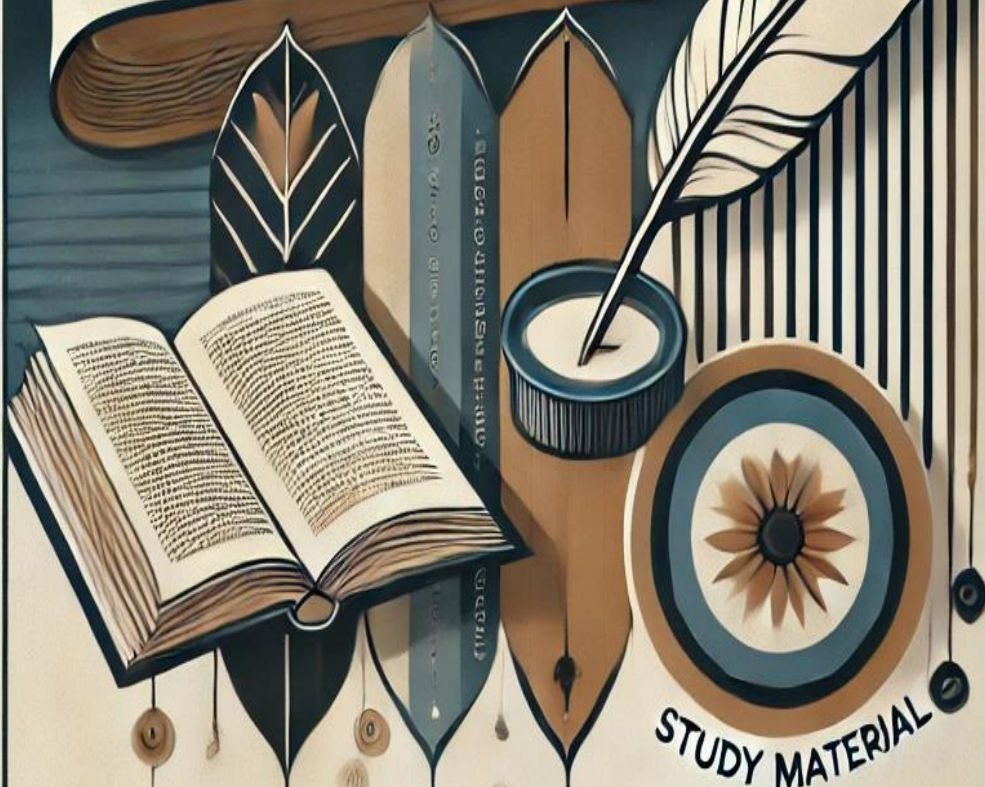


FYBA DSC-2: APPRECIATING POETRY

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STUDY MATERIAL

CTUDE MORALE

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APPRECIATING POETRY



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COURSE

Department of English Emalner
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The Solitary Reaper

William Wordsworth

“The Solitary Reaper” by William Wordsworth is a recollection of the poet’s emotional experience as he listens to a woman singing in the fields. Wordsworth's image-filled poem is highly evocative and inspiring. It asks readers to imagine a great deal and elevates these images. “The Solitary Reaper” is a lyrical poem published by the nature poet William Wordsworth in 1907. But the poem was originally written on November 5, 1805. It is a widely read poem, published in the collection Poems, in Two Volumes. This poem is unique for it is not based on the poet’s experience but on his friend and author, Thomas Wilkinson’s. Wordsworth has made a note of it in his Tours to the British Mountains.

Summary of The Solitary Reaper

“The Solitary Reaper” by William Wordsworth is written as a recollection of an overwhelming emotional experience. It is about the song sung by a Solitary Reaper. ‘The Solitary Reaper’ was singing and doing her work without minding anyone. But, the poet was observing her, mesmerized by the song. He compares her song to that of Nightingale and the Cuckoo-bird, yet he states that her song is the best. Despite the poet’s inability to decipher the song’s meaning, he understands that it is a song of melancholy. The poet listened motionlessly until he left the place, but the song never left him. Even after a long time, he has come away from that place, he says, he could still listen. The song continued to echo in his heart long after it is heard no more. The beautiful experience left a deep impact and gave him a long-lasting pleasure.

Analysis of The Solitary Reaper

Stanza One

*Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.*

In the First stanza of “The Solitary Reaper,” Wordsworth describes how the Reaper was singing all alone. During one of his journeys in the countryside of Scotland, he saw a Highland girl working in the field all alone. She had no one to help her out in the field. So she was singing to herself. She was singing without knowing that someone was listening to her song. The poet
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doesn't want to disturb her solitude so requests the passerby's go without disturbing her. She was immersed in her work of cutting and binding while singing a melancholy song. For the poet, he is so struck by the sad beauty of her song that the whole valley seems to overflow with its sound.

Stanza Two

*No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.*

In the second stanza of "The Solitary Reaper," the poet compares the young woman's song with 'Nightingale' and 'Cuckoo' – the most celebrated birds by the writers and poets for the sweetness of voice. But, here he complains that neither 'Nightingale' nor the 'Cuckoo' sang a song that is as sweet as hers. He says that no nightingale has sung the song so soothing like that for the weary travelers. For, the song of the girl has stopped him from going about his business. He is utterly enchanted that he says that her voice is so thrilling and penetrable like that of the Cuckoo Bird, which sings to break the silence in the 'Hebrides' Islands. He symbolically puts forth that her voice is so melodious and more than that of the two birds, known for their voice.

Stanza Three

*Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?*

In the third stanza of "The Solitary Reaper," the poet depicts his plight over not understanding the theme or language of the poem. The poet couldn't understand the local Scottish dialect in which the reaper was singing. So tries to imagine what the song might be

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about. Given that it is a 'plaintive number' and a 'melancholy strain' (as given in line 6) he speculates that her song might be about some past sorrow, pain, or loss 'of old, unhappy things' or battles fought long ago. Or perhaps, he says, it is a humbler, simpler song about some present sorrow, pain, or loss, a 'matter of to-day.' He further wonders if that is about something that has happened in the past or something that has reoccurred now.

Stanza Four

*Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.*

In the fourth stanza, the poet decides not to probe further into the theme. He comes to the conclusion that whatever may be the theme of her poem, it is not going to end. Not only her song but also her suffering sounds like a never-ending one. He stays there motionless and listened to her song quite some times. Even when he left and mounted up the hill he could still hear her voice coming amongst the produce, she was cutting and binding. Though the poet left that place, the song remained in his heart, long after he heard that song.

Literary/ Poetic Devices Used

'The Solitary Reaper' by William Wordsworth uses straightforward language and meter as well as natural theme and imagery. Once again Wordsworth reflected his belief in the importance of the natural world. The poem highlights his definition of poetry to be 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings from the poet and the readers' part.

Rhyme scheme

The poem's 32 lines are equally distributed among the four stanzas. Each stanza follows the rhyme scheme: ABABCCDD. Use of end rhymes, such as "profound/sound", "still/hill", "lay/day" and "grain/strain" makes the poem melodious.

Apostrophe

The poem "The Solitary Reaper" begins with an Apostrophe "Behold" where the poet addresses the unknown passersby. He uses it again in the seventh line "O Listen" telling them how the valley is filled with the sound of her.

Symbolism/ Metaphor

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The poet makes a symbolic comparison of the young woman's song with Nightingale and Cuckoo bird for the melodious nature of her song. But it turns out to be hyperbole for he exaggerates that her song is better than theirs. The poet very much captivated by her song that the valley is "overflowing with the sound". Again, he says that the song looked like a never-ending as her sorrows.

Rhetorical questions

The rhetorical question helps to make the point clear. For example, Wordsworth used "Will no one tell me what she sings?", "That has been, and may be again?" and "Familiar matter of to-day?" to express his curiosity over the theme and meaning of the song, the girl sang.

Imagery

The imagery used in a literary work enables the readers to perceive things involving their five senses. For example, "Reaping and singing by herself", "I saw her singing at her work" and "More welcome notes to weary bands" gives a pictorial description of the young woman at work. He makes the readers visualize what he has seen and how he felt.

About William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth is one of the most important English poets and a founder of the Romantic Movement of English literature, a style of writing that focuses on emotion and imagination. Wordsworth became known as a Lakeland Poet because of the area where he lived, which is renowned for its beautiful, wild landscapes, charming pastures, and countless lakes. He was often called a nature poet because of his emphasis on the connection between humans and the natural world. He became widely successful and was named Poet Laureate of England in 1843. Explore more William Wordsworth poems.

No Man Is an Island

John Donne

John Donne's "No Man is an Island" is about the connection between all of humankind. Donne essentially argues that people need each other and are better together than they are in isolation, because every individual is one piece of the greater whole that is humanity itself. The paragraph isn't actually a poem but a famous excerpt from Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. Written in 1623 when Donne was in the grips of a serious illness, the *Devotions* examine what it means to be a human being and the relationship between humanity and God. Each of this book's 23 sections features a "Meditation," "Expostulation," and "Prayer." This particular segment comes from the 17th "Meditation."

"No Man Is an Island" Summary

No human being is separate and isolated from the rest of humanity, like an island entirely on its own. Instead, every person is a part of the big metaphorical landmass that is humanity itself, one small piece of a larger whole. If a tiny lump of earth were to disappear into the ocean, then Europe would get smaller—just as it would get smaller if a big chunk of the coast broke off, or if your friend's house, or your own house, were to wash away. Likewise, the death of any person affects me, because I am a part of humanity. So, if you hear the death-knell ringing, never ask who it's ringing for: it's ringing for you.

Donne addresses humanity, asking everyone to reconsider how they perceive themselves and their relationship to everyone else. Donne creates a mood and tone that are contemplative and thoughtful, while direct enough to clearly convey the major themes of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls.'

Summary

'For Whom the Bell Tolls/No Man is an Island' by John Donne is a short, simple poem that addresses the nature of death and the connection between all human beings. Donne begins by addressing the impossibility of solitude. "No man," he says, is an island. All people are connected to one another. So much so that any loss is important. He extends the metaphor to compare the loss of a human being to the loss of a segment of a continent. This emphasis on interconnectivity is continued in the next lines. The poem turns, the poet addresses himself, and he asks that when the bell tolls one should not worry who it is tolling for. It is tolling for everyone. A single person's death is like the death of everyone.

Structure

'For Whom the Bell Tolls/No Man is an Island' by John Donne is a fourteen-line sonnet that does not follow either of the standard sonnet forms, Petrarchan or Shakespearean. The rhyme scheme is scattered with a few distinct end rhymes like "sea," "me," and "thee". Donne also chose not to use a specific metrical pattern. The lines vary in length, a feature that is unusual for a sonnet. There is a distinctive turn, or volta, towards the end of the poem. Donne

changes narrative perspectives and addresses his own position in the world. He also addresses the listener, asking that they change their understanding of what it means to be human.

Poetic Techniques

Donne makes use of several poetic techniques in 'For Whom the Bell Tolls/No Man is an Island'. These include but are not limited to enjambment, metaphor, and anaphora. The latter, anaphora, is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of multiple lines, usually in succession. This technique is often used to create emphasis. A list of phrases, items, or actions may be created through its implementation. For example, "As well as if a" which begins lines seven and eight. As well as "For" which starts two lines in the sestet.

Another important technique commonly used in poetry is enjambment. It occurs when a line is cut off before its natural stopping point. Enjambment forces a reader down to the next line, and the next, quickly. One has to move forward in order to comfortably resolve a phrase or sentence. For example, the transitions between lines eight and nine as well as twelve and thirteen.

A metaphor is a comparison between two, unlike things that do not use "like" or "as" is also present in the text. When using this technique a poet is saying that one thing is another thing, they aren't just similar. In this poem, Donne uses a metaphor to depict human relationships to landmasses and the bell tolling to death.

Detailed Analysis

Lines 1-4

No man is an island,

Entire of itself.

Each is a piece of the continent,

A part of the main.

In the first lines of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls/No Man is an Island' the speaker begins with a clear and memorable opening line. He states that "No man is an island". No single person is entirely separate from the rest of the world. Every human being is part of a whole. Donne transitions into one of the metaphorical conceits for which he is well-known. He compares human beings, their connection to one another and the rest of the world, to landmasses that are part of a continent. They are all "part of the main".

Lines 5-8

If a clod be washed away by the sea,

Europe is the less.

As well as if a promontory were.

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As well as if a manor of thine own

In the next quatrain, the conceit is continued. In these lines he adds onto it, saying that if the continent lost anything, from a “promontory” to a “clod,” or a “manor” that it would be less. This is relating back to human beings and how every loss, or death, is an injury to the whole. Humans are interconnected with one another and can therefore not afford to be flippant with one another’s lives.

Lines 9-14

Or of thine friend’s were.

Each man’s death diminishes me,

For I am involved in mankind.

Therefore, send not to know

For whom the bell tolls,

It tolls for thee.

In the sestet, of the final six lines of the sonnet, Donne adds onto the statements he made previously by noting that not only “your” loss is meaningful but also “thine friends”. Everyone is injured when one person is. The poem then transitions into first-person where the poet addresses himself and his connection to “mankind”. He speaks of “Each man’s death” as diminishing him. He is “involved” in the workings of humankind.

The last three lines directly address death and what it means when a new death comes to pass. He uses the image of a church bell tolling to symbolize death. When it rings, he says to the listener, do not ask “For whom” it tolls because it “tolls for” you. Whenever anyone dies, it is like everyone has died.

Sonnet 116

William Shakespeare

Summary

In 'Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds,' Shakespeare's speaker is ruminating on love. He says that love never changes, and if it does, it was not true or real in the first place. He compares love to a star that is always seen and never changing. It is real and permanent, and it is something on which a person can count. Even though the people in love may change as time passes, their love will not. The speaker closes by saying that no man has ever truly loved before if he is wrong about this.

Themes

Shakespeare used some of his most familiar themes in 'Sonnet 116'. These include time, love, and the nature of relationships. In the fourteen lines of this sonnet, he delves into what true love is and whether or not it's real. He uses a metaphor to compare love to a star that's always present and never changes. He is so confident in this opinion that he asserts no man has ever loved before if he's wrong. Shakespeare also brings elements of time into the poem. He emphasizes that time knows no boundaries, and even if the people in the relationship change, the love doesn't.

Historical Background

Many believe the mysterious young man for whom this and many other of Shakespeare's sonnets were written was the Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesly. Wriothesly was Shakespeare's patron, and The Bard's Venus, Adonis, and Tarquin and Lucrece were dedicated to the young man.

Structure and Form

This is a true Shakespearean sonnet, also called an Elizabethan or English sonnet. This type of sonnet contains fourteen lines, separated into three quatrains (four lines) and ending with a rhyming couplet (two lines). The rhyme scheme of this sonnet is abab cdcd efef gg. Like most of Shakespeare's works, this sonnet is written in iambic pentameter, which means each line consists of ten syllables. Within those ten syllables, there are five pairs, which are called iambs (one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable).

Literary Devices

Shakespeare uses several literary devices in 'Sonnet 116,' which include but are not limited to alliteration, examples of caesurae, and personification. The first, alliteration, is concerned with the repetition of words that begin with the same consonant sound. For example, "marriage" and "minds" in the first line, and "remover" and "remove" are in the fourth line.

Caesurae is used when the poet wants to create a pause in the middle of a line. The second line of the poem is a good example. It reads: “Admit impediments. Love is not love”. There is another example in line eight. It reads: “Whose worth’s unknown, although his height is taken.” The “pause” the poet uses might be marked with punctuation or intuited through the metrical pattern.

Personification is seen in the final sestet of the poem. There, Shakespeare personifies “Time” and “Love,” something that he does more than once in his 154 sonnets. He refers to them as forces that have the ability to change lives purposefully.

Detailed Analysis

While this sonnet is clumped in with the other sonnets that are assumed to be dedicated to an unknown young man in Shakespeare’s life, this poem does not seem to directly address anyone. In fact, Sonnet 116 seems to be the speaker’s—in this case, perhaps Shakespeare—ruminations on love and what it is. The best way to analyze Shakespeare’s sonnets is to examine them line-by-line, which is what will follow.

Lines 1-2

In the first two lines, Shakespeare writes,

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments.

These lines are perhaps the most famous in the history of poetry, regardless of whether or not one recognizes them as belonging to Shakespeare. Straight away, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of marriage to compare it to true, real love. He is saying there is no reason why two people who truly love should not be together; nothing should stand in their way. Perhaps he is speaking about his feelings for the unknown young man for whom the sonnet is written.

Shakespeare was unhappily married to Anne Hathaway, and so perhaps he was rationalizing his feelings for the young man by stating there was no reason, even if one is already married, that two people who are truly in love should not be together.

Lines 3-4

The second half of the second line begins a new thought, which is then carried on into the third and fourth lines. He writes,

Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove.

Shakespeare is continuing with his thought that true love conquers all. In these lines, the speaker tells the reader that if love changes, it is not truly loved because if it changes or

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someone tries to “remove” it, nothing will change it. Love does not stop just because something is altered. As clichéd as it sounds, true love, real love, lasts forever. The second quatrain of Sonnet 116 begins with some vivid and beautiful imagery, and it continues with the final thought pondered in the first quatrain.

Lines 5-6

Now that Shakespeare has established what love is not—fleeting and ever-changing—he can now tell us what love is. He writes,

O no, it is an ever fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken...

Here, Shakespeare tells his readers that love does not shift, change, or move; it is constant and in the same place, and it can weather even the most harrowing of storms or tempests and is never even shaken, let alone defeated. While weak, it can be argued here that Shakespeare decides to personify love since it is something that is intangible and not something that can be defeated by something tangible, such as a storm.

Lines 7-8

In the next line, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of the North Star to discuss love. He writes,

It is the star to every wand'ring bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

To Shakespeare, love is the star that guides every bark or ship on the water, and while it is priceless, it can be measured. These two lines are interesting and worth noting. Shakespeare concedes that love's worth is not known, but he says it can be measured. He neglects to tell his reader, but perhaps he is assuming the reader will understand the different ways one can measure love: through time and actions. With that thought, the second quatrain ends.

Lines 9-10

The third quatrain parallels the first, and Shakespeare returns to telling his readers what love is not. He writes,

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come...

Notice the capitalization of the word “Time.” Shakespeare is personifying time as a person, specifically, Death. He says that love is not the fool of time. One's rosy lips and cheeks will certainly pale with age as “his bending sickle's compass come.” Shakespeare's diction is important here, particularly with his use of the word “sickle.” Who is the person with whom

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the sickle is most greatly associated? Death. We are assured here that Death will certainly come, but that will not stop love. It may kill the lover, but the love itself is eternal.

Lines 11-12

This thought is continued in lines eleven and twelve, the final two lines of the third quatrain. Shakespeare writes,

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

He is simply stating here that love does not change over time; instead, it continues on even after the world has ended (“the edge of doom”).

Lines 13-14

Shakespeare uses lines thirteen and fourteen, the final couplet of Sonnet 116, to assert how truly he believes that love is everlasting and conquers all. He writes,

If this be error and upon me proved

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

In this part of Sonnet 116, Shakespeare is telling his reader that if someone proves he is wrong about love, then he never wrote the following words, and no man ever loved. He is conveying here that if his words were untrue, nothing else would exist. The words he just wrote would have never been written, and no man would have ever loved them before. He is adamant about this, and his tough words are what strengthen the sonnet itself. The speaker and poet himself are convinced that love is real, true, and everlasting.

FAQs

What is the main theme of ‘Sonnet 116’?

The main theme of the poem is the nature of true love, portrayed as unchanging, steadfast, and enduring regardless of life’s challenges and the passage of time.

What metaphor does Shakespeare use to describe love?

Love is described through several metaphors, including an “ever-fixed mark” that withstands storms and a guiding star for wandering ships.

How does ‘Sonnet 116’ relate to the other sonnets in Shakespeare’s sequence?

This sonnet is part of Shakespeare’s sequence of 154 sonnets, and it stands out for its unambiguous meditation on the nature of true love.

How does Shakespeare portray time in this sonnet?

Time is depicted as a force that can alter physical beauty but is powerless against true love’s enduring nature.

What is the significance of the concluding couplet?

The final couplet serves as a bold assertion of the truth of the poem’s claims about love, challenging anyone to prove them wrong and linking the validity of the entire poem to the speaker’s credibility.

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