

# British Poetry and Drama: 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries PYQ 2020

**Q1. Do you agree with the view that Macbeth is fighting a lost battle against forces beyond his control? Give a reasoned argument.**

**Ans. Macbeth, as portrayed in Shakespeare's renowned tragedy, is undoubtedly engaged in a fierce struggle against forces that are not solely within his control.** The progression of the narrative vividly exemplifies his gradual descent into a realm dominated by ambition and supernatural influences. His initial encounter with the witches plants the seeds of his ambition, and their prophecies act as catalysts for his reckless actions.

**Macbeth's internal conflict between his innate morality and his insatiable desire for power demonstrates his battle against forces beyond his control.** His soliloquies reveal his tortured conscience and the torment caused by his ambition, which ultimately drives him to commit heinous acts. Furthermore, the influence of Lady Macbeth further illustrates the external forces at play, as she manipulates him into pursuing the crown without restraint.

**The supernatural elements, embodied by the witches and the supernatural visions, underscore Macbeth's struggle against predestined fate.** The visions of Banquo's descendants and the infamous "bloody hands" scene symbolize the inescapable consequences of his actions, suggesting an inevitable downfall. These elements collectively highlight the theme of fate versus free will, intensifying the sense that Macbeth is entangled in a battle he cannot fully control.

**In conclusion,** Macbeth's tragic journey is undeniably characterized by his fight against forces beyond his immediate control. The interplay of ambition, morality, external manipulation, and supernatural elements all contribute to his downfall. This serves as a stark reminder of the intricacies of human nature and the perpetual conflict between individual agency and the influences of fate and circumstance.

**Q2. To what extent is Milton's Satan the true protagonist of Paradise Lost? Analyse the poet's complex construction of his heroic stature in Book 1.**

**Ans.** In the grand tapestry of John Milton's "Paradise Lost," the character of Satan does indeed hold a significant and complex role, which has led to the debate over whether he can be considered the true protagonist of the epic. This portrayal is particularly pronounced in Book 1, where Milton crafts an intricate portrayal of Satan that both challenges and entices the reader.

**Milton's depiction of Satan in Book 1 emphasizes his charismatic and dynamic qualities, marking him as a central figure.** He is depicted as a formidable and eloquent being who rallies his fellow fallen angels with persuasive rhetoric, reminiscent of a charismatic leader. The defiance he shows in the face of God's authority evokes a sense of admiration, despite his rebellion against divine order.

**Furthermore,** Satan's monologues in Book 1 reveal his complex motivations and aspirations, contributing to his heroic stature. His assertion that "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven"

reflects his commitment to personal agency and freedom, resonating with themes of individualism and the quest for self-determination.

**However**, while Satan's portrayal in Book 1 establishes him as a significant character, it's important to consider the broader context of the epic. As the narrative unfolds, Milton challenges the reader's sympathy for Satan by exposing his hubris, deceit, and manipulation. His desire for power and vengeance often lead to tragic consequences, not only for himself but also for those he influences.

**Ultimately**, Milton's construction of Satan as a complex and compelling figure serves to enhance the thematic depth of "Paradise Lost." While he is undoubtedly a central character in Book 1, the epic as a whole encompasses a broader canvas that involves the interplay of various characters and themes. The notion of Satan as the true protagonist is tempered by the larger moral and theological exploration of humanity's relationship with God and the consequences of free will.

**In conclusion**, Milton's presentation of Satan in Book 1 of "Paradise Lost" showcases his intricate construction as a character with heroic qualities, but it is within the context of the entire epic that his true role and significance are fully realized. Satan's complexity adds depth to the exploration of themes and forces at play in the narrative, inviting readers to engage with questions of morality, power, and the human condition.

**Q3. Angellica Bianca is absent at the conclusion of The Rover. Discuss how this dramatic plot pattern represents the traditional binary between the virgin heroine and the courtesan.**

**Ans.** In Aphra Behn's play "The Rover," the absence of Angellica Bianca at the conclusion serves as a poignant representation of the traditional binary between the virgin heroine and the courtesan figure. The character of Angellica embodies the complexities and conflicts inherent in this binary, and her absence underscores the contrasting fates that often await characters aligned with these roles.

**Angellica Bianca, a courtesan, is depicted as a sophisticated and independent woman who exercises agency over her own life and desires.** Her occupation as a courtesan blurs the lines between virtue and vice, challenging the conventional purity associated with the virgin heroine archetype. Angellica's emotional and intellectual depth sets her apart from more one-dimensional courtesan characters, making her an intriguing and multi-dimensional figure within the play.

**The binary between the virgin heroine and the courtesan is reinforced through the trajectories of Angellica and Florinda, who embodies the virgin heroine archetype.** Florinda's ultimate resolution involves marriage and a return to societal norms, reflecting the expected path of virtue and domesticity. Angellica, on the other hand, experiences heartbreak and isolation, aligning with the trope of the courtesan's tragic fate.

**Angellica's absence at the conclusion further emphasizes the divergent paths of these two archetypes.** While Florinda finds happiness through marriage, Angellica's absence leaves her fate unresolved, hinting at the societal consequences and isolation that courtesans often faced. This absence is a stark reminder of the limited options available to women who deviated from the path of virtue, contrasting the contrasting societal treatment of the virgin heroine and the courtesan.

**Furthermore**, Angellica's absence raises questions about agency and control over one's own narrative. Her departure suggests that she remains enigmatic and elusive, defying easy

categorization within the confines of the traditional binary. Her absence serves as a critique of the societal norms that constrain women's choices and limit their opportunities for self-determination.

**In conclusion**, Angellica Bianca's absence at the conclusion of "The Rover" reflects the traditional binary between the virgin heroine and the courtesan. Her complex characterization challenges simplistic categorizations, and her fate highlights the contrasting paths available to characters aligned with these archetypes. This absence serves as a commentary on the societal limitations placed on women and the complexities of agency, virtue, and societal expectations.

**Q4. Critically comment on how Pope in The Rape of the Lock satirises the displaced values of a world that sets more stock in appearances than realities.**

**Ans.** In Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," the poet employs satire to critique the superficial values of a society that places greater importance on appearances rather than underlying truths. Through his humorous and clever portrayal of the trivial incident of Belinda's lock of hair being cut, Pope reveals the absurdity of a world obsessed with superficiality.

**Pope satirizes the displaced values of this society by exaggerating the significance attached to the lock of hair.** The theft of Belinda's hair becomes a grand event, as if it were a matter of life and death, highlighting the triviality of the situation. This hyperbolic treatment exposes the frivolous nature of valuing external attributes over deeper qualities.

**The poem is rich in social commentary, using the mock-epic form to magnify the inconsequential.** Pope employs epic conventions like battles, gods, and supernatural interventions, which are typically reserved for grand heroic tales, to highlight the absurdity of applying such grandeur to a minor incident. This juxtaposition underscores the skewed priorities of the society depicted.

**Belinda's preparation rituals, such as her dressing table rituals, further emphasize the obsession with appearances.** Pope describes her use of cosmetics and adornments in meticulous detail, satirizing the excessive lengths individuals go to enhance their outer appearance while neglecting inner virtues. The poem's tone is playful yet critical, as Pope reveals the emptiness of valuing external beauty without substance.

**Moreover**, the introduction of sylphs and gnomes as supernatural beings that oversee the preservation of beauty serves as a satirical commentary on the preoccupation with appearances. The exaggerated attention given to protecting physical attributes contrasts with the neglect of genuine human virtues and concerns. This reinforces Pope's critique of misplaced values.

**Through these satirical techniques, Pope effectively exposes the absurdity of a society that prioritizes appearances over substance.** He encourages readers to reflect on the implications of such misplaced values and the emptiness that can arise from pursuing superficial ideals. "The Rape of the Lock" stands as a witty and insightful commentary on the superficiality and distorted priorities of its time, inviting readers to reconsider their own values and societal norms.

**In conclusion**, Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" satirizes the displaced values of a society fixated on appearances rather than realities. Through exaggeration, mock-epic conventions, and vivid descriptions, Pope highlights the frivolity of prioritizing external attributes over genuine qualities. The poem serves as a humorous yet incisive critique of a world that places undue importance on superficiality.

**Q5. In his philosophical treatise *Discourse on the Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, how does Descartes's doubt and scepticism towards sensory knowledge lead to his well-known formulation "I think therefore I am"?**

**Ans.** In René Descartes's philosophical treatise "Discourse on the Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences," his process of doubt and skepticism towards sensory knowledge plays a pivotal role in the formulation of his famous dictum "I think, therefore I am" (Cogito, ergo sum). Descartes's method of radical doubt serves as a foundational step in his quest for certain knowledge.

**Descartes initiates his philosophical inquiry by calling into question the reliability of sensory perception and the potential for illusion.** He introduces the concept of the "evil demon" or a powerful deceiver that could manipulate one's senses and create false perceptions, casting doubt on the accuracy of empirical observations. This doubt extends even to the possibility that one's entire sensory experience might be an illusion.

**By systematically doubting everything that can be doubted, Descartes aims to identify a fundamental truth that cannot be undermined by doubt.** He recognizes that if he doubts, there must be a thinking self that is engaged in the act of doubt. This realization forms the basis of the famous phrase "I think, therefore I am." Descartes argues that even if everything else could be an illusion, the act of doubt itself confirms the existence of a thinking self—a "res cogitans" or thinking thing.

**Descartes's doubt and skepticism towards sensory knowledge lead to the "I think, therefore I am" formulation by establishing the existence of the thinking self as an undeniable and indubitable truth.** This thinking self becomes the foundation upon which Descartes seeks to rebuild his system of knowledge. The act of doubting is what validates the existence of the doubter, demonstrating that even the most radical skepticism cannot undermine the certainty of self-awareness.

**In essence, Descartes uses doubt as a methodological tool to strip away uncertain beliefs and arrive at a foundational truth.** The act of doubt itself becomes the point of certainty from which he can reconstruct his understanding of reality. This foundational insight forms the cornerstone of Descartes's epistemology and has had a profound impact on Western philosophy, influencing subsequent thinkers and discussions about the nature of knowledge, existence, and the self.

**In conclusion,** Descartes's doubt and skepticism towards sensory knowledge lead to his well-known formulation "I think, therefore I am" by demonstrating that the very act of doubt establishes the existence of a thinking self. This thinking self becomes an undeniable and indubitable truth, providing the foundational certainty upon which Descartes builds his philosophical framework.

**Q6. The seventeenth century in England witnessed extensive debates on power, especially in the sphere of politics, monarchy and governance. Critically examine the statement with reference to any one of the following texts in your syllabus: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.**

**Ans.** In the seventeenth century, England indeed experienced intense debates on power, particularly in the realms of politics, monarchy, and governance. A text that provides valuable insights into these debates is Thomas Hobbes's "Leviathan." Hobbes's work reflects his philosophical exploration of power, the role of government, and the nature of human society.

**"Leviathan" was published in 1651 during a period marked by political turmoil and the English Civil War.** Hobbes's central thesis revolves around the concept of the social contract, wherein individuals surrender some of their natural rights to a sovereign authority in exchange for security and order. Hobbes's approach to power is rooted in his pessimistic view of human nature, which he describes as inherently selfish and driven by self-preservation.

**Hobbes argues that in the state of nature, without the presence of a common authority, individuals would engage in a constant struggle for power and resources, leading to a "war of all against all."** To escape this chaotic condition, individuals form a social contract to establish a powerful sovereign—a "Leviathan"—that maintains order and prevents conflict. This sovereign authority holds absolute power and is empowered to make and enforce laws for the common good.

**Hobbes's perspective on power is characterized by a focus on its consolidation within a strong central authority.** He believes that without a powerful sovereign to keep individuals in check, society would descend into chaos and violence. This view reflects the political context of the time, as the English Civil War had highlighted the dangers of unchecked power and the need for a stable governing structure.

**In "Leviathan," Hobbes also discusses the nature of monarchy and the legitimacy of political authority.** He argues that any form of government, whether it be a monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, is justified as long as it upholds the social contract and ensures the preservation of peace. However, Hobbes leans towards an absolute monarchy as the most effective means of maintaining order, given his concerns about human nature.

**In conclusion,** Thomas Hobbes's "Leviathan" critically engages with the debates on power, politics, and governance that were prominent in seventeenth-century England. His exploration of the social contract, the role of a sovereign authority, and the necessity of consolidating power within a central entity reflects the tumultuous political climate of the time. Hobbes's work contributes to the broader discourse on power and the establishment of effective government during this transformative period in English history.