The Metaphysical Poetry

Structure

- 1.1 Objectives**
- 1.2 Introduction**
- 1.3 Characteristics**
- 1.4 Intellectualism**
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- 1.6 Argument and Persuasion**
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- 1.12 The Extasie : Introduction**
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- 1.13 Questions**
- 1.14 Suggested Readings**

1.1 □ Objectives

In the following pages you will find analyses of what makes Metaphysical Poetry ‘metaphysical’ sections on characteristics of Metaphysical wit, conceit, Donne’s poems, Marvell’s and Herberts—all of which will help give you a clearer and deeper understanding of the Metaphysical Poets.

1.2 □ Introduction

The ‘term’ metaphysical was first used by Dr. Samuel Johnson in his Lives of the poets, to a group of early 17th century poets who attempted to analysis the most delicate shades of their psychological experiences in verse. However, the suggestion for this phrase, came to him from Dryden, who writing in 1663, said of Donne- “He affects the metaphysics...”. But we must not understand the term ‘metaphysical’ in its strict philosophical sense (i.e. verse dealing with metaphysics; poetry dealing with a philosophical conception of the universe and of the role of the individual in this drama of existence. In this sense Lucretius and Dante wrote ‘metaphysical’ poetry. Actually, the term ‘metaphysical’ has been in use to describe the special characteristics and features of the poetry of John Donne and of those who were influenced by him, viz.-George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Carew, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvel I and Robert Cowley. Almost all modern critics of John Donne and his school, from H.J.C. Grierson to Helen Garden and R.G. Cox have used this term and analysed its various features. But it must be remembered that Dr. Johnson actually intended the adjective ‘metaphysical’ to be pejorative. He attacked these poets’ lack of feeling, their learning and the surprising range of images and comparisons, they used. But finally after three centuries of neglect and disdain, the Metaphysical poets have come to be highly praised and have been very influential in the 20th Century British poetry and criticism.

1.3 □ Characteristics

Modern criticism of the Metaphysicals dates from Grierson’s anthology and T.S. Eliot’s praise of their fusion of thought and feeling. Though subject to intense scrutiny, the Metaphysical poetry has fared well with later critics-some have remarked on the Metaphysicals’ expression of the Renaissance individualism, namely that they present a private, not a public world. Many have concentrated upon stylistic features: recondite imagery, dissonance, logical argumentative structure, equivocal nature, and dramatic qualities. Most favoured of all has been the view that ‘Wit’-imaginative intelligence shown in verbal and intellectual agility-is a defining characteristics. Now, let us consider the main characteristics of the Metaphysical poetry in detail.

1.4 □ Intellectual ism

The Elizabethan poets dealt with certain conventional themes, namely madrigals and love lyrics, in a style of conscious artifice and verbal elaboration. On the other hand, the Metaphysical poets exercised their intellectuality to convey their subtle experience. Actually, these poets were learned, cultivated and intelligent men of rich and wide experience, engaged in the various fields of life. Their world around them was far more complex and it was moving fast-the old simple style was not enough to explore the complex ideas and feelings of the changing phenomena of their world. The worn-out Petrarchan conventions, 'the melodious fluency of Spenser's verse', 'the sweetness-long-drawn out' and the 'decorative use of classical mythology' failed to express the sensibility of the new age in which various warring emotions and sentiments were rife. There was a cry everywhere for "More matter and less words". Anthony Bacon commended Tacitus because he "hath written the most matter with the best conceit in the fewest words of any Historiographer". The metaphysical poets incorporated their learning and intellectual training in their art of poetry. They used words which call the mind into play, rather than those which speak to the senses or 'evoke an emotional response through memory'. They used words which have no associative value. These erudite poets drew their imagery from such varied sources as Medieval theology, Scholastic philosophy, the Ptolemaic astronomy of the Middle Ages, and the concept of the contemporary science and belief. Their mind move with great agility from one concept to another and it requires an equal agility on the part of the readers to follow them. We are at once reminded of Helen Gardner-"Poetry, like prose, should be close packed and dense with meaning, something to be "chewed and digested", which will not give up its secrets on a first reading" (**The Metaphysical Poets**). Jim Hunter rightly calls this intellectualism-'brainwork in poetry'.

1.5 □ The Metaphysical Conceit

Probably the most commented-upon device of the poetry of the Metaphysical is the conceit. Originally meaning a concept on image, 'conceit' came to be the term for figures of speech which establish a striking parallel-usually an elaborate parallel-between the two very dissimilar things or situation. In other words, a conceit is a highly exaggerated, fantastic and absurd comparison. As Dr. Johnson pointed out much earlier that in a conceit most heterogeneous elements are 'yoked by violence together'. Helen Gardner explains this device as a 'Comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or at least is more immediately striking'. Generally, comparison between two unlike things shows for the time being a likeness; but a comparison becomes a conceit when it impresses upon our mind the image of likeness while we are every moment conscious of the basic unlikeness.

It is generally supposed that the conceit was a curious innovation of the metaphysical poets. But the Elizabethan poetry, both dramatic and lyric, is full of conceits. But an Elizabethan conceit differs from a metaphysical conceit in several ways. Obviously unlike an Elizabethan conceit, a metaphysical conceit is learned. The Metaphysical poets exploited all knowledge-commonplace orotund, practical, philosophical, ethical or theological, true or fabulous-to form these conceits. But there is another equally important difference between the metaphysical poets and the Elizabethans, regarding the use of conceits. The Elizabethans used their conceits as ornaments; their conceits were merely decorations. But the Metaphysical conceit is organic rather than decorative: that is to say it embodies and develops the thought rather than merely embellishes it. They are a part of the poet's technique of communication, amplification and persuasion. Helen Gardener rightly sums up-". In a metaphysical poem, the conceits are instruments of definition in an argument or instrument to persuade. The poem has something to say which the conceit explicates or something to urge which the conceit helps to forward".

In sharp contrast to both the concepts and figures of the conventional Petrarchism is John Donne's **The Flea** a poem that uses a flea who has bitten both the lovers as the basic reference for its argument against the lady's resistance against the importunate lover. But the most famous conceit is Donne's Parallel (in **A valediction: Forbidding Mourning**), between the continuing relationship of his and his lady's soul, despite their physical parting, and the co-ordinated movements of the two feet of a draftsman's compass. Joan Bennet rightly pointed out that the metaphysical conceit at its most complete is a focal point at which emotion, sense-impression and thought are perceived as one.

1.6 □ Argument and Persuasion

As was mentioned earlier, an intellectual quality is an important feature of the Metaphysical poets. Invariably, the demand is made of the reader that the connection of ideas be grasped. The reader is held to a line of argument, a sequence of thought where every stage of development must be accurately followed and understood, if the poem is to make sense. Here, for example, is Donne's *The Flea*. Here the argument is a clever syllogism which pretends to trap the unwary listener who accepts the analogies or premises Donne offers. He delights the reader by his daring analogies, but in particular by his ingenuity in making so much out of so little.

“Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
Me is sucked first, and now sucks-thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods—mingled be;
Confess it, this cannot be said
A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhood,

Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood—made of two.
And this, alas, is more than we would do”.

“The premise upon which the poet bases his argument is a dexterous analogy between a flea bite, with the mixture of bloods in one flea, and the nature of sexual intercourse and the theology of marriage. From this equation he elaborates a flashing wcm-play which makes the flea the sacramental agency of their union and suggests that their lives and even children, are bound up within the flea. As an exercise in philosophical sleight of hand the poem appeals by its audacity and by its challenge to the reader to argue with the speaker”.

1.7 □ Concentration

Helen Gardner reminds us of Keats’ advice to pause upon a passage and “Wander with it, and muse upon it and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it and dream upon it...” and says that this dictum can be applied profitably to much poetry, particularly to the ‘Elizabethan and Romantic poetry’. But Metaphysical poetry demands that we pay attention and read on; it does not aim at providing, to quote Keats, ‘a little region to wander in’, where lovers of poetry may pick and choose. A metaphysical poem tends to be brief and is always closely woven. Specially Donne possesses this art of concentration and a sinewy strength of style and that is why they were regarded by many younger writers as their masters. Behind much of the metaphysical poetry, lies the classical epigram and therefore it will be proper to agree with Helen Gardner that ‘a metaphysical poem is an expanded metaphor’. Due to this epigrammatic quality, a metaphysical poem becomes witty and sometimes it suffers from artificial skilfulness or cleverness which verges on Ostentatiousness. Unlike a Spenserian stanza, stanza of Donne and Herbert-”is more like a limiting frame in which words and thoughts are compressed, a box where sweets compacted lie”.

1.8 □ Wit

In his life of Cowley in which Dr. Johnson first of all employed the term ‘metaphysical’ for Donne and his followers, he used the word ‘wit’ to describe the special quality of their poetry. Actually the word ‘wit’ is a ‘tricky’ term having various sorts of implications in various ages. The ‘wit’ of the metaphysical poets can be described in the words of T.S. Eliot-, “as a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience...simple, artificial, difficult or fantastic”. Wit is seen in the poet’s perception of similarity in dissimilarity and the ingenuity with which he brings together and combines opposites, whether in words or in ideas Donne’s poetry is

the poetry of wit, the poetry which uses the intellect to build up complex unities of thought out of materials which are conventionally non-poetic. By the just position of ideas which seem at first sight unrelated and even violently discordant and by their reconciliation in the heart of the poet's imagination, a more concrete and organic body of truth is achieved than is attainable by the use of familiar comparisons. For example, in *The Canonization*, the lovers are uniquely compared to the phoenix and to the eagle and the dove. Again in *The Flea*, Donne's verbal dexterity is seen in his likening the body of the flea, which has sucked his mistress' blood and his own, to their bridal bed. Actually, Donne's wit can be constantly seen in his poems-in his use of puns, word play, oxymoron and paradox-they abound in all his poems.

The 'wit' of the metaphysical poets shows their love for learning, but Dr. Johnson's saying that "to show their learning was their whole endeavour" seem not to be justified. Actually, the wide learning of the metaphysical poets had become a part of their poetic sensibility and it proved itself of extreme value of them-in discovering universal analogy in the midst of the most diverse kind of experience.

1.9 □ Element of Drama

The dramatic elements of the metaphysical poetry cannot be compared with the excellence of the Elizabethan drama, yet the relation of the former with the latter cannot be denied. Both Shakespeare and Donne used in their works, words commonly used by people in their daily life, which could render a heightened sense of dramatic situations. Specially in his songs and sonnets Donne used the technique of dramatic monologue-(in a dramatic monologue, the poet takes the speaker in a highly critical moment of his life and through his utterances, makes him lay bare his motives, ideas and principles. The dramatic monologue, like a soliloquy, is predominantly argumentative and analytical, but while the soliloquy is a sort of private debate, a dialogue of mind with itself, a dramatic monologue permits the presence of some other characters who generally keep mute. The rapid and subtle shift of mood within these poems shows the natural conversation and behaviour, the mystical devotion of the lover, his banter; and the externalisation of his cynicism and mystical devotion intensify the dramatic situation of his poems.

Even the opening lines of the metaphysical poems are dramatic e.g.-

"I wonder, by my troth, what thou, - and t
Did till we loved"?

(Donne: The Good-Monow)

"O" Who shall, form this Dungeon, raise A soul inslav'd so many ways?"

(Andrew Marvell: A Dialogue between the Soul and Body.)

1.9.1 Humour

Jim Hunter deplors the fact that poetry has been compartmentalised into the categories of light, tragic, lyrical, elegiac and some other forms. It is ridiculous to do so just as we may “allot specialised jobs to people” and may not “expect to meet much versatility in accomplishment”. But the metaphysical poets are surely the exception. They on the one hand deal with serious philosophical themes and on the other they blend with them touches of humour. Humour makes a metaphysical poem sober and charming. A serious philosophical statement, coloured with a subtle sense of humour makes some of these pomes most unique and interesting. Andrew Marvell’s **To his Coy Mistress** or George Herbert’s **Easter wings** are two brilliant examples.

1.9.2 Unified Sensibility

T.S. Eliot (**The Metaphysical Poets: Selected Essays**) finds this peculiar quality in the metaphysical poets because they, he says, combined thought and feeling-the two components of sensibility. Their poems were the product of intellectual effort as much as of emotion. A poem, abounding in exuberant emotional outburst lacking the conscious effort on the plane of thought to tame it shows a dissociation of sensibility, dissociation of thought and feeling from each other. Shelley’s **Ode to the West Wind** and Beethoven’s Fifth **symphony** are such examples. They loosen the chains of their emotions which sweep violently. But in the words of T.S. Eliot, the metaphysical poets possessed mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience”. They tried to “find the vertical equivalent for states of mind and feeling”. In Chapman and Donne there is “a direct sensuous apprehension of through, or are-creation of thought into feeling. “To Donne,” a thought was an experience; it modified his sensibility”.

1.9.3 Diction and Versification

In reaction to the sweet sounding words and phrases and hackneyed poetic diction of the early Elizabethan poetry, the metaphysical poets developed their own poetic diction. Their words are often prosaic, rugged and ‘unpoetic’. They prefer colloquial speech to the sweet cadence of sensuous poetry. Their diction is restrained and simple, but its most remarkable quality is that the etymological meaning of their words changes, particularly in the hands of John Donne; no word conveys its commonly accepted connotations. Without a detailed study of the contextual meaning of a word, its full force cannot be discovered-we shall have to suspend our modern interpretation of a word and work out from the text what a word in a poem stands for; they thus serve the purpose of the poet of fuse thought and feeling.

Their versification is coarse and jerky. Their rhythm is dictated by the meaning. It functions as a stimulant to the intellect; it is intricate to the extent of complexity of thought; it is revealed only when the shifting of emphases, according to the sense it carries, is grasped.

1.10 □ The Canonization: Introduction

The Canonization is a popular love poem of John Donne, expressing his positive attitude, towards love, an attitude of satisfaction and deep absorption in a love relationship. In **The Canonization**, there is a factual evidence of its dating-, the evidence being of ruined fortune and the king's face. Donne's fortune was ruined after he married Anne More in 1601 and was dismissed from the service of Sir Thomas Egerton and at least for next fourteen years, Donne had to undergo severe economic crisis. So the ruin of the fortune of Donne has its relevance to his love affair and in this sense the expression- "... ruin'd fortune flout' in **The Canonization** has immense importance in our endeavour in fixing the time of composition of the poem. The reference to 'king's face' in the poem is also significant. After the death of Queen Elizabeth, King James-I had acceded to the throne in 1603. Hence, it can be confirmed that the poem must have been written sometime in or after 1603, that is, by the time Donne has already tasted the aversion of the world to love. In this poem he reacts sharply and yet cunningly and confidently against the resentful and hostile demeanour of the World. Here Donne takes his love for Anne More as divine love and in his unique way proves the lovers to be 'Canonized' for love and to inspire even the worldly minded people with intense desire to emulate the two lovers. Though the argument in the poem centres on the love affair of Donne and Anne More, the range of the poem is cosmic. In fact, the whole of the contemporary world and the associated materials that come within the range of Donne's baroque consciousness, are composed into the five stanzas of the poem.

1.10.1 John Donne (1572-1633) : Life and Works

Donne related on his mother's side to Sir Thomas More, was born into a devout Catholic family. Educated at home by Catholic tutors, Donne went at the age of 11 to Hart Hall, Oxford, favoured by Catholics because it had no chapels, so that recusancy attracted less notice. He may later have transferred to Cambridge, but his religion debarred him from taking a degree in either university. In 1593 his younger brother Henry died in prison after being arrested for harbouring a Catholic priest. Somewhere about this time Donne apparently renounced his Catholic faith. He forfeited his chance of a civil career when he secretly married. Anne More, Lady Egerton's niece and daughter of a Surrey landowner. He was dismissed from Egerton's service and briefly imprisoned. Donne's next 14 years were marked by fruitless attempts to live down his disgrace and find responsible employment.

Donne's earliest poems, his satires and Elegies belong to the 1590s. His unfinished satirical epic. *The progress of the soul* bears the date 1601 and some at least of his Holy Sonnets were probably written in 1610-11. His 'Songs and Sonnets' are, however, largely impossible to date even approximately. Of his prose works, *Pseudo-Martyre*, an attack on Catholics who had died for their faith, and an attempt to gain royal favour by encouraging surviving Catholics to take the oath of allegiance to James, was published in 1610; *Ignatius His Conclave* an onslaught on the Jesuits in 1611. *Biathanatos* was a defence of suicide. His sermons appeared after his death in three volumes.

1.10.2 The Thought of the Poem

The speaker blurts out an impatient rebuke to some critic who objects to his being in love and tells him to find some other occupations. The man who is dissuading the lover may attend to his own advancement, but at any rate he should leave the lover undisturbed. In the second stanza, the lover continues the argument for his love, this time in the manner of rhetorical interrogations. He asks what harm his love has caused-have his sighs drowned ships? Have his tears flooded grounds? Does the coldness of his sighs prolong the winter? How does the lover's passion affect the health of society?

Actually this is a sarcastic rejection of the exaggerated claims of sonneteers writing in the Petrarchean tradition (an increasingly degenerate form of hyperbolic praise of a lady, and itemization of the lover's pangs, deriving from Petrarch's sonnet sequence, written to immortalize his beloved Laura).

The world goes about its business, the speaker maintains even though they are in love and he admits that the most unsavoury similes may be applied to them (without reprehension, since it is love which make them what they are). Let them be called 'flies' (for blindly copulating?) On tapers, which at their "Owne cost die" (that is, candles, burning but consuming themselves-based on a common pun of the word 'die' which had a secondary meaning of 'complete the sexual act', a meaning which was itself probably founded on the popular superstition that each sex act shortened one's life by a day). The speaker cannot outdo his accusers in similes. The "Eagle and the Dove" may be found in them (possibly a reference to voracious appetite and peaceful constancy, both of which are aspects of love) and the riddle of the phoenix finds an example in them, since they are two sexes accommodated" to one neutral thing" and -

"We dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love".

Beneath the rather graphic physical accuracy of the image, there is an almost blasphemous level of religious allusion. The phoenix (the fabulous bird which produced its own succession

from the ashes of its funeral pyre) of course “dies and rises the same” in a myth sense, but it is impossible to escape the suggestion of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, which is mystery in the proper religious sense, a sense insisted upon not only by the title (see word-notes), but by the marked religious vocabulary (‘hymns’, ‘hermitage’) which follows. Donne’s witty metaphoric finds its basis, and ultimately derives its meaning, however, from the fact that romantic love had for many years been treated in literature as a ‘religion’ with its own god, saints, hymns, and so forth.

The speaker goes no to say that their ‘legend’ (an account of a saint’s miracles and exemplary deeds) will be fit for sonnets, if not for chronicles, but that a “well wrought urne” (sonnet) befits the greatest ashes as finely as a ‘halfe-acre tombe’ (chronicle) and that by these hymns (sonnets written in their praise by succeeding generations of lovers) all men will recognise that they have been “Canonized for love”. Future ages will ‘invoke’ them (that is, ask them to intercede at the throne of the deity) as lovers:

“Who did the whole worlds soule-
contract, and drove
Into glasses of your eyes
(So made such mirrors and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize,)
Countries, Towns, courts: Beg from- above
A patterne of your love!”

The ‘religion of love’ figure is here complicated by the Platonic concept, of the world-soul (in Plato’s **Timaeus**, the physical world is regarded as a total organic body with its own soul) and the celestial Ideas, or forms which are the model (Patteme) for all earthly phenomenal. Donne is suggesting, through metaphor, the intensity of a love which, by excluding all external considerations, in effect creates its own little world - the idea or heavenly blueprint which is worthy for all aspiring lovers. There is also a neat union of the physical and the abstract in the image of the lovers’ eyes as ‘mirrors’ (to be interpreted either as an optical device or as a speculum, a common title for encyclopedic works) which ‘epitomize (either bring rays of light to a focus or gather together in summary form as in an encyclopedia) ‘Countries, Townes, courts’. (Based on the Coles)

Actually **The Canonization** is based upon a Paradox. (A PARADOX IS A STATEMENT WHICH SEEMS ON ITS FACE TO BE SELF-contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to make good sense). Love of women is profane activity denounced by the church, but here the poet daringly treats profane love, as if it were divine love. The lovers who are absorbed in the pleasure of the flesh are cunningly described as saints. But the poet cleverly argues his case and succeeds in establishing that devoted lovers are the saints’ - saints’, saints of love’. They

have renounced the world for each other and the body of each is an hermitage' for the other. They are as devoted each other as a saint is to God and so they are the saints of love. Thus a physical relationship is treated like a spiritual relationship. We are not sure whether it is a parody of Christian sainthood. But if it is at all parody, it is intensely a serious parody.

1.10.3 Wit in the Poem

The element of wit is present in *The Canonization* to an appreciable context. The poem contains many devices of wit, the apostrophies of the first stanza, the exaggerations and rhetorical questions of the second and the associations and conceits in the remaining stanzas. It is also to be observed that there is in the poem that particular kind of wit that results from the complexity of attitudes and wide range of experience. It begins with a tone of impatient defiance and ends on a note of pious exultation. The breathlessness of the opening stanza with short clipped phrases gives way ultimately to the invocation and prayer. Thus even in the space of one short poem, the poet's mood and tone shift from one extreme to the other and the rhythm and diction keep pace to the swift transition.

1.10.4 Important Annotations and Explanations

1. **Title:** *The Canonization* - the fact of being regarded as a saint; achieving sainthood. The central conceit of the poem is that the lovers have been canonized - declared to be saints - for love. "This could imply that their love had a mysterious and unearthly quality or that they have been martyred by those who have excluded them from the public world or that their loving has been so vigorous they have become martyrs by wearing themselves out". (Richard Gill).

l1. - The words are addressed to some friend or well-wisher who tries to dissuade the poet from love-making. Here the lover is imploring in the name of God because secular love is being regarded as a saintly pursuit in parody of Christian sainthood. This colloquial outburst and many other lines in the poem are remarkable for the abruptness of their speech rhythm

l2-13: **Palsy** - Paralysis

Gout - a disease affecting the joints, commonly associated with old men.

Just as it is useless for the friend to chide the poet for suffering from gout, palsy or baldness, so it is equally useless to try to dissuade him from love-making.

l17: **King's real or his stamped face**

The critic of the poet's love either may contemplate the real face of the king by taking a job at the court or contemplate the king's face stamped on coins by hoarding wealth. He must not waste time in trying to disturb the poet's love-making. It is a fine example of Donne's wit. The language of economic is a recurring feature in the poem (e.g. - 'stamped face'). The

reference to the king shows that the poem was written after the accession of king James I in 1603.

l 10. - Alas, alas - more a parody of the cynically critical attitude of the people towards lovers than a regret over his own plight.

l 10-*l* 18. “What is the poet’s attitude in this stanza? If there is scorn in his voice, is it still directed at the disturber, or is his real target are those petrarchan love-poets who write of lovers’ tears drowning the world or their sighs creating storms.”

l 15. **plague Bill** - list of the victims of plague. The plague broke out in epidemic form in London in the last decade of sixteenth century and again in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

Actually, the lover here argues that the heat of his passion has not affected the health of the society, his fevers have caused pain and sufferings only to his own self. Others have remained unaffected by his fevers; then why the people is so much antagonistic to his love-making?

l 20. “**Call her one, mee another fly**” -

- They are both like flies, because they are constantly moving round each other without any specific purpose. They love each other equally well.

l 21. - The lovers are also like tapers (candle) for they burn themselves out for each other’s love. A.B. Chambers argues that the reference is to the taper- fly which burns itself to death by approaching a flame. Both the flies and taper consume themselves and enjoy their being consumed to death. Donne uses the same sort of image in *Elegy VI*, (U-17-19) -

“.... so, the taper’s beamy eye

Amorously twinkling beckons the - giddy fly,

yet burns his wings...”.

l 21. - ‘die’ - Here, as elsewhere in Donne, there may be a play upon ‘die’ meaning the loss of sexual power after sexual consummation. The-traditional idea that sexual intercourse shortens life may also be present.

l 22. - The eagle is a bird of prey while dove is mild and innocent. But the poet and his beloved combine in themselves qualities of both of the eagle and the dove. They are both gentle like the dove and both of them are also tyrannical and destructive like the eagle. They prey upon each other and destroy each other. Their love is self-consuming. Out of this image of death comes the image of resurrection of life- “the riddle of the phoenix”.

l 23-*l* 27 - The phoenix is a mythical bird which every thousand years rejuvenated itself by being consumed in flames and rising renewed from its ashes. This riddle of the phoenix

makes more sense because of their love. Though the lovers are two separate personalities, their love makes them one and so they make a neutral sex like the phoenix (the phoenix is not one bird, but, two birds - the male and the female - forming a single neutral whole.) Again like the phoenix, they as one are consumed by fire of their physical sexual passion, and out of each sexual consummation they are reborn afresh in their life.

Actually the phoenix image was used in Sicilian poetry and later by Petrarch and many Petrarchans, Petrarch made the bird the image of his desire for Laura; Daniel hopes that his verse, phoenix like, will renew his Delia's life, Giles Fletcher wishes to rise again like the phoenix from the fire of his love and Sidney refers to Stella as a phoenix. So Donne has plenty of precedents in this respect, but his brilliant originality lies in using the bird to mean both the lovers and makes it hermaphroditic.

l 28-l 33. The lovers can die by love, a possibility suggested in the preceding stanza. The suggestion in these lines is that when the lovers have died, their legends may not be fit for tombs and hearse, but it will be fit for verse. Their names and deeds may not be recorded in history (possibly a dig at the traditional books of history which centre on only the deeds of misdeeds of the king on rulers) but their unique love story will be celebrated in sonnets.

It should be noted that the word 'hearse' here has not the modern meaning - i.e. car for bearing the coffin. Here it means a temple-shaped structure used in royal funerals, decorated with banners and lighted candles and on which it was customary for friends to pin short poems or epitaphs. Again James Reeves points out a clever conceit in the term".... "sonnets pretty rooms". Here, Donne is using 'sonnets' loosely for love poems, and 'stanza' in Italian means a 'room'.

1.11 □ Questions

Essay type questions :

1. Comment on the appropriateness of the title of 'The Canonization'?
2. What is a 'conceit'? Comment on the use of conceits in the poem.
3. Consider 'The Canonization' as a metaphysical poem.
4. Elaborate Cleanth Brooks' statement that Donne daringly treats profane love as if it were divine in 'The Canonization' ?

Short and objective type questions :

1. "The phoenix riddle hath more wit/By us." Bring out the meaning of the phoenix metaphor.
2. What does the word 'die' in the poem connote?

3. To whom does the poet address in the opening line of 'The Canonization' ?
4. Why do the lovers in the poem compare themselves to fly and taper?
5. For what do the eagle and the dove stand?
6. Name the disease images used in the poem.

1.12 □ The Extasie : Introduction

This poem is, in the words of Jack Daglish, a 'remarkably subtle work', perhaps the most famous of Donne's love poem'. By blending passion and ratiocination, the poet has presented a very fine case of the claim of the body in love. The soul may be responsible for the spiritual or platonic love, but the importance of the body, the physical basis of love cannot be denied. K.W. Gransden is right when he says that the word 'sex' is used in its modern sense for the first time. The two lovers meet and love and their souls leave their bodies and parley with one another. But physically, they are not aware of what they did before they loved each other: it was not sex which provoked them to do so. This is the state of 'ecstasy'. This is purely the platonic conception of love arising out of physical relationship and culminating in the heavenly love. The idea of the parleying of the two souls is also derived from Plato's idea of the immortality of the soul, its rebirth and 'new knowledge of the personality achieved by the fusion of the two lovers' souls'.

Their mystery of love will not be revealed unless the bodies of the lovers meet. The body is the book in which it lies hidden. The influence of the old Philosophy (in the Platonic idea of love and sex) and the Renaissance materialism (in the emphasis on the body) are evident in this poem. A.W. Gransden refers to this when he writes—

“The passion and certainty of **The Extasie** make it one of Donne's greatest poems. At the same time, the realistic 'earthing' of the poem's metaphysic which takes place at the end makes it one of the most metaphysical (in the literary sense) of all his poems”.

Actually in **The Extasie**, Donne achieved for once the perfect reconciliation of the physical and the spiritual which he was seeking in so much of his poetic thought.

1.12.1 The Extasie : Commentary

Extasie refers strictly to the supreme mystical experience in which the soul, transcending the body, attains the vision of God. This idea, defined by the neo-platonists and taken over by Christian philosophers, in common 17th century use, simply meant the mind's transcendence over the body. The poem opens with the two lovers, “one another's best”, sitting on a river bank their hands joined by a balme” which suggests an anointment of religious, magical

properties, and looking into one another's eyes. 'Entergraft', used to describe their intertwined hands, is a word of Donne's invention to emphasize the reciprocal force of the gesture. Their souls, however, have gone out of their bodies, and are compared to two armies, going forth to meet upon a battlefield, while their physical bodies, made pure by love, lie still upon the bank. This 'extasie' shows them the true source of their love as making one soul out of the mixture of the disparate elements in both of them. *Love* brings them together and as a transplanted violet, causes the one new soul, composed of both their former ones, to overcome loneliness. Yet the poet continues, this one new soul knows of what it is made, that is, that it must descend to the body for affections. Their bodies, while not the sum total of the lovers, are nonetheless their 'spheres' as they themselves identify with the intelligences or souls. They owe their bodies thanks, for that is how they were first drawn to each other and consider them alloy rather than 'drosse' - Heaven's influence on man operates in such a way that body must first encounter body before their souls can merge. Spirit, he says, holds together both man's body and his soul, and pure lovers' souls must descend to the sense and their faculties, "Else a great prince in prison lies"-i.e. the undiscovered bodily, provience. so they must turn to their bodies for further instruction. Although 'love's mysteries' are nurtured in the soul, the body is love's 'Booke', that is the source from which all mysteries of love are revealed. And the poet concludes, if anyone should have overheard or seen them, he will observe small change when the lovers do go about occupying their bodies - the same spiritual quality of their love will be in operation. This is a reversal of the first part of the poem, in which the lovers' spirits had left their bodies to negotiate on some purer ground. However, the logical argument has progressed to the point where soul needs body as the instrument of its revelation, and so the ending is the logical result of the initial argument. Donne's images are drawn from the realm of mystical experience, Christian philosophy, the neo-Platonic and scholastic psychology; they serve to progress the argument of his love poem.

The poem has a pastoral setting in keeping with the usual practice of the poets in the age. More specifically, Donne, in this respect, might have been influenced by Fulke Greville and Sidney. But Donne is unique in his setting of the poem. In *The Extasie*, the outdoor and the pastoral are mixed up with the indoor and the human. There is a fertile bank, but it is raised high like a pillow. The raised bank is the resting place of the violet, but the lovers are also resting close-by, in each other's arms. Thus through the use of suitable imagery, the indoor and the outdoor worlds are intertwined and human interest is imparted to the pastoral setting.

The *Extasie* is a clear expression of Donne's philosophy of love. Donne agrees with Plato that true love is spiritual - it is a union of the souls. But unlike Plato, Donne does not neglect the demand of the body. It is the body which brings the lovers together. Love beings in sensuous apprehension and spiritual love follows upon the sensuous. So the claims of body must not be ignored. Union of bodies is as essential as the union of souls. Thus Donne goes

against the teachings both of Plato and the Christian Divines in his stresses on the sensuous and physical basis even of spiritual love. In this respect he comes close to the Renaissance and modern point of view.

Again the philosophical background to the poem is provided by a number of medieval beliefs and philosophies and we have to understand those philosophies for a better appreciation of the poem.

Firstly, the idea of the soul, coming out of the body is derived from Plotinus who believed that in a blessed moment, the soul comes out of the body and converses with the Divine or the Over-Mind and ultimately the process resolves the mystery of life. In *The Extasie* the souls of the lovers come out of the body and the body remains inert, motionless. However, in the poem, the souls of the two lovers do not hold converse with the Over-Mind. They converse with each other and the mystery of love is thus resolved.

Secondly, the medieval theologians believed that the soul of man was formed of three different elements i.e. - (i) the animal or sensual soul, closely bound to the body; (ii) the logical or reasoning human soul; (iii) the intellectual soul. All these ideas are in background of Donne's poem. For example -

“But as all severale soules contain
Mixture of things they know not what,
Love, these mixt soules doth mix again
And makes both one, each this and that”.

Thirdly, there was a belief in medieval Physiology that the blood contains certain power and spirits which together make up the soul. These 'spirits' or powers were thus regarded as intermediaries between the soul and the body. This faith is reflected in the following lines of Donne -

“As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
The subtile knot, which makes us - man”.

Lastly, the conception of the older Ptolemaic system of astronomy is also incorporated into the poem.

“But O alas, so long, so faree
Out bodies why doe wee forlocare?
They are ours, though they are not wee :-
- Wee are,
Th' intelligences, they the sphere”.

The Intelligences were the spirits which inhabited the different heavenly bodies and imparted motion to them. Thus the souls are the Intelligences which inhabit the body and impart to it life and movement.

In conclusion, we agree with the opinion of George Williamson about the nature of love in Donne's "**The Extasie**". Donne like Herbert is interested less in the moral casuistry of love than in the philosophical question provoked by it. Hence the debate in **The Extasie** may involve body and soul, rather more than two lovers".

The Extasie is one of Donne's best metaphysical poems in the literary sense because conceits are drawn from several branches of learning as well as in the philosophical sense because it is concerned with such metaphysical problems as the union of souls and the relationship between soul and body. Moreover, it tries to fashion a language adequate for souls. The music of the verse - its rhythms and cadences - might be said to be so refined that it sounds like the elevated language a soul might be imagined to use.

1.13 □ Questions

Essay type questions :

1. How does Donne combine thought and feelings in 'The Ecstasy' ?
2. Consider 'The Ecstasy' as a metaphysical poem.
3. Do you agree with the view that 'in many respects 'The Ecstasy' resembles some of the love and the religious poems.
4. How is the dichotomy between physical and spiritual love resolved?
5. Comment on the use of conceits in the poem.
6. Would you call 'The Ecstasy' a poem of seduction? Give reasons for your answer.

Short and objective type questions :

1. What is meant by the term 'ecstasy' ?
2. What is the function according to a contemporary medical; idea of 'balm' in the human body?
3. What is actually meant by the 'intelligences'?
4. Explain the meaning embodied in 'Else a great prince in prison lies?'
5. What is referred to as 'subtle knot'?
6. Why do the souls of the lovers return to their bodies?
(Hints for the answer: The respective souls return to their bodies so that the lovers 'may

find in physical union the mystery of love revealed, just as the mystery of religion is revealed in the Bible.’)

7. What does the ecstasy at last ‘unperplex’ ? (/l. 29)
8. Why do the lovers owe their bodies ‘thanks’? (/l. 53)
9. What do you mean by the term ‘subtle knot’? (/l. 64)
10. Is there any significance in the comparison of the body to ‘book’?

1.14 □ Suggested Readings

1. John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*. (1981)
2. Gardner, Helen, ed. *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*. (1962)
3. Leishman, J.B., *The Monarch of Wit*. (1962)
4. *The complete English Poems of John Donne*; ed. Patrides, C.A.