**British Literature Part 4 — Dr. Kalyani Vallath**

**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”**

* Rowers’ 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