

BEGC-107: British Poetry and Drama - 17th & 18th Century
Assignment July, 2024 & January, 2025 Sessions
(Based on Blocks 1 - 4)

Course Code: BEGC-107/ 2024-2025
Max. Marks: 100

Section A

1. Write short notes on any four of the following. 20
- a) Metaphysical Poetry
 - b) Heroic couplet
 - c) Pastoral elegy
 - d) Mock epic
 - e) satire

Section B

Attempt any four questions. All questions carry equal marks.

- 2. Explain with examples, the mock-heroic elements in Mac Flecknoe. 10
- 3. Discuss The Duchess of Malfi as a tragedy of transgression. 10
- 4. Discuss the reasons for the rise of the novel form in the 18th century. 10
- 5. Elucidate the central idea of "An Essay on Man." 10
- 6. Comment on the superhuman and religious elements in Mac Flecknoe. 10

Section C

Attempt any two questions. All questions carry equal marks.

- 7. Would you agree that Dryden and the age that he lived and wrote in brought about a change in English poetry? Give a reasoned answer. 20
- 8. Differentiate between Classicism and Romanticism, giving examples. 20
- 9. Do you agree that Lycidas is an example of pastoral elegy? Discuss 20

Section - A

Q2 Write short note on any four of the following.

(a) Meta Physical Poetry :-

Meta Physical Poetry is a term that refers to a style of poetry that emerged in the early 17th century, primarily in England. This style is characterized by its intellectual rigor, use of elaborate and inventive metaphors known as conceits, and its focus on philosophical, spiritual and abstract themes. The term "metaphysical" was later coined by Samuel Johnson, who noted the poet's tendency to employ complex and often startling comparison that linked seemingly unrelated ideas, creating a unique blend of thought and emotion.

The leading figure of metaphysical poetry is John Donne, whose work is known for its dramatic, often colloquial tone and intricate use of language. His poems delve into themes such as love, morality and the nature of God, blending personal experiences with deep

philosophical reflection. Other notable meta-physical poets include George Herbert, who is known for his religious and devotional verse, Andrew Marvell, who wrote about the tensions between body and soul, and Henry Vaughan, whose work often focused on mystical and visionary experiences.

Metaphysical poetry is distinct for its use of paradox, irony and wordplay, as well as its exploration of the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds. This style of poetry remains influential for its ability to engage both the intellect and the emotions.

(6) Heroic couplet :-

Heroic couplets are pairs of rhyming lines in iambic pentameter, typically consisting of ten syllables each, with a rhythmic pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables. This form of verse popularised English literature during the 17th century and 18th centuries, notably by poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer, John Dryden and Alexander Pope. Heroic couplets are often used in epic and narrative poetry, which is why they are termed "heroic", drawing on their association with themes of heroism, grandeur and elevated subject matter.

Each couplet typically expresses a complete thought or idea, leading itself to clarity and precision. The rhyme scheme (AA, BB, CC) and the metre provide a harmonious and formal structure, making heroic couplets suitable for satire, moral philosophy, and poetic argument.

Alexander Pope masterfully employed heroic couplets in his satirical work like "The Rape of the Lock" and "An Essay on Man", using the form's elegance and discipline to convey wit, irony and profound observations.

(k) Pastoral Elegy is A pastoral elegy is a form of poetry that combines the themes of pastoral literature with the traditional elements of an elegy. This genre is characterized by its idealized depiction of rural life and nature, often using shepherds and simple countryside settings as symbols to explore themes of loss, mourning and lamentation.

Pastoral elegies typically mourn the death of a person, who is often represented as a shepherd or someone deeply connected to the nature, and express simpler, more innocent time.

The form dates back to classical antiquity, with Theocritus and Virgil being among the earliest to blend pastoral and elegiac elements. However, it gained prominence in English literature with poets like John Milton, whose famous poem "Lycidas" is a quintessential pastoral elegy mourning the death of a fellow poet. The poem combines the idyllic imagery of pastoral life with reflections on mortality, the fickleness of fortune, and the hope of resurrection.

(d) Mock Epic :-

A mock epic is also known as a mock-heroic poem, and elevated language of classical epic poetry to depict trivial or mundane subjects humorously. By employing the conventions of epic literature - such as invocation of the muse, lofty descriptions, extended simile, and the depiction of heroic deeds - mock epic highlight the absurdity or perversity of the topic, thus providing a satirical commentary on contemporary society, politics or human nature.

The purpose of mock epic is both entertain and critique. By contrasting the grandeur of the epic form with the triviality of its subject matter, it exposes the pretension and folly of its character and by extension, the society they represent. The mock epic's tone is often ironic, and its humour arises from the disparity between the high style and the low subject matter.

One of the most famous example of a mock epic is Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock", which satirizes a real-life incident - a quarrel over a lock of hair by "farming it" as a grand, epic struggle.

Section - B

Attempt any four questions. Ans

Q2 Explain with examples, the mock-heroic elements in Mac Flecknoe.

Ans "Mac Flecknoe", written by John Dryden in 1682, is a prominent example of a mock-epic or mock-heroic poem that uses the style and conventions of classical epic to satirize a contemporary subject.

Mock-Heroic Elements in "Mac Flecknoe" :-

i) Epic Language and Style :-

Dryden employs the lofty and formal language typical of epic poetry. He begins with an "invocation," similar to how classical epics like Homer's Iliad or Virgil's Aeneid start by invoking their muse. However in "Mac Flecknoe", this language of a king is used to describe the succession of a kingdom of dullness and nonsense, creating a ironic contrast.

ii) Parody of Heroic Conventions :-

The poem mimics the structure of an epic, complete with a hero's

succession. In this case, the "hero" Thomas Shadwell, is ironically celebrated for his stupidity and lack of talent.

(iii) Satirical Allusions:-

Dryden makes references to epic literature and classical mythology but subverts them for comedic effect.

The poem's mock-serious tone implies that Shadwell's incapacity is as momentous as the exploits of real epic heroes.

(iv) Grand Setting for Low Subjects:-

In traditional epics, the setting is vast and heroic.

Dryden, however, places Shadwell in a decaying city representing the land of nonsense and mediocrity, turning the typical epic landscape into a backdrop of dereliction and decay.

Example :- (i)

"All human things are subject to decay,
And, when Fate summons, monarchs must
obey."

This elevated style is typical of epics like those by Homer and Virgil, which often start with invocations to the Muse or a statement of the poem's grand theme. Here Dryden uses this style

to speak about the mundane and petty matter of literary dullness, setting up the ironic contrast.

(Ex) "A nursery of poets sprung about,
Where learned dullness ever loves to shoot;
Where Bentley late tempestuous went to bowl,
And Macer lay entranced amidst his stall."

This parody of a royal court or a grand setting typical in epics is instead filled with figures representing literary incompetence and the triviality of Shadwell's literary dominion.

Conclusion :-

Through these mock-heroic elements, Dryden effectively uses the elevated style of epic poetry to ridicule Shadwell's literary abilities, turning the conventions of grandeur and nobility on their head to highlight the mediocrity and absurdity of his rival.

Q3

Discuss The Duchess of Malfi as a tragedy of transgression.

Ans

"The Duchess of Malfi" by John Webster is a Renaissance tragedy that explores themes of power, corruption and the consequences of transgression. The play centers on the character of the Duchess, who defies social norms and familial expectations by secretly marrying her steward, Antonio, and bearing his children. This act of defiance sets in motion a series of tragic events, leading to her downfall and the downfall of those around her.

(2). Transgression Against Social and Class Norms:

The Duchess's decision to marry Antonio, a man of lower social standing, is a direct violation of the rigid class structures of Renaissance society. In the play, marriage across social classes is seen as a threat to the established order.

- Example: In Act I, Scene 1, the Duchess openly defies her brother's command that she should remain a widow. Her act of marrying Antonio in secret is an assertion of personal autonomy and a rejection of patriarchal control.

(2) Sexual Transgression And Female Autonomy :-

The Duchess's marriage is also a transgression in terms of her sexual autonomy. As a widow, she is expected to remain chaste and obedient, particularly because she holds a position of power. Her decision to pursue her desires and marry for love challenges the norms of female sexuality in a patriarchal society that expects women to be passive and controlled by male authority figures.

Example: In Act 3, Scene 2, the Duchess declares, "I am Duchess of Malfi still," asserting her identity and agency even in the face of danger. Her assertion of power and autonomy is a form of transgression because it directly challenges the societal belief that women should be submissive and controlled.

(3) The Uses of Madness And Psychological Torture:-

Madness is a recurring motif in the play, symbolizing the breakdown of order and the consequence of transgression. Ferdinand's descent into madness reflects the physiological impact of his moral corruption.

and incestuous desires. The use of psychological torture on the Duchess, such as the madmen scene in Act 9; highlights the play's exploration of mental and emotional transgression.

Example :- Ferdinand's lycanthropy signifies his

loss of humanity and control, indicating the extent of his internal moral and psychological disintegration. This madness is a direct result of his transgressive behaviour and the guilt associated with his actions.

Q4

Discuss the reasons for the rise of the novel form in the 18th century.

Ans

The rise of the novel in the 18th century marks one of the most significant developments in the history of literature. This period witnessed the emergence of the novel as a dominant literary form, and several interrelated social, cultural, economic and technological factors contributed to its popularity and development.

Below are some key reasons for the rise of the novel during the 18th century:

a) Social and Economic Changes :-

- Rise of the Middle Class : The 18th century

saw the growth of a prosperous middle class, which included merchants, professionals and tradespeople. This group had disposable income, leisure time and a growing interest in education and self-improvement.

- Urbanization :-

The growth of cities like London provided a larger audience for printed materials. Urbanization created a sense of social mobility and a dynamic environment that was reflected in novels.

- (b) Increased Literacy Rates :-

The 18th century saw a significant increase in literacy rate, partly due to the spread of education and the establishment of schools. As more people learned to read, the demands for reading material grew.

- (c) Focus on Individualism and Subjectivity :-

The novel's rise is also linked to the growing interest in individualism and the exploration of personal identity. Novels often centered on the inner lives of characters, their thoughts, feelings and personal development. This focus on individual subjectivity resonated with readers who were increasingly concerned with personal identity.

and self-discovery.

(d) Rise of Periodicals and Socialized Fiction:

The growth of periodicals and newspaper in the 18th century provided a platform for serialized fiction, which helped to popularize the novel. Serialized novels were published in installments, making them more accessible to readers who could not afford to buy books. This format also created anticipation and engagement as readers eagerly awaited the next installment.

(e) Moral and Didactic Purposes:

Many novels of the 18th century had a didactic purpose, aiming to teach moral lessons and promote virtuous behaviour. Authors like Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding used their novel to explore themes of morality, virtue and vice. The novel became a mean of engaging with ethical and social issues, making it only a source of entertainment but also a vehicle for moral instruction.

Q5

Elucidate the central idea of "An Essay on Man".

Ans "An Essay on Man" is a philosophical poem by Alexander Pope, published in 1733-1734. The poem explores human nature, the universe, and the relationship between humankind and the divine. The central idea of An Essay on Man revolves around the concept of the "Great Chain of Being" and humanity's place within this ordered universe.

Pope's message is to promote a sense of humility and acceptance by highlighting the limitations of human understanding and the importance of virtue.

Central Ideas of "An Essay ON Man"

1. The Great Chain of Being :-

One of the poem's fundamental ideas is the concept of the "Great Chain of Being," a hierarchical structure that Pope believed organizes all life and matter. This chain extends from the simplest forms of existence, such as inanimate objects to higher forms of life, like plants, animals, human, angels, and finally, God. Each entity in the chain has its place, purpose and rank and everything is interconnected.

Quote:-

"Vast chain of being! which from God began.

Nature, ethereal, human, angel, man, Beast, bird & fish, insect, what no eye can see.

No glass can reach; from infinite to thee, from thee to Nothing."

Pope emphasizes that this order is divine and that any attempt to question or disrupt this hierarchy leads to chaos. The idea is that humans must recognize their position in this chain and not strive to exceed it or understand the workings beyond their level.

2. Acceptance of One's Place in the Divine Order:

Central to Pope's argument is the idea that humans should accept their role within the divine plan without questioning God's purpose. He promotes the idea of trusting in God's wisdom, implying that the suffering and injustice seen in the world are part of a large, incomprehensible design.

Quote:-

"All nature is but art, unknown to Thee;

All chance, directions which they cannot
not see;
All discord, harmony not understand;
All partial evil, universal good;
And, spite of pride, in erring seconds spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."

This famous line, "whatever is, is right," captures Pope's advocacy for optimism and faith in divine providence. He contends that everything that happens, whether good or bad, has a reason and fits into the larger cosmic order designed by God.

3. The Pursuit of Virtue and Happiness

Another important theme in an Essay on Man is the pursuit of virtue as the path to true happiness. Pope argues that virtue lies in living according to nature and one's place in the divine order. True happiness comes not from wealth, power, or status but from inner contentment and harmony with God's will.

Quote:

"Know then this truth, enough for man to know,
Virtue alone is happiness below."

Pope emphasizes that seeking to live virtuously is the surest way to achieve happiness and fulfilment. This aligns with Enlightenment ideals, which promoted moral behaviour, rationality, and adherence to natural laws.

Section - C.

Attempt any two questions.

Q8

Differentiate between Classicism and Romanticism, giving examples.

Ans

Classicism and Romanticism are two distinct cultural, artistic and intellectual movements that emerged at different periods, each with its own defining characteristics and aesthetic principles.

Classicism :-

a) Time period :- Primarily associated with the 17th & 18th centuries, particularly during the Enlightenment.

5) Focus and Themes :- Classicism emphasizes

"reason, order, harmony and balance". It draws inspiration from the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, focusing on universality, clarity and idealised beauty. It values structures, decorum and adherence to established forms.

(e) Style :- The style is formal, restrained and often follows strict rule or guidelines. Classicist work often employs symmetry and proportion.

Example :-

- Literature :- Alexander Pope's, "The Rape of the Lock" and John Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel".

- Art :- Jacques-Louis David's Painting "Oath of the Horatii" and the architecture of the Parthenon in Athens.

- Music :- Compositions by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Franz Joseph Haydn.

Music - Compositions by Ludwig Van Beethoven,
such as his "Symphony No. 9," and the
works of Franz Schubert.

Romanticism:-

(a) Time period :- flourished in the late 18th and 19th centuries, revelling against the Industrial Revolution and the constraints of Classicism.

(b) Focus and Themes :- Romanticism values emotion,

imagination and individual and the experience. It celebrates the nature, the sublime, and the mysterious, often exploring themes of heroism, passion and the supernatural.

(c) Style :- Romantic works are characterized by

their emphasis on emotions and spontaneity. They often use vivid imagery, dramatic, contrasts and a sense of awe or wonder.

Example :- • Literature : William Wordsworth's

"Lines Composed a few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein".

• Art :- Casper David Friedrich's painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" and Francisco Goya's "The Third of May 1808".

Q9

Do you agree that Lycidas is an example of Pastoral elegy? Discuss.

Ans

Yes, Lycidas by John Milton is widely regarded as a classic example of a pastoral elegy. The Poem, written in 1637 to mourn the death of Milton's college friend Edward King, adheres to the conventions of the pastoral genre, in characters, and theme of loss, lamentation, and nature.

1. Pastoral Setting:

- The Poem is set in an idealised, rural landscape that aligns with the traditions of pastoral poetry.

In Lycidas, Milton invokes image of the countryside, streams and groves, creating a serene and idyllic backdrop. The use of Shepherds & pastoral imagery such as flowers, sheep and nature mirrors the classical pastoral works of Theocritus and Virgil.

2. Lamentation and Mourning:

- Central to the pastoral elegy is the expression of grief.

Lycidas mourns the untimely death of King,

who drowned in a shipwreck. The poem uses various metaphors and symbols, such as nature mourning and the fading of flowers,

to convey a profound sense of loss.

Milton laments the injustice of King's early death and reflect on the nature of Man and the purpose of life.

3. Invocation of the Musæ and Classical Allusions:-

- Pastoral elegies often begin with an invocation to the Musæ, and Lycidas follows this tradition.

Milton calls upon the musæ to help him express his sorrow. The poem is rich with classical allusions, referencing Greek and Roman mythology, which heightens its literary and cultural depth.

4. Critique and Reflection:-

- Although Lycidas follows the conventions of pastoral elegies, it also introduce a critical and reflective tone, particularly in its criticism of the church and clergy.

Milton uses the pastoral framework to critique the corruption within the Church of England, diverging from the purely personal lamentation typical of pastoral elegies to include social and religious commentary.

5. Use of Symbolism :-

The poem employs symbolic elements like the laurel, myrtle and ivy to represent the enduring nature of artistic and poetic achievement. The shipwreck symbolizes the unpredictable nature of life and fate, while the presence of natural elements like flower and fountain symbolize purity and the cyclical nature of life and death.