

Unit-II - MODERN LITERATURE (1600-1798)

Poetry (For Detailed study)

John Donne: Canonisation, The Ecstasie

John Donne

- ❖ John Donne was born on January 22, 1572, in London, England.
 - ❖ He is known as the founder of the Metaphysical Poets,
 - ❖ Metaphysical Poets, a term created by Samuel Johnson, an eighteenth-century English essayist, poet, and philosopher. T
 - ❖ he loosely associated group also includes George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and John Cleveland.
 - ❖ The Metaphysical Poets are known for their ability to startle the reader and coax new perspective through paradoxical images, subtle argument, inventive syntax, and imagery from art, philosophy, and religion using an extended metaphor known as a conceit.
 - ❖ Donne reached beyond the rational and hierarchical structures of the seventeenth century with his exacting and ingenious conceits, advancing the exploratory spirit of his time.
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- ☑ Born into a Roman Catholic family, Donne's personal relationship with religion was tumultuous and passionate, and at the center of much of his poetry.
 - ☑ He studied at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities in his early teen years.
 - ☑ He did not take a degree at either school, because to do so would have meant subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles, the doctrine that defined Anglicanism.
 - ☑ At age twenty he studied law at Lincoln's Inn.
 - ☑ Two years later he succumbed to religious pressure and joined the Anglican Church after his younger brother, convicted for his Catholic loyalties, died in prison.
 - ☑ Donne wrote most of his love lyrics, erotic verse, and some sacred poems in the 1590s, creating two major volumes of work: *Satires and Songs and Sonnets*.
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- ⇒ In 1598, after returning from a two-year naval expedition against Spain, Donne was appointed **private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton**. While sitting in Queen Elizabeth's last Parliament in **1601, Donne secretly married Anne More**, the sixteen-year-old niece of Lady Egerton. Donne's father-in-law disapproved of the marriage.
 - ⇒ As punishment, he did not provide a dowry for the couple and had Donne briefly imprisoned.
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- ❖ Donne suffered social and financial instability in the years following his marriage, exacerbated by the birth of many children.
 - ❖ He continued to write and published the *Divine Poems* in **1607**.

- ❖ In *Pseudo-Martyr*, published in 1610, Donne displayed his extensive knowledge of the laws of the Church and state, arguing that Roman Catholics could support James I without compromising their faith.
- ❖ In 1615, **James I pressured him to enter the Anglican Ministry** by declaring that Donne could not be employed outside of the Church.
- ❖ He was appointed Royal Chaplain later that year.
- ❖ His wife died in 1617 at thirty-three years old shortly after giving birth to their twelfth child, who was stillborn.
- ❖ **The *Holy Sonnets*** are also attributed to this phase of his life.
- ✧ In 1621, he became dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral. In his later years, Donne's writing reflected his fear of his inevitable death.
- ✧ He wrote his private prayers, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, during a period of severe illness and published them in **1624**.
- ✧ His learned, charismatic, and inventive preaching made him a highly influential presence in London.
- ✧ Best known for his vivacious, compelling style and thorough examination of mortal paradox
- ✧ John Donne died in London on March 31, 1631.

Poetry

Satires (1593)

Songs and Sonnets (1601)

Divine Poems (1607)

Pseudo-Martyr (1610)

An Anatomy of the World (1611)

Ignatius his Conclaue (1611)

The Second Anniuersarie. Of The Progres of the Soule (1611)

An Anatomie of the World (1612)

Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions (1624)

Deaths Dvell (1632)

Iuvenilia (1633)

Poems (1633)

Sapientia Clamitans (1638)

Wisdome crying out to Sinners (1639)

The Canonization

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,

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Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plaguy bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for Love.

And thus invoke us: "You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;

You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
 Into the 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 pattern of your love!"

Summary of "The Canonization"

- ❖ The speaker asks his addressee to be quiet, and let him love.
- ❖ If the addressee cannot hold his tongue, the speaker tells him to criticize him for other shortcomings (other than his tendency to love): his palsy, his gout, his "five grey hairs," or his ruined fortune.
- ❖ He admonishes the addressee to look to his own mind and his own wealth and to think of his position and copy the other nobles ("Observe his Honour, or his Grace, / Or the King's real, or his stamped face / Contemplate.")
- ❖ The speaker does not care what the addressee says or does, as long as he lets him love.
- ❖ The speaker asks rhetorically, "Who's injured by my love?" He says that his sighs have not drowned ships, his tears have not flooded land, his colds have not chilled spring, and the heat of his veins has not added to the list of those killed by the plague. Soldiers still find wars and lawyers still find litigious men, regardless of the emotions of the speaker and his lover.
- ❖ The speaker tells his addressee to "Call us what you will," for it is love that makes them so. He says that the addressee can "**Call her one, me another fly,**" and that **they are also like candles ("tapers"),** which burn by **feeding upon their own selves ("and at our own cost die").**
- ❖ In each other, the lovers find the eagle and the dove, and together ("**we two being one**") they illuminate **the riddle of the phoenix**, for they "die and rise the same," just as the phoenix does—though unlike the phoenix, it is love that slays and resurrects them.
- ❖ He says that they can die by love if they are not able to live by it, and if their legend is not fit "for tombs and hearse," it will be fit for poetry, and "We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms."
- ❖ A well-wrought urn does as much justice to a dead man's ashes as does a gigantic tomb; and by the same token, the poems about the speaker and his lover will cause them **to be "canonized," admitted to the sainthood of love.**
- ❖ All those who hear their story will invoke the lovers, saying that countries, towns, and courts "beg from above / A pattern of your love!"

Form

- ❖ **The five stanzas of "The Canonization" are metered in iambic lines** ranging from trimeter to pentameter; in each of the nine-line stanzas, the first, third, fourth, and seventh lines are in

pentameter, the second, fifth, sixth, and eighth in tetrameter, and the ninth in trimeter. (The stress pattern in each stanza is 545544543.)

- ❖ **The rhyme scheme** in each stanza is **ABBACCCDD**.

The Ecstasy: John Donne

- ❖ **The poem deals with Donne's metaphysics of love.** It presents the **communion of two souls of a loving couple on a grassy turf beside a river, untouched by carnal passions.** The physical aspect of love-making finds no mention here. **The lovers are engrossed in the thought of an abiding union and are animated by the impulse to coalesce and fuse into one.** The poem presents the lovers in a trans like state when both of them appear to be verging on being oblivious of their carnal life.
- ❖ **Donne's typical method is to present an idea in terms of concrete images.** The images become emotional equivalent of his thought. Let us see how he presents the unforgettable idea of a beatific experience through the image of 'extasie' reinforced by a wealth of images culled from different spheres of life.
- ❖ **There is a pun on the title word, 'extasie'.** In the modern sense it refers to the trans-like state the lovers have entered into. **But the original Greek meaning takes us to the heart of the poem.** The Greek word, 'ekstasis' means 'going forth'. The souls go out of their respective bodies. They have a dialogue ruminating over their communion, and surprisingly enough, **there is a bystander who is within a convenient distance from there. This third person is no impediment in their love-making on the spiritual plane. He appears to be device invented by the poet,** adding substance to their highfalutin experience, either by testifying to the veracity of the experience or by also coming under the spell of their ecstatic vision. **Here the poet's mood is romantic, bringing in the violet, a conventional image of love, reclining on the pregnant bank, but the pictorial description of the visual beauty simply enhances the intensity of their love without any romantic gloss, and it is much in keeping with the mood of the poet.** The expression, 'balm' also rightly finds company in the sweet –smelling violet evoking the right ambience. This image of the violet which has a visual beauty recurs later in the poem with a changed connotation without any romantic association. Here we have the botanical expression, 'grafting', as a variation in a different way on the image, 'to engraft our hands', used at the outset of the poem. **The two images: the images of engrafting hands and transplanting of a violet-work in conjunction with each other.** The former implies the removal of their separateness and their emerging into a single identity and the latter speaks of the strengthening of the weaker breed of the violet in a richer soil. It is symbolic of the creation of a new soil that is bereft of all weaknesses.

The Ecstasy

Where, like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.

Our hands were firmly cemented
 With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
 Our eyes upon one double string;
So to'intergraft our hands, as yet
 Was all the means to make us one,
And pictures in our eyes to get
 Was all our propagation.
As 'twixt two equal armies fate
 Suspends uncertain victory,
Our souls (which to advance their state
 Were gone out) hung 'twixt her and me.
And whilst our souls negotiate there,
 We like sepulchral statues lay;
All day, the same our postures were,
 And we said nothing, all the day.
If any, so by love refin'd
 That he soul's language understood,
And by good love were grown all mind,
 Within convenient distance stood,
He (though he knew not which soul spake,
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
Might thence a new concoction take
 And part far purer than he came.
This ecstasy doth unperplex,
 We said, and tell us what we love;
We see by this it was not sex,
 We see we saw not what did move;
But as all several souls contain
 Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love these mix'd **souls doth mix again**
 And makes both one, each this and that.
A single violet transplant,
 The strength, the colour, and the size,
(All which before was poor and scant)
 Redoubles still, and multiplies.
When love with one another so
 Interinanimates two souls,
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,
 Defects of loneliness controls.
We then, who are this new soul, know

Of what we are compos'd and made,
For th' atomies of which we grow
Are souls, whom no change can invade.
But oh alas, so long, so far,
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They're ours, though they're not we; we are
The intelligences, they the spheres.
We owe them thanks, because they thus
Did us, to us, at first convey,
Yielded their senses' force to us,
Nor are dross to us, but allay.
On man heaven's influence works not so,
But that it first imprints the air;
So soul into the soul may flow,
Though it to body first repair.
As our blood labors to beget
Spirits, as like souls as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtle knot which makes us man,
So must pure lovers' souls descend
T' affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great prince in prison lies.
To'our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love reveal'd may look;
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book.
And if some lover, such as we,
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still mark us, he shall see
Small change, when we're to bodies gone.

Summary of "The Ecstasy"

- **In the opening**, Donne is describing **the scenery of a river** or lakeside bank. **He describes himself and another as pillows on a bed as they lie there.**
- The second stanza describes **how their hands were held together and "cemented" with perspiration**. He then **describes beams coming out of their eyes** and twisting like thread which holds their eyes together as with a single, double thread.

- The third stanza Donne states that the lovers' **hands were all they had to make themselves into one**, further, he says that **the reflections in their eyes** were their only way to propagate.
- Stanza four **uses a metaphor of armies to describe their souls. The two are equal armies, and Fate keeps victory uncertain**, which is like the way the lovers' souls are suspended.
- Furthering the **army metaphor**, stanza **five has the souls negotiating as their bodies lie like memorial statues**. They remained that way the whole day and said nothing to each other.
- The next stanza postulates whether any **man can be so refined in love that he can understand the language of the soul**, and furthermore, if that "good" love of the mind stood at a convenient distance.
- Stanza seven relates **that the two souls now speak as one**; they may take a concoction and leave that place better off than when they arrived.
- The eighth stanza states **that their state of ecstasy "unperplexes" or simplifies things, and they can see that it was not sex that motivated them**.
- The ninth stanza furthers the idea that **two lovers are one soul** which is mixed in each a part of the other.
- The next stanza uses a metaphor of a transplanted violet to show how two souls can be inter-animated and how this "new" soul can repair the defects of each of the individual souls.
- The eleventh stanza again **furtheres the idea of two souls as one**. It says that the lovers know what they are made of, and that no change can invade them.
- The next stanza asks **why the bodies are left out**, and it says that although **the soul is the intelligence, the bodies are the sphere which controls them, like the celestial spheres**.
- Stanza thirteen **thanks the bodies for their service of bringing the soul to be and for yielding their senses**. The bodies are not impurities that weaken, but rather alloys that strengthen us.
- The next stanza relates **the method of how the body and soul are related**. Heaven's influence does not work on man like other things. It imprints the air so that people's souls may flow out from the body.
- Stanza fifteen tells **how our blood works to make "Spirits" that can help the body and soul together make us man**.

- **Stanza sixteen postulates that lovers' souls must give in to affections and wits that our bodies provide. If not, we are likened to a great prince in prison.**
- The next stanza says that **we turn to our bodies so that weak men may look at them**, but that love's true mysteries are grown in the soul. **The body is just the souls' "book."**
- The last stanza sums up the scene by **speculating how they would be regarded by another lover in their "dialogue" of the combined souls**. Donne says that **this lover will see a small change when their bodies are gone**.
- The images in *The Ecstasy* focus on **the relationship of the soul to the body**.
- Donne **begins with visual images of water, hands, perspiration and things that are physical in nature**.
- He proposes that two lovers' souls are formed into one and uses metaphors of alloys, celestial spheres and even a violet to make his point.
- Furthermore, Donne describes the process at work in the body by relating the mechanisms of blood and air.
- All of the images between lines 13 and 75 relate to the union of two souls, which creates a third soul that transcends the sum of the two.