

Comedy of Humours: Ben Jonson

- Ben Jonson (1572-1637):
 - Bricklayer like his stepfather; soldier in Flanders
 - Actor/playwright with Lord Admiral's Company (1597)
 - Imprisoned for satirical play *The Isle of Dogs* (1597)
 - Killed fellow actor in a duel; avoided execution with his wit
 - Wrote masques for King James's court
 - Quarrelled with stage designer Inigo Jones; rivals Marston and Dekker ("Wars of the Theatres")
 - Celebrity after *Every Man in His Humour* (1598)
 - Literary dictator at Mermaid Tavern
 - Buried upright in Westminster Abbey—epitaph: "O rare Ben Jonson!"
- Comedy of Humours:
 - Technique of characterization
 - Focus on individuals marked by one dominant characteristic, a distortion based on the four "humours" (Blood, Phlegm, Choler/yellow bile, Melancholy/black bile)
 - Sanguine: sociable, pleasure-seeking
 - Phlegmatic: relaxed, quiet
 - Choleric: ambitious, leader-like
 - Melancholic: introverted, thoughtful
 - Robert Burton (*Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621) and other writers popularized humoral physiology.
- Jonson's Works:
 - Scholarly, imaginative, responsive to social, political, artistic issues
 - Revolted alongside Donne against age's artistic conventions; humanist/classical imitations
 - Not only antiquarian—close awareness of lower-class London life
 - *Timber, or Discoveries*: scholarly work / "Commonplace" book (conventional wisdom for Jonson's poetry/plays)

Notable Plays

- *Every Man in His Humour* (perf. 1598; print 1601)
 - Performed by Lord Chamberlain's Men; Shakespeare acted in it
 - Comedy of intrigue, draws from Roman comedy
 - Prologue attacks contemporary drama themes/conventions; explains Humours theory
 - Bobadill—boastful, cowardly soldier
 - Ironic tone, colloquial style
- Plot:

- Kitely's brother Wellbred brings boisterous friends home
- Kitely fears for his wife Dame Kitely's honor
- Edward Knowell (with overly concerned father) woos Kitely's sister Bridget
- Captain Bobadill present; Brainworm (Knowell's servant, father's spy) complicates plot
- Justice Clement resolves issues; Knowell wins Bridget
- Volpone or the Fox (perf. c. 1605, pub. 1607)
 - Wealthy Venetian Volpone pretends to be dying to attract gifts from would-be heirs; servant Mosca assists
 - Voltore (lawyer), Corbaccio (elderly), Corvino (merchant) all try to benefit
 - Satire on greed/corruption; "Legacy hunters" trope from Roman literature
- Epicene or the Silent Woman (c.1609)
 - Morose, bachelor averse to noise, seeks a "silent" woman to disinherit nephew
 - Epicene, supposedly quiet, becomes talkative after marriage—revealed to be a boy in disguise
 - Model analysis by Dryden in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy
- The Alchemist (1610)
 - Plague-stricken London; Lovewit leaves, servant Face and Subtle use house for fraud as alchemy charade
 - Victims include Sir Epicure Mammon, Abel Drugger, Dapper, Puritans Kastril and Dame Pliant
 - Surly unmasks plot; Lovewit returns/marries Dame Pliant
- Bartholomew Fair (1614)
 - Annual fair on St. Bartholomew's Day (24 Aug)
 - Vivid character gallery—Adam Overdo (justice), Bartholomew Cokes (country squire), Grace Wellborn (suitor), Waspe (servant), Busy (hypocritical Puritan)
- Tragedies:
 - Sejanus His Fall (perf. 1603, print 1605): Roman setting, performed by King's Men with Shakespeare
 - Catiline His Conspiracy (perf./print 1611): Roman, classical model, considered labored and mechanical

Metaphysical Poetry

Intellectual Background

- Renaissance humanism/Scientific Revolution: stimulated intellectual curiosity
- Reformation/Counter-Reformation: prompted spiritual questioning
- Greek/Roman lit influenced poetic style
- Empiricism/rationalism shaped philosophy

The "Metaphysical Poets"

- 17th century group influenced by John Donne; similarities but differences exist
- "Metaphysical" term:

- Dryden first referred to Donne's poetry as "affecting the metaphysics"
- Johnson formalized the grouping; analyzed metaphysical imagery (Life of Cowley)
- Metaphysical Poetry Features:
 - Rough speech rhythms
 - Heated arguments, syllogism
 - Witty/cynical "metaphysical conceit" (extended metaphor/comparison); unlike Petrarchan/romantic conceits
 - Shocking, dramatic style, "carpe diem" philosophy
 - Critiqued in 18th century for false wit

Major Poets

- John Donne (leader)
- Abraham Cowley
- Andrew Marvell
- Cavaliers: Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew
- Religious: George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne
- Last: John Cleveland

Metaphysical Conceit

- Extended metaphor/comparison, combining unrelated concepts for intellectual/philosophical depth
- Uses spatial, temporal, scientific, literary, philosophical references
- Examples: Donne's "The Flea" (love=flea), Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" (love=vegetable), Herbert's "The Altar" (faith=architecture)
- Dr Johnson: "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together"—Life of Cowley
- T.S. Eliot, in "The Metaphysical Poets", praised their "unified sensibility"—ability to "feel thoughts and think feelings"

John Donne (1572-1631)

- Poet, satirist, Anglican priest; Dean of St Paul's Cathedral
- Complex, intricate language, imagery; use of conceits (extended metaphors)
- Themes: reason, logic, love, death, spirituality; draws from science, philosophy, theology

Major Poems

- "The Sun Rising"
 - Love poem; sun as a busy, unruly person interfering with lovers
 - Reverses conceit—speaker gives himself sun's power
- "The Flea"
 - Argument for intimacy—flea's bite joins lovers' blood
 - Flea as marriage altar

- Holy Sonnets: 19 spiritual poems
- “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”
 - Separation; lovers compared to mathematical compass
- “Good Morrow”
 - Evolving love; childhood lust to “true” love
- “Batter My Heart”
 - Religious struggle, redemption; God as potter, conqueror, ravisher

“The Canonization”

- Themes: love, spirituality, art
- Defense of love—devotion not distraction
- Love compared to saints/martyrs; idea of sacred union/canonization
- Central theme: love is transcendent, sacred, not sinful
- Last stanza: appeal for lover to join sacred union
- Cleanth Brooks used as example of poetic paradox

Symbols

- Candles (lovers consumed by love)
- Eagle and dove (lovers)
- Phoenix (immortal love)
- Saints (spirituality)
- “Well-wrought urn” (containment, perfection of love)

George Herbert (1593-1633)

- Worldly/academic early life; became priest (1630)
- Considered saintly by contemporaries
- Poems unpublished in lifetime; simple, modest, honest, religious in tone (not like Donne); no love poetry

Major Poems

- “The Altar”: explores devotion to God
- “The Collar”: struggle with faith/doubt
- “The Pulley”: divine relationship
- “Easter Wings”: visually wing-shaped; resurrection/redemption
- Collection: “The Temple” (1633)
- Prose: “The Country Parson” (1632)

Henry Vaughan

- Physician; early work Cavalier and pastoral; changed after Silex Scintillans, inspired by Herbert
- Religious poems superior to love poems
- Silex Scintillans ("The Flashing Flint", 1650): best work
 - Title: stony hardness of heart struck to fire by God's steel
 - Preface: rejects earlier love poetry as vain
- Influenced by brother Thomas Vaughan (mystic), personal misfortune, civil unrest
- Turned to religious contemplation, imagination

Notable Poems

- The Retreat
 - Poem of spiritual optimism; loss and longing for childhood's heavenly glory
 - Theme: return to original innocence
 - Inspired Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode"
- The Waterfall
 - Meditation on water's mystical significance; journey of soul
 - Wordsworthian nature treatment

Andrew Marvell (1621-78)

- Poet, politician, administrator; MP, tutor to Mary Fairfax
- Broad cultural interests; urbane, witty metaphysical poetry

Major Works

- "To His Coy Mistress"
- "The Garden"
- "The Definition of Love"
- Mower Poems (Damon)
- "Upon Appleton House"

"To His Coy Mistress"

- Classic metaphysical blend of passion/conceits
- Carpe diem philosophy (seize the day) vs religious (Puritan) restraint
- Humorously exaggerated fantasy; images of death and decay
- Urgency, passion ("an hundred years to praise thine eyes")

"The Garden"

- Early quiet, reflective poem; nature, luxury, worldly criticism
- Conceit, argument, allusions

"Bermudas"

- Rovers' song of thanksgiving, identifying with English; rhythmic
- Acknowledges debt to Edmund Waller's "The Battle of the Summer Island"

Mower Poems

- Series of four; narrated by Damon the mower
- Themes: rejection by Juliana, love for nature, embrace of renunciation

Puritan England

Reformation

- 16th-century religious/cultural movement to reform Catholic Church
- Causes: church corruption, rise of humanism/individualism, Renaissance/Enlightenment influence
- Key Events:
 - Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses (1517)
 - John Calvin's Institutes of Christian Religion (1536)
 - Henry VIII's English Reformation (1534)
- Effects:
 - Emerged Protestantism; Catholic/Protestant split
 - Declined papal authority, rise of nation-states
 - Sparked religious wars (Thirty Years' War; English Civil War)
 - Promoted literacy/education; helped Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment
 - Spread vernacular languages; expanded literary audiences

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658)

- Puritan politician/scholar; Lord Protector, England/Scotland/Ireland (1653-58)
- Founded Commonwealth (republic), controversial statesman

Commonwealth

- Established May 19, 1649 (after Charles I executed), ended 1660 (Charles II restored)
- Republic led by Parliament, Council of State, Lord Protector (Oliver then Richard Cromwell)
- Abolished monarchy and Lords, promoted Protestantism/religious toleration

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

- Non-conformist preacher/writer; tinker's son, Civil War parliamentary soldier
- Crisis in 1647, influenced by religious books (Dent's The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven, Bayley's The Practice of Piety)
- Public preacher; sermons drew from personal spiritual conflict
- Arrested/refused release post-Restoration; 12 years in jail; wrote prolifically

Major Works

- “Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners” (1666): spiritual autobiography
- “The Pilgrim’s Progress” (1678)
- “Life and Death of Mr Badman” (1680)
- “The Holy War” (1682)

Pilgrim’s Progress (1678)

- Allegory: Christian’s journey from City of Destruction to Heavenly Jerusalem
- Inspired by Bunyan’s conversion experience; Christian flees City with book, burden, advised by Evangelist
- Path: Slough of Despond, Burning Mount, Wicket-Gate, Interpreter’s House, The Cross (burden gone), Hill Difficulty, House Beautiful, Valleys of Humiliation and Shadow of Death, Vanity Fair, Lucre Hill, River of Life, By-Path Meadow, Doubting Castle, Delectable Mountains, Enchanted Ground, Beulah, River to Celestial City
- Faithful (companion) dies at Vanity Fair; Hopeful joins Christian

Characters

- Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Ignorance, Talkative, By-ends (dangerous “friends”)
- Lord Hategood (vanity fair judge), Giant Despair (Doubting Castle), Apollyon (dragon-like fiend, defeated by Christian)

Part II

- Christian’s wife Christiana, sons, and neighbour Mercy follow same quest with Great-Heart guide
- Meet Feeble-mind, Ready-to-halt, Honest, Valiant-for-truth, Steadfast, Despondency, Much-afraid

Significance

- Considered first English novel
- Explains Christian theology; themes: conversion, faith, spiritual growth, sin/redemption/salvation
- Mirrors social, political, religious 17th-century England
- Uses biblical allegory and symbolism; vivid imagery/characters/metaphors

John Milton (1608-74)

- Not part of any movement; polyglot, scholar; studied Christ’s College, Cambridge (“Lady of Christ”)
- Italy travels (met Galileo); Secretary for Foreign Tongues (Cromwell)
- Civil War/interregnum witness; Commonwealth supporter; opposed monarchy/episcopacy, debated divorce, censorship, education, science

Major Works

- Paradise Lost (1667)
 - Epic of the Fall of Man
- Paradise Regained (1671): Epic—Jesus’ temptation
- Samson Agonistes (1671): tragic closet drama
- Areopagitica (1644): press freedom pamphlet
- Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: treatises
- “History of Britain” (1670), “Artis Logicae” (1672), “De Doctrina Christiana”

Paradise Lost Book 1

- Humanity's first disobedience (Adam/Eve's Fall); Original Sin brings death/banishment; Jesus' future act will restore
- Invocation of Muse: Holy Spirit (who inspired Moses, Bible)
- Poetic ambition: surpass classical poets with divine inspiration
- Poem justifies God's ways to man

Main Theme (Book 1)

- Satan and followers construct "Pandemonium" (Hell's Parliament)
- Satan—once favored angel, rebels with fellow angels, cast into Hell
- Recovers, leads others: Moloch, Chemos, Astoreth, Thammuz, Dagon, Rimmon, Isis, Osiris, Belial, others
- Mulciber builds Pandemonium

Other Books

- Book II: Satan debates in Pandemonium
- Book III: God/Son; Satan tricks Uriel
- Book IV: Satan enters Paradise, influences Eve's dream
- Books V-VIII: Raphael warns Man
- Book IX: The Fall
- Book X: Son pronounces punishment
- Books XI-XII: Michael shows Adam future, leads Adam/Eve from Eden. "Felix culpa"/fortunate fall is declared.

"Lycidas"

- 1637: Pastoral elegy for Edward King (Cambridge friend who drowned)
- Combines classical, Christian, personal elements
- Context explained in 1645 edition ("monody")
- Poem: speaker picks mourning plants, recalls pastoral days, mourns Lycidas' death; mythic nymphs unable to help, digressions on fame and corrupt clergy; St. Peter grieves for King, denounces corrupt clergy; flowers for Lycidas' bier; reassurance—Lycidas with saints; "Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new"

Sonnets

- 23, written intermittently; Petrarchan style
- Hazlitt: compared to Paradise Lost like "flowers on a column"
- Best: "When the assault was intended to the city", "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont", "On His Blindness"

"On His Blindness" (Sonnet 19)

- Opens "When I consider how my light is spent", ends "They also serve who only stand and wait"
- Explores his blindness, values patient intentions over action

Prose

- Milton identified as poet first; prose was "left hand"
- Two types: religious, political; both timely and forward-thinking (separation of church/state)

Anti-Prelatical Tracts

- Five written against episcopacy; attacked High Church Anglicans and Wm. Laud

Divorce Tracts

- Four written when wife Mary Powell left; argued for divorce for incompatibility
- The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, The Judgment of Martin Bucer, Tetrachordon, Colasterion
- Praised marital “cheerful conversation” over mere procreation; valued companionship—relates to Adam/Eve

Areopagitica (1644):

- Response to 1643 Licensing Order; modeled after Isocrates; Areopagus (Athenian tribunal)
- Plea for press freedom; truth is elusive after the Fall
- Cites biblical/classical sources

Of Education

- Wrote (1644)—letter to Samuel Hartlib
- Called for university reform, Christian humanist ideal: “repair ruins of our first parents by regaining knowledge of God and thus love/imitate Him”

Anti-Monarchical Pamphlets

- Defended, justified Charles I’s execution (Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, 1649; Eikonoklastes, 1649)
- Engaged in pamphlet war; responded to charges (Second Defence): saw blindness as a trial giving him special spiritual illumination