

FREE SAMPLE SET | IGNOU GUESS PAPER | DECEMBER 2026 TEE

MEG-01 British Poetry

The compulsory reference-to-context question, three repeat themes solved, and a plan for the rest

Course: MEG-01 British Poetry, 8 credits, MAEG Year I elective (Common Prospectus July 2026)

Programme: MA English (MEG)

December 2026 paper: Saturday 2 January 2027, 2 PM to 5 PM (IGNOU tentative date sheet dated 21 September 2026)

Built from: IGNOU MEG-01 papers of June 2023, December 2023, December 2024 and June 2025, read on IGNOU's servers on 29 September 2026

STUDY REFERENCE

WRITE IN YOUR OWN WORDS

NOT AN IGNOU PUBLICATION

How IGNOU sets the MEG-01 paper

MEG-01 is a 3-hour paper for 100 marks. The instruction was the same in the four papers read for this set:

- **Question 1 is compulsory.** It asks you to explain any two of four passages "with reference to the context", at 10 marks each.
- **Attempt five questions in all**, including Question 1.
- **All questions carry equal marks**, 20 each.

Because Question 1 cannot be skipped, reference to context (RTC) is the single most important skill for this paper. It is covered first below.

Repeat map: what came back

A tick means the poet or theme was asked in that paper as an RTC passage, a full question or a short note. Only what we could read is counted; a few questions at the end of the June 2023 and December 2024 papers were not visible to us.

Poet or theme	Jun 2023	Dec 2023	Dec 2024	Jun 2025	Papers
Milton: Lycidas, L'Allegro, the sonnets, the epic	Q3	Q6, RTC	RTC	Q3, RTC	4 of 4
Satire of Dryden and Pope: Mac Flecknoe, Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot	RTC	Q4	Q3	RTC	4 of 4
Metaphysical poetry: Donne, Marvell	Q2	none seen	Q4, RTC	note	3 of 4
Spenser: Amoretti, Epithalamion, Prothalamion	RTC	none	none	Q2, RTC	2 of 4
Chaucer: the General Prologue	none	Q2	none	RTC	2 of 4
Yeats: Sailing to Byzantium, Easter 1916	RTC	Q3, Q7	none	none	2 of 4
Larkin: Church Going	none	Q8	none	Q6	2 of 4
Sylvia Plath: death and suicide, Lady Lazarus	none	Q5	none	note	2 of 4

Poet or theme	Jun 2023	Dec 2023	Dec 2024	Jun 2025	Papers
Romanticism: Blake, Shelley, features of the movement	none	none	RTC (The Tyger)	Q4, 2 notes	2 of 4
Renaissance; Browning; Rossetti; Imagism; Dylan Thomas	RTC (Rossetti)	none	Q2, RTC (Browning)	Q5, note	1 each

What the map says. Milton and the Restoration and Augustan satirists came back in all four papers. Metaphysical poetry came back in three. Those three are solved in full below.

The later poets (Yeats, Larkin, Plath) rotate between full questions and short notes, so prepare an answer plan for each.

The June 2026 MEG-01 paper is listed on ignou.ac.in (as MEG-01), and the same page carries the December 2025 session. Read both before your exam, since this set could not.

Reference to context: the method that earns the 20 compulsory marks

The four papers took RTC passages from Spenser, Dryden, Rossetti, Yeats, Milton (three times), Browning, Blake, Marvell, Chaucer and Pope. You cannot predict the passage, but you can master the method. Answer each passage in four moves, in about 250 words:

1. **Identify.** Name the poem and the poet, for example "These lines are from *Lycidas*, John Milton's pastoral elegy of 1637."
2. **Place.** Say where in the poem the lines come and what has just happened.
3. **Explain.** Paraphrase the lines and clear up any difficult word or allusion.
4. **Comment.** Point out one technique (image, allusion, rhyme, metre, tone) and one idea that links the lines to the whole poem.

Worked example (passage from the December 2023 paper). "Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more, / For *Lycidas* your sorrow is not dead."

These lines are from Milton's *Lycidas* and open the final movement of the elegy. After lament, the digression on fame and St Peter's attack on the clergy, the speaker turns from grief to consolation. He tells the mourning shepherds to stop weeping because the drowned *Lycidas* is not dead: like the day-star that sinks into the ocean and rises again, he has risen "through the dear might of him that walked the waves", that is, through Christ. The repetition of "weep no more" marks the turn from sorrow to joy. The passage shows the poem's fusion of the classical pastoral with Christian resurrection.

Three repeat themes, solved

1. Discuss the themes of *Lycidas* and show how Milton joins the classical and the Christian.

Covers June 2023 Q3 and the *Lycidas* passages of December 2023 and December 2024. Link it to Milton's development if the question asks about Milton as a poet.

Introduction. *Lycidas* (1637) is Milton's pastoral elegy on Edward King, a fellow student at Christ's College, Cambridge, who drowned in the Irish Sea. It follows the conventions of the classical pastoral elegy of Theocritus and Virgil. It fills that frame with questions about death, poetic vocation and divine justice that belong to Milton's own time.

The pastoral frame. The poet and King appear as shepherds who shared the same hill and flock, a figure for their shared studies. The conventions are all present: invocation of the Muses, grief shared by nature, a procession of mourners, a catalogue of flowers strewn on the hearse, and a closing consolation.

Theme 1: death and the poet's vocation. King died young, before his work was done. The speaker asks why anyone should labour at "the thankless Muse" if death can cut life short. This is the poem's central anxiety, and it is Milton's own as a young poet preparing for great work.

Theme 2: fame and divine judgement. Phoebus answers that true fame is not earthly praise. It lives in heaven, judged by God, "all-judging Jove". The classical god gives a Christian answer: the reward of labour is certain, though not in this world.

Theme 3: the corrupt clergy. St Peter, "the Pilot of the Galilean lake", attacks the careless and greedy clergy who feed themselves rather than their flocks. The hungry sheep look up and are not fed. The "two-handed engine at the door" warns of coming judgement. Here the pastoral image of the shepherd becomes literal, because the shepherd is also the pastor.

Theme 4: consolation and resurrection. The final movement turns grief into joy. Lycidas, like the day-star, sinks only to rise again through Christ, "him that walked the waves", and he becomes the "genius of the shore" who protects others at sea.

The joining of the classical and the Christian. Pagan and Christian figures stand side by side: the Muses and Orpheus, Neptune and Triton, and then St Peter and Christ. Milton does not see a conflict. The classical elegy supplies the form and the sense of loss; Christian faith supplies the answer to it. The coda, in which the uncouth swain rises and moves on to "fresh woods, and pastures new", suggests a poet ready for a larger task.

Conclusion. *Lycidas* turns a private loss into a meditation on vocation, fame, church and resurrection. It shows the young Milton mastering a classical form and filling it with the moral seriousness that later drives *Paradise Lost*.

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2. Why did satire flourish in the age of Dryden and Pope? Illustrate with Mac Flecknoe and Pope's satire.

Covers December 2023 Q4 and December 2024 Q3, plus the Dryden (June 2023) and Pope (June 2025) passages.

Introduction. From the Restoration of 1660 to the death of Pope in 1744, satire became a leading mode of English poetry. Dryden and Pope made it an art of wit, argument and polished couplets.

Why satire flourished.

- *Politics and religion.* The Restoration settlement, the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, and the rise of Whig and Tory parties created constant public quarrel. Satire was the weapon of that quarrel, as Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* shows.

- *Neoclassical values.* The age prized reason, order, decorum and correctness. Satire judged folly and vice against these standards and aimed to correct them by ridicule.
- *A reading public and a literary marketplace.* Coffee houses, printing and periodicals created a public that followed literary and political rivalries, and personal satire of writers found an eager audience.
- *The heroic couplet.* Its closed, balanced, epigrammatic form suited antithesis and the memorable sting of satire.

Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* (published 1682). This is a mock-heroic satire on the playwright Thomas Shadwell. Flecknoe, the aged monarch of the realm of Nonsense, looks for an heir as dull as himself and chooses Shadwell. The poem's opening, "All human things are subject to decay, / And when fate summons, monarchs must obey", sounds like epic grandeur and then collapses into comedy. The satiric portraiture works by elevation and deflation. Shadwell is crowned with epic ceremony, yet praised for a dullness so complete that he never deviates into sense. The mantle falling on him at the end parodies Elijah's mantle passing to Elisha. The poem joins personal satire to literary criticism, since dullness in writing is the real target.

Pope. *The Rape of the Lock* uses the mock-epic to laugh at fashionable society, turning a quarrel over a stolen curl into an epic war. The *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, source of the June 2025 passage about "Poor Cornus", defends Pope against his enemies. It draws sharp portraits such as Atticus (Addison) and Sporus (Lord Hervey), and moves from comedy to contempt.

Conclusion. Satire flourished because the age was quarrelsome, confident in reason, and equipped with a public and a perfect verse form. Dryden gave it a mock-heroic structure; Pope refined its wit and widened its social range.

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3. Examine the main characteristics of metaphysical poetry with examples from Donne and Marvell.

Covers June 2023 Q2, the Donne question of December 2024 and the Marvell passage, and the June 2025 note on "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning".

Introduction. The term goes back to Dryden, who said Donne "affects the metaphysics", and to Samuel Johnson's *Life of Cowley*. Johnson wrote that in these poets "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together". In the twentieth century, Grierson's anthology and T. S. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (both 1921) revived their reputation.

Main characteristics.

- *The conceit.* An extended, surprising comparison between unlike things. In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", Donne compares two lovers' souls to the legs of a pair of compasses: the fixed foot leans after the roaming one and makes its circle just.
- *Wit and learning.* Images come from science, geography, law, alchemy and theology rather than from conventional nature.

- *Argument.* A poem often proceeds like a debate, with premises and a conclusion, to persuade a lover, God or the reader.
- *A dramatic, colloquial voice.* Openings are abrupt and spoken, and the metre is often rough in the service of natural speech.
- *Unity of thought and feeling.* Eliot praised these poets for feeling their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose, before what he called the "dissociation of sensibility".
- *Sacred and profane together.* Love poems use religious language, and religious poems use the language of love.

Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress". This is an argument in three parts. *If we had world enough and time, slow courtship would be fine; but time is short and "the grave's a fine and private place" where no one embraces (the December 2024 passage); therefore let us seize our pleasure now.* Wit, logic and the shadow of death meet in one poem, the metaphysical mode at its sharpest.

Conclusion. Metaphysical poetry joins intellect and emotion through the conceit, argument and a speaking voice. Johnson thought the joining violent; Eliot thought it the mark of a unified sensibility. Your answer should show both readings through examples.

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Answer plans for the other repeat themes

Milton as an epic poet (June 2025 Q3). Cover:

- the Renaissance ambition to write a national epic;
- Milton's long preparation and his choice of a biblical subject over Arthurian legend;
- the civil war, Puritan faith and the fall of the Commonwealth;
- *Paradise Lost* as a Christian epic that justifies the ways of God to men.

Milton as a sonneteer (December 2023 Q6). Cover:

- his use of the Italian (Petrarchan) form;
- his widening of the sonnet from love to politics, religion and personal crisis, as in the sonnet on his blindness;
- the flexible run-on lines.

Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Easter 1916" (June 2023, December 2023):

- art against life, and youth against age;
- Byzantium as the city of timeless art;
- the "terrible beauty" of 1916 and the poet's changing judgement of the rebels.

Larkin, "Church Going" (December 2023 Q8, June 2025 Q6):

- a sceptical visitor in an empty church;
- the decline of belief;

- the church's survival as a serious place where births, marriages and deaths are still marked.

Spenser, Epithalamion and Prothalamion (June 2025 Q2): Epithalamion as Spenser's song for his own wedding, with its day-long structure and refrain; Prothalamion as a spousal verse for others, with the Thames refrain.

Chaucer's art of characterisation in the General Prologue (December 2023 Q2):

- types who are also individuals;
- telling detail of dress and habit;
- irony through the naive narrator, with the Monk as a good example.

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Short notes worth preparing

Lady Lazarus (Plath). A dramatic monologue of repeated near-death and return. The speaker performs her survival before a watching crowd, and the poem joins private suffering, spectacle and defiance.

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning (Donne). Parting without tears, because refined love does not depend on physical presence. It holds the compass conceit.

Fern Hill (Dylan Thomas). Childhood on a farm remembered as a golden, timeless world, with the awareness that time was leading the child towards age and death all along.

The Triumph of Life (Shelley). Shelley's last, unfinished visionary poem. A procession of the famous is conquered by Life, a dark reflection on power, desire and disillusion.

London (Blake). From *Songs of Experience*. The speaker walks the chartered streets and hears in every cry the "mind-forged manacles" of a society that exploits children, soldiers and the poor.

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Practise these in your own words

These practice prompts are ours, written to match the repeat themes above. They are not IGNOU questions.

1. How does Milton use the pastoral convention to speak about his own time in *Lycidas*?
2. "Mock-heroic satire enlarges in order to diminish." Discuss with reference to Dryden and Pope.
3. What is a metaphysical conceit? Analyse two examples.
4. Compare the treatment of time in "To His Coy Mistress" and "Fern Hill".
5. How do Yeats and Larkin write about faith and its loss?

Use this set in the last three weeks

- **Week 3:** practise one RTC every day on a passage from a poem in your course, in about 250 words.
- **Week 2:** write the three solved themes from memory, 35 minutes each.
- **Final week:** turn each answer plan into a full answer and learn the five notes.
- **Last two days:** read the December 2025 and June 2026 papers on ignou.ac.in.

What this free set is, and is not

This set covers three MEG-01 themes that repeated across the four papers above, plus the RTC method. The complete MEG-01 set, with every repeat theme, RTC practice and short notes solved, costs ₹49 as a PDF or ₹100 as a printed copy, plus a one-time ₹100 courier charge per printed order. Order on WhatsApp +91 93546 37830.

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