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## Unit 1: Chaucer to Shakespeare

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4. John Donne’s A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

John Donne

Life:

- John Donne was born on **1572 in London, England.**
- He was born into a **Catholic family** during a strong anti-Catholic period in England.
- Donne’s father, also named **John,** was a prosperous London merchant.
- His mother, **Elizabeth Heywood,** was the grand-niece of Catholic martyr, Thomas More.
- In 1601, **Donne secretly married Anne More,** with whom he had twelve children.
- His occupations were **Poet, Priest, Anglican Minister and Lawyer.**
- He was also a gifted artist in **sermons and devotional writing.**
- He studied at **Oxford and Cambridge University.**
- However, **Donne could not obtain a degree from either institution** because of his Catholicism, since he refused to take the Oath of Supremacy required to graduate.
- On 6 May 1592 he was admitted to **Lincoln's Inn,** one of the Inns of Court.
- He is considered the pre-eminent **representative of the metaphysical poets.**
- At age 25, Donne was appointed **private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton,** Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England.
- He held his position with Egerton for several years and it's likely that around this period Donne converted to Anglicanism.
- **He became an Anglican priest,** although he did not want to take Anglican orders.
- In 1615 Donne was awarded an **honorary doctorate in divinity from Cambridge University.**
- He became a **Royal Chaplain** in the same year, and a **Reader of Divinity at Lincoln's Inn** in 1616, where he served in the chapel as minister until 1622.
- Donne was appointed **Vicar of St. Dunstan’s-in-the-West. In 1621, he was appointed the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London.**
- He also served as a **Member of Parliament** in 1601 and in 1614.
- He delivered his famous **Death’s Duel sermon** at the Palace of Whitehall before King Charles I in February 1631.
- **Izaak Walton,** who wrote a biography of Donne in 1658.
Works:

Poetry:

- Satires (1593)
- Songs and Sonnets (1601)
- Divine Poems (1607)
- Pseudo-Martyr (1610)
- An Anatomy of the World (1611)
- Ignatius his Conclave (1611)

- **Biathanatos (1608)**
  - During this middle period Donne wrote Biathanatos, which was published after his death by his son in 1646.

- **Pseudo-Martyr (1610)**
  - His Pseudo-Martyr (1610) accused Roman Catholics of promoting false martyrdom (when a person or a group of people suffer or are killed for the sake of their religion) for financial gain.

- **Ignatius His Conclave (1611)**
  - Ignatius His Conclave (1611) was popular in both English and Latin versions: it brilliantly mocks the Jesuits but is interesting today because it reflects the new astronomy of Galileo (1564–1642) and toys with the notion of colonizing the moon.

- **Devotions upon Emergent Occasions (1624)**
  - This book became quite famous for its phrase "for whom the bell tolls" and for the golden statement that "no man is an island".

Donne's works are noted for their strong, sensual style and include sonnets, love poems, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons.

- His subjects are love, sexuality, religion and death.
- His poetry is noted for its vibrancy of language and inventiveness of metaphor, especially compared to that of his contemporaries.
- He wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems.
These features, along with his frequent dramatic or everyday speech rhythms, his tense syntax and his tough eloquence, were both a reaction against the smoothness of conventional Elizabethan poetry.

His elaborate metaphors, religious symbolism and flair for drama soon established him as a great preacher.

His early career was marked by poetry that bore immense knowledge of English society and he met that knowledge with sharp criticism.

Another important theme in Donne's poetry is the idea of true religion, something that he spent much time considering and about which he often theorized.

Donne's style is characterised by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies and dislocations.

He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits.

He belongs to the literary movement of Metaphysical poetry.

John Donne was the founder of the Metaphysical Poetry.

Dryden first coined the term ‘Metaphysics’.

Dr.Johnson first used the term ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ in his work ‘Life of Cowley’.

The group of metaphysical poets includes John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marwell, Abraham Cowley, Robert Southwell, Richard Crawshaw, Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Carew.

Metaphysical conceit is a metaphor of two different ideas combined into one often through use of imagery.

Donne took part in the Earl of Essex's crusades against the Spanish in Cadiz, Spain, and the Azores in 1596 and 1597 and wrote about this military experience in his poems "The Storm" and "The Calm."

Donne continued to write worldly poems and, about 1609 or 1610, he produced a powerful series of "Holy Sonnets," in which he reflected on sickness, death, sin, and the love of God.

In 1610, John Donne published his anti-Catholic polemic ‘Pseudo-Martyr’, renouncing his faith.

In it, he proposed the argument that Roman Catholics could support James I without compromising their religious loyalty to the pope.
This won him the king's favor and patronage from members of the House of Lords.

The change can be clearly seen in "An Anatomy of the World" (1611), a poem that Donne wrote in memory of Elizabeth Drury, daughter of his patron, Sir Robert Drury of Hawstead, Suffolk.

The poem "A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day", concerns the poet's despair at the death of a loved one.

Having converted to the Anglican Church, Donne focused his literary career on religious literature.

He quickly became noted for his sermons and religious poems.

The lines of these sermons and devotional works would come to influence future works of English literature, such as Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls, which took its title from a passage in Meditation XVII of Devotions.

Donne is considered a master of the metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery.

An example of this is his equation of lovers with saints in "The Canonization".

One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" where he compares two lovers who are separated to the two legs of a compass.

Donne's works are also witty, employing paradoxes, puns, and subtle yet remarkable analogies.

His pieces are often ironic and cynical, especially regarding love and human motives.

John Donne's poetry represented a shift from classical forms to more personal poetry.

Donne is noted for his poetic metre, which was structured with changing and jagged rhythms that closely resemble casual speech.

He wrote ‘Devotions upon Emergent Occasions’ published in 1624.

This work contains the immortal lines “No man is an island”

He also composed poetic letters, funeral songs, and witty remarks, which were published after his death as ‘Songs and Sonnets’.

The first two editions of John Donne's poems were published posthumously, in 1633 and 1635, after having circulated widely in manuscript copies.
Death:

- He died on 31 March **1631 in London, England**.
- Donne was buried in old St Paul’s Cathedral, where a memorial statue of him was erected with a Latin epigraph.
- His memorial survived in the **Great Fire of London in 1666**.
- It was believed that Donne suffered from stomach cancer which was the most prominent reason of his death.
- He died on March 31, 1631 and was buried in **St. Paul’s Cathedral**.
- A memorial statue of him was erected at the Cathedral with a Latin epigraph engraved on it.

Quotes:

- “He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses” – **John Dryden**
- "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging" – **Ben Jonson**
- “The wit of metaphysical poets is a kind of Discordia concerns, a combination of dissimilar images” – **Dr. Johnson**
- “Metaphysical poetry is the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together”
  - **Dr. Johnson**
A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

Text

1) As virtuous men pass mildly away,
   And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
   The breath goes now, and some say, No:

2) So let us melt, and make no noise,
   No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
   To tell the laity our love.

3) Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
   Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres,
   Though greater far, is innocent.

4) Dull sublunary lovers' love
   (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
   Those things which elemented it.

5) But we by a love so much refined,
   That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
   Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

6) Our two souls therefore, which are one,
   Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
   Like gold to airy thinness beat.

7) If they be two, they are two so
   As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
   To move, but doth, if the other do.
8) And though it in the center sit,
    Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
    And grows erect, as that comes home.

9) Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
    Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
    And makes me end where I begun.

Background:
- "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is a **metaphysical poem** by John Donne.
- It was written in 1611 or 1612 for his wife Anne before he left on a trip to France/Germany with **Sir Robert Drury**.
- It is a 36-line love poem that was first published in the 1633 collection ‘**Songs and Sonnets**’.

Stanza 1:
- **Virtuous men are not afraid of death.**
- They gently whisper to their souls to leave their bodies.
- It is only **ordinary people** who are terrorized by the approach of death.
- They are alarmed when the virtuous man dies slowly, but surely.
- Not being sure whether the virtuous man is dying or reviving, they keep oscillating between despair and hope.
- Some observe that the virtuous man's breath is going and some say that it is not.
- The observers are tense and panic-stricken.
- But the **virtuous man remains calm**.
- He is not at all affected by the prospect of impending death.

Stanza 2:
- In the same way, the poet wants his wife not to be agitated by the prospect of his separation.
Usually, **floods of tears are shed and tempestuous sighs** are heaved by the wife when her husband is about to depart from her.

But poet considers such an action as very **coarse and profane**.

The poet does not want his wife to make ah noisy scenes in order to impress the laity about the strength of her love for her husband.

Instead of crying noisily, **the poet and his wife melt and fuse together quietly**.

**Stanza 3:**

- **Earthquake** terrifies people.
- People keep calculating the extent of the destruction caused by the earthquake.
- They keep talking of the dangers portended by the earthquake.
- All people are alarmed the outbreak of the earthquake.
- But nobody is frightened by the **movement of planetary bodies**, though it is certainly of far greater importance than the earthquake.
- Similarly, only **sensual lovers** are pained at the prospect of separation.
- But the people like the poet and his wife whom have risen above sensuality are not at all perturbed by the thought of separation.

**Stanza 4:**

- **Dull, worldly lovers** are interested only in sensual pleasures.
- Since there is only a physical appetite they cannot bear with physical separation.
- Physical separation removes the very basis of their love.

**Stanza 5:**

- But the poet and his beloved have risen above physical love.
- **Their love is refined and purged of the physical appetite**.
- Theirs is a **Platonic**, mental love.
- **Their minds are inter-united** and so they are not affected by physical separation.
- Even when the husband is far away from his beloved he does not miss nor does he long for, the eyes, lips and hands of his beloved. For, he is mentally one with her.
Stanza 6:

- Since the souls of the poet and his wife are united, physical separation does not cause a breach or gap in their love.
- On the other hand, when they are physically separate, their love only grows and expands.
- Gold, when it is beaten up, grows thin and wiry but is not at all destroyed.
- Similarly, the separation of the lovers only deepens their love.

Stanza 7:

- The separation of the husband and the wife is only like the separation of the twin legs of a compass.
- One foot of the compass remains fixed and the other foot rotates.
- The fixed foot does not make any attempt to move away its original position.
- Similarly, the wife’s attachment to her husband remains constant.

Stanza 8:

- Though the fixed foot of the compass remains unmoved in the centre, yet it leans towards the rotating foot of the compass.
- It becomes erect only when the rotating leg comes back to it.

Stanza 9:

- The wife will maintain a similar relationship to the poet.
- He moves away from his wife like the rotating leg of the compass.
- She will remain firm in her attachment to him like the fixed foot of the compass and so the rotating foot of the compass is able to draw a perfect circle.
- Her firmness makes the husband just and also wins him back to her.
John Donne’s A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

1) About whom did T.S. Eliot write “A thought to him was an experience”? (NET – D06)
   (A) Herbert  (B) Marvell  (C) Donne  (D) Crashaw

2) T.S. Eliot uses ………… poetry as the most prominent example of united sensibility and thought. (PG – 2012)
   (A) Andrew Marvell’s  (B) George Herbert’s
   (C) Henry Vaughan’s  (D) John Donne’s

3) John Donne is called a ………… poet. (PG – 2013)
   (A) Spiritual  (B) Metaphysical  (C) War  (D) Patriotic

4) Who defines metaphysical poetry as “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together”? (PG – 2013)
   (A) T.S. Eliot  (B) John Donne  (C) Dr. Johnson  (D) Dryden

5) In addition to his poetry, Donne is also famous for his ………….. (PT – 2006)
   (A) plays  (B) essays  (C) satires  (D) sermons

6) The ascension of King James I in ……… inaugurated the Jacobean age. (NET – J13)
   (A) 1600  (B) 1601  (C) 1603  (D) 1609

7) Who was the originator of metaphysical poetry?
   (A) Ben Jonson  (B) Dr. Johnson  (C) John Dryden  (D) John Donne

8) Which title of Ernest Hemingway was taken from Donne’s Meditation?
   (A) A Farewell to Arms  (B) The Old Man and the Sea
   (C) The Sun Also Rises  (D) For Whom the Bell Tolls

9) Which poet and critic coined the term “metaphysical poet”? 
   (A) Samuel Johnson  (B) John Donne  (C) Henry Vaughan  (D) Ben Jonson

10) Which poet was the chapter of “Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets” based on in which the term ‘Metaphysical Poets’ was used by Samuel Johnson?
     (A) Abraham Cowley  (B) John Donne
     (C) Richard Crashaw  (D) George Herbert
11) Who said about John Donne, “He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign…”?
   (A) Samuel Johnson    (B) John Dryden    (C) Thomas Traherne    (D) Robert Southwell

12) Who was the Dean at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, England?
   (A) Andrew Marvell    (B) Henry Vaughan    (C) John Donne    (D) John Dryden

13) Who defined the wit of Metaphysical Poets as “…a kind of Discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike.”
   (A) John Dryden    (B) Samuel Johnson    (C) T.S. Eliot    (D) Herbert Grierson

14) Donne could not obtain a degree from Oxford and Cambridge University because

   (A) he did not complete his graduate course
   (B) he refused to take the Oath of Supremacy
   (C) he wrote against University on religious issues
   (D) he did not support the king James I

15) In A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning, how does Donne describe the death of virtuous people?
   (A) Silent    (B) Slow    (C) Painful    (D) Clamorous

16) In ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’, Donne compares his love and devotion to his beloved with……….. (DIET – 2009)
   (A) needle and thread    (B) the feet of the compass
   (C) magnet and iron    (D) none of these

17) Donne wants to separate from his beloved without ………..
   (A) information    (B) happiness    (C) tear-floods    (D) harms and fears

18) “But trepidation of the spheares, Though greater farre, is innocent”. Here ‘trepidation of the spheares’ means……..
   (A) Movement of planetary bodies    (B) Earthquake
   (C) Movement of Sun    (D) Movement of Moon

19) Donne addressed his wife Anne More on the occasion of his departure to …………along with Sir Robert Drury.
   (A) Rome    (B) France    (C) Ireland    (D) Scotland
20) The love between poet and his beloved is………..
   (A) Physical       (B) Spiritual       (C) Materialistic       (D) Philosophical

21) Donne says that his love with his wife would cover a large area due to separation just as
   …………………when beaten, does not break but expands wider and wider.
   (A) Iron       (B) Silver       (C) Gold       (D) Bronze

22) The poem ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’ was first published in …………..
   (A) Sermons       (B) Meditations       (C) Satires and Elegies       (D) Songs and Sonnets

23) Donne compares his beloved to …………………
   (A) the fixed foot of a compass       (B) the roaming foot of a compass
   (C) the fixed foot of a divider       (D) protractor

24) In the opening stanza of ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’, the speaker compares his
   leave-taking to…………
   (A) leaves scattered by wind
   (B) the futile attempt to entrap a deer
   (C) the devastation caused by an earthquake
   (D) the parting of the soul from virtuous man at death

25) What is the basic theme of the poem, ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’?
   (A) Union of two lovers       (B) The speaker’s fear of death
   (C) Heavenly bodies       (D) Holy marriage

26) ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’ is a …………………poem.
   (A) Metaphysical       (B) Allegorical       (C) Dramatic       (D) Narrative

27) “Dull Sublunary lovers’ love, (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit”. Here ‘Dull sublunary
    lovers’ refers to………
   (A) Spiritual lovers       (B) Earthly lovers
   (C) Psychological lovers       (D) Intellectual lovers
28) Donne says that the separation from his wife does not break of love because theirs is a……….. love.

   (A) platonic  (B) romantic  (C) sensual  (D) sexual

29) The poem is written on the occasion of…………

   (A) the poet’s anniversary  (B) the death of poet’s child
   (C) the poet travelling away from his wife  (D) the death of poet’s friend

30) Donne says that his beloved’s firmness makes a ‘circle just’. Here circle is a symbol of………

   (A) Perfect life  (B) Imperfect life  (C) Unhappy life  (D) Happy life
4. John Donne’s A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

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| 6 | C | 16 | B | 26 | A |
| 7 | D | 17 | C | 27 | B |
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| 9 | A | 19 | B | 29 | C |
| 10| A | 20 | B | 30 | A |
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Faculty:
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- BRTE - 2010,
- PG TRB - 2013,
- SET (English - 2012),
- NET (English - 2012),
- NET (Education - 2015),
- SET (Education – 2016),
- Engg TRB – 2017 (State First)