

## CM Littérature

The 15th century was an age of sterility as far as literary creation is concerned for various reasons : first, political reasons, the war in France, then afterwards, the war of the roses (Lancaster vs York) and secondly, linguistic reasons, indeed the language was to be transformed in the 15th century. What remains of the period is the *Morte d'Arthur* which was written by Sir Thomas Malory and printed by Caxton in 1485.

The 16th century was, on the contrary, the century of the English Renaissance under the Tudor dynasty mainly Henry VIII (1509 - 47) and Elizabeth I (1558 - 1603). On the continent, the Renaissance means a liberation of religious and philosophical thoughts, a revival of criticism, the growth of Humanism with Petrarch, the love of beauty. Italy was at the origin of the Renaissance. What is called the English Renaissance corresponds to the publication of *The Essays* by Montaigne in France (1580).

After that, there is the Late Renaissance, or the Jacobean Renaissance which took place under the reign of James I (1603 - 25).

### The Elizabethan period

The Elizabethan period was characterized by an atmosphere of exuberance : the age was suited for stimulating the imagination of the poets and this mainly because their patron who were noble men encouraged them to write poetry and masque for the court. A masque was a kind of entertainment played by the courtiers themselves and they danced and sing in it.

The Queen was, of course, at the center of the universe, especially after the defeat of the Invincible Armada in 1588 (= the King of Spain sent many ships and it was called the Invincible Armada). We can say that the spirit of the age was one of national pride and highly developed Protestant feeling as well.

It was also a period of exoticism because there were quite a few attempts at colonisation (Drake), so new animals and products were imported to England (parrots were really fashionable).

The Queen was also flattered in the poetry of the period, yet, the paragon of the period was the Countess of Pembroke who inspired many poets.

During the Renaissance, the university of Cambridge was far more progressive than Oxford, it was a center of Humanism and Protestantism and the scholars had a particular interest in critical theory : they wanted to establish new rules in literature.

As far as critical theory is concerned, in 1589, Puttenham defined certain rules in his *Art of English Poesie*. In this book, he says that the imitation of the anciens, Italiens poets, the French Pleiade (Ronsard, Du Bellay...) was a good thing but it should not be servile. What was encouraged was linguistic experience as well as metrical experience but above all, critical theory assumed the form of a defense or justification of imaginative readings. This calls a new enthusiasm among the poets of the time which was reinforced by the neo-Platonic theory whose representatives was Pico de la Mirandola. The neo-Platonic belief was that when a poet wrote, he was under a divine inspiration in an ecstatic state or « furor poeticus ».

**Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)** : He was middle-class, he was educated in Merchant Taylors then he went to Cambridge as a sizar. He left Cambridge in 1576, and he went to London afterwards. In 1579 he joined the household as one of the Queen's favourites, the earl of Leicester. He met the paragon of the period : Sir Philip Sidney and he was fascinated by him. Then, he began *The Faerie Queene* and published the *Shepeards calendar* and English poetry was born. It is a pastoral position of twelve poems or eclogues in connexion with the twelve months of the year.

In 1580, Spenser was appointed Secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton who was going to Ireland as Lord Deputy. It was a real exile for him, he didn't like the country although he was given a castle near Cork, the castle of Kilcorman (South East). As a consequence, he suffered from melancholy and he wrote his masterpiece *The Faerie Queen* (1590 => books 1, 2, 3 / 1596 => books 1 to 6 / *Amoretti* in 1595).

He married Elizabeth Boyle (he was talking about her in *Amoretti*) and he had 4 children.

In 1598 there was an insurrection in Ireland and the castle was burnt so he went back to London and he died there in 1599.

The Faerie Queen was a long poem of an epic in verse, and at the origine it was supposed to contain twelve books, 12 Aristotelian virtues. The story is that a King author who travel in quest of Gloriana (he was ment to celebrate Elizabeth the I, the Faerie Queen).

The setting is the Faerie land, and the characters of fairies. The Faerie Queen can be read as a beautiful story but also as a moral, as well as religious allegory. The meter is the Spenserian stanza (9 iambic lines, the first 8 being pentameters, and the last, hexameters or alexandrine).

Verse  $\neq$  Line

Verse = versified poetry

Line of verse

The basic line of verse = the iambic pentameter or heroic line.

(u -) iamb  $\neq$  trochaic (- u)

1) *Masculine line* : 10 syllables with the 10th stressed

2) *Feminine line* : 11 syllables with the 10th stressed, but the 11th syllable unstressed.  
Hendecasyllable.

Iambic pentameter = each pentameter as 5 feet / but sometimes the iamb is replaced by another foot. Then we have a shift in rhythm.

Conceit : thought, idea, conception. It might also denote a fanciful disposition, an ingenious act of deception or a witty or clever remarque or idea.

The word conceit has come to denote in elaborate figurative devise, which often incorporate metaphor (=comparison), simile, hyperbole (=exaggeration) or oxymora .

A conceit is intended to surprise and delight by his wit (=esprit) ingenuity and intellectual.

The sonneteer conceits => decorative.

The writers of love sonnets have a large number of conventional conceits (ex : conceit of oxymora

ex : I fear, I hope, I burn and freeze like ice).

There is also the jealousy conceit in which the lover wishes he were an ornament, an article of clothing, or a creature of his mistress (« That I might touch that cheek »).

The inventory of blazon conceit : a catalogue of mistress charms and perfections. (The « carpe diem » conceit).

## \*Edmund Spenser

### Sonnet 54 (*Amoretti*)

All the rhymes are masculine which give a rising movement to the poem.

The reader make more easily sympathise with the poet.

The sonnet consist of 4 complex sentences coinciding with the structure of the poem structure.

Subordination and coordination (ex : In the first sentence we find a relative plausible to ING describing the attitude of the poet).

« When » is repeated twice, then a marked transition with the adverb « yet », and further the coordination « but ».

As for the last sentence it introduces the question which is immediately followed by an answer which is very categorical.

The lexicon is simple because the words are mainly of saxon origin and the register is formal.

As far as deviation is concerned we find archaic works (=myrth, mirth, merth).

The lexical fields can be distributed between the world of the theater (=play, pageant, and comedy, and tragedy which are antithetic, beholding is repeated twice as well as the phrase constant eye) and that of feelings (=antithetic terms as well such as merth, sorrow, woes, smart, mone and even the verbs I joy / delight not, I wail / I laugh, I laugh / I cry...).

We find quite a few adverbs of manner (diversely, ydly) and also a few adverbs of time (soon after, when...).

The structure of the poem : the sonnet begins with an assertion with a metaphor in which the world is compared with a theater in which his love is a spectator. Then, afterwards, the poet expresses his confusion in front of the lady's attitude by giving a few example of his vain efforts to attract her attention. Last, he concludes by « nothing can move her ».

In the theme of impossible love : we notice a shock contrast between the acute feelings of the poet and the startle indifference of the lady. It is expressed through the metaphors (=She cried a river) and similes (=She's like a rose).

The poet plays all the parts, all the roles on the stage : both the comic and the tragic ones. Whereas she sits idly.

The lady remains passive, she does not participate to the show, she does not react. The simile on line 6 is suggestive of the odd of the actor who is capable of expressing joy or sorrow according to the part he plays.

He suggests that there is a total discrepancy between the mood of the poet and the woman's.

« She's a woman but a senseless stone » => alliteration in 's'.

The lady describes here does not correspond to the Elizabethan's ideas of the woman : she is petrified like a statue (= a heart of stone, senseless stone...).

To conclude, this sonnet is typical of Spenser because of his theme, on the one hand, and on the other hand because of its musical quality. When we read it we notice a melancholy tone suggested by such alliteration in 'mask in myrth', 'merth nor rues'... The efficiency of the poetic effect is also due to the majority of mono-syllabic words used by the poet. As far as the rhymes are concerned, they often reflect the antithetic structure of the poem (ex : stay riming with play, comedy vs tragedy, mone and stone... Eye and cry).

Sir Philip SYDNEY : He was an aristocrat, the nephew of earl of Leicester. He was educated at Shrewsbury and later at Christ Church (Oxford).

He was a courtier, a great soldier and a poet. He was learned in high sense of justice, but he was also good at sports (= a tournament). At last he was a passionate Protestant. He was certainly the most brilliant poet of the period. In 1583, after travelling through France, Austria and Italy he married Frances the daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham.

Long before, in 1576, he had met Penelope Devereux, the daughter of the Earl of Essex to whom he addressed his famous sonnet Astrophil and Stella.

He died when he was wounded to death during a battle against the Spaniard in the law country. Although none of his words were published in his lifetime he exercised a tremendous influence on the poets of his time and afterwards.

His Apologie for Poetrie or Defence of Poesie, published after his death, had a great influence on the poets at the time. One of his major achievement, The Arcadia which is a pastoral romance which was written in order to entertain his sister, the countess of Pembroke (= describes many events, tournaments, fights, struggles even rapes. It is very ambiguous because the 2 heroes are 2 princes who disguise themselves as a shepard and a shepardess).

Sidney borrowed from Petrarch, Sir Thomas Wyatt and the French players.

Sidney wrote it in order to express his love to Penelope who was obliged to write Lord Rich.

Imagery : allusion to Cupid through « love give the wound » and to his arrows. But here, the poet denies the Gods' intervention by saying that it wasn't love at first sight. The metaphor is telescoped further in the second part

There is no escape for the poet : the metaphor of the « mine » implied that there is some cunning in the poem, as well as a secret strategy to win his heart assimilated to a fortress.

But what is striking is that the lover is not even mention : only love which is a metonymy in this instant.

After his surrender, the poet compares himself to a slave entirely submitted to his mistress, which implied a certain amount of masochism.

We must add to this the feeling that he is powerless and incapable of reasoning as line 12-13 suggest : « the remnant of my wit » => he has lost a good part of his intelligence.  
The last line ends on a beautiful metaphor : « While with a feeling skill I paint my hell ».  
Love = a real and endless suffering. He imagines to be more a victim than a happy lover.  
To conclude, despite his reputation as a very precious and somewhat elaborate poet, Sydney displays here an undeniable originality in the tone and the mood of this sonnet. We are far from the soppy conception of love of some of the poets of the time.

### **William Shakespeare - Sonnet 144 :**

Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) : his sonnet was published only in 1609 and he was probably written between 1593 and 1596.

About 154 sonnets were attributed to Shakespeare.

The dedication of the sonnets has caused much ink to flow.

« To the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets : Mr W.H » => we never knew who was Mr W.H.

A relationship with a mysterious young man is the subject of many sonnets.

One of the subject of the others is the poet infatuation for a blonde-haired girl who is unfaithful : she's musical, but without virtue nor even beauty. The poet is her slave.

Sonnet 144 : Composed of 3 quatrains and a couplet => each quatrain forms a full sentence just by the couplets. These sentences are complex, for ex : inversion, etc...

In fact, the syntax perfectly suits the mood of the poet. The majority of the lines are masculine, except for lines 5 and 7. The structure of the poem is mainly antithetic and it reflects the themes developed by Shakespeare.

The sonnet is written in the first person, that is to say, the poet invites the reader to share his dilemma => he has two loves : a man who is compared to a good angel and a woman who is compared to a bad one. He is torned between them and he feels incapable to choose between them.

Lexicon : it's more simple than it is abstract => the register is essentially religious. Indeed, we notice some repetitions like « spirits » (l1,3), « better angel » (l3,5), « angel » (l9), « bad angel » (l14), « hell »...

We also notice a few contrasts in pairs of words, nouns essentially : « comfort » as opposed to « despair », « better angel » as opposed to « better spirits », « saint » as opposed to « devil »...

We find few comparatives adjectives : « better », « worser », « ill », « bad », « foul »...

The verbs describe mental processes and express the poet's meditation and doubts : « suspect », « tell », « guess », « know »... All the verbs refer to temptation : « fire », « corrupt »...

As for the passive form « be turned » which is a clear reference to « metamorphosis » which is a clear characteristic of demons.

As for « would » (= root modality) and « may » (= modalité épistémique), « shall » : it reflects the perplexity of the poem, and « shall » reflects the incredibility.

Simile : line 2 « spirits » to « to hell » => good vs evil.

The metaphor on lines 3 and 4 give use some precisions : a fair man is defined as a « better angel » and a woman as a « worser spirit ». Reference of Eve by whom Adam was corrupted in Paradise and the nation was echoed in the second quatrain : the perversity of the woman/temptress is suggested by her guile (= ruse). She tries to corrupt the « better angel » and she's supposed to have « foul pride ». What is suggested here is that she interferes in the poet's love for the fair man, that is to say, the good angel.

On the other hand, the poet seems to be the powerless witness of their « friendship ». Although he can't do anything, he has the feeling that « his angel be turned fiend », that is to say, his angel has been corrupted by the dark lady. Consequence : he has been precipitated in hell.

We can see that the imagery is both conventional and ambiguous : the poet is torned between his love for a man and for a woman. Or that he describes the corrupting character of the woman's love. The concluding lines convey his doubts or perplexity as if he could not choose but he also conveys his pessimism because he suggests that the bad angel could win in the end.

## ***The 17th century***

The 17th century was characterized by a period of great political disorder : England was divided between two parties : the partisans of Oliver Cromwell, the Puritans, and the partisans of the King, the Catholics. Political situation => consequences on literature.

The Royalists poets or Caroline poets wrote short poems called lyrics and the main motive of this poem was love. These poems were kind of a continuation of the Elizabethan poems : they followed classical rules.

Robert Herrick was the great figure of the Caroline poets : his main achievement was *Hesperides* and his philosophy was *Carpe Diem* => « Gather ye rose buds while ye may ».

The puritan side : John Milton (1608 - 1674) was the greatest figure of this side. He was the exact opposite of Herrick => he was educated at Saint Paul. His father was a scrivener. He had a very hard training, he had private tutors who taught him Hebrew in addition to Greek and Latin. Then, he went to Cambridge when contemplated becoming a clergyman but he couldn't because he was a Puritan.

During the 6 years that he spent at Horton (Buckinghamshire) with his father, he read the classics and prepared himself for his vocation as a poet. He first wrote *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso* in 1632. It's an allegorical poem about the value of 'mirth', and the second one is about melancholy.

Then he wrote *Comos* in 1634, a masque which was very popular.

1637 : *Lycidas*, a poem.

Then, he traveled in Italy where he met Galileo which was persecuted by the inquisition.

On learning that the Civil War was about to break in England, Milton came back hurriedly to participate in war.

He truly believed that only the Puritans were a guarantee of liberty, and so he sided with him.

1642 : he married Mary Powell, the daughter of a Royalist, she left after 6 weeks, and in 1643, he published a Pamphlet on the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.

Yet, she came back to him in 1645, and she died in 1652. By then, Milton was blind.

He married another woman who died in 1653.

He married a third woman in 1662.

**Milton and literature** : to him it was a form of action, as well as a mission. So he wrote pamphlets, the first one being *The Areopagitica* in 1644, in which he defended the freedom of the press.

After the execution of Charles I in 1649, he published *the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* which is a pamphlet, a justification of the execution of the monarch when he's not liked by the people.

Needless to say that such an idea was revolutionary.

So that after this publication, Milton was decided as a regicide throughout Europe.

He also wrote pamphlets without divorce, in which he shows that incompatibility of minds was as harmful as adultery.

Afterwards, he engaged into his composition of *Paradise Lost*. He started in 1658 and ended in 1663. And now he had become blind in 1652 because he had studied too much by candlelight.

*Paradise Lost* is an epic poem in 12 books, but it is a Christian epic. In this long poem Milton's purpose is **to justify the ways of God to man from the fall of man to his loss of paradise.**

The book reflects all the ideas of the 17th century : philosophical ideas as well as religious or scientific (=ex : reference to Galileo). The style is certainly difficult because the order of the words is more Latin than English => Latinized diction. This style is called Milton's Grand Style.

In fact, what is particularly striking is that the thought that Milton developed in his poem is extremely modern.

To sum up his conception : to him, if man fell it was not the fault of God, but of man himself. Because God was omniscient but he had endowed man with free will. In spite of that, man fell and was banished from Paradise and had to provide for his needs.

On the whole, *Paradise Lost* is highly individualistic. The Romantic poets afterwards considered that Satan was a representation of Milton himself.

He also expresses his political thoughts as well as disillusionment because if he was confident in a Republic at the origin after a restoration, he felt disgusted with the English people, 'the populist' of England, although he had fought for liberation.

In fact, Milton did not believe in the army, in generals like Cromwell and because of his attitude, Milton was sent to prison because he was judged as suspect.

All that he wrote after restoration is pessimistic, like *Paradise Regained* an epic published in 1671 or *Samson Agonisties* published before his death in 1674.

At the end of his life, he had come to the conclusion that the only way of governing England was Oligarchy.

*Paradise Lost* : The analysis of *Paradise Lost* was made by Milton himself in the introduction that he wrote for each book. There is a sort of summary before each book.

To sum up briefly, the poem relate the form and rebellion of Satan, then the creation of the world, Satan's revenge on Adam and Eve and afterwards, their banishment from the Paradise.

Satan is the most attractive character of the poem, which is rather unexpected for a religious poet.

The whole poem is written in blank verse (= unrhymed iambic pentameter -> 'To be / or not / to be / that is / the ques/tion' 5 pieds iambic). We find a constant use of alliterations.

The action is situated in Hell, nine days after Satan and his legions have been driven out of Heaven : they are lying in the Burning Lake.

Satan which means 'the adversary' in Hebrew, and Beelzebub rise from the lake of fire and rouse over fallen angels.

« Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven » => Chiasme.

Of Satan speech is made up of a series of questions and answers in which he expresses his indignation as being condemned to remain in Hell. Then, he decided to reign over this new Kingdom.

Now, we can noticed internal rhymes : the rhythm is quite regular and the lines are all masculines. We find a few end-stopped lines, commas, full-stops, deux point...

The caesuras are particularly powerful, for example on the first line of the passage : « Is this the region, this the soil, the clime » => represents hesitation, he doesn't know.

The punctuation of this passage marks the stages of Satan's reasoning. It is very vivid, it could be a sort of dramatic monologue. The sentences are long and elaborate and the syntax is of course, complex (= we find questions, relative causes, imperatives, exclamations, quite a few modals...)

In this passage, modals = particularly interesting, because they reflect the progression of Satan's thoughts as well as his rebellious mind.

Line 244 : 'you must', line 246 : 'he can', line 247 : 'what shall', line 256 'I should be'...

We have strong modals showing that Satan is determined and has authority.

The lexicon is mostly abstract and the register is formal and religious. We notice a number of repetition 'heaven', 'hell', 'rain' (=verb + noun), 'lost', 'hail'...

But we can say that the main characteristics of Satan's speech is the used of antithesis = 'celestial light' opposed to 'infernal world', 'heaven' is opposed to 'hell', 'happy' to 'unhappy'...

The nouns are numerous in the passage, there refer either to the lexical field of topography (like regions, soil, site, place, mention, field, world and we can also include heaven and hell which are places here -> Milton vision of Heaven and Hell is anthropomorphic.

Hierarchy of being -> divine or spiritual connotation here (archangel, sovereign, possessor, equal, associates, co-partners...). We can find contrasts in pairs as far as feelings are concerned : 'joy' as opposed to 'horrors', 'envy' and 'ambition'.

The adjectives = appreciative. We can also find contrasts : 'happy' opposed to 'mournful' and 'unhappy', 'free', 'secure', 'faithful', 'astonished'.

We find quite a few adjectives in the superlative : 'best', 'profoundest', 'better'

Some verbs : statives (dwell, be, is)... Other are dynamic (change, made, half-built, try...). And one use of the verb of movement (drive us hands).

The adverbs : above, where, however, here, thus... We find one adverb of time, 'forever' and one adverb of manner 'thus'.

We can say that the semantic function is quite powerful, there is an economy of mean that is very effective here.

The imagery : the metaphors -> 'this mournful bloom' opposed to 'celestial light' = we understand that we have here a traditional image of Hell as a dark place and Heaven as a realm of divine light. Here, we have some biblical inspiration = God as sovereign pertains to the same tradition.

Satan expresses a very modern conception as well as his absolute trust or Milton's in the power of the mind.

This is an expression of Satan hubris (=wanton insolence -> ignoring the God's warnings and feeling kind of superior) and usually it brings about downfall and Nemesis (=Goddess of vengeance).

Line 263 : 'better to reign in Hell than serve in Hell' => Satan's pride.

Satan's rhetoric : Satan's eloquence is particularly clever, he knows how to handle language and here, he has a properly dramatic dimension. After first expressing his indignation he seems to submit to God's decision after ascertain that he is his equal.

Hamartia = tragic error.

A proof that Satan can find 'Right Reasons' (= la raison éclairée par les ou Dieu) = with reason limited to the power reasoning without its religious dimension.

The consequence of his reasoning lead him to 'reign in Hell rather than serve in Heaven' which is coherent with his personality.

Satan's first speech reveals his evil nature, his pride and his rebellious personality.

We can say that he deserves his name 'the adversary'.

In spite of this, Milton manages to arouse a feeling of fascination for his character. Much later the romantic poets praised the figure of Satan because they found in him all the possibilities of men's mind and sense of revolt.

**John Donne** : was born in London and belonged to a roman catholic family. He studied at Oxford and Cambridge and afterwards traveled to Italy and Spain. He became secretary to a lord but in 1601 he eloped with his 16 years old niece whom he had married secretly. This lead him to prison and to poverty, afterwards John who had abandoned the Catholic faith was ordained in the Anglican church. He became Dean of St Paul's.

His earliest poems were satires and elegies written in the 1590s. His Holy Sonnets were probably written between 1610-11. However his songs and sonnets are impossible to date.