

**MEG – 01: BRITISH POETRY ASSIGNMENT 2018 - 2019**

**1. Explain any two of the excerpts of poems given below with reference to their context:**

**(iii) All humane things are subject to decay, And,  
when Fate summons, Monarchs must obey:**

**Answer-**

In John Dryden's satirical poem Mac Flecknoe, the following lines can be found: All human things are subject to decay, And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey. The quote refers to the fact that no one, not even monarchs, can stop death when it comes. The subtitle is A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.

In these first lines, Dryden clearly establishes his satirical voice. He is using grand language, tone, ideas, and historical allusion to discuss the leader of the realm of Nonsense, assuredly not the name readers were expecting. Comparisons to Rome, the evocation of such universal themes such as death and fate, and the use of heroic couplets serve to discomfit and amuse the reader when they start to realize what Dryden is up to. In the lines that follow, Dryden skewers Shadwell in the harshest of ways, but nowhere is the tone bitter or the insults blatant. Rather, through this mock-heroic style, Dryden suggests just how lacking in merit his subject is.

Dryden begins with a lofty commentary on mortality, God, and kings, his introduction to what we can only assume will be a grandiose epic of Homeric proportions. As we will soon discover, the entirety of the poem is written in rhymed heroic couplets, typical of the epic style. (Check out "Form and Meter" for more on how this poem is put together.) From this initial couplet, Dryden creates the atmosphere of an epic, a grandiose story of gods and kings, in line with the tradition of poetic big names like Homer or Milton.

**(v) Tyger Tyger, burning bright In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye Could frame thy fearful symmetry?**

**Answer-**

These lines are taken from William Blake poem the Tiger. The Tyger" is a poem by the English poet William Blake published in 1794 as part of the Songs of Experience collection. Literary critic Alfred Kazin calls it "the most famous of his poems", and The Cambridge Companion to William Blake says it is "the most anthologized poem in English". It is one of Blake's most reinterpreted and arranged works.

The poem begins with the speaker asking a fearsome tiger what kind of divine being could have created it: "What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Each subsequent

stanza contains further questions, all of which refine this first one. From what part of the cosmos could the tiger's fiery eyes have come, and who would have dared to handle that fire? What sort of physical presence, and what kind of dark craftsmanship, would have been required to "twist the sinews" of the tiger's heart? The speaker wonders how, once that horrible heart "began to beat," its creator would have had the courage to continue the job. Comparing the creator to a blacksmith, he ponders about the anvil and the furnace that the project would have required and the smith who could have wielded them. And when the job was done, the speaker wonders, how would the creator have felt? "Did he smile his work to see?" Could this possibly be the same being who made the lamb?

These first lines set up to whom the poem is addressed: the "Tyger." It begins with the repetition of the name ("Tyger, tyger"). The repetition creates a chant-like mood to the whole poem, which contributes to the mysteriousness. Reading it, you can't help but get the feeling this poem is about way more than the biggest cat in the world.

What is this about "burning bright, / In the forests of the night"? Tigers don't burn. When you see crazy or unexpected metaphors like this – which always happens with Blake – slow down and chew on them for a minute.

"Burning bright" may describe the appearance of the Tyger (tigers have fiery orange fur), or it may on a deeper level describe a kind of energy or power that this Tyger has.

The Tyger's presence in "the forests of the night" further increases the mystery and power of the creature – it's elusive, while at the same time burning with some sort of inner force.

### **What immortal hand or eye Could frame thy fearful symmetry**

These lines introduce the central question of the poem: what "immortal" being or force is able to contain or produce the Tyger's sublime form? Big stuff, we know.

The "immortal hand or eye," symbols of sight and creation, immediately conjure references to a creative God (in pretty much all cases with Blake, "God" refers to the Christian God). If this is so, then questioning whether God could do anything is a direct attack on the omnipotence of such a God.

To "frame," here, is probably to contain, kind of like putting a picture in a frame. When you frame something, the boundaries are clear, the object isn't going anywhere.

"Fearful symmetry," is a very nuanced quality to have. "Fearful" references the scariness of a tiger, but also alludes to the sublime. The sublime is an old notion of really big, powerful, mysterious stuff that terrifies us because it's big, powerful and mysterious. The first BIG example that should come to mind: God, or the divine (that stuff is big and powerful and mysterious).

Symmetry is a classical quality of the divine, as well as the defining factor of artistic beauty. So, there are lots of doors open with the first stanza. Just hold on, it'll be OK. If there is one thing Blake does, it's open doors, but it can be hard to keep track of where each one might lead as you read through the poem.

## **2. What are the main features of metaphysical poetry? Give examples from the poets and the poems in the course. 20**

**Answer-** You've probably heard of haikus, lyrical poems and limericks. All of those types of poetry have specific qualities that allow us to group them together. Metaphysical poetry is a little bit different. The poems classified in this group do share common characteristics: they are all highly intellectualized, use rather strange imagery, use frequent paradox and contain extremely complicated thought.

However, metaphysical poetry is not regarded as a genre of poetry. In fact, the main poets of this group didn't read each other's work and didn't know that they were even part of a classification.

Literary critic and poet Samuel Johnson first coined the term 'metaphysical poetry' in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1179-1781). In the book, Johnson wrote about a group of 17th-century British poets that included John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan. He noted how the poets shared many common characteristics, especially ones of wit and elaborate style.

The term "metaphysical poetry" was not a term used by Donne or by his contemporaries when referring to poems by him or other poets of his time. The term was first used, when referring to Donne, by John Dryden in 1693 when he complained that Donne "affects the Metaphysics . . . in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts." Later, the great critic Samuel Johnson, in his *Lives of the Poets*, wrote that "about the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets," of whom Donne was the chief. The term "metaphysical," then, was used both by Dryden and by Johnson more as a term of disapproval than as a merely descriptive term.

### **Main features of metaphysical theory -**

#### **Characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry**

(1) Dramatic manner and direct tone of speech is one of the main characteristics of metaphysical poetry. In the starting line of the poem "The Canonization" – there is given a dramatic starting – "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love".

(2) Concentration is an important quality of metaphysical poetry in general and Donne's poetry is particular. In his all poems, the reader is held to one idea or line of argument. Donne's poems are brief and closely woven. In "The Extasie", the principal argument is that the function of man

as a man is being worthily performed through different acts of love. He continues with the theme without digression. For instance,

“As ‘twixt two equal armies, Fate  
Suspends uncertain victorie,  
Our souls, (which to advance their state,  
Were gone out,) hung ‘twixt her and me”.

(3) An expanded epigram would be a fitting description of a metaphysical poem. Nothing is described in detail nor is any word wasted. There is a wiry strength in the style. Though the verse forms are usually simple, they are always suitable in enforcing the sense of the poem. For instance –

“Moving of the earth brings harms and fears  
Men reckon what it did and meant,  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent”.

(4) Fondness for conceits is a major character of metaphysical poetry. Donne often uses fantastic comparisons. The most striking and famous one used by Donne is the comparison of a man who travels and his beloved who stays at home to a pair of compasses in the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” –

“If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two,  
Thy soul fixt foot makes no show  
To move, but doth, if t’other do”.

We find another conceit in the very beginning couple of lines of “The Extasie” –

“Where like a pillow on a bed,  
A pregnant bank swelled up, ...”.

(5) Wit is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry. So, here we find various allusions and images relating to practicality all areas of nature and art and learning-- to medicine, cosmology, contemporary discoveries, ancient myth, history, law and art. For instance, in “The Extasie”, Donne uses the belief of the blood containing certain spirits which acts as intermediary between soul and body –

“As our blood labours to get  
Spirits, as like souls, as it can,  
Because such fingers need to knit  
That subtle knot, which makes us man:”

In the same poem, the Ptolemaic system of astrology is also used when he says –

“... We are  
The intelligences, they the sphere”.

(6) Metaphysical Poetry is a blend of passion and thought. T. S. Elliot thinks that “passionate thinking” is the chief mark of metaphysical poetry. There is an intellectual analysis of emotion in Donne’s Poetry. Though every lyric arises out of some emotional situation, the emotion is not

merely expressed, rather it is analyzed. Donne's poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" proves that lovers need not mourn at parting. For instance,

"So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love".

(7) Metaphysical Poetry is a fusion of passionate feelings and logical arguments. For example, in "The Canonization", there is passion expressed through beautiful metaphors:

"Call us what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another fly,  
We are tapers too, and at our own cost die,  
And we in us, find the eagle and the dove".

But at the same time, the tone of the poem is intellectual and there is plenty of complexity involved in the conceits and allusions, such as the "Phoenix riddle".

(8)

Metaphysical Poetry is the mixture of sensual and spiritual experience. This characteristic especially appears in Donne's poetry. Poems such as "The Canonization", "The Extasie" – even though they are not explicitly discussed, the great metaphysical question is the relation between the spirit and the senses. Often Donne speaks of the soul and of spiritual love. "The Extasie" speaks of the souls of the lovers which come out of their bodies negotiate with one another. For instance,

"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".

(9) Usage of satire and irony is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry. Donne also uses this in his poems. For example, in "The Canonization", there is subtle irony as he speaks of the favoured pursuits of people – the lust for wealth and favours. "Take you a course, get you a place, Observe his honour, or his Grace".

(10) As far as Donne is concerned, the use of colloquial speech marks the metaphysical poetry. This is especially apparent in the abrupt, dramatic and conversational opening of many of his poems. For instance,

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

"Or the King's real, or his stamped face" (The Canonization)

(11) Carelessness in diction is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry. These poems reacted against the cloying sweetness and harmony of the Elizabethan Poetry. They deliberately avoided conventional poetic expression. They employed very prosaic words, if they

were scientists or shopkeepers. Thus, we find, in their poetic works, rugged and unpoetic words. Their versification and their dictions are usually coarse and jerky.

(12) Affectation and hyperbolic expression is another character of metaphysical poetry. It is often hard to find natural grace in metaphysical writing, abounding in artificiality of thought and hyperbolic expression. The writer deemed to say "something unexpected and surprising. What they wanted to sublime, they endeavored to supply by hyperbole; their amplification had no limit, they left not only reason but fancy behind them and produced combination of confused magnificence". For instance, the lines of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" –  
"Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat".

(13) The lyrics of the metaphysical poems are very fantastic and peculiar. According to A. C. Word, "The metaphysical style is a combination of two elements, the fantastic form and style and the incongruous in matter and manner". Therefore, so far we discussed the salient features of metaphysical poetry, it is proved that John Donne is a great metaphysical poet.

### **3. Does the Dejection: An Ode contain any elements of what comprises Romanticism? Discuss with examples. 20**

#### **Answer-**

The poem "Dejection: An Ode" by T.S. Coleridge contains elements of romanticism. The poem is about the importance of imagination in poet's life after the state of depression. The poet tries to compensate his despair and grief with the help of the imagination and creative powers of the nature. The reflection of internal beauty which enhances the outer structure of a person was one of the characteristics of the Romanticism.

Romanticism is the name given to a dominant movement in literature and the other arts – particularly music and painting – in the the period from the 1770s to the mid-nineteenth century: It is regarded as having transformed artistic styles and practices. Like many other terms applied to movements in the arts, the word covers a wide and varied range of artists and practices. It is a retrospective term, applied by later literary, art and musical historians. None of the artists we refer to as Romantics would have so described themselves. It was a European phenomenon, particularly powerful in Britain, France and Germany, but also affecting countries such as Italy, Spain and Poland. There was also, to some extent, an American version of the movement.

Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is most likely the most well-known and widely-read of his odes, and the critic Allen Tate once said that this ode "at least tries to say everything that a poet can say." The ode exhibits several of the themes that we associate with poems of the Romantic Period in English literature--transience of life, altered states of reality, nature and the natural



world, mortality, and the power of poetry to transport the poet.

The ode begins, for example, with an indication that the poet's sense of reality may be altered when he tells us that "and a drowsy numbness pains My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk, Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains. . . ." From the start, then, we have a poet who is perhaps observing life and nature through the filter of an altered mind.

When we get to lines 25 and following (third stanza), Keats discusses another pre-occupation of the Romantics, the transience of life. We are presented with images of decay, old age and death: "Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs, Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies." Keats is, unfortunately, accurately depicting the aging of men, who often become victims of palsy, lose their hair, and die.

But in stanza 4, the poetry is able to escape the ravages of old age and time by taking flight on the "viewless wings of Poesy." In this stanza and stanza 5, Keats essentially describes himself as not particularly fearful of death--"Now more than ever it seems rich to die, To cease upon the midnight with no pain. . . ." He notes, however, that, having died, he's no longer going to be able to hear the nightingale's song.

In stanzas 7 and 8, Nature's permanence, another Romantic theme, is clear when Keats says that "Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird!" The nightingale's voice that Keats hears was heard thousands of years ago in classical times and even the biblical era. Keats bids farewell to the nightingale, whose song has enabled him to escape the reality of his mortality and transported him into the natural world for awhile. Consistent with his altered state of mind, the poet cannot tell if he actually heard the nightingale's song or if the vision and song were just part of a dream.

#### **4. Write an essay on Dylan Thomas's use of images in his poetry?**

##### **20 Answer-**

Dylan Thomas a roistering, drunken and doomed poet or a revolutionary poet in the 1930's with many popular poems. Thomas was against any literary group or movement despite this he is generally categorized as a part of the Modernism, Neo-romantic movements. His style played against the strict verse forms of the time his most used theme was the unity of life and the process of life and death and how new life is linked to the previous generations. He saw the advances of biology during his time to be a magical way of producing unity out of the diversity. Thomas also saw men and women trapped in cycles from growth to new life. By analyzing his poems "and death shall have no dominion" and "do not go gently into that good night" it is clear that Dylan Thomas uses poetic devices like imagery, metaphors, and repetition skillfully to convey the theme of death and the evolution of your life as a source of inspiration for his poetry.

First of the many important poetic devices Dylan Thomas uses one of the most used and effective ones is imagery. Imagery is when an author uses strong and descriptive word to create an image for the reader. He uses this device to create the common theme of death and how your life is evolved in many of his poems especially in the poems "and death shall have no dominion" and "do not go gently into that good night". In one of his poems "do not go gently into that good night" he is writing this poem about the death of his father and he uses night as an image for death.

Much of the acclaim that is given to Dylan Thomas is attributable to his marvelous use of imagery that awakens the senses of the listener/reader of his poetry and lends a unique reality to his abstraction of thought. Clearly, there is a vitality and passion lent to his verse with his imagery. One critic writes of Thomas, "His rich rhetoric and imagery gave his poetry a magical touch."

Thomas is especially renowned for his use of nature imagery as in such poems as "A Winter's Tale" in which the image of the bird connotes the Holy Ghost or Pentecostal Dove that imparts powers to the individual. In addition, there is a connection of the spiritual with the physical and the bird undergoes a metamorphosis in the bride's body that rises with him in spirituality. Regarding such imagery that combines contradictions such as that of the bird and the bride, Thomas writes,

6 Out of the inevitable conflict of images--inevitable, because of the creative, destructive, and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war--I try to make that momentary peace which is a poem.

Another nature poem replete with imagery is "Poem in October." On his thirtieth birthday the speaker emerges from the limits of the town, he finds that nature greets him with herons as priests and the waves of the ocean standing to honor him. In short, through the honor of nature and its imagery, the speaker transcends the mundane and rises to an ethereal joy.

Thomas also employs images of death in many of his poems, the most famous of which is "Do Not Go Gentle Into the Night" in which death is portrayed as "the dying of the light" and "darkness." The anger and rage expressed toward these images denotes the poet's passion for life. In this poem and in all his works, certainly Thomas's artistic and original utilization of imagery is his greatest medium for meaning.

**5. Would you consider Sylvia Plath's Daddy to be an expression against the voice of patriarchy? Comment critically.**

**Answer-** This poem is a very strong expression of resentment against the male domination of women and also the violence of all kinds for which man is responsible. The speaker expresses her rage against her 'daddy', but daddy himself is a symbol of male. As well as a symbol of more general agents and forces like science and reason, violence and war, the German and their Hitler, and all other "inhuman" agents of oppression in the world. The speaker is also a symbol of female and the creative force, humility, love and humanity in general.



This poem can also be analyzed from a psychological point of view. It is the outpour of a neurotic anger through the channel of creative art, or poetry. It is a kind of therapy. The poem is also significant for its assonance, allusion and images. Though it is slightly autobiographical, the poem must be interpreted symbolically and psychologically without limiting it to the poetess's life and experiences also.

The poem begins with the angry attack on daddy: "you", "black shoe", "I have had to kill you".

The name-calling continues: daddy is a ghostly statue, a seal, a German, Hitler himself, a man-crushing engine, a tank driver (Panzer man), a swastika symbol of the Nazi, a devil, a haunting ghost and vampire, and so on. The speaker has lived for thirty years, poor and white, as in the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War. She is not able to breathe or express her pain. Her tongue is stuck in her jaw, or in the barbell wires. She is always scared of daddy or the German images of terror. She feels like a Jew herself. She feels she is crushed under the roller as the Polish were killed by the German in 1941.

She is afraid of the German language that is obscene and vague. She remembers the concentration camps like Dachau, Auschwitz and Belsen where thousands of Jews were tortured and killed. She feels she is a descendant of a gypsy ancestress (ancient mother). She is afraid of the neat mustache like that of Hitler, and the Aryan eye. The image of a boot in the face comes to her troubled mind. She thinks her daddy had a brutish (savage) black heart. She remembers the image of a strict teacher near the blackboard, which is also her father's image. She was ten when he died. But she wanted to kill him again, and throw him out of her mind. She also tried to die herself, but they prevented her. Then she made an effigy or (model) of him and killed it. She had killed him and his vampire that drank her blood for seven years. She claims that all the villagers also hated and still hate him. So, he can go back and die forever. She calls him a bastard.

The extremity of anger in this poem is not justifiable as something possible with a normal person in real life. We should understand that this is partly due to the neurosis that Plath was actually suffering from. Besides, it is essential to understand from the psychoanalytic point of view, the poem does not literally express reality alone: it is the relieving anger and frustration, and an alternative outlet of the neurotic energy in the form of poetic expression. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the anger as being directed against the general forces of inhumanity, violence and destruction only symbolized by 'daddy'. In fact, Plath's father loved her very much when she was a child, before he died when she was only eight. So her death was always a shock to her. But, while she felt tortured and destitute without her father, she also felt suppressed by her father's dominating image. The idea is mixed and complex. She said, "He was an autocrat... I adored and despaired him, and I probably wished many times that he were dead". The poem moves far beyond the father-daughter team if we read carefully. By a process of association and surrealism, the protest moves from father to Hitler and then to inhumanity and oppression. Sylvia Plath also said that "the personal experience is very important, but... I believe (poetry) should be relevant to larger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on." This means that the frustration and anger against a dominating father who left her a destitute has here become a starting point or central symbol for larger issues including Hitler, torture and inhumanity. The poem is, therefore, also about the victimization of modern war. The poem is only slightly autobiographical, but it is more general.

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The theme of female protest is perhaps the most striking symbolic meaning in the poem. The female speaker represents the creative force and she is angry with the destructive forces symbolized by her daddy and the male. But, we should also see the poem as a psychological poem that allows the speaker to relieve her neurotic energy through the channel of creativity. The speaker says, "I'm trough", meaning "I'm satisfied" at the end. She is relieved. The allusions of the Second World War are all real. The anger against the German, soldiers, Hitler and his Nazi party is not too much. The reader will justify this anger if he tries to imagine the inhumanity of Hitler.

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