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Department of English

Course – B. A. 1st Year

Paper - First

Topic – Michael Drayton : " Since There is no Help Left..."

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Michael Drayton (1563 – 23 December 1631) was an English poet who came to prominence in the Elizabethan era. Drayton was a distinguished writer and poet in Elizabethan England. He was a contemporary of many literary giants in his era, and he wrote one of the longest poems in English history.

Michael Drayton was a literary giant in an age of literary giants. Given his distinguished peers in Elizabethan England, it was difficult to stand out, but Drayton left a body of literature that was inspired, as much in his time as ours. Detailed biographical material on Drayton is somewhat sketchy at best. Drayton was born 1563 in Hartshill, Warwickshire. His father was a tradesman and his socio-economic status was modest at best. His social stock rose when he worked as a page for the weN8 N9 N9 N9 V8hy nobleman Sir Henry Goodere in Polesworth who sponsored and promoted the theater and literary works. He fell in love with Goodere's daughter Anne, and some of his literary characters were patterned after her. Sadly for Drayton, she married someone else and Drayton himself never married.

Drayton's first writing appeared in the 1590s. His first work, The Harmony of the Church (1591) was a work of religious poems that paraphrased much of the Bible. His Idea, the Shepherd's Garland consisted of nine pastoral poems set in rural settings. Drayton produced a wide variety of genres, but he was especially drawn to pastoral, rural, and idyllic historical themes. His several historical works include The Legend of Piers Gaveston, which was about an English nobleman and confidant of King Edward II. Another was a poem on civil unrest titled The Barons' Wars, though originally published under the title Mortimeriades before being revised. His Robert, Duke of Normandy was another historical work as was his Matilda, about the royal House of Sussex.

Drayton lived in an age of transition. In 1603, James I succeeded the long-running monarch Elizabeth I as king. Drayton favored Elizabeth who had presided over an era of enormous creativity in the arts with the likes of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, John Donne, Philip Sidney, Philip Spenser, and Ben Johnson.

Customary for his era, poets welcomed the incoming monarch with song and verse in hopes of attainting key appointments. Drayton heaped praise on James I in his poem To the Majestie of King James, but received nothing in return, and for a brief spell wrote bitter satire such as The Owle which was an attack on a corrupt royal court. Nevertheless, he was a prodigious writer. In 1594, he published the first of fifty-three sonnets and by 1619 he had a total of sixty-three which survive today. Some have speculated that Shakespeare himself borrowed material from Drayton, but it seems more likely that the two contemporaries worked independent of each other.

Drayton abandoned his biting satire and produced more celebrated works. His England's Heroical Epistles was a series of literary exchanges between well-known romances in English history. This work was also meant as a tribute piece to the Roman poet Ovid who wrote the Heroides. He wrote a number of short works, such as the epic Battle of Agincourt about the infamous battle between English and French military forces, and

his Ode to the Virginian Voyage which was another tribute piece that celebrated the English colonization of the Americas and the New World. One of his later works is Nymphidia which was a fairytale-like story full of memorable characters and story lines. His much-celebrated Poly-Olbion was dedicated to Prince Henry, the son of James I, and is one of the longest poems in the English language. Over the years, it proved to be an inspiration for later writers to emulate. It is an incredible 15,000 lines and it is a nostalgic poem on the Elizabethan era punctuated through with idyllic pastoral settings in England and Wales.

The Poem

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.

Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;

And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,

That thus so cleanly I myself can free.

Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,

And when we meet at any time again,

Be it not seen in either of our brows

That we one jot of former love retain.

Now at the last gasp of Love’s latest breath,

When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies;

When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,

And Innocence is closing up his eyes—

Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,

From death to life thou might’st him yet recover!

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Introduction : Since There's No Help ~By Michael Drayton~ 'Since There's No Help' is a typical example of Drayton's work, yet it has been solely responsible for plucking Drayton from the general obscurity of Elizabethan sonneteers. It was his one and only "excellent" sonnet, reaching the "highest level of poetic feeling and expression"1 considered to be the "the one sonnet by a contemporary which deserves to rank with some of Shakespeare's best" This poem is written in traditional Shakespearian sonnet form, consisting of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is also consistent of a Shakespearean sonnet, being

(abab cdcd efef gg) yet critics are divided as to whether this sonnet can be split into the traditional three quatrains and a rhyming couplet, as with other Shakespearean sonnets. Lemuel Whitaker, in his essay 'The Sonnets of Michael Drayton', argued "many critics have shut their eyes to the sestet". "Now", at the opening of line 9, undoubtedly acts as a Volta, marking a substantial change in tone and causing some critics, including Whitaker, to consider this sonnet as an octave and a sestet, following the Petrachan sonnet form, rather than as a Shakespearian sonnet.

The repetition of "glad" in line three adds power and emphasis. This type of rhetorical device is often used when a poet is trying to convince the reader of his point of view. It also suggests that that the poet is not only trying to persuade the reader, but himself also. From this, it can be inferred that he deeply loves the woman and that his opinion in line four that "so cleanly I myself can free" is not the case. This language appears to be a form of self-deception and a male refusal to admit an emotional problem, which he cannot overcome, and is

one that I think many modern audiences could identify with. This attempt to conceal pain and true emotion is also evident in line 8, where the poet's uses the colloquial expression, "one jot", professing to be careless and almost cynical of the power of love. Here, the simplistic language adds poignancy to the words of the poet. While Drayton was one of the sonneteers that indulged in a conventional literary expression, this seemingly male reluctance to admit his pain and loss of control of his feelings for a woman who has rejected him does not fit into this form of sonnet vogue.

Drayton associates his railed relationship with his loss of innocence. This may be a reference to how his 'innocent', romantic illusions, possibly consistent with the tradition form of courtly love, have been shattered by this experience. Unexpectedly, the tone again changes in the final couplet. It is only here that Drayton admits that he really doesn't want his relationship and love to "die", he wants he to help them "recover". It is this idea of recovery that provides the reader with an important clue to the 'real' sentiments of the poet. The

couplet also implies, that it was not in fact the poet who ended the relationship, but the woman, as it is her that he begs to save it "when all have given him over". While 'Since There's No Help' displays many of the literary conventions of the time, it is by no means a stereotypical 'Courtly Love' sonnet, conveying no real feelings. Considering the context of the poet's life, this poem is probably autobiographical, dedicated to the love.

A summary poem

Michael Drayton was a contemporary of William Shakespeare – he was born a year before Shakespeare, in 1563 – and, like the Bard, he was a Warwickshire lad. But although he wrote a great number of poems – including a long verse travelogue about England – Drayton's poetry is not read much now. That is, with the notable exception of this one sonnet, beginning 'Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part', which is widely anthologised and reasonably well-known. The poem is deft enough to make a little closer analysis of its language rewarding and useful.Since there's no help,

come let us kiss and part' was not originally a standalone sonnet, but the 61st poem in a sonnet sequence, Idea's Mirror, published in 1594, around the time that Shakespeare may have been composing his Sonnets. Drayton's sequence of sonnets are about his attempts to woo a lady, who was probably his patron's daughter, Anne Goodere. But sonnet sequences were often written for patrons or as intellectual exercises to share among friends: whether Sir Philip Sidney really loved Penelope Rich, and whether Shakespeare was really romantically involved with the Fair Youth, remain tantalising questions without clear answers.

The opening line and valedictory tone suggest, 'Since there's no help' comes towards the end of the cycle known as Idea's Mirror, by which point Drayton has lost hope of ever winning his lady. This is clear from the argument in the sonnet, which we might summarise or paraphrase as follows: 'It's no good, so let's split up. I'm glad, actually – no, really, I am – to be out of this relationship. Let's shake hands and forget everything we once promised each other; and when we meet in the

future, let's agree not to show the other any sign that we still love one another. Now, as our love for each other dies for ever, as we realise that we cannot entertain any further hope that we can make this work – now, if you wanted to, you could reawaken my dying love for you, and bring it back to life.'

In other words, then, 'Since there's no help' is a break-up poem that ends, in the final couplet, with a sudden turn – indeed, not just a turn (a common feature of the sonnet) but a turnaround, whereby Drayton effectively says that all of this could be reversed if the lover wished. But this shift has also begun with that 'Now' which begins the ninth line, ushering in the sestet or final six lines. And it is marked by the change from imperative mood ('Shake hands', 'cancel', 'Be it not') to the subjunctive ('thou wouldst', 'thou might'st').

This is what marks out Drayton's sonnet as a memorable and striking poem: the way the poet goes from brash confidence that he is happy to be leaving the relationship behind to essentially saying, 'Look, say the

word and I'll be back with you like a shot.' One wonders if A. E. Housman had this poem in mind when he penned his 'Shake hands' poem about his hopeless love, for Moses Jackson.

But the other thing which makes 'Since there's no help' such a memorable expression of hopeless love is the directness of the language: it's bluff, virile, and to the point. This makes the poem easy to understand, but also makes the undermining of the poet's over-confidence in the latter section of the sonnet all the more affecting.

Assignments

- **Write an essay on Drayton as a poet.**
- **Discuss Drayton as a love poet.**
- **Write a note on the development of the poetic career of Michael Drayton.**

- **How has Drayton expressed the idea of separation of lovers in "Since there's no help left…".?**
- **Write a critical appreciation of the poem "Since there's no help left…" by Michael Drayton.**

Work cited

- ***The Winged Word*** **written by David Green**
- ***The Glossary of Literary Terms*** **written by M. H. Abrahms & Geoffrey Galt Harpham.**
- ***An Outline History of English Literature*** **written by William Henry Hudson**