

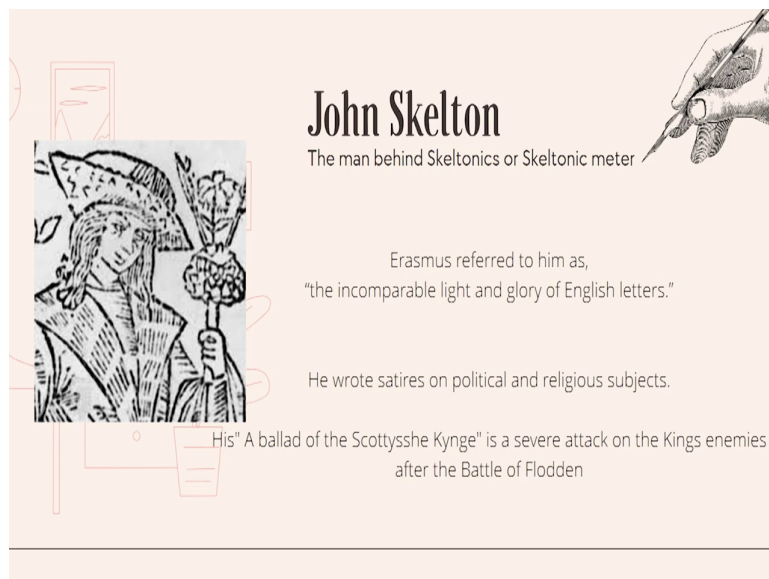
Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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Lecture - 19
English Poetry: An Overview. Elizabethan to Metaphysical

Hello, welcome to this continued lecture on An Overview of English Poetry. In the last class, we discussed the origins of English poetry and we discussed the early English poets through them we came to discuss Chaucer and we described Chaucer as the first major English poet or the father of English poets.

So, now in the second class what we are going to deal with is discussing English poetry from post-Chaucer's period to Metaphysical poetry.

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John Skelton
The man behind Skeltonics or Skeltonic meter

Erasmus referred to him as,
"the incomparable light and glory of English letters."

He wrote satires on political and religious subjects.

His "A ballad of the Scottyshe Kynge" is a severe attack on the Kings enemies after the Battle of Flodden

Before we go to Elizabethan poetry, the first halt for us after Chaucer is John Skelton. Historically John Skelton plays a major role, especially for those of us who are interested in political satire; how literature can be used as a kind of political satire, to ridicule the political structure and thereby critique it. Of course, the intention is not just to ridicule, but to bring in positive changes in political power structures. And therefore, considering Skelton's contribution to this particular genre of writing Erasmus calls him "the incomparable light and glory of English letters", because he mastered a particular genre of English verse which is

political satires. So, in his works, he makes use of some kind of contemporary allegories political satires and ridicules established structures, especially in his book called “A ballad of the Scottyshe Kynge”. One can look at a kind of strange spellings, these are not misrepresentations of spellings, that is how they were originally spelt and we must keep those things in mind that is how they were spelt. The English language has changed considerably since then, but this is how these words were spelt at that point of time.

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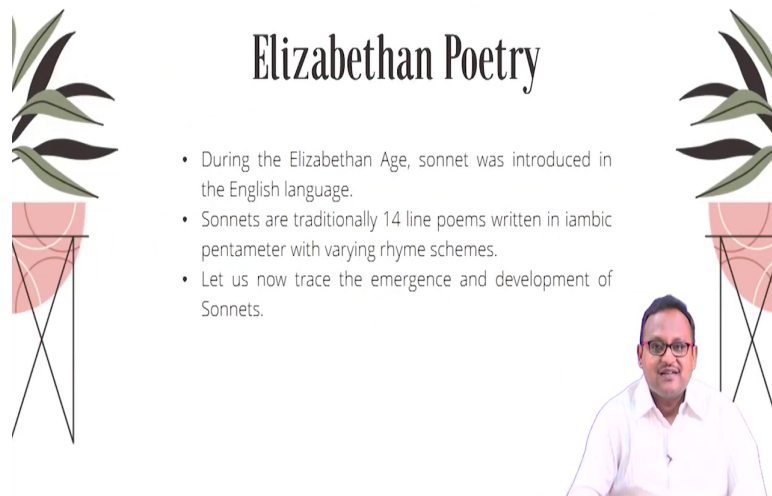
What is Skeltonic Meter?

"Skeltonics, short verses of an irregular metre much used by the Tudor poet John Skelton. The verses have two or three stresses arranged sometimes in falling and sometimes in rising rhythm. They rely on such devices as alliteration, parallelism, and multiple rhymes and are related to doggerel. Skelton wrote his verses as works of satire and protest, and thus the form was considered deliberately unconventional and provocative."

Skelton Porta

In fact, Skelton's contribution is also there in his use of certain meters. In fact, now that is come to be called the Skeltonic meter. So, what does he do? Skeltonic meters are employed in verses which are short verses that have a kind of an irregular meter used by the Tudor poet John Skelton, that is why they are called Skeltonic meters. So, that is also his contribution to British, English literature, and English poetry as such. Whenever any work is used as a kind of political satire that belongs to a protest genre of literature the intention is more than lampooning and ridiculing. Here literature is used as a means of protest a site of producing resistance and thereby marking your descent. So, therefore, Skelton becomes important for us because he elevates literature and poetry especially English poetry as a literary site for protest as or as a note of descent.

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Elizabethan Poetry

- During the Elizabethan Age, sonnet was introduced in the English language.
- Sonnets are traditionally 14 line poems written in iambic pentameter with varying rhyme schemes.
- Let us now trace the emergence and development of Sonnets.

From Skelton, let us move on to Elizabethan Poetry. In fact, for any serious student of poetry, especially serious student of English poetry, Elizabethan poetry marks a kind of a golden origin of great poetry. We come face to face with such a body of poetry that excels on many fronts. So, Elizabethan poetry is really very important for us. One of the remarkable features of Elizabethan poetry is the introduction of a subform of poetry called Sonnets. Of course, those sonnets were quite popular in other parts of Europe, especially in Italy. So, it was for the first time introduced into English poetry here during the Elizabethan period therefore, Elizabethan poetry marks the arrival of the sonnet. I do not need to introduce sonnets to you because in one of our earlier classes we discussed sonnets in great detail and even in a quiz followed by that class we discussed them. There was a question you can recall right, how do you distinguish a Petrarchan sonnet from a Shakespearean sonnet and all that. So, generally, a sonnet has 14 lines to that of course, we have also discussed exceptions to this 14 lines rule, there are sonnets of 12 lines sonnets they are called Curtal sonnets and 16 lines sonnets Caudate sonnets and all that we have discussed. Here, we need to remember that sonnets were introduced at this particular juncture of time.

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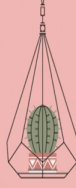
Sir Thomas Wyatt

Sir Thomas Wyatt was a lyric poet and is credited with introducing sonnet to English Literature.

His collection of ninety-six love poems titled Tottel's Miscellany, posthumously published in 1557, is a noteworthy work of literature.


The 31 of which are the first sonnets in English, of which ten are translations from Petrarch. While he retained the Petrarchan form entirely except for the ending couplet that he introduced.

Wyatt was also responsible for introducing the persona note in English Poetry.



The credit for introducing sonnets into the English soil goes to Sir Thomas Wyatt. So, you can call him the father of English sonnets. Because again of his exposure to other European literature especially Italian literature, he also has translated a couple of Petrarchan sonnets, but he has not just confined his literary service there he went on to contribute sonnets, original sonnets to English poetry. His collection of ninety-six love poems is called Tottel's Miscellany which is his contribution to English poetry; almost it was posthumously published in 1557 after the poet's death which is what you call Posthumous publication - publication of something after the death of the writer. And in this collection, about one-third of them are translations from Petrarch. Here until that point in time sonnets were they were slightly impersonal. So, he has to his credit added a kind of a personal touch, a personal note, to English poetry through sonnets that something that has to be kept in mind.

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Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

Henry Howard's name is associated with Wyatt since he published some of his poems with Wyatt's in Tottel's Miscellany
His poems were mostly lyrics and some were sonnets


He and Wyatt were the first English poets to use three quatrains followed by a couplet, i.e., the English or Shakespearian convention and are known as the "Fathers of English Sonnets"

Howard was the first English poet to publish blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) in his poem "Certain Booke of Virgilies Aeneid" translated into English Meter (1557)



Along with Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard has also played a major role in introducing and popularizing the genre of a sonnet or the subtype of genre therefore, they share a credit a joint credit for introducing sonnets here and what is remarkable here is that these two guys were the precursors of what can be called the Shakespearean sonnet. In fact, they were the ones who introduced the variation of the Petrarchan sonnet if you recall it consists of two stanzas. One is an Octave an 8 line stanza and another one is a Sestet 6 lines one whereas, here it is 3 quatrains 3 stanzas or 4 line stanzas or a 4 line stanza; three of them $4 \times 3 = 12$ plus a couplet you have a couplet. So, these two are the precursors of English sonnets or they can also be called later they were perfected by an extraordinary literary figure the world has ever seen called Shakespeare, but more of Shakespeare in subsequent slides.



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Sir Philip Sidney


He is also a prominent poet and a literary critic
His sequence of 108 love sonnets, *Astrophel and Stella* is of exceptional literary merit Sidney usually followed Petrarchan octave (abbaabba), with variations in the sestet which include the English Final couplet

His "Apologie for Poetrie" is one of the finest critical essays in English



Another stop before Shakespeare is Sir Philip Sidney. Philip Sidney occupied a major role, especially in his critical work called "Apologie for Poetrie". In fact, there has been a kind of a debate between philosophy and poetry. Philosophers have pitted philosophy vis-a-vis poetry and have been declaring philosophy as a kind better than poetry or something like that. But in "Apologie for Poetrie", Sidney almost champions the cause of poetry against philosophy. He scores a goal against philosophy and champions the cause of poetry. So, that is his contribution when it comes to him as a literary critic as that is his contribution, but as a poet he has a remarkable collection of sonnets, love sonnets, "Astrophel and Stella" that is something that has to be kept in mind.

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Edmund Spenser

Born in 1552/3, Spenser was a renowned poet and contributed much to the genre of poetry
"The Faerie Queene", a long allegorical poem is a defining poem in English Literature that introduced Spenserian Stanza.

A Spenserian Stanza consists of eight iambic pentameter lines followed by a ninth line of six iambic feet (an alexandrine); the rhyme scheme is ababbcbcc

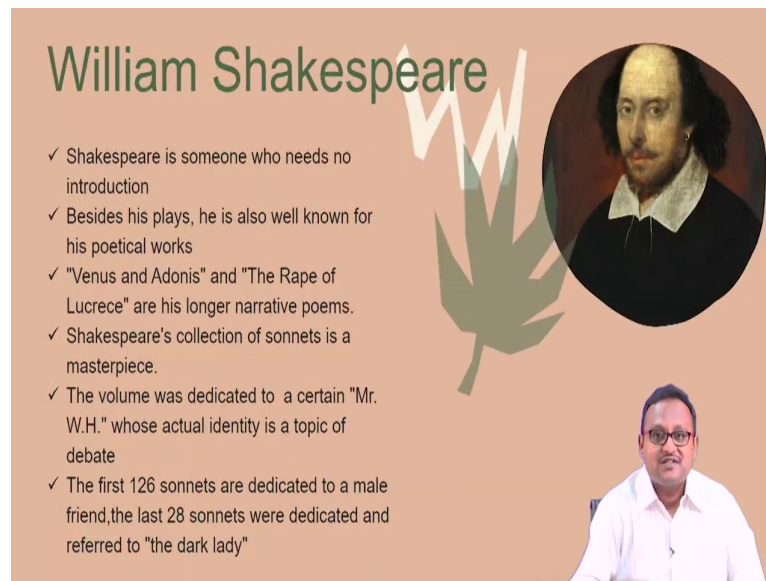
He also wrote 88 Petrarchan Sonnets celebrating the progress of his love and titled the collection Amoretti, apart from many other well known as well as miscellaneous poems.

Let us now enjoy a sonnet by Spenser...



From Philip Sidney again let us go to Edmund Spenser. Spenser too wrote sonnets, but of course, sonnets were not so much his preferred mode or medium of expression. He wrote poetry in other ways especially pastoral poems. His remarkable contribution is "The Faerie Queene". It is a kind of a long allegorical poem, a pastoral poem that you find in which he introduces his own particular type of stanza which later comes to be called a Spenserian stanza. So, a Spenserian stanza I mean if you are really curious to know has eight iambic pentameter lines followed by the ninth line of six iambic feet. So, that is a kind of a variation that he brings in. So, he writes about close to 90 Petrarchan Sonnets and all that.

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William Shakespeare

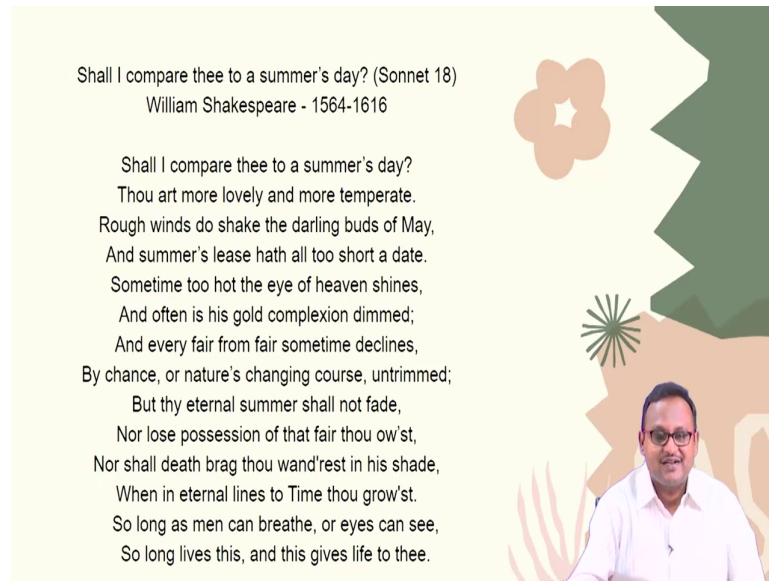
- ✓ Shakespeare is someone who needs no introduction
- ✓ Besides his plays, he is also well known for his poetical works
- ✓ "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece" are his longer narrative poems.
- ✓ Shakespeare's collection of sonnets is a masterpiece.
- ✓ The volume was dedicated to a certain "Mr. W.H." whose actual identity is a topic of debate
- ✓ The first 126 sonnets are dedicated to a male friend, the last 28 sonnets were dedicated and referred to "the dark lady"

The slide features a circular portrait of William Shakespeare in the top right corner and a green leaf graphic in the center. A small inset photo of a man in a white shirt is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide area.

From Spencer let us go to Shakespeare - who occupies the pinnacle of English literature. Why English literature alone, any literature in the world, in fact, the name of Shakespeare is almost synonymous with extraordinary standards, literary standards anywhere across the globe. So, he is like you can replace literature with Shakespeare something like that. So, it is not an exaggeration if we say that there is nobody who is not aware of Shakespeare, in the world of letters almost Shakespeare is the king something like that, even hyperbole. But, of course, if we have read his works it does appear to be that he is a master of drama, master of poetry, master of sonnets, an exemplary literary figure. And his contribution to furthering the English language is immense. Probably after the Bible, Shakespeare must have contributed lot many words to the English language as such. Probably, when it comes to individuals the highest contribution must have come from this great guy William Shakespeare that is why we say he needs no introduction to any serious student of literature. Of course, Shakespeare is well known for his plays. He has about 40 plus plays, some of them are not available. They are remarkable plays undoubtedly, but maybe when we come to discuss drama we may discuss Shakespeare in detail. But until that point of time, our interest in Shakespeare is his contribution to poetry even if you take out his contribution to the world of drama Shakespeare's name still stands out because not many of us may be aware, but he is an extraordinary poet. In fact, even in his plays, you find an abundant and rich use of poetry. In fact, you can even call his plays are a cornucopia of rich imaginative poetry even there.

So, he has to his credit more than 150 sonnets and in fact, these sonnets are again shrouded in mystery like the very personality of Shakespeare which is shrouded in mystery. In fact, many believe that probably Shakespeare may be a pseudonym for some other writer. Many of them have even gone on to even allude that there was nobody called Shakespeare during that time, Shakespeare might have been a pen name or a kind of a pseudonym. Let us leave these debates aside, but even his sonnets are shrouded in mystery because they are dedicated to a mysterious person called Mr W H. They are just dedicated to a person who is identified by his initials W and H. Again there are a lot of theories concerning who this W H is, is he a patron of Shakespeare, is he a friend of Shakespeare and there are a lot of discussions around that equation between that particular person and Shakespeare and all that we are not going into all that non-literary discussion. He has dedicated most of these sonnets to this particular friend and patron and about 25 and odd sonnets to another mysterious dark lady, maybe his lady love, maybe again a lady patron. It is been dedicated to the dark lady, about 25 or 28 odd ones and about 155 out of the majority of them are dedicated to the mysterious friend W H. If you look at these sonnets they are an extraordinary contribution that is precisely what I was saying. Even if you take away all the plays that are attributed to Shakespeare, Shakespeare's name would still be written in the golden letters because of his sonnets. These sonnets exemplify the writers' imagination, creativity, perspective towards life, their literary craftsmanship, the use of language, and the use of diction take up any measure any standard these sonnets stand out. Well, in order to give you a glimpse of the quality of these sonnets. Let us directly delve into these sonnets themselves, but more apart from these sonnets he also has to his credit other poems called "Venus and Adonis", and "The Rape of Lucrece" a kind of satire, but still an important contribution to poetry.

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Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (Sonnet 18)
William Shakespeare - 1564-1616

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

So, here we have with us a beautiful sonnet and when we read the sonnet; well what you can also do you can note down some of the predominant figures of speech employed here and thereby you can also enhance your understanding of figures of speech.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

You are more lovely and more temperate.

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
and summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Again, please go on noting down the rhyme scheme because his sonnets are a kind of rich source for any student of literature. You can study it from their structural perspective, from their creative perspective, from the perspective of figures of speech employed there from the perspective of a rich way of life presented them all these things.

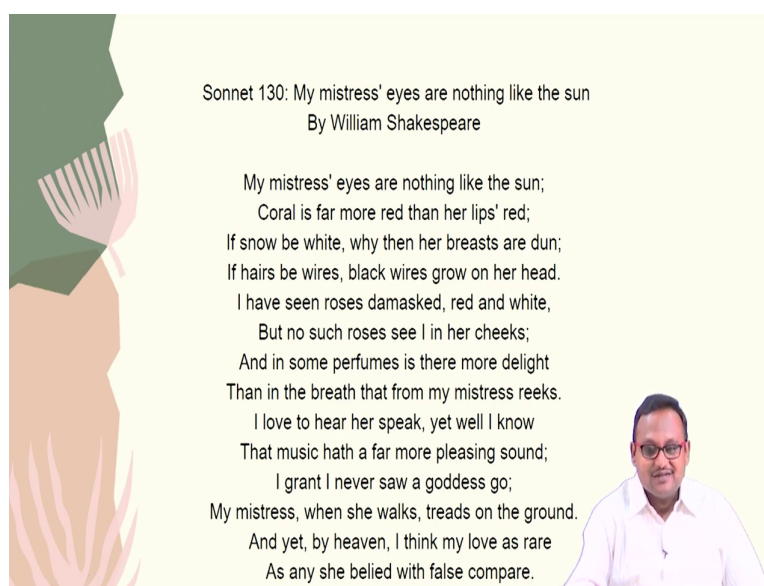
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
and often is his gold complexion dimmed;
and every fair from fair sometime declines
by chance or nature's changing course untrimmed,
but your eternal summer shall not fade
nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
nor shall death brag you wand'rest in his shade,
when in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

So, long as men can breathe or eyes can see.

So, long lives this and this gives life to thee.

So, these lines are used symbolically or metaphorically, figuratively in order to capture how you can make a mortal being immortal. So, this is where probably a mortal being can claim victory over death how because when their names are etched in literature, as long as literature lives, their name also lives, their person also lives. So, this is one way of conquering death. So, he is saying to the person he addresses he says it's true you are beautiful you are more beautiful than this, you are more beautiful than that, but what I can make you well after a certain time this beauty that you are so proud of may vanish, and I have a way to make it immortal. How do I make it? When I put your name in my sonnets I am going to make you immortal. Look at the confidence of the writer look at how beautifully the writer and confidently declares that he is going to make that person immortal and how prophetic that was. Had it not been if it were not for the reference in these kinds of sonnets, we would not even have read about that person today because history has witnessed so many beautiful people, so many handsome people. So, not all of them are recalled except during their lifetime and especially except by those that are around those people no one else remembers them right, but now because of the sonnet, all of us at least for some time come to scratch our head about the beauty of this lady or beauty of this person. So, this is the power of literature that it can make human beings immortal. So, this is something that has to be kept in mind.

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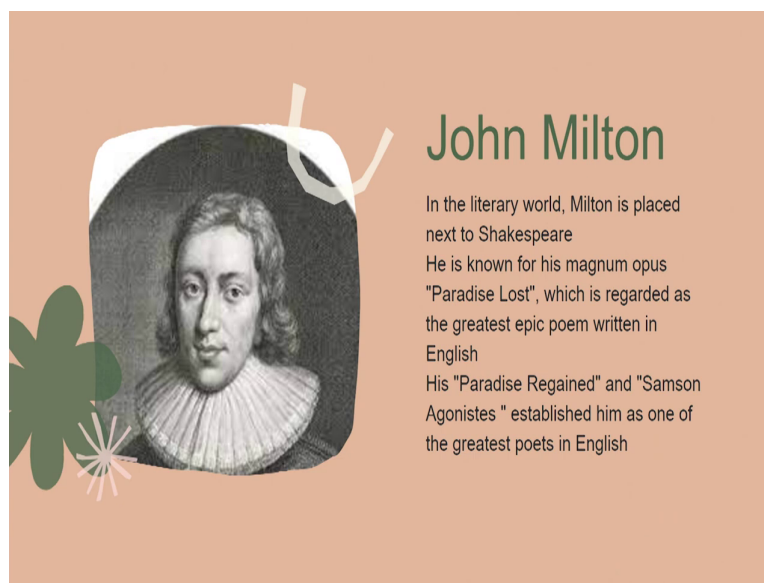
Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
By William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

From Shakespeare's sonnet, I have another sonnet again for want of time. I am not reading it again it is this particular sonnet is dense - in the sense that it makes use of dense similes; if there is one poem that stands out for using similes it is a direct comparison "my mistresses eyes are nothing like the sun....".

So, he goes on directly comparing the so-called dark lady to very many objects, natural objects. So, this poem exemplifies the use of a simile, you can take a look at this poem it is called sonnet number 130.

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From Shakespeare, we move on to John Milton. Again Milton is a kind of an iconoclastic name when it comes to English poetry. Milton after a while loses his sight. Nevertheless, he continues writing poetry he continues writing his service to literature. Especially his poem "On His Blindness" is an extraordinary poem. He says now imagine what happens what would be the plight of a writer who has relayed on his eyes to see and write, all of a sudden if he loses sight of his eyes what happens to the person, what happens to the person, how can he read it is like weaning him away from the very source of life right. So, during those desperate times, he writes that particular poem "On His Blindness" and that is where you come across these immortal lines those lines that are a kind of a treasure house for any optimist. He says they also serve those who only stand and wait. He says that I have lost my eyes, how do I serve God, I cannot do anything then towards the end of that particular poem he says they also serve who only stand and wait because probably it is a kind of a testing time. So, if we

can learn to be patient without complaining if we can endure even that and gracefully under pressure if we can maintain that it is also another kind of service to God on these remarkable lines. His contribution to English literature is immense, especially through his “Paradise Lost” and “Paradise Regained”; these are two of his immortal works' and the greatest epics. In fact, these are modern epics in English literature and they establish his preeminent position in English poetry these works.

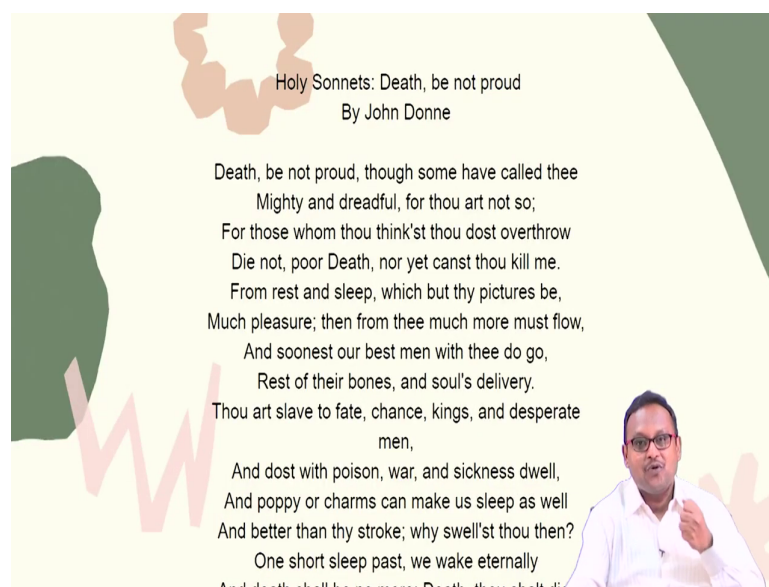
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From John Milton, we move on to Metaphysical poetry. In fact, with the discussion of metaphysical poetry, we are going to end this class and maybe in the next class, we are going to take up the discussion of English poetry post-metaphysical poetry until its modern practice modernist poetry. Metaphysical poetry is a kind of revolutionary poetry, it is a kind of a welcome deviation from the neoclassical poetry practised during the Miltonic times be it in terms of the subject matter, the use of language, the use of diction and attitude towards life, it is totally revolutionary. And interestingly metaphysical poetry can be called a kind of an equivalent of Bhakti poetry in the Indian context because like Bhakti poetry is revolutionary in very many ways metaphysical poetry is also revolutionary it is religiosity, but not in a conventional sense of the term. So, through their ingenious use of conceits, irony and metrical compositions or flexibility in the way they compose it; it brings a kind of a whiff of fresh air into English poetry one of the remarkable traits of metaphysical poetry is their use of conceit a specialized literary device figure of speech called conceit.

So, in conceit, it is a comparison - remember when it comes to the comparison you have simile and metaphor, but the conceit is a kind of a strange comparison, when you look at a conceit you will be surprised until you read the entire poem you do not know on what basis the poet is comparing one with the other. For instance, the poet compares John Donne who is probably one of the quintessential metaphysical poets compares lovers to a pair of compasses. He compares lovers to a pair of compasses. Why does he compare? What are the grounds for comparison? It may sound strange, but when you read it you realize that it is with the help of this literary device he almost fuses two disparate, dissimilar things. There is definition one of conceit is “two objects violently yoked together”. Two disparate objects are violently yoked together, but not because of course, there is no scope for a natural comparison, but when you complete reading the poem you understand the beauty of that comparison all the more. So, that is metaphysical conceit, which is a quintessential trait of metaphysical poetry. Some of the well-known practitioners of this particular movement of poetry or genre of poetry are John Donne, George Herbert Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan and others. If you have read this poem called “The Pulley” there is a beautiful poem called “The Pulley”.

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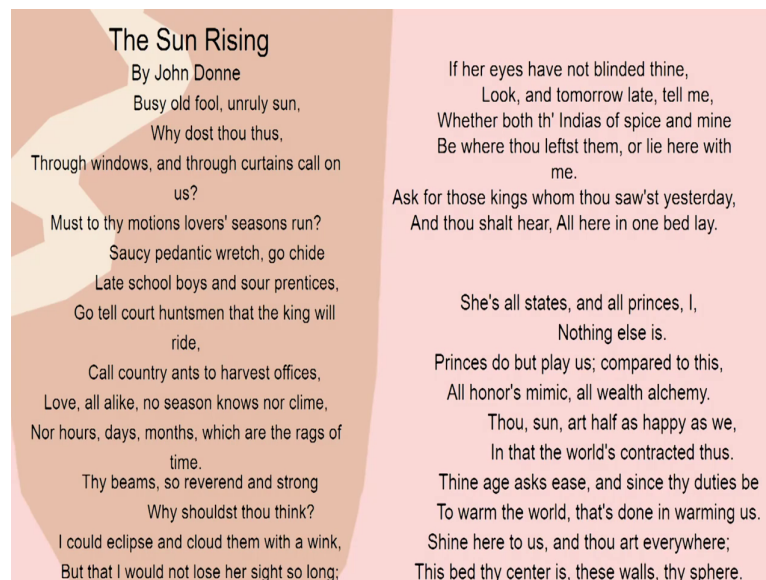
Again a very important metaphysical poem; he compares ‘stress’, the pressure that we have, the anxiety that we face in human life to a pulley. Like the pulley is used as a kind of leverage to push something ahead; he says anxiety, sorrow or lack of happiness, God uses these qualities as a pulley. So, using them God pushes us towards him he pushes human beings

towards himself he uses them as a kind of leverage a very interesting conceit that the poet uses. And one of the remarkable traits of metaphysical poetry is a kind of a dramatic beginning more than dramatic it is a kind of a shocking beginning, in the very first line the poet makes the reader sit tight, sit up and read it. Now, look at this.

“Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
mighty and dreadful for you are not so;”

Because death is called the great leveller, a great equalizing force, whatever maybe we may be during our life a king, queen an ordinary person, a clerk, a pure slave whatever this may be during our roles on this planet - death brings an end to all of us that is why it is called the great leveller. So, therefore, it is called very mighty. But now look at the challenge, the poet here challenges death and says do not be so proud that you are powerful. In fact, you are definitely not powerful I can defeat you something like that and the rest of the poem explains why death should not be proud and how you score over death something like that. Similarly, that is a kind of shocking challenge.

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Similarly, you also have another poem called "The Sun Rising", "The Sun Rising". And here again, he addresses the sun as a direct challenge. He says sun do not be so proud I can eclipse you in the blink of an eye I can eclipse you.

Now, look how beautiful the allusions are. What happens? Many say the sun is all-powerful and all that, but when you close your eyes you are going to I mean at least metaphorically it appears as if you are eclipsing the sun at least from your perspective right. So, this is metaphysical poetry in a nutshell for us, with a shocking beginning, use of strange comparisons, unconventional tone, unconventional diction, and strangely most of these practitioners have a religious background. So, you can call metaphysical poetry a kind of the equivalent of Bhakti poetry in the Indian context. Before I end, I am sure you enjoyed this lecture as well; we began our discussion of this class from middle English poetry onwards, we discussed precursors of Shakespeare and introduction of sonnet here Philip Sidney's 'defence of poetry' and then we discussed the greatness of Shakespeare, we even read some interesting sonnets by Shakespeare. And now, of course, we are ending this with a discussion of metaphysical poetry, John Donne and some interesting comparisons and poetic techniques used here. So, in the next class, we would complete our discussion of an overview of English poetry. So, beginning with the origins we have come up to metaphysical poetry. So, in the next class, we are going to complete our understanding of an overview of English poetry alright. Until then take care.

Thank you.