**HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**STUDY MATERIAL**

**CLASS: II B. A. ENGLISH SUBJECT CODE: 16AACEN4**

**UNIT 1& 2: AUGUSTAN AGE – 18TH CENTURY (1700-1798)**

**WRITERS: ALEXANDER POPE, SAMUEL JOHNSON**

Literary life in England flourishes so impressively in the early years of the 18th century that contemporaries draw parallels with the heyday of Virgil, Horace and Ovid at the time of the emperor Augustus. The new Augustan Age becomes identified with the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14), though the spirit of the age extends well beyond her death.

The oldest of the Augustan authors, Jonathan Swift, first makes his mark in 1704 with The Battle of the Books and A Tale of a Tub. These two tracts, respectively about literary theory and religious discord, reveal that there is a new prose writer on the scene with lethal satirical powers.
The tone of oblique irony which Swift makes his own is evident even in the title of his 1708 attack on fashionable trends in religious circles - An Argument to prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England, may as Things now stand, be attended with some Inconveniences.

In the following year, 1709, a new periodical brings a gentler brand of humour and irony hot off the presses, three times a week, straight into London's fashionable coffee houses. The Tatler, founded by Richard Steele with frequent contributions from his friend Joseph Addison, turns the relaxed and informal essay into a new journalistic art form. In 1711 Steele and Addison replace the Tatler with the daily Spectator.

The same year sees the debut of the youngest and most brilliant of this set of writers. Unlike the others, Alexander Pope devotes himself almost exclusively to poetry, becoming a master in the use of rhymed heroic couplets for the purposes of wit. In 1711 he shows his paces with the brilliant Essay on Criticism (the source of many frequently quoted phrases, such as 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'). He follows this in 1712 with a miniature masterpiece of mock heroic, The Rape of the Lock.

In Windsor Forest (1713) Pope seals the Augustan theme, using the poem to praise Queen Anne's reign just as Virgil celebrated that of Augustus.
Pope is so much in tune with the spirit of his age that he is able, in his mid-twenties, to persuade the British aristocracy to subscribe in large numbers to his proposed translation of Homer's Iliad into heroic couplets.

The work appears in six volumes between 1715 and 1720, to be followed by the Odyssey (1725-6). The two projects bring Pope some £10,000, enabling him to move into a grand riverside villa in Twickenham. This is just half a century after Milton receives £10 for Paradise Lost.
The weapon of these authors is wit, waspish in tone - as is seen in The Dunciad (1728), Pope's attack on his many literary enemies. The most savage in his use of wit is undoubtedly Swift. His Modest Proposal, in 1729, highlights poverty in Ireland by suggesting that it would be far better for everybody if, instead of being allowed to starve, these unfortunate Irish babies were fattened up and eaten.

Yet, astonishingly, a book of 1726 by Swift, almost equally savage in its satirical intentions, becomes one of the world's best loved stories - by virtue simply of its imaginative brilliance. It tells the story of a ship's surgeon, Lemuel Gulliver.

**Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver's Travels: 1719-1726**

Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe, has a genius for journalism in an age before newspapers exist which can accomodate his kind of material. He travels widely as a semi-secret political agent, gathering material of use to those who pay him. In 1712 he founds, and writes almost single-handed, a thrice-weekly periodical, the Review, which lasts only a year. But it is his instinct for what would now be called feature articles which mark him out as the archetypal journalist.

A good example is the blend of investigative and imaginative skills which lead him to research surviving documents of the Great Plague and then to blend them in a convincing fictional Journal of the Plague Year (1722).
Another work which could run week after week in a modern newspaper is his immensely informative Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain, published in three volumes in 1724-7. But his instinctive nose for a good story is best seen in his response to the predicament of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor who survives for five years as a castaway on a Pacific island before being discovered in 1709.

Just as the plague documents stimulated a fictional journal, this real-life drama now prompts Defoe to undertake the imagined autobiography of another such castaway, Robinson Crusoe (1719).
Defoe imagines in extraordinary detail the practical difficulties involved in building a house and a boat, in domesticating the local animals, and in coping with unwelcome neighbours. This is a cannibal island. The native whom Crusoe rescues from their clutches on a Friday becomes his faithful servant, Man Friday.

Defoe's interests seem to lie mainly in the theme of man's creation of society from primitive conditions, but meanwhile he almost unwittingly writes a gripping adventure story of survival. Robinson Crusoe is avidly read as such by all succeeding generations - and has a good claim to be considered the first English novel.
Seven years later another book appears which immediately becomes one of the world's most popular stories, and again seems to do so for reasons not quite intended by its author. Jonathan Swift, a man inspired by savage indignation at the ways of the world, writes Gulliver's Travels (1726) as a satire in which human behaviour is viewed from four revealing angles.

When Gulliver arrives in Liliput, he observes with patronising condescension the habits of its tiny inhabitants. But in Brobdingnag, a land of giants, he is the midget. When he proudly tells the king about European manners, he is surprised at the royal reaction. The king says that humans sound like 'little odious Vermin'.
Gulliver's next stop, the flying island of Laputa, is run by philosophers and scientists (as Plato might have wished); predictably they make a mess of things. Finally Gulliver visits a land ruled by intelligent horses (the Houyhnhnms, Swift's version of whinnying). The hooligans here are brutal and oafish beasts in human shape, the Yahoos.

Once again the sheer vitality of the author's imagination transcends his immediate purpose. Of the millions who enjoy Gulliver's fantastic adventures, few are primarily aware of Swift's harshly satirical intentions.

**The English novel: 1740-1749**

During a quarter of a century, from 1740, the novel makes great advances in England, with notable achievements in several different styles.

Defoe has laid a foundation with Robinson Crusoe, and has followed this up with The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders in 1722. Moll's story is more like a conventional novel than that of Robinson Crusoe, being set in the real world of low-life London and the plantations of Virginia. It is full of vitality and incident, but it is basically - as the title states - a sequence of fortunes and misfortunes for the heroine. Crusoe had his isolation to give focus to the story. Moll has only her vivacious character. Of plot, in the normal sense, there is little.

This lack of focus is fully answered by Samuel Richardson, a novelist of much greater influence in his own time than today. Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded (1740) tells the story of Pamela Andrews trying to ward off the sexual advances of the young man of the house in which she is a maid. The narrative develops in the form of letters - most of them written by Pamela herself.

The ability to unfold a plot through correspondence, spinning out the detail and viewing events from several different angles, is the pioneering discovery of Richardson. He takes it to much greater length in Clarissa (7 vols, 1747-8), a novel of more than a million words and the longest in the English language.
Pamela has a somewhat unconvincing happy ending. Clarissa, an altogether darker account of a relationship between two upper-class characters, ends in disaster for both. This account of pyschological warfare between the sexes is much read throughout Europe. The brilliantly savage erotic novel by Laclos, Les Liaisons Dangereuses (1782), can be seen as a direct descendant.

A more cheerful offshoot of Richardson's efforts is the first novel by Henry Fielding, a magistrate in London's Bow Street court with an intimate knowledge of the city's low life. Offended by the sentimental unreality of Pamela, he writes Joseph Andrews (1742) - the story of Pamela's brother, who is a minor character in Richardson's book.

Fielding finds virtue not in respectability (the ultimate yardstick in Pamela) but in the warm-hearted honesty of a group of ordinary and often unfortunate characters, in particular the absent-minded Parson Adams. His plot, loose and picaresque though it is in many respects, has its own logic and consistency.

The ingredients pioneered in Joseph Andrews are deployed by Fielding with even greater success in Tom Jones (1749). The adventures in a vividly wicked world of the lusty but honest Tom, and the survival against all the odds of his love for Sophia Western, provide a novel of romance and adventure which has kept its power ever since - as is evident in its several incarnations on film.

**The English novel: 1759-1766**

The most original novel of the 18th century, and one of the most chaotically endearing books of any age, is published from 1759 by a clergyman on the staff of the cathedral in York. It is Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy.

Told as Tristram's autogiography, the book begins - logically but unconventionally - with the scene at his conception. Thereafter, in a series of looping digressions interrupted with sudden surprises (such as a page of solid black in mourning for poor Yorick), Sterne dwells upon a small number of quite ordinary characters who come vividly alive thanks to their minor obsessions and eccentricities. We are well into Vol. 3 before the author is born. Slightly before that event he at last has a moment to write his Preface.
Sterne's blend of fantasy and mock-learning owes much to Rabelais, but he adds an easy playfulness, a friendly teasing of the reader, which his contemporaries find immediately attractive. The success of the first two volumes in 1759 is so great that Sterne is able to retire to a quiet curacy in north Yorkshire. Tristram Shandy could go on for ever, but the story ends in the middle of nowhere after Vol. 7 (1767), merely because that is where its author stops writing.

Tristram Shandy - with its amused interest in the relationship between writer and reader, and in the nature of narrative - seems two centuries ahead of its time, resembling a modern demolition of the very idea of the novel.

The next English novel to retain a devoted readership through the centuries is, by contrast, firmly in the mainstream of fiction. Oliver Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) tells the story of a simple and good-hearted vicar who puts up stoically with a series of disasters, mainly brought upon him by the vagaries of his children, until he eventually emerges unscathed.

The events are more melodramatic than those which drive the plots of Jane Austen, but Goldsmith's unaffected prose and gentle irony prefigure later advances in the English novel. Between them, the experiments in English fiction in the mid-18th century make almost anything possible.

**Johnson and Boswell: 1755-1791**

'Lexicographer: a writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words.'

That definition appears in the Dictionary of the English Language by Samuel Johnson, published in 1755. Its heavyweight solemnity, enlivened by the joke at its centre, is the quality which has made Dr Johnson England's best-loved literary character. His cast of mind is known now not from his own voluminous writings but from the devoted account written by his young friend James Boswell and published in 1791 as The Life of Samuel Johnson.

Boswell meets Johnson in London in 1763 and keeps in touch on his annual visit from Edinburgh, where he is employed as a lawyer. Boswell is a man fascinated by conversation (as is revealed in his own extremely vivid journals), and in Johnson he has met the heavyweight champion of this particular art. From early in their friendship he conceives the plan of writing the great man's life, and begins to note down his views and remarks.

It is evident from Boswell's pages that Johnson, like Falstaff, is alarming as well as witty. As Goldsmith observes in Boswell's pages: 'There is no arguing with Johnson; for when his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt end of it.'
Boswell's literary efforts on behalf of his friend mean that more of Johnson's curmudgeonly opinions are remembered and affectionately quoted than those of any other Englishman.

A frequent butt is Boswell's own country. 'Sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England'. As it happens this prejudice is particularly inappropriate in Johnson's lifetime when Edinburgh, in particular, is enjoying a period of creativity known subsequently as the Scottish Enlightenment. But vigorous opinions of Johnson's kind transcend small local realities.
Johnson, the devoted Londoner, has little interest in travelling. Asked by Boswell whether the famous Giant's Causeway would not be worth seeing, he replies: 'Worth seeing? yes; but not worth going to see.'

Even so, Boswell does somehow persuade the reluctant tourist to accompany him on a journey north in 1773 - recorded by Johnson in A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775), and by Boswell in Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides (1785). This is a region of particular topical interest, for the Celtic fringe of Britain has suddenly become famous as the home of the poet Ossian. His newly discovered epic work excites all Europe - except, almost alone on the issue, Samuel Johnson.
Everywhere in the islands there is talk of Fingal, a supposed poem by Ossian discovered and translated by James Macpherson and published in 1762. Johnson tells Boswell that he considers it 'as great an imposition as ever the world was troubled with'. When Johnson's views become public, in his book of 1775, Macpherson demands a retraction and gets the reply: 'What shall I retract? I thought your book an imposture from the beginning, I think it upon yet surer reasons an imposture still.'

Johnson's critical sense makes his Lives of the Poets (1779-81) a valuable work even today. And on the Ossian issue he is ahead of the best minds in Scotland. Even Hume and Adam Smith are at first taken in by the poem.

**The Scottish Enlightenment: 1748-1785**
During the second half of the 18th century Scotland is in the forefront of intellectual and scientific developments. The movement known now as the Scottish Enlightenment has much in common with the broader Enlightenment, in its emphasis on rational processes and the potential of scientific research. This Scottish version is mainly of interest for the concentration of achievement within a small region. The people involved are in the university departments and laboratories of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The founding figure can be said to be the philosopher David Hume. He publishes his most significant work, A Treatise on Human Nature, early in his life, in 1739-40, but it receives little attention at the time.
Hume travels during much of the 1740s, becoming better known only after he settles in Edinburgh in 1751. His treatise is now published again in three more accessible parts (An Essay concerning Human Understanding 1748, An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals 1751, A Dissertation on the Passions 1757). His Political Discourses of 1752 give him a wider reputation, being translated into French.

At this time he becomes a close friend of Adam Smith, who as yet is a primarily a moral philosopher - making his name in 1759 with The Theory of Moral Sentiments. His great work of political economy, The Wealth of Nations, is still nearly two decades in the future.
Hume and Smith are the intellectual leaders of this Scottish movement, but they have distinguished colleagues in scientific research. In 1756 Joseph Black, a lecturer in chemistry in Glasgow, publishes a paper which demonstrates the existence of carbon dioxide. Five years later Black discovers the principle of latent heat. By that time he has befriended a Glasgow laboratory technician, James Watt, who also has an enquiring mind and an interest in heat.

Meanwhile in Edinburgh a 'Society of Gentleman in Scotland' has been formed to emulate the great publishing achievement of the continental Enlightenment, Diderot's Encyclopédie which has been appearing in parts since 1751.
The gentlemen in Scotland produce between 1768 and 1771 the first edition of a dictionary of the arts and sciences under the title Encyclopaedia Britannica. Unlike its French predecessor, it has been revised and reissued ever since.

While the Encyclopaedia Britannica is coming off the presses, a retired doctor in Edinburgh has been studying the local rock strata. In 1785 James Hutton reads a paper on this unusual topic to the newly founded Royal Society of Edinburgh. His approach breaks new ground. Hutton is the pioneer of scientific geology, one of the main contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment to the field of human enquiry.

**Macpherson and Chatterton: 1760-1777**
In the late 1750s James Macpherson, a Scottish schoolmaster, begins travelling in the Highlands and islands to collect Gaelic manuscripts and oral accounts of traditional Celtic literature. The result is a collection of supposed translations of ancient texts, published in 1760 as Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language.

Macpherson follows this in 1762 with a much more ambitious publication, an entire epic poem by the semi-legendary Irish poet Oisin, supposed son of the Celtic warrior hero Finn McCool.
Transferred by Macpherson to Scotland, the pair become Ossian and Fingal - and the poem itself is published as Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem composed by Ossian. This is rapturously received as a romantic relic from the Middle Ages, with only a few dissenting voices such as Dr Johnson's.

It is later proved to be almost entirely Macpherson's own book, with a few scraps of ancient ballads inserted here and there, but its success has another significance. The Celtic twilight imagined in Ossian's name chimes perfectly with a new longing for something more mysterious than the rationalism of the Enlightenment.
This developing mood of romantic medievalism (less frivolous than Horace Walpole's self-indulgence at Strawberry Hill) is given another boost in 1765 with the publication of Thomas Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. This contains genuine medieval ballads, mainly taken from a single surviving manuscript. In many cases they are somewhat over-restored by Percy, as an editor, but this is a trivial detail in the developing mood of the time.

Both Ossian and Percy are read with avid interest by a brilliant and lonely boy in Bristol, now in his early teens. Thomas Chatterton lives his own imaginative life in the late Middle Ages.

Chatterton invents a 15th-century poet, Thomas Rowley, and sets him among historical Bristol characters of the period. He writes Rowley's poems for him, and forges documents and correspondence relating to his life. These are sufficiently convincing to deceive various local antiquaries. Horace Walpole at first accepts as authentic a treatise by Rowley on painting which Chatterton sends him (The Ryse of Peyncteynge yn Englande).

In March 1769 Chatterton has a supposed early medieval work (Ethelgar. A Saxon poem) accepted by the Town and Country Magazine. Two months later the same periodical publishes one of his Rowley poems.
In April 1770 Chatterton moves to London to seek his fortune. But no one in the capital city pays much attention. In August, in a garret, the 17-year-old boy takes arsenic and dies.

Seven years later a volume of the Rowley poems is published in London, assumed by the publisher to be by the 16th-century author. For many years argument rages as to whether these poems are by Rowley or Chatterton. Unlike Macpherson's forgeries, those believing them to be Chatterton's see in them a fresh and original talent. Called by Wordsworth 'the marvellous Boy, The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride', Chatterton becomes a powerful influence in early romanticism.

**Decline and Fall: 1764-1788**

The most famous work of history by an English author has a precisely pinpointed moment of inspiration. Edward Gibbon later describes the day: 'It was at Rome, on the 15th of October, 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefoot friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.'

The eventual offspring of that moment is The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, published between 1776 and 1778. The six volumes cover a vast sweep of European history from the 2nd centuryto the fall of Constantinople in 1453.
Decline and Fall is an act of enquiring nostalgia by a classicist of the rational 18th century who looks back to the Roman world, a society which he finds in so many ways admirable, and wonders why, where and when everything went wrong. He discovers, as he must have suspected he would on that day in 1764, that the barefoot friars and their superstitious colleagues during the medieval centuries are to blame for the long process which he describes in a typically challenging phrase as 'the triumph of barbarism and religion'.

Paradoxically, Gibbon writes a great work on the Middle Ages at the very time when the period's merits are most undervalued by scholars such as himself.
His book is an immediate success when the first volume is published in 1776 - partly because some of his comments on Christianity provoke controversy, but above all due to the elegant irony of his prose and his ability to rise to the grand historic moment.

The full orchestra plays in long rolling cadences when Gibbon describes an event such as the crusaders in 1204 sacking Constantinople. But a new character (in this case Rienzo) may be introduced with a simple and challenging sentence; 'In a quarter of the city which was inhabited only by mechanics and Jews, the marriage of an innkeeper and a washerwoman produced the future deliverer of Rome.' Gibbon's readers have found this blend irresistible.
At the end Gibbon brings his work full circle. His story ends with two events of the 15th century, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks and the return of the papacy to Rome. Renaissance Rome, with papal encouragement, rediscovers and takes pains to restore the glories of classical Rome. By the time of Gibbon's visit the city is the destination of every Grand Tourist.

Gibbon states with some satisfaction in his conclusion: 'The monuments of ancient Rome have been elucidated by the diligence of the antiquarian; and the footsteps of heroes, the relics not of superstition but of empire, are devoutly visited by a new race of pilgrims from the remote, and once savage, countries of the north.

**UNIT 3&4: ROMANTIC AGE (1798- 1887)**

**WRITERS: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, ALFRED LORD TENNYSON**

**Romanticism**

Rapid social and political change in late eighteenth-century Europe is accompanied by a shift from faith in reason to an emphasis on the senses, feelings, and imagination, and an interest in untamed nature. Romantic Literature, an artistic and philosophical movement typified by its emphasis on inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual, seeks to come to terms with this changing environment.

The first generation of Romantic authors, Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, inspired by the revolutionary overthrow of old regimes in America and France, attempt to articulate a new demotic language expressive of the primary human feelings as found in the 'language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society’. In doing so, they fashion exciting revolutionary theories of their own, partly in reaction against the neo-classicism of Augustan literature.

**Revolution and reaction 1789-98**

William Blake, the first of the Romantic authors, a self-taught engraver and visionary poet, publishes Songs of Innocence in 1789. Drawing on biblical tradition, the poetry of John Milton, Bunyan, Dante, and Nonconformist literature, Blake voices his fervent belief in spiritual and political liberty. Short lyrical poems with hand-coloured plates including titles such as ‘The Little Girl Lost’ and ‘The Little Girl Found’, express Blake’s prophetic sense of the trials of precarious innocence in a world of adult corruption and cruelty.

In the following year, Blake publishes The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, a prose work written as a rejection of Emanuel Swedenborg’s theological views. Arranged as a collection of aphorisms, it explores Blake’s ideas about contraries, ‘Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate’, which he claims are necessary to human existence, and without which there is ‘no progression’. The Marriage includes the provoking statement that Milton, in writing with such energy and verve about devils and Hell in Paradise Lost, was ‘a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it’. Blake ends this collection with the apocalyptic ‘Song of Liberty’, calling for the revolutionary overthrow of all tyrannies.

In 1795 Blake further explores the theme of man’s divided nature by extending his Songs of Innocence, adding parallel ‘Songs of Experience’ to emphasise the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul: the interlocking of innocence and experience, vitality and repression, desire and guilt. The ‘Songs of Experience’ include the celebrated poem, The Tyger:
   Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
   In the forests of the night,
   What immortal hand or eye
   Could frame thy fearful symmetry?.

The topic of childhood innocence in a fallen world is also a feature of the Lake poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge, in their innovative use of the ballad tradition in Lyrical Ballads (1798). Poems such as ‘We are Seven’ and ‘Anecdote for Fathers’, written in a simple - some said puerile - style, celebrate the knowingness of a child’s-eye view. The preface to the Lyrical Ballads provides a manifesto for the burgeoning Romantic movement, declaring the incidents and situations of ‘low and rustic life’, rendered in the language ‘really used by men’, to be the proper subject of poetry. Here the ‘essential passions of the heart’ are more readily identifiable, claims Wordsworth, than in the metropolis. The collection included landmark poems such as The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Tintern Abbey.
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner plays out struggles in Coleridge’s own psyche. An aged mariner having returned from a sea voyage unburdens his soul to a man going to a wedding, describing how he shot an albatross flying above his ship after which a curse fell on the ship. As a mark of the mariner’s guilt, the dead albatross was hung about his neck. Mysteriously, all of the crew died except the mariner who returned home safely, but he is for evermore condemned to wander from land to land and teach love to ‘Both man and bird and beast’.

Kubla Khan (composed 1797; first published 1816) famously incorporates its own creation myth. Coleridge claimed that it was a mere fragment of a much greater piece recovered upon waking from an opium-induced sleep. Upon waking he was aware of having composed two or three hundred lines of the poem whilst asleep, and immediately began to set these down on paper. Before finishing he was disturbed by an unidentified ‘person…from Porlock’; when he afterwards attempted to recall the remainder he found that he had forgotten everything.

One of the most remarkable features of Romantic poetry is the extent to which the consciousness of the poet is centre stage. In 1798-9 Wordsworth writes The Prelude, a two-book version of the long philosophical poem finally published in full only in 1850. Originally conceived as a preamble to a greater work, The Recluse, the Prelude describes the ‘Growth of a Poet's Mind’.

The poem records the ebb and flow of Wordsworth’s inner-life, first as a boy at Hawkshead, then in subsequent, expanded versions, his experience at university in Cambridge, time spent in France in 1791 when he became inspired by the French Revolution, and his reading and travel; it includes retrospectives on the ‘Love of Nature Leading to Love of Man’, and on ‘Imagination and Taste, How Repaired and Restored’. The Prelude is a ground-breaking psychological epic on a scale with Paradise Lost and is often regarded as Wordsworth's crowning achievement as a poet.

**Jane Austen and the English novel 1802-18**
The daughter of a vicar, the Reverend George Austen, Jane Austen extended and questioned the eighteenth-century tradition of the novel of sentiment, and is now regarded as the most important novelist of the Romantic period. Her novels view with an ironic but sympathetic eye upper-middle-class English society. Austen delights in exploring subtle nuances of language and minute turns of phrase.

Her earliest novel, Northanger Abbey, begun in 1798, is sold to a publisher in 1803 but not published until 1818. The heroine of the novel is Catherine Morland, a seventeen-year-old girl addicted to Gothic novels, a literary form that thrived in Britain from the 1790s to the 1820s. Austen comically juxtaposes elements of the Gothic form such as castles and desolate landscapes with the realities of life as normally found ‘in the Midland counties of England'.

In 1811, she publishes Sense and Sensibility. The novel explores the contradictory characters of two sisters, Elinor and Marianne, one the picture of good sense, the other swayed by a giddy and romantic sensibility. The novel examines the psychology of romantic love and the constraints placed upon individual desire by prudence, honour and duty.

In Pride and Prejudice, published in 1813, Austen revises an earlier work, ‘First Impressions’, refused by the publisher in 1797. The novel, the most popular of Austen’s works as well as being her personal favourite, follows the adventures of Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth succeeds in winning the dashing Fitzwilliam Darcy, ‘Mr Darcy’, the archetypal romantic hero. Pride and Prejudice makes love its main focus, and is the first of a new sub-genre of the novel, the romance novel. Only two more of her novels were published during her lifetime, Mansfield Park (1814) and Emma (1815). Persuasion was published like Northanger Abbey in 1818, the year after her death.

**Second-generation Romanticism: Byron, Keats, and Shelley**

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, a second generation of Romantic writers emerges, led by Byron, Keats, and Percy Shelley, all of whom were at school when Wordsworth and Coleridge published Lyrical Ballads (1798). The intervening years, between that landmark publication and Byron’s explosion onto the European literary scene with Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812), witness a cooling of revolutionary spirit in Europe. In 1804 Napoleon is crowned emperor and in 1814 the Bourbon monarchy is restored in France.

The younger Romantics, in seeking to redefine Romanticism, challenge the Lake poets. Shelley accuses Wordsworth of betraying the hopes of the Revolution, and Keats questions Wordsworth's concept of ‘the egotistical sublime’, while Byron regrets that Wordsworth confined his muse to ‘such trifling subjects.’ (Review of Wordsworth’s Poems, Monthly Literary Recreations, 1807.)

George Gordon Byron (often referred to as Lord Byron, being the 6th in that line), publishes his first collection of poems in 1807; unremarkable in terms of quality, they are roundly attacked by reviewers. In 1809, he takes up his seat in the House of Lords then spends the next two years touring Spain, Malta, Greece, and the Levant. During this period the Peninsular War (1807–14), provoked by France’s invasion of Spain and Portugal, forces Britain to take a more active role in the Napoleonic Wars. Whilst the British government sees itself as engaged in a war in defence of liberty against tyranny, Byron considers the British position hypocritical and continues to sympathise with the republican ideals of the French Revolution, even retaining a measure of respect for Napoleon whom he regards as a flawed and misunderstood hero.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812–18), an unfinished poem written in Spenserian stanzas, is a meditation on the Peninsular War and on the European crisis in general, and considers wider questions connected with freedom, nature, and heroism. The poem recounts the travels of a misanthropic, self-exiled pilgrim, Childe Harold, the first of the Byronic heroes. The central character has much in common with Byron though he repeatedly denied any identification with Harold. Byron wrote in the Preface that had he proceeded to finish Childe Harold, the protagonist’s character ‘would have deepened’. Indeed, in subsequent poems such as The Corsair, Manfred and Don Juan, Byron returns to the same theme though with little significant development of his hero.
In 1815, after a passionate affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, Byron marries Annabella Milbanke, Lady Melbourne's niece. The marriage is short-lived and the following year, amid rumours of his incestuous relationship with his half-sister, he separates from his wife and leaves England permanently, spending time with the Shelleys in Geneva. During these years in exile, Byron composes his masterpiece, Don Juan (1819–24). The poem describes the adventures of a gallant young man shipwrecked on a Greek island, and is a powerful critique of social and sexual conventions, as well as criticism of other Romantic writers and of the Duke of Wellington, Napoleon’s vanquisher at Waterloo. Byron died in 1824 of a fever in Missolonghi, where he was giving support to Greek insurgents in their fight for independence.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a committed atheist and son of a baronet and member of Parliament, was expelled (1811) from Oxford University for writing an antireligious pamphlet, The Necessity of Atheism. In the same year he married Harriet Westbrook, a pupil at the same school as Shelley’s sister, but three years later, in 1814, he abandoned her and their young child to elope with Mary Godwin, the daughter of the atheist philosopher William Godwin and the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft.

Shelley first comes to public attention as a serious poet in 1813 with the publication of Queen Mab, which imagines a future society founded on principles of free love, atheism, and vegetarianism. In 1816 he publishes a visionary poem, Alastor, or, The Spirit of Solitude. The poem explores the dilemma facing the solitary poet who, in pursuit of his intellectual ideals, attempts to live without human sympathy and dies alone. On a summer visit to Geneva later that year, Shelley and Mary Godwin first meet Byron. In December 1816 Shelley’s estranged wife, Harriet, commits suicide, and shortly after he marries Mary.

With the death in 1817 of Princess Charlotte, only child of the Prince of Wales, the succession to the British throne is put in danger. In the same year, Shelley writes a sonnet, Ozymandias, the Greek name for Ramses II. The poem, which was a contribution to the then popular trend of Romantic Orientalism, reflects on the inevitable decline of all leaders. A decayed statue of Ramses bears the legend: ‘”Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” The last three lines of the sonnet make Shelley's point.
   Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
   Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
   The lone and level sands stretch far away.
Whilst on holiday in Leghorn, Shelley composes To a Sky-lark (1820). Written as an ode, a form at which Romantic poets excelled, it celebrates the freedom and intensity of a bird. In 1821, he writes a pastoral elegy Adonais (1821) on the death of his friend, John Keats, from consumption. Shelley would himself be dead within a year, drowned off Leghorn.

Percy Shelley’s summer in Geneva with Mary and Byron in 1816 provided the inspiration for Mary Shelley’s famous novel, Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus (1818). Mary afterwards recounted how one cold and rainy night in June she wrote the novel as part of a ghost-writing competition. Frankenstein is modelled on the classical story of Prometheus who defied the gods by stealing fire from them and created man from clay. In the novel, Victor Frankenstein, a Swiss scientist, manufactures a life-like monster out of corpses, and is later killed by his creation. The book was an overnight success and single-handedly inaugurated the science fiction genre.

John Keats, one of a new group of Romantic writers known pejoratively by Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine as the ‘Cockney School’, first rises to prominence in 1818 having abandoned a career in medicine to dedicate himself to poetry. Endymion (1818), is a four-book poem based on a mythical story about a beautiful young man so beloved by the moon that she descends from the skies every night to be with him. Keats alters the story into a Romantic quest for ideal beauty, by representing the young man as going down to the underworld in search of the moon. In 1818, Keats falls in love with Fanny Burney. Keats’s letters to Fanny, Shelley and others, are among the most important in literary history.

In Ode on a Grecian Urn (1820), Keats meditates on an image of bucolic bliss portrayed on an Attic vase. He is moved to reflect on the contrast between things eternal and transient.  Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
   Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu.
The poem contains the immortal lines, in which Keats strives for some equivalence between the two:
    Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
   Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
Keats died in Rome in 1821. His tombstone bears the line: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'.

**UNIT 5&6: THE MODERN AGE (1900 ONWARDS)**

**WRITERS: THOMAS HARDY, THE PRESENT AGE WRITERS**

**The 20th Century**

The 20th century opened with great hope but also with some apprehension, for the new century marked the final approach to a new millennium. For many, humankind was entering upon an unprecedented era. H.G. Wells’s utopian studies, the aptly titled Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought (1901) and A Modern Utopia (1905), both captured and qualified this optimistic mood and gave expression to a common conviction that science and technology would transform the world in the century ahead. To achieve such transformation, outmoded institutions and ideals had to be replaced by ones more suited to the growth and liberation of the human spirit. The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the accession of Edward VII seemed to confirm that a franker, less inhibited era had begun.

Many writers of the Edwardian period, drawing widely upon the realistic and naturalistic conventions of the 19th century (upon Ibsen in drama and Balzac, Turgenev, Flaubert, Zola, Eliot, and Dickens in fiction) and in tune with the anti-Aestheticism unleashed by the trial of the archetypal Aesthete, Oscar Wilde, saw their task in the new century to be an unashamedly didactic one. In a series of wittily iconoclastic plays, of which Man and Superman (performed 1905, published 1903) and Major Barbara (performed 1905, published 1907) are the most substantial, George Bernard Shaw turned the Edwardian theatre into an arena for debate upon the principal concerns of the day: the question of political organization, the morality of armaments and war, the function of class and of the professions, the validity of the family and of marriage, and the issue of female emancipation. Nor was he alone in this, even if he was alone in the brilliance of his comedy. John Galsworthy made use of the theatre in Strife (1909) to explore the conflict between capital and labour, and in Justice (1910) he lent his support to reform of the penal system, while Harley Granville-Barker, whose revolutionary approach to stage direction did much to change theatrical production in the period, dissected in The Voysey Inheritance (performed 1905, published 1909) and Waste (performed 1907, published 1909) the hypocrisies and deceit of upper-class and professional life.

Many Edwardian novelists were similarly eager to explore the shortcomings of English social life. Wells—in Love and Mr. Lewisham (1900); Kipps (1905); Ann Veronica (1909), his pro-suffragist novel; and The History of Mr. Polly (1910)—captured the frustrations of lower- and middle-class existence, even though he relieved his accounts with many comic touches. In Anna of the Five Towns (1902), Arnold Bennett detailed the constrictions of provincial life among the self-made business classes in the area of England known as the Potteries; in The Man of Property (1906), the first volume of The Forsyte Saga, Galsworthy described the destructive possessiveness of the professional bourgeoisie; and, in Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) and The Longest Journey (1907), E.M. Forster portrayed with irony the insensitivity, self-repression, and philistinism of the English middle classes.

These novelists, however, wrote more memorably when they allowed themselves a larger perspective. In The Old Wives’ Tale (1908), Bennett showed the destructive effects of time on the lives of individuals and communities and evoked a quality of pathos that he never matched in his other fiction; in Tono-Bungay (1909), Wells showed the ominous consequences of the uncontrolled developments taking place within a British society still dependent upon the institutions of a long-defunct landed aristocracy; and in Howards End (1910), Forster showed how little the rootless and self-important world of contemporary commerce cared for the more rooted world of culture, although he acknowledged that commerce was a necessary evil. Nevertheless, even as they perceived the difficulties of the present, most Edwardian novelists, like their counterparts in the theatre, held firmly to the belief not only that constructive change was possible but also that this change could in some measure be advanced by their writings.

Other writers, including Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling, who had established their reputations during the previous century, and Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton, and Edward Thomas, who established their reputations in the first decade of the new century, were less confident about the future and sought to revive the traditional forms—the ballad, the narrative poem, the satire, the fantasy, the topographical poem, and the essay—that in their view preserved traditional sentiments and perceptions. The revival of traditional forms in the late 19th and early 20th century was not a unique event. There were many such revivals during the 20th century, and the traditional poetry of A.E. Housman (whose book A Shropshire Lad, originally published in 1896, enjoyed huge popular success during World War I), Walter de la Mare, John Masefield, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden represents an important and often neglected strand of English literature in the first half of the century.

The most significant writing of the period, traditionalist or modern, was inspired by neither hope nor apprehension but by bleaker feelings that the new century would witness the collapse of a whole civilization. The new century had begun with Great Britain involved in the South African War (the Boer War; 1899–1902), and it seemed to some that the British Empire was as doomed to destruction, both from within and from without, as had been the Roman Empire. In his poems on the South African War, Hardy (whose achievement as a poet in the 20th century rivaled his achievement as a novelist in the 19th) questioned simply and sardonically the human cost of empire building and established a tone and style that many British poets were to use in the course of the century, while Kipling, who had done much to engender pride in empire, began to speak in his verse and short stories of the burden of empire and the tribulations it would bring.

.James’s awareness of crisis affected the very form and style of his writing, for he was no longer assured that the world about which he wrote was either coherent in itself or unambiguously intelligible to its inhabitants. His fiction still presented characters within an identifiable social world, but he found his characters and their world increasingly elusive and enigmatic and his own grasp upon them, as he made clear in The Sacred Fount (1901), the questionable consequence of artistic will.

Another expatriate novelist, Joseph Conrad (pseudonym of Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, born in the Ukraine of Polish parents), shared James’s sense of crisis but attributed it less to the decline of a specific civilization than to human failings. Man was a solitary, romantic creature of will who at any cost imposed his meaning upon the world because he could not endure a world that did not reflect his central place within it. In Almayer’s Folly (1895) and Lord Jim (1900), he had seemed to sympathize with this predicament; but in Heart of Darkness (1902), Nostromo (1904), The Secret Agent (1907), and Under Western Eyes (1911), he detailed such imposition, and the psychological pathologies he increasingly associated with it, without sympathy. He did so as a philosophical novelist whose concern with the mocking limits of human knowledge affected not only the content of his fiction but also its very structure. His writing itself is marked by gaps in the narrative, by narrators who do not fully grasp the significance of the events they are retelling, and by characters who are unable to make themselves understood. James and Conrad used many of the conventions of 19th-century realism but transformed them to express what are considered to be peculiarly 20th-century preoccupations and anxieties.

**The Modernist revolution**

Anglo-American Modernism: Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, and Eliot
From 1908 to 1914 there was a remarkably productive period of innovation and experiment as novelists and poets undertook, in anthologies and magazines, to challenge the literary conventions not just of the recent past but of the entire post-Romantic era. For a brief moment, London, which up to that point had been culturally one of the dullest of the European capitals, boasted an avant-garde to rival those of Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, even if its leading personality, Ezra Pound, and many of its most notable figures were American.

The spirit of Modernism—a radical and utopian spirit stimulated by new ideas in anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political theory, and psychoanalysis—was in the air, expressed rather mutedly by the pastoral and often anti-Modern poets of the Georgian movement (1912–22; see Georgian poetry) and more authentically by the English and American poets of the Imagist movement, to which Pound first drew attention in Ripostes (1912), a volume of his own poetry, and in Des Imagistes (1914), an anthology. Prominent among the Imagists were the English poets T.E. Hulme, F.S. Flint, and Richard Aldington and the Americans Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and Amy Lowell.

Reacting against what they considered to be an exhausted poetic tradition, the Imagists wanted to refine the language of poetry in order to make it a vehicle not for pastoral sentiment or imperialistic rhetoric but for the exact description and evocation of mood. To this end they experimented with free or irregular verse and made the image their principal instrument. In contrast to the leisurely Georgians, they worked with brief and economical forms. Meanwhile, painters and sculptors, grouped together by the painter and writer Wyndham Lewis under the banner of Vorticism, combined the abstract art of the Cubists with the example of the Italian Futurists who conveyed in their painting, sculpture, and literature the new sensations of movement and scale associated with modern developments such as automobiles and airplanes. With the typographically arresting Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex (two editions, 1914 and 1915) Vorticism found its polemical mouthpiece and in Lewis, its editor, its most active propagandist and accomplished literary exponent. His experimental play Enemy of the Stars, published in Blast in 1914, and his experimental novel Tarr (1918) can still surprise with their violent exuberance.

World War I brought this first period of the Modernist revolution to an end and, while not destroying its radical and utopian impulse, made the Anglo-American Modernists all too aware of the gulf between their ideals and the chaos of the present. Novelists and poets parodied received forms and styles, in their view made redundant by the immensity and horror of the war, but, as can be seen most clearly in Pound’s angry and satirical Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920), with a note of anguish and with the wish that writers might again make form and style the bearers of authentic meanings.

In his two most innovative novels, The Rainbow (1915) and Women in Love (1920), D.H. Lawrence traced the sickness of modern civilization—a civilization in his view only too eager to participate in the mass slaughter of the war—to the effects of industrialization upon the human psyche. Yet as he rejected the conventions of the fictional tradition, which he had used to brilliant effect in his deeply felt autobiographical novel of working-class family life, Sons and Lovers (1913), he drew upon myth and symbol to hold out the hope that individual and collective rebirth could come through human intensity and passion.

On the other hand, the poet and playwright T.S. Eliot, another American resident in London, in his most innovative poetry, Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) and The Waste Land (1922), traced the sickness of modern civilization—a civilization that, on the evidence of the war, preferred death or death-in-life to life—to the spiritual emptiness and rootlessness of modern existence. As he rejected the conventions of the poetic tradition, Eliot, like Lawrence, drew upon myth and symbol to hold out the hope of individual and collective rebirth, but he differed sharply from Lawrence by supposing that rebirth could come through self-denial and self-abnegation. Even so, their satirical intensity, no less than the seriousness and scope of their analyses of the failings of a civilization that had voluntarily entered upon the First World War, ensured that Lawrence and Eliot became the leading and most authoritative figures of Anglo-American Modernism in England in the whole of the postwar period.

These were, however, writers of an earlier, more confident era. A younger and more contemporary voice belonged to members of the Bloomsbury group. Setting themselves against the humbug and hypocrisy that, they believed, had marked their parents’ generation in upper-class England, they aimed to be uncompromisingly honest in personal and artistic life. But in the fiction of Virginia Woolf the rewards of this outlook were both profound and moving. In short stories and novels of great delicacy and lyrical power, she set out to portray the limitations of the self, caught as it is in time, and suggested that these could be transcended, if only momentarily, by engagement with another self, a place, or a work of art. This preoccupation not only charged the act of reading and writing with unusual significance but also produced, in To the Lighthouse (1927), The Waves (1931)—perhaps her most inventive and complex novel—and Between the Acts (1941), her most sombre and moving work, some of the most daring fiction produced in the 20th century.

Woolf believed that her viewpoint offered an alternative to the destructive egotism of the masculine mind, an egotism that had found its outlet in World War I, but, as she made clear in her long essay A Room of One’s Own (1929), she did not consider this viewpoint to be the unique possession of women. In her fiction she presented men who possessed what she held to be feminine characteristics, a regard for others and an awareness of the multiplicity of experience; but she remained pessimistic about women gaining positions of influence, even though she set out the desirability of this in her feminist study Three Guineas (1938). Together with Joyce, who greatly influenced her Mrs. Dalloway (1925), Woolf transformed the treatment of subjectivity, time, and history in fiction and helped create a feeling among her contemporaries that traditional forms of fiction—with their frequent indifference to the mysterious and inchoate inner life of characters—were no longer adequate. Her eminence as a literary critic and essayist did much to foster an interest in the work of other female Modernist writers of the period, such as Katherine Mansfield (born in New Zealand) and Dorothy Richardson.

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**The literature of World War II (1939–45)**

The outbreak of war in 1939, as in 1914, brought to an end an era of great intellectual and creative exuberance. Individuals were dispersed; the rationing of paper affected the production of magazines and books; and the poem and the short story, convenient forms for men under arms, became the favoured means of literary expression. It was hardly a time for new beginnings, although the poets of the New Apocalypse movement produced three anthologies (1940–45) inspired by Neoromantic anarchism.

It was a poet of an earlier generation, T.S. Eliot, who produced in his Four Quartets (1935–42; published as a whole, 1943) the masterpiece of the war. Reflecting upon language, time, and history, he searched, in the three quartets written during the war, for moral and religious significance in the midst of destruction and strove to counter the spirit of nationalism inevitably present in a nation at war. The creativity that had seemed to end with the tortured religious poetry and verse drama of the 1920s and ’30s had a rich and extraordinary late flowering as Eliot concerned himself, on the scale of The Waste Land but in a very different manner and mood, with the well-being of the society in which he lived.