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A Brief History of English Literature

UNIT - 1

CHAPTER 1

Old English Literature

The Old English language or Anglo-Saxon is the earliest form of English. The period is a long one and it is generally considered that Old English was spoken from about A.D. 600 to about 1100. Many of the poems of the period are pagan, in particular *Widsith* and *Beowulf*.

The greatest English poem, *Beowulf* is the first English epic. The author of *Beowulf* is anonymous. It is a story of a brave young man Beowulf in 3182 lines. In this epic poem, Beowulf sails to Denmark with a band of warriors to save the King of Denmark, Hrothgar. Beowulf saves Danish King Hrothgar from a terrible monster called Grendel. The mother of Grendel who sought vengeance for the death of her son was also killed by Beowulf. Beowulf was rewarded and became King. After a prosperous reign of some forty years, Beowulf slays a dragon but in the fight he himself receives a mortal wound and dies. The poem concludes with the funeral ceremonies in honour of the dead hero. Though the poem *Beowulf* is little interesting to contemporary readers, it is a very important poem in the Old English period because it gives an interesting picture of the life and practices of old days.

The difficulty encountered in reading Old English Literature lies in the fact that the language is very different from that of today. There was no rhyme in Old English poems. Instead they used alliteration.

Besides *Beowulf*, there are many other Old English poems. *Widsith*, *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, *Exodus*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Wife's Lament*, *Husband's Message*, *Christ and Satan*, *Daniel*, *Andreas*, *Guthlac*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Battle of Maldon* etc. are some of the examples.

Two important figures in Old English poetry are Cynewulf and Caedmon. Cynewulf wrote religious poems and the four poems, *Juliana*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Christ* and *Elene* are always credited with him. Caedmon is famous for his *Hymn*.

Alfred enriched Old English prose with his translations especially Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Aelfric is another important prose writer during Old English period. He is famous for his *Grammar*, *Homilies* and *Lives of the Saints*. Aelfric's prose is natural and easy and is very often alliterative.



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CHAPTER 2

Middle English Literature

Geoffrey Chaucer

Poet Geoffrey Chaucer was born circa 1340 in London, England. In 1357 he became a public servant to Countess Elizabeth of Ulster and continued in that capacity with the British court throughout his lifetime. *The Canterbury Tales* became his best known and most acclaimed work. He died in 1400 and was the first to be buried in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner.

Chaucer's first major work was 'The Book of the Duchess', an elegy for the first wife of his patron John of Gaunt. Other works include 'Parlement of Foules', 'The Legend of Good Women' and 'Troilus and Criseyde'. In 1387, he began his most famous work, 'The Canterbury Tales', in which a diverse group of people recount stories to pass the time on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

William Langland, (born c. 1330—died c. 1400), presumed author of one of the greatest examples of Middle English alliterative poetry, generally known as *Piers Plowman*, an allegorical work with a complex variety of religious themes. One of the major achievements of *Piers Plowman* is that it translates the language and conceptions of the cloister into symbols and images that could be understood by the layman. In general, the language of the poem is simple and colloquial, but some of the author's imagery is powerful and direct.

PERIODS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA

In Europe, as in Greece, the drama had a distinctly religious origin. The first characters were drawn from the New Testament, and the object of the first plays was to make the church service more impressive, or to emphasize moral lessons by showing the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil doer. In the latter days of the Roman Empire the Church found the stage possessed by frightful plays, which debased the morals of a people already fallen too low. Reform seemed impossible; the corrupt drama was driven from the stage, and plays of every kind were forbidden. But mankind loves a spectacle, and soon the Church itself provided a substitute for the forbidden plays in the famous Mysteries and Miracles.

MIRACLE AND MYSTERY PLAYS

In France the name *miracle* was given to any play representing the lives of the saints, while the *mystère* represented scenes from the life of Christ or stories from the Old Testament associated with the coming of Messiah. In England this distinction was almost unknown; the name Miracle was used indiscriminately for all plays having their origin in the Bible or in the



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lives of the saints; and the name Mystery, to distinguish a certain class of plays, was not used until long after the religious drama had passed away.

The earliest Miracle of which we have any record in England is the *Ludus de Sancta Katharina*, which was performed in Dunstable about the year 1110. It is not known who wrote the original play of St. Catherine, but our first version was prepared by Geoffrey of St. Albans, a French schoolteacher of Dunstable. Whether or not the play was given in English is not known, but it was customary in the earliest plays for the chief actors to speak in Latin or French, to show their importance, while minor and comic parts of the same play were given in English.

For four centuries after this first recorded play the Miracles increased steadily in number and popularity in England. They were given first very simply and impressively in the churches; then, as the actors increased in number and the plays in liveliness, they overflowed to the churchyards; but when fun and hilarity began to predominate even in the most sacred representations, the scandalized priests forbade plays altogether on church grounds. By the year 1300 the Miracles were out of ecclesiastical hands and adopted eagerly by the town guilds; and in the following two centuries we find the Church preaching against the abuse of the religious drama which it had itself introduced, and which at first had served a purely religious purpose. But by this time the Miracles had taken strong hold upon the English people, and they continued to be immensely popular until, in the sixteenth century, they were replaced by the Elizabethan drama.

The early Miracle plays of England were divided into two classes: the first, given at Christmas, included all plays connected with the birth of Christ; the second, at Easter, included the plays relating to his death and triumph. By the beginning of the fourteenth century all these plays were, in various localities, united in single cycles beginning with the Creation and ending with the Final Judgment. The complete cycle was presented every spring, beginning on Corpus Christi day; and as the presentation of so many plays meant a continuous outdoor festival of a week or more, this day was looked forward to as the happiest of the whole year.

Probably every important town in England had its own cycle of plays for its own guilds to perform, but nearly all have been lost. At the present day only four cycles exist (except in the most fragmentary condition), and these, though they furnish an interesting commentary on the times, add very little to our literature. The four cycles are the Chester and York plays, so called from the towns in which they were given; the Towneley or Wakefield plays, named for the Towneley family, which for a long time owned the manuscript; and the Coventry plays, which on doubtful evidence have been associated with the Grey Friars (Franciscans) of Coventry. The Chester cycle has 25 plays, the Wakefield 30, the Coventry 42, and the York 48. It is impossible to fix either the date or the authorship of any of these plays; we only know certainly that they were in great favor from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. The York plays are generally considered to be the best; but those of Wakefield show more humor and variety, and better workmanship. The former cycle especially shows a certain unity resulting from its aim to represent the whole of man's life from birth to death. The same thing is noticeable in *Cursor Mundi*, which, with the York and Wakefield cycles, belongs to the fourteenth century.



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After these plays were written according to the general outline of the Bible stories, no change was tolerated, the audience insisting, like children at “Punch and Judy,” upon seeing the same things year after year. No originality in plot or treatment was possible, therefore; the only variety was in new songs and jokes, and in the pranks of the devil. Childish as such plays seem to us, they are part of the religious development of all uneducated people. Even now the Persian play of the “Martyrdom of Ali” is celebrated yearly, and the famous “Passion Play,” a true Miracle, is given every ten years at Oberammergau.

THE MORAL PERIOD OF THE DRAMA

The second or moral period of the drama is shown by the increasing prevalence of the Morality plays. In these the characters were allegorical personages,—Life, Death, Repentance, Goodness, Love, Greed, and other virtues and vices. The Moralities may be regarded, therefore, as the dramatic counterpart of the once popular allegorical poetry exemplified by the *Romance of the Rose*. It did not occur to our first, unknown dramatists to portray men and women as they are until they had first made characters of abstract human qualities. Nevertheless, the Morality marks a distinct advance over the Miracle in that it gave free scope to the imagination for new plots and incidents. In Spain and Portugal these plays, under the name *auto*, were wonderfully developed by the genius of Calderon and Gil Vicente; but in England the Morality was a dreary kind of performance, like the allegorical poetry which preceded it.

To enliven the audience the devil of the Miracle plays was introduced; and another lively personage called the Vice was the predecessor of our modern clown and jester. His business was to torment the “virtues” by mischievous pranks, and especially to make the devil’s life a burden by beating him with a bladder or a wooden sword at every opportunity. The Morality generally ended in the triumph of virtue, the devil leaping into hell-mouth with Vice on his back.

The best known of the Moralities is “Everyman,” which has recently been revived in England and America. The subject of the play is the summoning of every man by Death; and the moral is that nothing can take away the terror of the inevitable summons but an honest life and the comforts of religion. In its dramatic unity it suggests the pure Greek drama; there is no change of time or scene, and the stage is never empty from the beginning to the end of the performance. Other well-known Moralities are the “Pride of Life,” “Hyckescorner,” and “Castell of Perseverance.” In the latter, man is represented as shut up in a castle garrisoned by the virtues and besieged by the vices.

Like the Miracle plays, most of the old Moralities are of unknown date and origin. Of the known authors of Moralities, two of the best are John Skelton, who wrote “Magnificence,” and probably also “The Necromancer”; and Sir David Lindsay (1490-1555), “the poet of the Scotch Reformation,” whose religious business it was to make rulers uncomfortable by telling them unpleasant truths in the form of poetry. With these men a new element enters into the Moralities. They satirize or denounce abuses of Church and State, and introduce living personages thinly



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disguised as allegories; so that the stage first becomes a power in shaping events and correcting abuses.

THE INTERLUDES

It is impossible to draw any accurate line of distinction between the Moralities and Interludes. In general we may think of the latter as dramatic scenes, sometimes given by themselves (usually with music and singing) at banquets and entertainments where a little fun was wanted; and again slipped into a Miracle play to enliven the audience after a solemn scene. Thus on the margin of a page of one of the old Chester plays we read, "The boye and pigge when the kinges are gone." Certainly this was no part of the original scene between Herod and the three kings. So also the quarrel between Noah and his wife is probably a late addition to an old play. The Interludes originated, undoubtedly, in a sense of humor; and to John Heywood (1497?-1580?), a favorite retainer and jester at the court of Mary, is due the credit for raising the Interlude to the distinct dramatic form known as comedy.

Heywood's Interludes were written between 1520 and 1540. His most famous is "The Four P's," a contest of wit between a "Pardoner, a Palmer, a Pedlar and a Poticary." The characters here strongly suggest those of Chaucer. Another interesting Interlude is called "The Play of the Weather." In this Jupiter and the gods assemble to listen to complaints about the weather and to reform abuses. Naturally everybody wants his own kind of weather. The climax is reached by a boy who announces that a boy's pleasure consists in two things, catching birds and throwing snowballs, and begs for the weather to be such that he can always do both. Jupiter decides that he will do just as he pleases about the weather, and everybody goes home satisfied.

All these early plays were written, for the most part, in a mingling of prose and wretched doggerel, and add nothing to our literature. Their great work was to train actors, to keep alive the dramatic spirit, and to prepare the way for the true drama.

CHAPTER 3

ELIZABEHAN POETRY AND PROSE

After the death of Geoffrey Chaucer in 1400, a century has gone without great literary outputs. This period is known as Barren Age of literature.

Even though there are many differences in their work, Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey are often mentioned together. Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the Sonnet in England whereas Surrey wrote the first blank verse in English.

Thomas Wyatt followed the Italian poet Petrarch to compose sonnets. In this form, the 14 lines rhyme abbaabba (8) + 2 or 3 rhymes in the last six lines.



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The Earl of Surrey's blank verse is remarkable. Christopher Marlow, Shakespeare, Milton and many other writers made use of it.

Tottel's *Songs and Sonnets* (1557) is the first printed anthology of English poetry. It contained 40 poems by Surrey and 96 by Wyatt. There were 135 by other authors. Some of these poems were fine, some childish.

In 1609, a collection of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets was printed. These sonnets were addressed to one "Mr. W.H.". The most probable explanation of the identity of "W.H." is that he was William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.

Other people mentioned in the sonnets are a girl, a rival poet, and a dark-eyed beauty. Shakespeare's two long poems, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece* are notable. One of the most important poets of Elizabethan period is Edmund Spenser (1552-1599). He has been addressed "the poets' poet". His pastoral poem, *The Sheperd's Calendar* (1579) is in 12 books, one for each month of the year. Spenser's *Amoretti*, 88 Petrarchan sonnets celebrates his progress of love. The joy of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle is expressed in his ode *Epithalamion*. His *Prothalamion* is written in honour of the double marriage of the daughters of the Earl of Worester. Spenser's allegorical poem, *The Faerie Queene* is his greatest achievement. Spenser invented a special metre for *The Faerie Queene*. The verse has nine lines and the rhyme plan is ababbcbcc. This verse is known as the 'Spenserian Stanza'. Sir Philip Sidney is remembered for his prose romance, *Arcadia*. His critical essay *Apology for Poetry*, sonnet collection *Astrophel and Stella* are elegant.

Michael Drayton and Sir Walter Raleigh are other important poets of Elizabethan England. Famous Elizabethan dramatist Ben Jonson produced fine poems also.

The University Wits John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Robert Green, Christopher Marlow, and Thomas Nash also wrote good number of poems. John Lyly is most widely known as the author of prose romance entitled *Euphues*. The style Lyly used in his *Euphues* is known as Euphuism. The sentences are long and complicated. It is filled with tricks and alliteration. Large number of similes are brought in.

John Donne's works add the beauty of Elizabethan literature. He was the chief figure of Metaphysical Poetry. Donne's poems are noted for its originality and striking images and conceits. *Satires*, *Songs and Sonnets*, *Elegies*, *The Flea*, *A Valediction: forbidding mourning*, *A Valediction: of weeping* etc. are his famous works.

Sir Francis Bacon is a versatile genius of Elizabethan England. He is considered as the father of English essays. His *Essays* first appeared in 1597, the second edition in 1612 and the third edition in 1625. Besides essays, he wrote *The Advancement of Learning*, *New Atlantis* and *History of Henry VII*.



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Bacon's popular essays are *Of Truth, Of Friendship, Of Love, Of Travel, Of Parents and Children, Of Marriage and Single Life, Of Anger, Of Revenge, Of Death, etc.*

Ben Jonson's essays are compiled in *The Timber or Discoveries*. His essays are aphoristic like those of Bacon. Jonson is considered as the father of English literary criticism.

Many attempts were carried out to translate Bible into English. After the death of John Wycliff, William Tyndale tried on this project. Coverdale carried on the work of Tyndale. The *Authorized Version of Bible* was published in 1611.

CHAPTER 4

ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

The English dramas have gone through great transformation in Elizabethan period. The chief literary glory of the Elizabethan age was its drama. The first regular English comedy was *Ralph Roister Doister* written by Nicholas Udall. Another comedy *Gammar Gurton's Needle* is about the loss and the finding of a needle with which the old woman Gammar Gurton mends clothes.

The first English tragedy was *Gorboduc*, in blank verse. The first three acts of *Gorboduc* written by Thomas Norton and the other two by Thomas Sackville.

The University Wits contributed hugely for the growth of Elizabethan drama. The University Wits were young men associated with Oxford and Cambridge. They were fond of heroic themes. The most notable figures are Christopher Marlow, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nash, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, and George Peele.

Christopher Marlow was the greatest of pre-Shakespearean dramatist. Marlow wrote only tragedies. His most famous works are *Edward II, Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Doctor Faustus*. Marlow popularized the blank verse. Ben Jonson called it "the mighty line of Marlow".

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is a Senecan play. It resembles Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Its horrific plot gave the play a great and lasting popularity.

The greatest literary figure of English, William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon on April 26, 1564. He did odd jobs and left to London for a career. In London, he wrote plays for Lord Chamberlain's company. Shakespeare's plays can be classified as the following

1. The Early Comedies: in these immature plays the plots are not original. The characters are less finished and the style lacks the genius of Shakespeare. They are full of wit and word play. Of this type are *The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, and The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

2. The English Histories: These plays show a rapid maturing of Shakespeare's technique. His characterization has improved. The plays in this group are *Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V*.



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3. The Mature Comedies: The jovial good humour of Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, the urban worldlywise comedy of Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and the comic scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* etc. are full of vitality. They contain many comic situations.

4. The Sombre Plays: In this group are *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. These plays show a cynical attitude to life and are realistic in plot.

5. The Great Tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear* are the climax of Shakespeare's art. These plays stand supreme in intensity of emotion, depth of psychological insight, and power of style.

6. The Roman Plays: *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* etc. follow the great tragic period. Unlike Marlow, Shakespeare is relaxed in the intensity of tragedy.

7. The Last Plays: The notable last plays of Shakespeare are *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

The immense power and variety of Shakespeare's work have led to the idea that one man cannot have written it all; yet it must be true that one man did. Thus Shakespeare remains as the greatest English dramatist even after four centuries of his death.

Other dramatist who flourished during the Elizabethan period is Ben Jonson. He introduced the "comedy of humours", which portrays the individual as dominated by one marked characteristic. He is best known for his *Every Man in his Humour*. Other important plays of Jonson are *Every Man out of his Humour*, *Volpone or the Fox*, and *The Alchemist*,

John Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are important Elizabethan dramas. Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Heywood, Beaumont and Fletcher etc. are other noted Elizabethan playwrights.

CHAPTER 5

John Milton and His Time

John Milton (1608- 1674) was born in London and educated at Christ's College, Cambridge. After leaving university, he studied at home. Milton was a great poet, polemic, pamphleteer, theologian, and parliamentarian. In 1643, Milton married a woman much younger than himself. She left Milton and did not return for two years. This unfortunate incident led Milton to write two strong pamphlets on divorce. The greatest of all his political writings is *Areopagitica*, a notable and impassioned plea for the liberty of the press.

Milton's early poems include *On Shakespeare*, and *On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three*. *L'Allegro* (the happy man) and *Il Penseroso* (the sad man) two long narrative poems. *Comus* is a masque written by Milton when he was at Cambridge.



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His pastoral elegy *Lycidas* is on his friend, Edward King who drowned to death on a voyage to Ireland. Milton's one of the sonnets deals with the theme of his blindness.

Milton is remembered for his greatest epic poem *Paradise Lost*. *Paradise Lost* contained twelve books and published in 1677. Milton composed it in blank verse. *Paradise Lost* covers the rebellion of Satan (Lucifer) in heaven and his expulsion. *Paradise Lost* contains hundreds of remarkable lines. Milton coined many words in this poem.

Paradise Regained and *Samson Agonistes* are other two major poems of Milton.

Milton occupies a central position in English literature. He was a great Puritan and supported Oliver Cromwell in the Civil War. He wrote many pamphlet in support of parliament.

LYRIC POETS DURING MILTON'S PERIOD (THE CAVALIER POETS)

Milton's period produced immense lyric poetry. These lyrical poets dealt chiefly with love and war.

Richard Lovelace's *Lucasta* contains the best of his shorter pieces. His best known lyrics, such as *To Althea, from Prison* and *To Lucasta, going in the Wars*, are simple and sincere.

Sir John Suckling was a famous wit at court. His poems are generous and witty. His famous poem is *Ballad upon a Wedding*.

Robert Herrick wrote some fresh and passionate lyrics. Among his best known shorter poems are *To Althea*, *To Julia*, and *Cherry Ripe*.

Philip Massinger and John Ford produced some notable in this period.

Many prose writers flourished during Milton's age. Sir Thomas Browne is the best prose writer of the period. His *Religio Medici* is a curious mixture of religious faith and scientific skepticism. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Vulgar Errors* is another important work.

Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Thomas Fuller's *The History of the Holy War* are other important prose works during this period. Izaak Walton's biography of John Donne is a very famous work of Milton's period. His *Compleat Angler* discusses the art of river fishing.

CHAPTER 6

RESTORATION DRAMA AND PROSE

The Restoration of Charles II (1660) brought about a revolution in English literature. With the collapse of the Puritan Government there sprang up activities that had been so long suppressed. The Restoration encouraged levity in rules that often resulted in immoral and indecent plays.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

Dryden is the greatest literary figure of the Restoration. In his works, we have an excellent reflection of both the good and the bad tendencies of the age in which he lived. Before the



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Restoration, Dryden supported Oliver Cromwell. At the Restoration, Dryden changed his views and became loyal to Charles II. His poem *Astrea Redux* (1660) celebrated Charles II's return.

Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*(Miracle Year) describes the terrors of Great Fire in London in 1666. Dryden appeared as the chief literary champion of the monarchy in his famous satirical allegory, *Abasalom and Achitophel*. John Dryden is now remembered for his greatest mock-heroic poem, *Mac Flecknoe*. *Mac Flecknoe* is a personal attack on his rival poet Thomas Shadwell.

Dryden's other important poems are *Religio Laici*, and *The Hind and the Panther*. John Dryden popularized heroic couplets in his dramas. *Aurengaxebe*, *The Rival Ladies*, *The Conquest of Granada*, *Don Sebastian etc.* are some of his famous plays. His dramatic masterpiece is *All for Love*. Dryden polished the plot of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in his *All for Love*.

As a prose writer, Dryden's work, *An Essay on Dramatic Poesie* is worth mentioning. John Bunyan's greatest allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Holy War*,

Comedy of Manners

Restoration period produced a brilliant group of dramatists who made this age immortal in the history of English literature. These plays are hard and witty, comic and immoral. It was George Etheredge who introduced Comedy of Manners. His famous plays are *She Would if She Could*, *The Man of Mode* and *Love in a Tub*.

William Congreve is the greatest of Restoration comedy writers. His *Love for Love*, *The Old Bachelor*, *The Way of the World* and *The Double Dealer* are very popular.

William Wycherley is another important Restoration comedy playwright. His *Country Wife*, and *Love in a Wood* are notable plays.

Sir John Vanbrugh's best three comedies are *The Provoked Wife*, *The Relapse* and *The Confederacy*.

UNIT - II

CHAPTER 7

ENGLISH POETS, 1660-1798

ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)



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Alexander Pope was the undisputed master of both prose and verse. Pope wrote many poems and mock-epics attacking his rival poets and social condition of England. His *Dunciad* is an attack on dullness. He wrote *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) in heroic couplets. In 1712, Pope published *The Rape of the Lock*, one of the most brilliant poems in English language. It is a mock-heroic poem dealing with the fight of two noble families.

An Essay on Man, Of the Characters of Women, and the translation of *Illiad* and *Odyssey* are his other major works.

Oliver Goldsmith wrote two popular poems in heroic couplets. They are *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*.

James Thompson is remembered for his long series of descriptive passages dealing with natural scenes in his poem *The Seasons*. He wrote another important poem *The Castle of Indolence*.

Edward Young produced a large amount of literary work of variable quality. *The Last Day*, *The Love of Fame*, and *The Force of Religion* are some of them.

Robert Blair's fame is chiefly dependent on his poem *The Grave*. It is a long blank verse poem of meditation on man's morality.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) is one of the greatest poets of English literature. His first poem was the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*. Then after years of revision, he published his famous *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Its popularity had been maintained to the present day. Other important poems of Thomas Gray are *Ode on a Favourite Cat*, *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*.

William Blake (1757-1827) is both a great poet and artist. His two collections of short lyrics are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. His finest lyric is *The Tiger*.

Robert Burns is known as the national poet of Scotland. *A Winter Night*, *O My Love is like a Red Red Rose*, *The Holy Fair* etc. are some of his major poems.

William Cowper, **William Collins**, and **William Shenstone** are other notable poets before the Romanticism.

CHAPTER 8

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

DANIEL DEFOE (1659-1731)

Daniel Defoe wrote in bulk. His greatest work is the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. It is based on an actual event which took place during his time. *Robinson Crusoe* is considered to be one of the



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most popular novels in English language. He started a journal named *The Review*. His *A Journal of the Plague Year* deals with the Plague in London in 1665.

Sir Richard Steele and **Joseph Addison** worked together for many years. Richard Steele started the periodicals *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The English Man*, and *The Reader*. Joseph Addison contributed in these periodicals and wrote columns. The imaginary character of Sir Roger de Coverley was very popular during the eighteenth century.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) is one of the greatest satirists of English literature. His first noteworthy book was *The Battle of the Books*. *A Tale of a Tub* is a religious allegory like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. His longest and most famous work is *Gulliver's Travels*. Another important work of Jonathan Swift is *A Modest Proposal*.

Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is very much famous for his *Dictionary* (1755). *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is a longish poem by him. Johnson started a paper named *The Rambler*. His *The Lives of the Poets* introduces fifty-two poets including Donne, Dryden, Pope, Milton, and Gray. Most of the information about Johnson is taken from his friend James Boswell's biography *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

Edward Gibbon is famous for the great historical work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. His *Autobiography* contains valuable material concerning his life.

Edmund Burke is one of the masters of English prose. He was a great orator also. His speech *On American Taxation* is very famous. *Revolution in France* and *A Letter to a Noble Lord* are his notable pamphlets.

The letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Earl of Chesterfield, Thomas Gray and Cowper are good prose works in Eighteenth century literature.

The Birth of English Novel

The English novel proper was born about the middle of the eighteenth century.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) is considered as the father of English novel. He published his first novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* in 1740. This novel is written in the form of letters. Thus *Pamela* is an 'epistolary novel'. The character Pamela is a poor and virtuous woman who marries a wicked man and afterwards reforms her husband. Richardson's next novel *Clarissa Harlowe* was also constructed in the form of letters. Many critics consider *Clarissa* as Richardson's masterpiece. *Clarissa* is the beautiful daughter of a severe father who wants her to marry against her will. *Clarissa* is a very long novel.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) is another important novelist. He published *Joseph Andrews* in 1742. *Joseph Andrews* laughs at Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. His greatest novel is *Tom Jones*. Henry Fielding's last novel is *Amelia*.



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Tobias Smollett wrote a 'picaresque novel' titled *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. His other novels are *The Adventures of Ferdinand* and *Humphry Clinker*.

Laurence Sterne is now remembered for his masterpiece *Tristram Shandy* which was published in 1760. Another important work of Laurence Sterne is *A Sentimental journey through France and Italy*. These novels are unique in English literature. Sterne blends humour and pathos in his works.

Horace Walpole is famous both as a letter writer and novelist. His one and only novel *The Castle of Otranto* deals with the horrific and supernatural theme.

Other 'terror novelists' include William Beckford and Mrs Ann Radcliffe.

CHAPTER 9

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY POETS (THE ROMANTICS)

The main stream of poetry in the eighteenth century had been orderly and polished, without much feeling for nature. The publication of the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 came as a shock. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the beginning of the romantic age. They together with Southey are known as the Lake Poets, because they liked the Lake district in England and lived in it.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was the poet of nature. In the preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth set out his theory of poetry. He defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions". His views on poetical style are the most revolutionary.

In his early career as a poet, Wordsworth wrote poems like *An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches*. *The Prelude* is the record of his development as a poet. It is a philosophical poem. He wrote some of the best lyric poems in the English language like *The Solitary Reaper, I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud, Ode on the Itimations of Immorality, Resolution and Independence etc.* *Tintern Abbey* is one of the greatest poems of Wordsworth.

Samuel Tylor Coleridge (1772-1814) wrote four poems for *The Lyrical Ballads*. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is the most noteworthy. *Kubla Khan, Christabel, Dejection an Ode, Frost at Midnight* etc. are other important poems. *Biographia Literaria* is his most valuable prose work. Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare are equally important.

Lord Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was based on his travels. *Don Juan* ranks as one of the greatest of satirical poems. *The Vision of Judgment* is a fine political satire in English.



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PB Shelley (1792-1822) was a revolutionary figure of Romantic period. When Shelley was studying at Oxford, he wrote the pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* which caused his expulsion from the university. *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Alastor* are his early poems. *Prometheus Unbound* is a combination of the lyric and the drama. Shelley wrote some of the sweetest English lyrics like *To a Skylark*, *The Cloud*, *To Night* etc. Of his many odes, the most remarkable is *Ode to the West Wind*. *Adonais* is an elegy on the death of John Keats.

John Keats (1795-1821) is another great Romantic poet who wrote some excellent poems in his short period of life. His *Isabella* deals with the murder of a lady's lover by her two wicked brothers. The unfinished epic poem *Hyperion* is modelled on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. *The Eve of St Agnes* is regarded as his finest narrative poem. The story of *Lamia* is taken from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. *Endymion*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to Psyche*, *Ode on Melancholy* and *Ode to Autumn* are very famous. His *Letters* give a clear insight into his mind and artistic development.

Robert Southey is a minor Romantic poet. His poems, which are of great bulk, include *Joan of Arc*, *Thalaba*, and *The Holly-tree*. 4

CHAPTER 10

LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY POETS (Victorian Poets)

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-92) is a chief figure of later nineteenth century poetry. His volume of *Poems* contain notable poems like *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Ulysses*, *Morte d' Arthur*. The story of *Morte d' Arthur* is based on Thomas Malory's poem *Morte d' Arthur*. *In Memoriam* (1850) caused a great stir when it first appeared. It is a very long series of meditations upon the death of Arthur Henry Hallam, Tennyson's college friend, who died at Vienna in 1833. *In Memoriam* is the most deeply emotional, and probably the greatest poetry he ever produced. *Maud and Other Poems* was received with amazement by the public. *Idylls of the King*, *Enoch Arden*, *Harold* etc. are his other works.

Robert Browning (1812-89) is an English poet and playwright whose mastery of dramatic monologues made him one of the foremost Victorian poets. He popularized 'dramatic monologue'. *The Ring and the Book* is an epic-length poem in which he justifies the ways of God to humanity. Browning is popularly known by his shorter poems, such as *Porphyria's Lover*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. He married Elizabeth Barrett, another famous poet during the Victorian period. *Fra Lippo Lippi Andrea Del Sarto* and *My Last Duchess* are famous dramatic monologues.

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was an English poet and cultural critic who worked as an inspector of schools. He was the son of Thomas Arnold, the famed headmaster of Rugby School.



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Arnold is sometimes called the third great Victorian poet, along with Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning.

Arnold valued natural scenery for its peace and permanence in contrast with the ceaseless change of human things. His descriptions are often picturesque, and marked by striking similes. *Thyrsis*, *Dover Beach* and *The Scholar Gipsy* are his notable poems.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was an English poet, illustrator, painter and translator in the late nineteenth century England. Rossetti's poems were criticized as belonging to the 'Fleshy School' of poetry. Rossetti wrote about nature with his eyes on it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wife of Robert Browning wrote some excellent poems in her volume of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

AC Swinburne followed the style of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Swinburne's famous poems works are *Poems and Ballads* and *tristram of Lyonesse*.

Edward Fitzgerald translated the *Rubaiyat* of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam. Fitzgerald's translation is loose and did not stick too closely to the original.

Rudyard Kipling and **Francis Thompson** also wrote some good poems during the later nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 11

Nineteenth Century Novelists (Victorian Novelists)

Jane Austen 1775-1817 is one of the greatest novelists of nineteenth century English literature. Her first novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) deals with the life of middle class people. The style is smooth and charming. Her second novel *Sense and Sensibility* followed the same general lines of *Pride and Prejudice*. *Northanger Abbey*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion* are some of the other famous works. Jane Austen's plots are skillfully constructed. Her characters are developed with minuteness and accuracy.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is considered as one of the greatest English novelists. Dickens has contributed some evergreen characters to English literature. He was a busy successful novelist during his lifetime. *The Pickwick Papers* and *Sketches by Boz* are two early novels. *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations* are some of the most famous novels of Charles Dickens. No English novelists excel Dickens in the multiplicity of his characters and situations. He creates a whole world people for the readers. He sketched both lower and middle class people in London.



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William Makepeace Thackeray was born in Calcutta and sent to England for education. William Thackeray is now chiefly remembered for his novel *The Vanity Fair*. While Dickens was in full tide of his success, Thackeray was struggling through neglect and contempt to recognition. Thackeray's genius blossomed slowly. Thackeray's characters are fearless and rough. He protested against the feeble characters of his time. *The Rose and the Ring*, *Rebecca and Rowena*, and *The Four Georges* are some of his works.

The Brontës

Charlotte, Emily, and Anne were the daughters of an Irish clergy man Patrick Brontë, who held a living in Yorkshire. **Charlotte Brontë's** first novel, *The Professor* failed to find a publisher and only appeared after her death. *Jane Eyre* is her greatest novel. the plot is weak and melodramatic. This was followed by *Shirley* and *Villette*. Her plots are overcharged and she is largely restricted to her own experiments.

Emily Brontë wrote less than Charlottë. Her one and only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is unique in English literature. It is the passionate love story of Heathcliff and Catherine.

Anne Bronte's two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are much inferior to those of her sisters, for she lacks nearly all their power and intensity.

George Eliot (1819-1880) is the pen-name of Mary Ann Evans. *Adam Bede* was her first novel. Her next novel, *The Mill on the Floss* is partly autobiographical. *Silas Marner* is a shorter novel which gives excellent pictures of village life. *Romola*, *Middle March* and *Daniel Deronda* are other works of George Eliot.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) published his first work *Desperate Remedies* anonymously. *Under the Greenwood Tree*, one of the lightest and most appealing of his novels established him as a writer. It was set in the rural area he was soon to make famous as Wessex. *Far From the Madding Crowd* is a tragi-comedy set in Wessex. The rural background of the story is an integral part of the novel, which reveals the emotional depths which underlie rustic life. The novel, *The Return of the Native* is a study of man's helplessness before the mighty Fate. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* also deals with the theme of Man versus Destiny. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* aroused the hostility of conventional readers due to their frank handling of sex and religion. At the beginning *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was rejected by the publishers. The outcry with the publication of *Jude the Obscure* led Hardy in disgust to abandon novel writing. Thomas Hardy's characters are mostly men and women living close to the soil.

Mary Shelley, the wife of Romantic poet PB Shelley is now remembered as a writer of her famous novel of terror, *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein* can be regarded as the first attempt at science fiction. *The Last Man* is Mary Shelley's another work.

Edgar Allan Poe was a master of Mystery stories. Poe's powerful description of astonishing and unusual events has the attraction of terrible things. Some of his major works are *The Mystery of*



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Marie Roget, The Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Fall of the House of Usher and The Mystery of Red Death.

Besides poetry collections like *The Lady of the Last Minstrel, Marmion, The Lady of the Lake,* and *The Lord of the Isles*, **Sir Walter Scott** produced enormous number of novels. *Waverly, Old Mortality, The Black Dwarf, The Pirate,* and *Kenilworth* are some of them. He was too haste in writing novels and this led to the careless, imperfect stories. He has a great place in the field of historical novels.

Frederick Marryat's sea novels were popular in the nineteenth century. His earliest novel was *The Naval Officer*. All his best books deal with the sea. Marryat has a considerable gift for plain narrative and his humour is entertaining. *Peter Simple, Jacob Faithful* and *Japhet in Search of His Father* are some of his famous works.

R.L. Stevenson's *The Treasure Island*, **George Meredith's** *The Egoist*, **Edward Lytton's** *The Last Days of Pompeii*, **Charles Reade's** *Mask and Faces*, **Anthony Trollope's** *The Warden*, **Wilkie Collins's** *The Moonstone*, **Joseph Conard's** *Lord Jim*, **Nathaniel Hawthorne's** *The Scarlet Letter* etc. are some of other famous works of nineteenth century English literature.

CHAPTER 12

Other Nineteenth Century Prose

Charles Lamb is one of the greatest essayists of nineteenth century. Lamb started his career as a poet but is now remembered for his well-known *Essays of Elia*. His essays are unequal in English. He is so sensitive and so strong. Besides *Essays of Elia*, other famous essays are *Dream Children* and *Tales from Shakespeare*. His wife, Mary Lamb also wrote some significant essays.

William Hazlitt's reputation chiefly rests on his lectures and essays on literary and general subjects. His lectures, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, The English Poets* and *The English Comic Writers* are important.

Thomas De Quincey's famous work is *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. It is written in the manner of dreams. His *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets* contain some good chapters on Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Thomas Carlyle is another prose writer of nineteenth century. His works consisted of translations, essays, and biographies. Of these the best are his translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, his *The Life of Schiller*, and his essays on Robert Burns and Walter Scott.



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Thomas Macaulay (Lord Macaulay) wrote extensively. He contributed for *The Encyclopedia of Britannica* and *The Edinburgh Review*. His *History of England* is filled with numerous and picturesque details.

Charles Darwin is one of the greatest names in modern science. He devoted almost wholly to biological and allied studies. His chief works are *The Voyage of the Beagle*, *Origin of Species*, and *The Descent of Man*.

John Ruskin's works are of immense volume and complexity. His longest book is *Modern Painters*. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and *The Stones of Venice* expound his views on artistic matters. *Unto this Last* is a series of articles on political economy.

Samuel Butler, the grandson of Dr. Samuel Butler was inspired by the Darwinian theory of evolution. *Evolution Old and New*, *Unconscious Memory*, *Essays on Life, Art and Science*, *The Way of All Flesh* etc. rank him as one of the greatest prose writers of nineteenth century. He was an acute and original thinker. He exposed all kinds of religious, political, and social shams and hypocrisies of his period.

Besides being a great poet, **Mathew Arnold** also excelled as an essayist. His prose works are large in bulk and wide in range. Of them all his critical essays are probably of the greatest value. *Essays in Criticism*, *Culture and Anarchy*, and *Literature and Dogma* have permanent value.

Lewis Carroll, another prose writer of nineteenth century is now remembered for her immortal work, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Ever since its publication, this novel continues to be popular among both the children and adult readers.

UNIT – III

CHAPTER 13

Twentieth-century novels and other prose

The long reign of Queen Victoria ended in 1901. There was a sweeping social reform and unprecedented progress. The reawakening of a social conscience was found its expression in the literature produced during this period.

Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay but soon moved to Lahore. He worked as a news reporter in Lahore. Kipling was a prolific and versatile writer. His insistent proclamation of the superiority of the white races, his support for colonization, his belief in the progress and the value of the machine etc. found an echo on the hearts of many of his readers. His best-known



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prose works include Kim, *Life's Handicap*, *Debts and Credits*, and *Rewards and Fairies*. He is now chiefly remembered for his greatest work, *The Jungle Book*.

E.M Forster wrote five novels in his life time. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* has well-drawn characters. Other novels are *The Longest Journey*, *A Room with a View*, *Howards End*, and *A Passage to India*. *A Passage to India* is unequal in English in its presentation of the complex problems which were to be found in the relationship between English and native people in India. E.M Forster portrayed the Indian scene in all its magic and all its wretchedness.

H.G Wells began his career as a journalist. He started his scientific romances with the publication of *The Time Machine*. *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The First Men in the Moon* and *The Food of the Gods* are some of his important science romances. *Ann Veronica*, *Kipps* and *The History of Mr Polly* are numbered among his sociological novels.

D.H Lawrence was a striking figure in the twentieth century literary world. He produced over forty volumes of fiction during his period. *The White Peacock* is his earliest novel. The largely autobiographical and extremely powerful novel was *Sons and Lovers*. It studies with great insight the relationship between a son and mother. By many, it is considered the best of all his works. Then came *The Rainbow*, suppressed as obscene, which treats again the conflict between man and woman. *Women in Love* is another important work. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a novel in which sexual experience is handled with a wealth of physical detail and uninhibited language. Lawrence also excelled both as a poet and short story writer.

James Joyce is a serious novelist, whose concern is chiefly with human relationships- man in relation to himself, to society, and to the whole race. He was born in Dublin, Ireland. His first work, *Dubliners*, is followed by a largely autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is an intense account of a developing writer. The protagonist of the story, Stephen Dedalus is James Joyce himself. The character Stephen Dedalus appears again in his highly complex novel, *Ulysses* published in 1922. Joyce's mastery of language, his integrity, brilliance, and power is noticeable in his novel titled *Finnegan's Wake*.

Virginia Woolf famed both as a literary critic and novelist. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out* is told in the conventional narrative manner. A deeper study of characters can be found in her later works such as *Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*. In addition to her novels, Virginia Woolf wrote a number of essays on cultural subjects. Woolf rejected the conventional concepts of novel. She replaced emphasis on incident, external description, and straight forward narration by using the technique "**Stream of Consciousness**". James Joyce and Virginia Woolf popularized this writing technique.

George Orwell became a figure of outstanding importance because of *Animal Farm*. It is a political allegory on the degeneration of communist ideals into dictatorship. Utterly different was *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on the surveillance of state over its citizen. *Burmese Days* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* are other works.



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William Golding deals with man's instinct to destroy what is good, whether it is material or spiritual. His best known novel is *Lord of the Flies*. *The Scorpion God*, *The Inheritors* and *Free Fall* are other notable works.

Somerset Maugham was a realist who sketched the cosmopolitan life through his characters. *The Moon and Sixpence*, *Mrs. Craddock* and *The Painted Veil* are some of his novels. His best novel is *Of Human Bondage*. It is a study in frustration, which had a strong autobiographical element.

Kingsly Amis's *Lucky Jim*, *Take a Girl like You*, *One Fat Englishman*, and *Girl* are notable works in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 14

Twentieth Century Drama

After a hundred years of insignificance, drama again appeared as an important form in the twentieth century. Like the novelists in the 20th century, most of the important dramatists were chiefly concerned with the contemporary social scene. Many playwrights experimented in the theatres. There were revolutionary changes in both the theme and presentation.

John Galsworthy was a social reformer who showed both sides of the problems in his plays. He had a warm sympathy for the victims of social injustice. Of his best-known plays *The Silver Box* deals with the inequality of justice, *Strife* with the struggle between Capital and Labour, *Justice* with the meaninglessness of judiciary system.

George Bernard Shaw is one of the greatest dramatists of 20th century. The first Shavian play is considered to be *Arms and the Man*. It is an excellent and amusing stage piece which pokes fun at the romantic conception of the soldier. *The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and *The Man of Destiny* are also noteworthy. *Man and Superman* is Shaw's most important play which deals the theme half seriously and half comically. Religion and social problems are again the main topics in *Major Barbara*. *The Doctor's Dilemma* is an amusing satire. Social conventions and social weaknesses were treated again in *Pygmalion*, a witty and highly entertaining study of the class distinction. *St Joan* deals with the problems in Christianity. *The Apple Cart*, *Geneva*, *The Millionaire*, *Too True to be Good* and *On the Rocks* are Shaw's minor plays.

J M Synge was the greatest dramatist in the rebirth of the Irish theatre. His plays are few in number but they are of a stature to place him among the greatest playwrights in the English language. Synge was inspired by the beauty of his surroundings, the humour, tragedy, and poetry of the life of the simple fisher-folk in the Isles of Aran. *The Shadow of the Glen* is a comedy based on an old folktale, which gives a good romantic picture of Irish peasant life. It was followed by *Riders to the Sea*, a powerful, deeply moving tragedy which deals with the toll taken



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by the sea in the lives of the fisher-folk of the Ireland. *The Winker's Wedding* and *The Well of the Saints* are other notable works.

Samuel Beckett, the greatest proponent of Absurd Theatre is most famous for his play, *Waiting for Godot*. It is a static representation without structure or development, using only meandering, seemingly incoherent dialogue to suggest despair of a society in the post-World War period. Another famous play by Beckett is *Endgame*.

Harold Pinter was influenced by Samuel Beckett. His plays are quite short and set in an enclosed space. His characters are always in doubt about their function, and in fear of something or someone 'outside'. *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *A Night Out*, *The Homecoming* and *Silence* are his most notable plays.

James Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* gave the strongest tonic to the concept of Angry Young Man. *Watch it Come Down*, *A Portrait of Me*, *Inadmissible Evidence* etc. are his other major works.

T.S Eliot wrote seven dramas. They are *Sweeney Agonistes*, *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman*.

Juno and the Paycock, *The Plough and the Stars*, and *The Silver Tassie* marked **Sean O'Casey** out as the greatest new figure in the inter-War years. His own experience enabled him to study the life of the Dublin slums with the warm understanding.

Another leading playwright of 20th century was **Arnold Wesker**. Wesker narrated the lives of working class people in his plays. *Roots*, *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* are his famous works.

Bertolt Brecht, **J.B Priestley**, **Somerset Maugham**, **Christopher Fry**, **Peter Usinov**, **Tom Stoppard**, **Bernard Kops**, **Henry Livings**, **Alan Bennett** et al are other important playwrights of twentieth century English literature.

CHAPTER 15

Twentieth Century Poetry

The greatest figure in the poetry of the early part of the Twentieth century was the Irish poet **William Butler Yeats**. Like so many of his contemporaries, Yeats was acutely conscious of the spiritual barrenness of his age. W.B Yeats sought to escape into the land of 'faery' and looked for his themes in Irish legend. He is one of the most difficult of modern poets. His trust was in the imagination and intuition of man rather than in scientific reasoning. Yeats believed in



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fairies, magic, and other forms of superstition. He studied Indian philosophy and Vedas. *An Irish Seaman Foresees His Death, The Tower, The Green Helmet* etc. are his major poems.

With possible exception of Yeats, no twentieth century poet has been held in such esteem by his fellow-poets as **T.S Eliot**. Eliot's first volume of verse, *Prufrock and Other Observations* portrays the boredom, emptiness, and pessimism of its days. His much discussed poem *The Waste Land*(1922) made a tremendous impact on the post-War generation, and it is considered one of the important documents of its age. The poem is difficult to understand in detail, but its general aim is clear. The poem is built round the symbols of drought and flood, representing death and rebirth. The poem progresses in five movements, "The Burial of the Dead", "The Game of the Chess", "The Fire Sermon", "Death by Water", and "What the Thunder Said". Eliot's poem *Ash Wednesday* is probably his most difficult. Obscure images and symbols and the lack of a clear, logical structure make the poem difficult.

W.H Auden was an artist of great virtuosity, a ceaseless experimenter in verse form, with a fine ear for the rhythm and music of words. He was modern in tone and selection of themes. Auden's later poems revealed a new note of mysticism in his approach to human problems. He was outspokenly anti-Romantic and stressed the objective attitude.

Thomas Hardy began his career as a poet. Though he was not able to find a publisher, he continued to write poetry. Hardy's verses consist of short lyrics describing nature and natural beauty. Like his novels, the poems reveal concern with man's unequal struggle against the mighty fate. *Wessex Poems, Winter Words, and Collected Poems* are his major poetry works.

G.M Hopkins is a unique figure in the history of English poetry. No modern poet has been the centre of more controversy or the cause of more misunderstanding. He was very unconventional in writing technique. He used Sprung-rhythm, counterpoint rhythm, internal rhythms, alliteration, assonance, and coinages in his poems.

Dylan Thomas was an enemy of intellectualism in verse. He drew upon the human body, sex, and the Old Testament for much of his imagery and complex word-play. His verses are splendidly colourful and musical. Appreciation of landscape, religious and mystical association, sadness and quietness were very often selected as themes for his verses.

Sylvia Plath and her husband **Ted Hughes** composed some brilliant poems in the 20th century. Plath's mental imbalance which brought her to suicide can be seen in her poetry collections titled *Ariel, The Colossus, and Crossing the Water*. **Ted Hughes** was a poet of animal and nature. His major collection of poetry are *The Hawk in the Rain, Woodwo, Crow, Crow Wakes and Eat Crow*.

R.S Thomas, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Peter Porter, Seamus Heaney et al are also added the beauty of 20th century English poetry.



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War Poets

The First World War brought to public notice many poets, particularly among the young men of armed forces, while it provided a new source of inspiration for writers of established reputation. **Rupert Brooke**, **Siegfried Sassoon**, and **Wilfred Owen** are the major War poets. **Rupert Brooke**'s famous sonnet "If I should die, think only this of me" has appeared in so many anthologies of twentieth century verse. Brooke turned to nature and simple pleasures for inspiration. **Sassoon** wrote violent and embittered poems. Sassoon painted the horrors of life and death in the trenches and hospitals. **Wilfred Owen** was the greatest of the war poets. In the beginning of his literary career, Owen wrote in the romantic tradition of John Keats and Lord Tennyson. Owen was a gifted artist with a fine feeling for words. He greatly experimented in verse techniques.

English Poetry in the Seventeenth Century

A question that can be asked of any century's poetry is whether it owes its character to "forces"—nonliterary developments to which the poets respond more or less sensitively—or whether, on the other hand, the practice of innovative and influential poets mainly determines the poetry of the period. Clearly, great poets do not always shape the literature of their century, as the cases of the twin giants of seventeenth century England, William Shakespeare and John Milton, indicate. What Ben Jonson wrote of Shakespeare is true of both: They are "not of an age, but for all time!" John Donne and John Dryden, however, are poets who seem to have stamped their personalities on much of the poetry of their own and succeeding generations.

John Donne and John Dryden

John Donne (1572-1631) turned twenty-nine in the year 1601. **John Dryden** (1631-1700), busy to the last, died at the end of the century. Thus a century brimming with good poetry may be said to begin with Donne and end with Dryden. On most library shelves, Donne and Dryden are both literally and figuratively neighbors. If not the shaper of poetry in the first half of the century, Donne stands at least as its representative poet, while Dryden, born only a few months after Donne died in 1631, probably has an even more secure claim to the same position in the final decades of the century. They may indeed have determined the poetic climate; certainly they serve as barometers on which modern readers can see that climate registered. The distinctive differences between the writings of the two men testify to the diversity of seventeenth century poetry and to the likelihood that powerful forces for change were at work in the interim.

The differences are apparent even when—perhaps particularly when—roughly similar types of poems (and parallels between the two are inevitably rough) are chosen. Donne wrote two sequences of religious sonnets. One begins:



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Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I run to death, and death meets me as fast, A
nd all my pleasures are like yesterday.

Dryden is known for two longer religious poems, one of which, *Religio Laici* (1682), begins: “Dim as the borrowed beams of moons and stars/ To lonely, weary, wand’ring travelers,/ Is Reason to the soul. . . .” A long list of contrasts might be drawn up, most of which would hold true of entire poems and, for that matter, of the works of the two poets generally.

Donne addresses God directly, for example, and even ventures to command him, while neither in his opening nor anywhere else in 456 lines does Dryden apostrophize his maker, although several times he refers circumspectly to “God,” “Godhead,” or “Omnipotence.” Donne not only personifies but also personalizes the abstraction *death*, which “runs fast” and “meets” the speaker. Dryden’s chief abstraction, *Reason*, is grand but “dim,” and another that he introduces soon thereafter, *Religion*, though described as “bright,” remains inanimate. Donne’s sonnet has an immediate, even urgent, quality; Dryden sets out in a more deliberate and measured way, as if any necessary relationships will be established in due time. Donne achieves that immediacy through a plain, simple vocabulary, thirty-one of his first thirty-five words having only one syllable. Although there are no striking irregularities after the first line, rhetorical stresses govern the rhythm. Dryden’s diction is also simple, but there are more polysyllables, and their arrangement, as in “lonely, weary, wand’ring travelers,” creates a smoother, more regular cadence.

In other ways, the poems elicit different responses. Donne is paradoxical. The reader senses in his third line that rigorous demands are being made on him. What does “I run to death” mean exactly? How can that be? Why is death said to do the same? Such questions have answers, no doubt, but the reader anticipates that he will have to work for them, that he must stay alert and get involved. Dryden, on the other hand, begins by making a statement that can be accepted without any particular mental activity (which is not necessarily to say that it should be, or is intended to be, so accepted). Whereas the person setting out to read Donne suspects that obscurities may lie ahead, the beginner at Dryden finds nothing to raise such expectations. (The reader will hardly be surprised to find Dryden saying, near the end of the poem: “Thus have I made my own opinions clear.”)

Samplers of other poems by the two poets reveal similar contrasts right from the beginning. Frequently, in Donne’s poems, a speaker is addressing someone or something—God, a woman, a friend, a rival, the sun—in a tone that is often abrupt, questioning, or imperious. The poems are often dramatic in the sense of implying a situation and a relationship. They make demands, both on the addressee and the reader, who is present in somewhat the same way as an audience in a theater. Dryden was a dramatist, and a highly successful one, but he seems to have reserved drama for his plays. In his poems, he is inclined to begin, as in *Religio Laici*, with statements, often in the form of generalizations: “All human things are subject to decay.” “From harmony, from heavenly harmony,/ This universal frame began.” “How blest is he who leads a country



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life.” While not condescending to his readers, Dryden is much more likely to go on to tell them something—something clear, measured, plausible.

The Elizabethan Heritage

The Renaissance came to England late. Sixteenth century Italian poetry is dotted with famous names—Ludovico Ariosto, Pietro Bembo, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Tor-quato Tasso—and French poets distinguished themselves throughout the century, Pierre de Ronsard and the Pléiade group overshadowing others of whom today’s readers would hear much more but for that brilliant constellation of poets. The Elizabethan poets’ debt to these older literatures, particularly to that created by their French elders and contemporaries, has been well documented. After the appearance of *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) by Edmund Spenser (c.1552-1599), English poetry came on with a rush, while the post-Renaissance Baroque movement was already rising on the European continent. By 1600, both Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) were dead, but many of their contemporaries from the 1550’s and 1560’s worked on, with many of their brightest achievements still ahead. As relief from the earlier but continuing Elizabethan tradition of ponderous, prosaic moralizing exemplified by the incessantly reprinted and expanded *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1555, 1559, 1563), the poets of later Elizabethan decades favored pastorals, love son-nets, mythological narratives, and of course songs and the verse drama.

As part of the last wave of poets to come of age under Elizabeth, Donne and Jonson might have been expected to rebel against their elders. Fifteen years or so of hobnobbing with Hobbinol (poet Gabriel Harvey, c. 1545-1630) and other literary shepherds and of agonizing with woebegone Petrarchan lovers over their unattainable or recalcitrant golden ladies goaded the new generation into staking out new territory. The sweetness and naïveté of much Elizabethan verse cloyed their literary taste buds. The serious side of Elizabethan endeavor ran wearily to themes of transience and mutability. There was room for more realism and sophistication, and new forms and conventions.

Donne responded by parodying the ideal Petrarchan mistress in his paean to indiscriminate love, “I can love both fair and brown,” meanwhile reserving that standard vehicle for love laments, the sonnet, for religious purposes. Jonson refused to write son-nets at all, coolly praised a goddess named Celia, and claimed, with some exaggeration, that he did not write of love. As mythologizers, Elizabethans were accustomed to plunder from Ovid and the Ovidians, but Donne did not conduct his raids on the *Metamorphoses* (c. 8c.e.; English translation, 1567), with its wistful accounts of lovers vanished into foliage and feathers; instead, he concentrated on Ovid’s saucy prescriptions for both love-making and love-breaking in the *Amores* (c. 20 b.c.e.; English translation, c. 1597), *Arsamatoria* (c. 2b.c.e.; *Art of Love*, 1612), and *Remedia amoris* (before 8c.e.; *Cure for Love*, 1600). Later (or perhaps just alternatively) he drew on the pre-Petrarchan traditions, including Platonism and Scholasticism, to write of love as a refining and exalting experience. As for Jonson, where the Elizabethans were amply decorous, he tended to be blunt and epigrammatic. More rigorously than Donne, he rejected the medieval trappings that clung to Elizabethan poetry.



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Neither man, however, made anything like a clean break with Elizabethan values. In satirizing Petrarchan conventions, Donne was only continuing a tendency implicit in the Petrarchan mode almost from its beginning, Shakespeare already preceding him in English poetry in his sonnet "My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun." The man most responsible for the English sonnet-writing mania, Sidney, had, in his *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) suggested all sorts of latent possibilities for the deployment of wit that the Elizabethans had barely begun to exploit. Elizabethan moral earnestness awaited poets who could bring fresh resources to its expression. The student of the drama can hardly escape the conclusion that Donne owed something of his penchant for dramatizing love and religious conflict to the fact that he grew up in London at a time of flourishing theatrical activity, when even writers deficient in dramatic talent strove to turn outplays. Jonson must have learned much about friendship from *Sidney's Arcadia* (1590,1593, 1598), the fourth book of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), and other romances of the sort before turning this subject to account in poetic forms more congenial to him. Again, Jonson's distinctive contribution to song writing depended on his good fortune in maturing at a time when music was everywhere in the air, as Willa McClung Evans showed in *Ben Jonson and Elizabethan Music* (1929). In short, Elizabethan influences on these Jacobean poets were very far from exclusively negative ones.

Edmund Spenser

Seventeenth century developments originating with Donne and Jonson have absorbed much of the attention of literary students, but the Spenserian tradition must not be underrated. As its master, Edmund Spenser, was a many-faceted poet, the tradition is a rich and diverse one. Michael Drayton carried his adaptations of Spenserian pastoral to the verge of the new century's fourth decade. The greatest English poet after Shakespeare found in *The Faerie Queene* the best model for his own epic. Some poets imitated Spenser's idealism, some his sensuous and even sensual music, some his achievement in romantic narrative, and some his demanding stanza. No one like Spenser wrote in the seventeenth century, but the rays of his genius shone over the century and long after-ward. The twentieth century emphasis on Donne and the Metaphysical poets has had the unfortunate effect of obscuring the illumination that Spenser furnished generations of respectful and admiring followers.

London Brotherhood

In few European countries was there such a concentration of talent and creative energy as in Renaissance London. England had no city to rival it in size or cultural pretensions, and to the city or to the court came all aspiring writers and all ambitious men. Literary associations blossomed easily in its square mile, as did rivalries and jealousies. Although London did not boast a university, many of its creative men came to know one another in school. Beginning in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, for example, and extending over the next seventy years, the roster of poets who attended just one school, Westminster, includes Jonson, Richard Corbett,



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Giles Fletcher, Henry King, George Herbert, William Strode, Thomas Randolph, William Cartwright, Abraham Cowley, and Dryden. Half of these men later gravitated to one Cambridge college, Trinity. A similar list of poets who claimed residence at London's Inns of Court might be made. It is likely that the richness of late Elizabethan and seventeenth century English poetry owes much to the cross-fertilization that is almost inevitable when virtually all of the poets of any given time know one another more or less intimately. Although poets have always come together for mutual support and stimulation, in the seventeenth century, the poets who did so were not beleaguered minorities without status in the intellectual world or insulated coterie intent on defending the purity of their theory and practice against one another. Poets constituted something of a brotherhood—although brothers are known to fight—and not a school or club where narrowness can prevail along with good manners.

Realizing the essentially close relationships among poets whose work scholars tend to classify and mark off from one another, modern commentators on seventeenth century poetry have emphasized the common heritage and shared concerns of writers once assumed to be disparate and even antagonistic. It is well to recall this shared heritage and common cause when distinguishing—as criticism must distinguish—among individual achievements and ascertainable poetic movements.

The Metaphysical School

After Sir Herbert Grierson's edition of Donne's poems in 1912, critics spent some decades attempting to define and delineate "Metaphysical poetry." T. S. Eliot, in a 1921 essay, lent his prestige to the endeavor, and such studies as George Williamson's *The Donne Tradition* (1930), Joan Bennett's *Four Metaphysical Poets* (1934), J. B. Leishman's *Metaphysical Poets* (1934), Helen C. White's *The Metaphysical Poets* (1936), and Rosemond Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (1947) refined readers' understanding of the movement but created such a vogue that the term "metaphysical" came to acquire a bewildering variety of applications and connotations, with the understandable result that some critics, including Leishman, came to view it with suspicion. Nevertheless, it remains useful for the purpose of designating the kind of poetry written by Donne, Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, Andrew Marvell (at least some of the time), and a considerable number of other seventeenth century poets, including the American, Edward Taylor. The earlier tendency to call these poets a "school" has also fallen into disrepute because the term suggests a much more formal and schematic set of relationships than existed among these poets. Douglas Bush, in his valuable contribution to the Oxford History of English Literature series, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (1962), refers to the Metaphysicals after Donne as his "successors," while Joseph H. Summers prefers another designation, as the title of his 1970 study, *The Heirs of Donne and Jonson*, indicates.

Because the bulk of *English Metaphysical poetry* after Donne tends to be religious, it has been studied profitably under extra literary rubrics, especially by Louis L. Martz as *The Poetry of Meditation* (1954), in which the author demonstrates how many distinctive features of such



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poetry derive from the Christian art of meditation, especially from such manuals of Catholic devotion as Saint Ignatius of Loyola's *Ejercicios espirituales* (1548; *The Spiritual Exercises*, 1736) and Saint Francis de Sales's *An Introduction to the Devout Life* (c. 1608). Barbara Kiefer Lewalski has argued for the importance of Protestant devotional literature in her *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (1979). Donne and some of his followers have been profitably studied as poets of wit, a classification that connects them with Jonson and the Jonsonians, in later books by Leishman (*The Monarch of Wit*, 1951) and Williamson (*The Proper Wit of Poetry*, 1961), as well as in the aforementioned book by Summers.

Students of literature continue to be intrigued by the word "metaphysical," however, and by the challenge of pinpointing its essential denotation. One of the most distinctive traits of this poetry is the Metaphysical conceit, an image that, as its name suggests, is in-tended to convey an idea rather than a sensory quality. The conceit, as exemplified by Donne's comparison of the quality of two lovers' devotion to the draftsman's compass in *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, or the pulley image in Herbert's poem of that title used to express the speaker's sense of the relationship between God and humans, is likely to be ingenious, unexpected, and apparently unpromising; the poet is inclined to develop it at considerable length (Donne uses three stanzas for his compass conceit, while Herbert builds his whole poem on the pulley image) and in a number of particulars; and the result, often arrived at through argumentation, justifies the seeming incongruity of the image. An interesting comparison between Donne's imagery and that of Shakespeare has been made by Cleanth Brooks (in *The Well Wrought Urn*, 1947) with the view of demonstrating the use of similar conceits by Shakespeare, who is never thought of as a Metaphysical.

Describers of Metaphysical poetry have most often cited a cluster of traits, no one of which differentiates this mode from others. Metaphysical poems are often dramatic, colloquial in diction and rhythm, and set forth in intricate and varied forms with respect to line lengths, rhyme schemes, and stanzaic configurations. Whether dealing with sexual or religious love, Metaphysical love poems develop the psychological aspects of loving that are always implicit, sometimes explicit in the Petrarchan tradition. Sexual, Platonic, and religious love are frequently explored in terms seemingly more appropriate to one of the other types. Thus Donne assures God that he will never be "chaste, except you ravish me," and a lady that "all shall approve/ Us canonized for love." Crashaw can refer to a mistress as a "divine idea" in a "shrine of crystal flesh," and, in another poem, to God as a rival lover of Saint Teresa.

The chief trait of Metaphysical poetry in the eyes of Earl Miner (*The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley*, 1969) is its "private mode." He considers the most distinctive aspect of the love or religious experience in this poetry to be its individual and private character. Either because the poet senses a breakdown of social bonds or be-cause these bonds threaten the integrity of private experience, the Metaphysical poet is in self-conscious retreat from the social realm. Thus Donne's love poems often evoke third parties only to banish them as early as the first line: "For God's sake, hold your tongue, and let me love." The earlier Metaphysicals,



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however, are familiar with the world that they reject, and its immanence contributes to the dramatic quality in their poetry. In later poets such as Vaughan and Traherne, the interfering world has receded; as a result the dramatic tension largely disappears.

Metaphysical poetry's reputed taste for the obscure and the "far-fetched" has been overemphasized by critics from Dryden to the twentieth century. That it is intellectual and that its allusions are likely to necessitate numerous glosses for modern readers there can be little doubt. The ideal audience for Metaphysical poetry was small and select. To pre-Restoration readers, however, the poems probably did not seem especially difficult. It is simply that Renaissance learning was replaced by a different learning. As the century waned, a gap widened between the old and new learning; as a result Dryden had more difficulty reading Donne than do modern readers, who enjoy the benefit of modern scholars' recovery of much of that older learning. The continuing popularity of Metaphysical poetry demonstrates readers' continuing willingness to absorb glosses without which the richness of the poetry is lost.

European Metaphysical Poetry (1961), an anthology by Frank J. Warnke with a long critical introduction, presents French, German, Spanish, Dutch, and Italian texts of selected poems with facing verse translations. The volume includes a number of poems analogous to the works of Donne and his followers and distinguishes between the Metaphysical and Baroque traditions, although clearly they overlap.

Metaphysical Poets in the New World

A Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), rivals Taylor (c. 1645-1729), who came to America in 1668, as the first Metaphysical poet of the New World. Like Crashaw, Sor Juana writes emotional, sexually charged religious verse, but also like him, she was a keen student of theology and something of an intellectual. In Taylor, the Metaphysical manner and a Puritan religious outlook produced a body of poetry unique in the American colonies or elsewhere. The influence of Richard Baxter's famous book *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1692) is heavier on Taylor than on any other Metaphysical poet, and many of his poems are cast as meditations. The language is that of a man who lived and worked on the late seventeenth century American frontier, cut off from the society of the learned and the artistic. Even his conceits, such as the one on which he bases "Huswifery"—"Make me, O Lord, thy spinning wheel complete"—have a homely, rough-hewn air.

Religious Poetry and Other Trends

Finally, the seventeenth century produced a body of poetry not usually classified as Metaphysical but having some affinities with that tradition. Much of it is religious. Emblem poetry, best exemplified by Francis Quarles (1592-1644), was a mixed-media art including a print that depicted a scene of religious or moral significance, a biblical quotation, a related poem, another quotation, and, in most cases, a concluding epigram. The engravings in emblem books are frequently more interesting than the poems, but the form seems to have made its mark on Spenser, Shakespeare, and several of the Metaphysical poets, notably Herbert and Crashaw.



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Herbert's great book *The Temple* (1633) contains several poems that, arranged to form figures, become in effect emblems of their subject matter. Another poet, Henry More, in his fondness for allegory and the Spenserian stanza points to one large influence, but often reminds the reader of the Metaphysicals in his choice and handling of imagery, even though his work is more justly charged with obscurity than theirs. At the same time, More is one of the few seventeenth century poets who is known to have studied René Descartes and to have been directly influenced by the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. If, as Basil Willey has argued in *The Seventeenth Century Background* (1934), Cartesian thought undermined confidence in the "truth" of poetry, it is in More that one should be able to read the signs of the decline, but More seems as sure of the truth of his poetical utterances as of his *Divine Dialogues* (1668) in prose. Other Metaphysically tinged poetry will be considered part of the mid-century transition below.

Ben Jonson

From a twentieth century perspective Ben Jonson (1573-1637) was overshadowed by Shakespeare as a playwright and by Donne as a lyric and reflective poet, but his importance in his time is difficult to overestimate. Before his time, England had produced classical scholars who edited texts, produced grammars and other educational tools, and wrote significant prose. Not until Jonson, however, did an Englishman combine classical learning with great poetic ability. Jonson's interpretation of the classical heritage, which involved (besides the drama) imitations of such distinctly classical forms as the epigram, ode, and verse epistle; the translation into verse of Horace's *Ars poetica* (c. 17 b.c.e.; *The Art of Poetry*) and the employment of poetry as an ethical, civilizing influence not only enriched poetry but also defined classicism itself for generations of Englishmen. Even present-day classicists are likely to conceive of its essential spirit as comprising such virtues as simplicity, clarity, symmetry, detachment, and restraint, although such qualities are hardly the hallmarks of Euripides, Pindar, Ovid, and any number of other Greek and Roman poets. Jonsonian classicism proved to be a timely anti-dote to Elizabethan verbosity and extravagance, however, and generated some of the best poetry of the seventeenth century.

All Jonson's favorite classical forms had been practiced in the sixteenth century, though often in an eclectic and self-indulgent way. Jonson showed that the discipline of strict classicism could be liberating. Bush has pointed out that his imitations of Martial not only capture the temper of the greatest Roman epigrammatist better than did any of his predecessors, but also display more originality than earlier poems in this genre. Although not a great love poet, Jonson wrote a series of song lyrics that are models of their type, one of them, "Drink to me only with thine eyes" being familiar to millions of people who know nothing of classicism or of Jonson himself. His verse letter "To Penshurst," though initially unexciting to a reader accustomed to Donne's pyrotechnics, achieves an unobtrusive but unforgettable effect. When, at the end, he contrasts the Sidney family mansion with other houses—"their lords have built, but thy lord dwell"—he has accomplished a tribute worth all the fulsome compliments that Elizabethans heaped on their benefactors. It was through his study of Horace, a quiet bastion of civility in the noisy Roman Empire, that Jonson was able to produce such an effect.



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Like Donne, Jonson not only wrote fine poems but inspired others of a high order as well. Robert Herrick (1591-1674), to whom Jonson was “Saint Ben,” sometimes approached his master in the art of epigram and sometimes exceeded him in the writing of cool, elegant lyrics. Poets such as Edmund Waller (1606-1687) who reached the heights only infrequently probably could not have done so at all without Jonson’s example (and occasionally Donne’s also). The delicacy of Waller’s “Go, lovely rose” is an inheritance of the Tribe of Ben. If the same poet’s Penshurst poems fall short of Jonson’s, Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House” is both marvelously original and indebted to Jonson. William Alexander McClung, in *The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry* (1977), has shown how the poets after Jonson were able to set forth both an ideal of environment and an ideal of virtue through their reflection in a house.

Neither Jonson nor his followers necessarily came by their Horatian restraint and moderation naturally. As a young man, Jonson flashed the same hot temper that many another Elizabethans did not bother to control. In 1598, he plunged a rapier six inches into the side of a fellow actor named Gabriel Spencer, killing him instantly. He escaped with a branding on the thumb by pleading benefit of clergy—a dubious privilege possible for an educated man in or out of holy orders. Pen in hand, however, he modeled his work on that of Horace, who counseled, and perhaps practiced, moderation as a “golden mean.” Horace did not prevent Jonson from lashing out verbally at his critics from time to time, but the Roman poet probably saved the impetuous Jonson from many a poetical gaucherie.

Many of Jonson’s followers were political conservatives, advocates of royal supremacy and others who had most to fear from the intransigent Puritans, whose power grew steadily throughout the first half of the century until they forced Charles I from his throne and, in 1649, beheaded him for treason. Thus Jonsonian classicists overlapped, but did not subsume, the Cavalier lyric poets, who celebrated the not particularly Horatian virtues of war, chivalry, and loyalty to the monarchy. Just as paradoxically, the great classicist of the generation after Jonson turned out to be Latin secretary of Oliver Cromwell’s Commonwealth, the militant Puritan Milton.

At their best, the Jonsonians wrote graceful and civilized lyrics reflecting a philosophy that was, in the best sense of the term, Epicurean. Like the Elizabethans, they were attracted to the theme of human mortality, but whereas the earlier poets had responded to the inevitability of decline and death with lugubrious melancholy, the Tribe of Ben had imbibed Horace’s advice: *carpe diem*, or “seize the day.” They wrote the most beautiful lyrics on this theme ever written in English: Herrick’s “To Daffodils,” “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” and “Corinna’s going A-Maying,” Waller’s “Go, lovely rose,” and Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress.”

Analysis of Andrew Marvell’s To His Coy Mistress

Another subject dear to the heart of Jonsonians was one relatively rare in previous (and many later) eras: children. Jonson wrote, with deep feeling yet immense restraint, of the deaths of two children. “On My First Daughter” does not repeat the personal pro-noun of the title, although the



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reader learns that her name was Mary. The parents, how-ever, are referred to in the third person, only the final phrase, “cover lightly, gentle earth!” betraying the speaker’s involvement in the child’s demise. An even finer poem, “On My First Son,” has only six couplets and yet achieves enormous poignancy through the most economical means. Jonson could have expressed his love no more forcefully than by saying: “Here doth lie/ Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry.” The lesson he draws is more Horatian than Christian: “For whose sake, henceforth, all his vows be such/ As what he loves may never like too much.” Although Jonson wrote a few religious lyrics, it seems to be the classical legacy that he cherished most deeply.

Among those who gathered with Jonson at the Mermaid Tavern, Corbett also wrote of family members, including one poem “To His Son, Vincent” in which he characteristically sets forth moderate wishes for his offspring, “not too much wealth, nor wit,” and on the positive side, the graces of his mother, friends, peace, and innocence at the last. Among the poets who wrote poems about other people’s children was William Cartwright, who expressed wishes for a friend’s newborn son, and Herrick, who penned two short epitaphs and two graces for children to recite at meals. Obviously the range of childhood poems in the seventeenth century is very narrow, even if Traherne’s mystical poems “Shadows in the Water,” “Innocence,” and others are included. Even so, that children figure in poetry at all is an indication that Jonson’s disciples do not consider commonplace subjects beneath their notice.

As might be expected of admirers of Horace and Martial, Jonsonians favored shortlines and short stanzas, though without the intricacy and irregularity often seen in Meta-physical lyrics. They often wrote in couplets, though the form known as the heroic couplet does not appear much before mid-century and does not become important until the age of Dryden. The couplets mirror the unassuming quality of so much early English classicism but commonly betray careful craftsmanship. The diction is rather plain, the metaphors few, and not often unusual. The words and images are carefully chosen, however, with an eye to precision and euphony. The tone is tender and affectionate toward friends and loved ones, sarcastic toward those who, like fools, deserve it. There are few high flights, but neither are Jonsonian lapses likely to be very gross. Speech, Jonson wrote, in *Timber: Or, Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter* (1641) is “the instrument of society.” Furthermore, “words are the people’s.” The poet is someone who uses the people’s resources for the people’s good.

Baroque Poetry

Probably because it arose as a reaction against a Renaissance classicism that had no parallel in England before Jonson, the Baroque movement, beginning around 1580 and continuing for the better part of a century, had few manifestations in English poetry. First applied to architecture and later to sculpture and painting, the term described in particular the style of certain sixteenth century Venetian painters, particularly Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto, and of those, such as El Greco, who were influenced by the Venetians. The Baroque disdained formal beauty and placidity in favor of asymmetrical composition, rich color, energy, and even contortion.



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Applied to prose style, “baroque” signifies the revolt against full and rounded Ciceronian elegance, a tendency to place the main sentence element first, the avoidance of symmetry by varying the form and length of constructions, and a greater autonomy for subordinate constructions, which tend to follow the main sentence element. English had developed a Ciceronian prose style, but a recognizably anti-Ciceronian prose arose in the seventeenth century, notably in such works as Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* (1642).

In poetry, the Baroque has some affinities with the Metaphysical, but the differences are suggested by the adjectives used to describe the Baroque: “ornate,” “sensuous,” “pictorial,” and “emotional.” The Baroque is more likely to reject logic and reason, which are useful to Metaphysical poets of an argumentative bent. In his *European Metaphysical Poetry*, Frank J. Warnke distinguishes between a Baroque inclination to use contrast and antithesis for the purpose of separating opposites and a Metaphysical preference for paradox and synthesis to produce a fusion of opposites. The Baroque was cultivated chiefly—not exclusively—by Roman Catholics as an expression of the Counter-Reformation spirit; it stands in contrast to the austerity of much northern European Protestant art.

The only English poets commonly associated with the Baroque are Fletcher and Crashaw (c. 1612-1649). Although Crashaw left more than four hundred poems, he is best known for his Saint Teresa poems, especially his florid “Upon the book and picture of the seraphical Saint Teresa” called “The Flaming Heart.” The poem blazes to a finish in a series of oaths that illustrate the Baroque manner:

By thy large draughts of intellectual day,
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;
By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire
By thy last morning’s draught of liquid fire. . . .

By these and other oaths he asked to be emptied of self and enabled to imitate her example. It is no surprise to learn that Crashaw lived for some years on the Continent, that he renounced his Anglican priesthood to become a Roman Catholic, and that he died in Italy.

Fletcher (c. 1585-1623), on the other hand, stands as a caution against too facile generalizations. He is best known for his devotional poem, *Christ Victorie, and Triumph in Heaven, and Earth, Over, and After Death* (1610). He remained English and Anglican, and although his poetry reminds some readers of the baroque pioneer Guillaume du Bartas, he usually causes readers of Spenser to think of *The Faerie Queene*. The case of Fletcher underlines the fact that English writers of the earlier seventeenth century felt no compulsion to wage war with the Renaissance, since its greatest nondramatic poet, far from being a doctrinaire classicist, synthesized elements classical, medieval, and Renaissance.

The Baroque style in poetry, as in the visual arts, contained more than the usual number of the seeds of decadence. Baroque poets were liable to grotesqueness, obscurity, melodrama, and



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triviality. Its excesses no doubt helped pave the way for the later neo-classical resurgence. Again by analogy with architecture, some literary historians have seen the Baroque also leading to the rococo, understood as a fussy, over decorative, playful style that nevertheless might serve a serious purpose for a neoclassicist engaged in playful satire. The most obvious example in English literature, Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), comes early in the eighteenth century.

UNIT - IV

Mid-century Transition

To argue for too neat a mid-century transition between the earlier classical, Metaphysical, and Baroque styles, on the one hand, and the neoclassical age on the other, is perhaps to betray an obsession with the neoclassical virtue of symmetry, but in a number of ways the mid-century marks a turning point. England's only interregnum straddles the century's midpoint, while on the Continent the Thirty Years' War came to an end with the treaties of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Both of these political events involved poetry and poets, the English Civil War more strikingly. The continental wars, insofar as they involved Protestant-Catholic clashes, represented nothing new, but they exhibited several modern features. Because they involved most European states in one way or another and required a general congress of nations to achieve even temporary peace, these conflicts augured the modern situation, in which local conflicts can trigger unforeseen large-scale involvement. Armorers preparing soldiers for battle had to devise protection against traditional weapons such as the sword and also new ones such as the pistol; the latter were often used as a kind of last resort, as clubs, or thrown at enemies more often than they were fired. All over Europe men were getting a preview of the mass destruction they could expect in future wars. The necessity of compromise and toleration—never before recognized as virtues—was beginning to dawn. More and more it seemed essential that reason and judgment, not passion and force, reign.

England had embarked on its internal war in 1642. The Puritans, who had already succeeded in closing London's theaters, alarmed conservative Englishmen by closing down the monarchy itself. The execution of Charles I and the proclamation of the Commonwealth in 1649 culminated nearly a decade of violence that had driven Sir John Denham, Sir William Davenant,



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and Thomas Hobbes, among others, into exile, and the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace into prison, where he penned several immortal poems. The political transition ended in 1660. Young Dryden wrote *Astraea Redux* (1660), an elaborate poetic tribute to a great event: the return of Charles II, son of the executed king, in glory. The adjustments made by all the former belligerents signal a new era. The next revolution, in 1688, despite ingredients seemingly as volatile as those which had precipitated the mid-century war, was not bloody.

Miner (*The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley*) has referred to the decade between 1645 and 1655 as a “microcosm” of the century as a whole. Certainly it was a productive time for poets. In only the first half of that decade appeared Waller’s *Poems* (1645), Sir John Suckling’s *Fragmenta Aurea* (1646), Crashaw’s *Steps to the Temple* (1646, 1648), Herrick’s *Hesperides: Or, The Works Both Humane and Divine of Robert Herrick, Esq.* (1648), Lovelace’s *Lucasta: Epodes, Odes, Sonnets, Songs, &c. to Which Is Added Aramantha, a Pastorall* (1649), and Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* (parts 1 and 2, 1650, 1655), all studded with still familiar anthology favorites. Although Marvell’s posthumous poems are difficult to date, at least some of his best are presumed to have been written in the early 1650’s, as were a number of the finest of Milton’s sonnets, while *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674) was evolving in Milton’s imagination. Miner’s point, however, is that the poets at work at this time are difficult to classify as Cavalier, Puritan, Metaphysical, or neoclassical. The distinctive earlier voices—those of Donne and Jonson and Herbert—had been stilled, and the most distinctive later one had not yet developed. The teenage Dryden’s notorious foray into Metaphysical imagery in his 1649 poem “Upon the Death of the Lord Hastings,” where Hastings’s smallpox blisters are compared to “rosebuds stuck in the lily-skin about,” and where “Each little pimple had a tear in it/ To wail the fault its rising did commit,” presages the great neoclassicist only in its use of rhymed pentameter couplets—and those are not yet particularly “heroic.”

That particular form, the end-stopped couplet with its potential for balance, antithesis, and memorable precision, was being hammered out in the 1640’s by such poets as Waller, Denham, and John Cleveland (otherwise remembered chiefly as a decadent Metaphysical) in a series of spirited anti-Puritan satires. The latter’s 1642 poem, “Cooper’s Hill,” now faded, looks forward to the Augustan Age with its blend of Horatian and Vergilian sentiments, its lofty abstractions, and its skillful handling of rhythm. The pentameter couplet was as old as Geoffrey Chaucer, but as a distinct unit, sometimes virtually a stanza in itself, it was capable of generating quite different effects. Detachable, quotable, suited for uttering the common wisdom, the great truths apparent to all, it embodied the neoclassical concept of wit, which was variously defined from this period on, but most memorably (because so well-expressed in a couplet, of course) by Pope in 1711: “True wit is nature to advantage dressed,/ What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed.”

At the very middle of the century appeared a work by a man whose profession was neither poet nor critic but whose terse genealogy of a poem marks off the distance between the ages of Donne and Dryden. Hobbes was responding to remarks on epic made by Davenant in the preface to his fragmentary heroic poem *Gondibert* (1651) when he wrote:



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Time and education beget experience; experience begets memory; memory begets judgment and fancy; judgment begets the strength and structure, and fancy begets the ornaments of a poem.

It is impossible to imagine Donne countenancing the splitting asunder of “structure” and “ornaments,” or for that matter acknowledging “ornaments” at all—for where were they in his poetry?

The following year, 1651, saw the publication of Hobbes’s magnum opus, the *Leviathan*. There he made explicit what his answer to Davenant had implied: “In a good poem. . . both judgment and fancy are required: but the fancy must be more eminent.” In other words, “ornament” is more important than “structure.” To be sure, Hobbes was only stating succinctly a view that had already surfaced in Francis Bacon’s philosophy: Poetry is make-believe (“feigned history,” as Bacon put it in *The Advancement of Learning* back in 1605) and has nothing to do with truth. This reproach becomes more damning when seen in the context of the linguistic theories set forth elsewhere by Hobbes and by the Royal Society of London in the following decade.

Another work of the mid-century marks a beginning rather than a transition. In 1650, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* was published in London. Supposedly the manuscript had been spirited across the Atlantic without its author’s consent. It was the first book of poems by an American woman, Anne Bradstreet. Discounting the doggerel of such works of piety as *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640), it was in fact the first book of poems by any American. More than two hundred years would pass before another woman poet would do as well as Bradstreet, who, twenty years earlier, as a teenage bride, had emigrated to Massachusetts.

Poetry and the Scientific Revolution

Of the nonliterary forces on seventeenth century poets, the New Science may well have been the most uniformly pervasive throughout the Western world. Whereas social, political, and even religious developments varied considerably in nature and scope, the scientists were busy discovering laws that applied everywhere and affected the prevailing worldview impartially. Some artists and thinkers discovered the New Science and pondered its implications before others, but no poet could fall very many decades behind the vanguard and continue to be taken seriously. The modern reader of, say, C. S. Lewis’s *The Discarded Image* (1964) and E. M. W. Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) observes that the Elizabethan “picture” had not changed substantially from the medieval “image” described by Lewis. Between 1600 and 1700, however, the world view of educated people changed more dramatically than in any previous century. Early in the century Donne signaled his awareness of science’s challenge to the old certitudes about the world. By Dryden’s maturity, the new learning had rendered the Elizabethan brand of erudition disreputable and its literary imagination largely incomprehensible.

In *The Breaking of the Circle* (1960), Marjorie Hope Nicolson uses a popular medieval symbol, the circle of perfection, to demonstrate the effect of the New Science on the poets’ perception of their world. The universe was a circle; so was Earth and the human head. The circle was God’s



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perfect form, unending like himself, and all its manifestations shared in the perfection. It was easy—one might almost say “natural”—for Donne to begin one of his sonnets: “I am a little world made cunningly.” Significantly, Donne did not say that he was *like* a little world. Not only did he use a metaphor instead of a simile, but also he used the metaphor confident that he was expressing a truth. In another sonnet, Shakespeare refers to his soul as “the center of my sinful earth.” Two thousand years earlier, Aristotle had said that “to make metaphors well is to perceive likeness,” and this judgment still stood firm. Already, however, a succession of thinkers from Nicolaus Copernicus in 1543 to Sir Isaac Newton in 1687 were at work breaking up the circle of perfection.

A special irony attaches to the contribution of Copernicus, a pious Roman Catholic who took the concept of the circle of perfection for granted when he set forth his helio-centric theory of the solar system. His insight was to see the Sun, not Earth, as the center of God’s operations in the visible world. To him, it was perfectly obvious that God would impart perfect circular motion to the planets. Unfortunately his new model provided even less accurate predictability of planetary motions than the old geocentric theory that it was intended to replace. Thus he had to invent an ingenious system of subordinate circles—“eccentrics” and “epicycles”—to account for the discrepancies between the simple version of his model and his observations of what actually went on in the heavens. Thus, although his heliocentric theory incurred condemnation by Protestant and Catholic alike, his cumbersome model did not attract many adherents, and for decades intelligent people remained ignorant of his theory and its implications.

Two contemporaries of Donne changed all that. In 1609, Galileo built a telescope; by the next year, he was systematically examining not just the solar system but other suns beyond it. Johann Kepler discovered, virtually at the same time, the elliptical orbit of Mars. He did this by breaking the old habit—his own as well as humankind’s—of regarding physical events as symbols of divine mysteries, and thereby swept Copernicus’s eccentrics and epicycles into a rubbish heap. When Donne wrote *An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary*, in 1611, he showed his familiarity with the new astronomy:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.

Even before the confirmation of Copernicus’s theory, the greatest literary geniuses of his century raised versions of the great question provoked by the new science. Michel Eyquem de Montaigne put it most simply in his *Essais* (books 1-2 1580; rev. 1582; books 1-3, 1588; rev. 1595; *The Essays*, 1603): “What do I know?” The word “essays” signifies “attempts,” and the work can be described as a series of attempts to answer his question. Miguel de Cervantes, setting out with the rather routine literary motive of satirizing a particularly silly type of chivalric romance, stumbled on his theme: the difficulty of distinguishing appearance from reality—even for those who, unlike Don Quixote, are not mad. The second part of Cervantes’s novel, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615; *The History of the Valorous and Wittie Knight-Errant, Don Quixote of the Mancha*, 1612-1620; better known as *Don Quixote de la Mancha*),



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written like the first out of an understandable but pedestrian literary ambition (to reclaim his hero from the clutches of a plagiarist), raises the disturbing possibility that the madman interprets at least some aspects of reality more sensibly than the “sane” people among whom the idealistic Don Quixote was floundering. Shakespeare, having already endorsed the ancient concept of the poet as a divinely inspired madman in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (pr. c. 1595-1596), created, at the very beginning of the new century, a “mad” hero who raises an even more profound question: Can knowledge of the truth, even if attainable (and Hamlet gains the knowledge of the truth that concerns him most—the circumstances of his father’s death—through ghostly intervention), lead to madness and paralysis of the will?

Unlike Eliot’s twentieth century figure of J. Alfred Prufrock, who asks, “Do I dare disturb the universe?,” medieval man did not disturb, and was not disturbed by, the universe. Even the presumed decay of the world from its original golden age did not alarm him, for it was all part of the plan of a wise and loving Creator. In *An Anatomy of the World*, the decay of the world has become profoundly disturbing, for the very cosmic order itself seems to be coming apart: “’Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.” Shortly before writing this poem—and perhaps afterward—Donne was able to write poetry of the sort quoted earlier, in which he moves easily from macrocosm to microcosm; but he also recognized that the “new philosophy calls all in doubt.”

Astronomical discoveries were not the only form of knowledge. In 1600, William Gilbert wrote a book on magnetism. He was, like Copernicus, a good sixteenth centuryman and could talk about lodestones as possessing souls; his important discovery, however, was that the earth is a lodestone. In 1628, when William Harvey published his findings on the circulation of the blood, he referred to the heart as the body’s “sovereign” and “inmost home,” but in the process, he taught the world to regard it as a mechanism—a pump. The old worldview was being destroyed quite unintentionally by men whose traditional assumptions often hampered their progress, but whose achievement made it impossible for their own grandchildren to make the same assumptions or to take the old learning seriously. As a result of Robert Boyle’s work, chemistry was banishing alchemy, a subject taken seriously not only by poets but also by the scientists of an earlier day. At century’s end, to talk of a person as a “little world” was mere quaintness, for Harvey had taught everyone to regard the body as one sort of mechanism, while the astronomers insisted that the solar system was another. It was merely idle to make connections between them.

As the scientists focused more clearly on their subjects, the poets’ vision became more blurred. Astronomy is only one such subject area, but it is a particularly useful one for the purpose of demonstrating the change. Around 1582 Sidney’s Astrophel could exclaim: “With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb’st the skies,/ How silently, and with how wan a face.” Astrophel is a disappointed lover, of course, and need not be taken too seriously. What strikes the reader is the ease with which his creator sees parallels between the moon and the earthbound lover. In a more serious context, Herbert addresses a star: “Brightspark, shot from a brighter place/ Where beams surround my Savior’s face.” Herbert almost surely knew what Galileo had been doing, but his “brighter place” still lay, as it were, beyond the reach of the telescope. In 1650, Vaughan could begin a poem: “I saw Eternity the other night/ Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,/ All



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calm, as it was bright.” The reader’s first inclination is perhaps to marvel at the facility of the utterance, but is the tone as matter-of-fact as it seems? Might not Donne and Herbert have seen eternity everynight? On second thought one wonders whether the moments of insight are getting rarer. Five years later, Vaughan published “They are all gone into the world of light,” a poem reflecting an awareness of the transience of the heavenly vision:

And yet, as Angels in some brighter dreams
Call the soul, when man doth sleep:
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
And into glory peep.

At the end of the poem the speaker begs God to “disperse these mists.” Any reader can verify that in later Metaphysical poetry the view of heaven gets cloudier. Traherne, almost surely writing in the Restoration, sees heaven not through the earthly eye but mystically with a sight often blurred by dream, shadows, and mists. In “My Spirit,” for ex-ample, his soul “saw infinity/ ‘Twas not a sphere, but ‘twas a power/ Invisible.” In *Religio Laici*, Dryden can see none of this and counsels submission to the Church. By 1733, Pope has banished all thought of reading heavenly meanings in the heavens: “The proper study of Mankind is Man”—unless, of course, one happens to be an astronomer.

Neoclassicism from 1660 to 1700

By the Restoration, the poets had turned their attention primarily to public and social themes. The comedy of this period has given readers the impression of a licentious age determined to bury the memory of Puritanistic domination and live as fast and loose an existence as possible. Such behavior could not have characterized more than a tiny percentage of the people of later Stuart England. It was an age struggling for order through compromise. Wit might entertain, but life required sober judgment.

The classical tradition survived the New Science better than did the Metaphysical. It did not aspire to compete with science in the realm beyond everyday human and social experience. The Jonsonian tradition of short lyric and reflective poems no longer flourished, but the neoclassicists of the Restoration rediscovered satire and the heroic poem—the latter primarily in the remarkable triad of Miltonic poems published between 1667 and 1671: *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671). Horace was not neglected, but the study and translation of the Homeric and Vergilian epics gained in popularity. The time might have been ripe for a great patriotic epic (Milton considered a true Arthurian epic that would rectify the deficiencies of Spenser’s episodic one before he finally settled on the yet nobler idea of justifying God’s way to humans), but whether because Milton’s accomplishment had pre-empted the field or because history as Restoration poets knew it could not be hammered into the Vergilian mold, it was not written.

Instead, Dryden produced something new: a political satire in a heroic style based on a contemporary controversy over the attempt to exclude Charles II’s Roman Catholic brother



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James from the royal succession. It was a serious matter, laden with danger for the principal in the struggle, for Dryden, and for the nation. He did not use blank verse, as Shakespeare and Milton had in their greatest works, but the heroic couplet, a form that Dryden had been honing for twenty years. The result is a poem of peculiar urgency, yet by virtue of Dryden's skillful representation of Charles II as the biblical King David and of the earl of Shaftesbury as "false Achitophel," who attempts to turn Absalom(Charles's illegitimate son, the duke of Monmouth) against his father, the poem takes on universality. It is by far the most impressive poem of the period: *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681, 1682).

The drama aside, satire is the greatest literary achievement of the Restoration, and it is also the most diverse. From Samuel Butler's low burlesque of the Puritans in *Hudibras* (1663, 1664, 1678, parts 1-3) to Dryden's sustained high style in *Absalom and Achitophel*, from a butt as small as one undistinguished playwright (Thomas Shadwell in Dryden's 1682 mock-epic *Mac Flecknoe: Or, A Satyre upon the True-Blew-Protestant Poet, T. S.*) to one as large as humankind, vain aspirer to the status of rational being (the earl of Rochester's "A Satire Against Mankind," printed in 1675), verse satire flourished, providing models for even greater achievements in the first part of the following century. The Renaissance notion of decorum as the delicate adjustment of literary means to ends, of the suitability of the parts to the whole, governed these diverse attempts at diminishing the wickedness and folly that Restoration poets considered it their duty to expose and correct. Even *Hudibras*, with its slam-bang tetrameter couplets and quirky rhymes, seems the perfect vehicle for flaying the routed Puritans, and its levels of irony are far more complex than superficial readers suspect. When satire began to invade prose, as it increasingly did in the eighteenth century, its narrative possibilities increased, but it lost subtle effects of rhythm, timing, and rhyme.

Compared with the first sixty years of the century, the Restoration seems a prosaic age. A considerable number of its most accomplished writers—John Bunyan, the diarists Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, Sir William Temple, John Locke—wrote no poetry worth preserving, and Dryden himself wrote a large proportion of prose. Does the preponderance of prose and satire confirm Eliot's early charge that a "dissociation of sensibility" had set in by the time of the Restoration? Is it true that writers no longer could fuse thought and feeling, with the consequence that prose was used for conveying truth and poetry for the setting forth of delightful lies?

Hobbes, who had little use for poetry in general, praised the epic as conducive to moral truth, and he admitted that satire can be defended on moral grounds also. The Restoration poets in England were the successors of a classical tradition that emphasized the ethical value of poetry, so they might as plausibly be considered carrying out, on a somewhat larger scale, the dictates of Jonson as those of Hobbes. The Royal Society of London, of which Dryden was a member, was founded in 1662 for "the improving of natural knowledge," and among its ambitions it numbered the improving of the language by waging war against "tropes" and "figures" and "metaphors." One cannot imagine Donne having any-thing to do with such an organization, all the more because the Society on principle did not discuss "such subjects as God and the soul." It is difficult to see how Dryden's association with it substantiates the charge of dissociated sensibility, however, for



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there is certainly both thought and feeling together in *Absalom and Achitophel*, even if it is, like the Royal Society itself, earthbound and relatively unmetaphorical, and, while it is no doubt instructive, generations of readers have taken delight in it also.

One is tempted to offer a different explanation for Restoration writers' greater attachment to prose and to satire. The reading audience expanded greatly in the seventeenth century, and increasingly it became the business of the writer to satisfy its interests, which for a variety of reasons were political and social. The early Metaphysical writers possessed a very small audience (one another and a few more who shared the same interests); very much the same situation obtained for Jonson and his followers. When the readership increased, poets modified their work accordingly. When Dryden did write of religion, he wrote of it as he and his contemporaries understood it. That Dryden took little delight in Donne's poetry is clear from his remarks in "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire" (1693):

Donne affects the metaphysics, not only in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts and entertain them with the softnesses of love.

Dryden did not understand Donne's intentions very well, but he understood his own political intentions very well indeed.

In his own and the century's final years, Dryden worked primarily at translation, promising in his "Preface to *Fables Ancient and Modern*" (1700), "if it should please God to give me longer life and moderate health." He added another provision: "that I meet with those encouragements from the public, which may enable me to proceed in my undertaking with some cheerfulness." This is the remark of a public figure—a former poet laureate, author of a stream of plays and published books since the 1600's, a veteran attraction at Will's Coffee House in London.

Poets had not always expected such encouragements. When Donne died in 1631, only four of his poems had been published. Herbert, Marvell, and Traherne saw few or none of their poems in print. Jonson, on the other hand, had offered his work to the public, even inviting ridicule in 1616 by boldly calling his volume *Works*. Like Dryden after him, he had developed a healthy sense of audience in his career as a playwright. He had even more reason to fear an unhappy audience than Dryden, for along with John Marston and George Chapman, he had been imprisoned and very nearly mutilated by a gang of Scots retainers of James I whom the trio had outraged by some of their jests in their play *Eastward Ho!* (pr., pb. 1605). Nevertheless, Jonson promised a translation of Horace's *Ars poetica* (c. 17 b.c.e.; *The Art of Poetry*), with no provisions whatsoever, that same year. The fact that he did not deliver the translation until long afterward does not seem to have had anything to do with readers' wishes. Jonson usually conveyed the impression that whatever he had to say amounted to nothing less than a golden opportunity for any sensible reader or listener.



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Even if one assumes that Dryden's hope for encouragement may have been only an expression of politeness, that politeness itself signifies a change of relationship with the "public." Most of the poetry written in the time of Donne and Jonson has the quality of being overheard. It is as if the poet is praying, making love, or rebuking a fool, and the reader has just happened to pass by. If the poem is a verse epistle, the reader experiences the uncomfortable feeling that he is reading someone else's mail—and quite often that is so. By 1700, the poet seems conscious of producing a document for public inspection and proceeds accordingly, with all the implications—fortunate and unfortunate—of such a procedure. He will not tax the public with too many difficulties, for some of them—too many, perhaps—will not understand. He had better polish his work, and he had better not be dull. He might produce one of those "overheard" lyrics once in a while, but the chances are that they will yield few excellences not imitative of earlier poets whose circumstances favored that type of poem.

The neoclassical sense of audience would continue, as the neoclassical period would continue, for nearly another century—at least in those poets with access to a public. The poet's public stance would give rise to more fine satire and reflective poems of great majesty and sustained moral power. The knack of lyric would be largely lost, and, when recovered, the lyrics would be romantic. No one would ever write poems like *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* or *To His Coy Mistress* again.

UNIT - V

English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century

The poetry of the sixteenth century defies facile generalizations. Although the same can obviously be said for the poetry of other periods as well, this elusiveness of categorization is particularly characteristic of the sixteenth century. It is difficult to pinpoint a century encompassing both the growling meter of John Skelton and the polished prosody of Sir Philip Sidney, and consequently, past efforts to provide overviews of the period have proven unhelpful. Most notably, C. S. Lewis in his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954) contrived an unfortunate division between what he called "drab" poetry and "Golden" poetry. What he means by this distinction is never entirely clear, and Lewis himself further confuses the dichotomy by occasionally suggesting that his own term "drab" need not have a pejorative connotation, although when he applies it to specific poets, it is clear that he intends it to be damaging. Further-more, his distinction leads him into oversimplifications. As Lewis would have it, George Gascoigne is mostly drab (a condition that he sees as befitting a poet of the "drab" mid-century) though blessed with occasional "Golden" tendencies, while Robert Southwell, squarely placed in the "Golden" period, is really a mediocre throwback to earlier "drab" poetry. Such distinctions are hazy and not helpful to the reader, who suspects that Lewis defines "drab" and "Golden" simply as what he himself dislikes or prefers in poetry.

The muddle created by Lewis's terminology has led to inadequate treatments of the sixteenth century in the classroom. Perhaps reinforced by the simplicity of his dichotomy, teachers have



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traditionally depicted the fruits of the century as not blossoming until the 1580's, with the sonneteers finally possessing the talent and good sense to perfect the experiments with the Petrarchan sonnet form first begun by Sir Thomas Wyatt early in the century. Students have been inevitably taught that between Wyatt and Sidney stretched a wasteland of mediocre poetry, disappointing primarily because so many poets failed to apply their talents to continuing the Petrarchan experiments begun by Wyatt. Thus, indoctrinated in the axiom that, as concerns the sixteenth century, "good" poetry is Petrarchan and "bad" poetry is that which fails to work with Petrarchan conceits, teachers deal in the classroom mostly with the poets of the 1580's and later, ignoring the other poetic currents of the early and mid-century. It has been difficult indeed to overcome Lewis's dichotomy of "drab" and "Golden."

Fortunately, there have been studies of sixteenth century poetry that are sensitive to non-Petrarchan efforts, and these studies deserve recognition as providing a better perspective for viewing the sixteenth century. In 1939, Yvor Winters's essay "The Sixteenth Century Lyric in England: A Critical and Historical Reinterpretation" focused on some of the less notable poets of the period, such as Barnabe Googe, George Turberville, and Gascoigne, who, until Winters's essay, had been dismissed simply because they were not Petrarchan in sentiment, and the essay also helped to dispel the notion that the aphoristic, proverbial content of their poetry was symptomatic of their simple-mindedness and lack of talent. By pointing out how their sparse style contributes to, rather than detracts from, the moral content of their poetry, Winters's essay is instrumental in helping the reader develop a sense of appreciation for these often overlooked poets. In addition to Winters's essay, Douglas L. Peterson's book *The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles* (1967), taking up where Winters left off, identified two major poetic currents in the sixteenth century: the plain style and the eloquent style. Peterson provided a more realistic and less judgmental assessment of the non-Petrarchans as practitioners of the "plain" rhetorical style, a term that was a welcome relief from Lewis's "drab." Thus, Winters's and Peterson's efforts were helpful in destroying the damaging stereotypes about the "bad" poets of the mid-century.

Poetry as Craft

Despite the difficulties inherent in summarizing a century as diverse as the sixteenth, it is possible to discern a unifying thread running through the poetry of the period. The unity stems from the fact that, perhaps more than any other time, the sixteenth century was consistently "poetic"; that is, the poets were constantly aware of themselves as poetic craftsmen. From Skelton to Edmund Spenser, poets were self-conscious of their pursuits, regardless of theme. This poetic self-consciousness was manifested primarily in the dazzling display of metrical, stanzaic, and prosodic experimentation that characterized the efforts of all the poets, from the most talented to the most mediocre. In particular, the century experienced the development of, or refinement upon, for example, the poulter's measure (alternate twelve- and fourteen-syllable lines), blank verse, heroic couplets, rime royal, ottava rima, terza rima, Spenserian stanza, douzains, fourteeners—all appearing in a variety of genres. Characteristic of the century was the poet watching himself be a poet, and every poet of the century would have found himself in



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agreement with Sidney's assessment of the poet in his *Defence of Poesie* (1595) as prophet or seer, whose craft is suffused with divine inspiration.

Social Context

This process of conscious invention and self-monitoring is one key to understanding the poetry of the sixteenth century. It is a curious fact that whereas in other periods, historical and social factors play a large role in shaping poetic themes, in the sixteenth century, such extra literary influences did little to dictate the nature of the poetry. Surprisingly, even though Copernicus's theory of a heliocentric universe was known by mid-century, the poetry barely nodded to the New Science or to the new geographical discoveries. Certainly, the century experienced almost constant political and religious turbulence, providing abundant fare for topical themes; a less apolitical period one can hardly imagine. It was the prose, however, more than the poetry, that sought to record the buffetings created by the fact that the official religion in England changed four times between 1530 and 1560.

It seems that the instability created by this uneasiness had the effect of turning the poets inward, rather than outward to political, social, and religious commentary (with the exceptions of the broadside ballads, pseudo journalistic poems intended for the uncultivated, and the verse chronicle history so popular at the close of the century), bearing out the hypothesis that good satire can flourish only in periods of relative stability. For example, despite the number of obvious targets, the genre of political satire did not flourish in the sixteenth century, and its sporadic representatives, in particular anticlerical satire, a warhorse left over from the Middle Ages, are barely noteworthy. A major figure in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) is Gloriana, a figure depicting Queen Elizabeth, but she is an idealized rendering, only one of many such celebrations in poetry of Queen Elizabeth, not intended to provide a realistic insight into her character.

Rise of Vernacular Languages

Thus, to the poet of the sixteenth century, the primary consideration of the poetic pursuit was not who or what to write about, but rather how to write. The reason for this emphasis on style over content is simple enough to isolate. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the English language was experiencing severe growing pains. In fact, throughout Europe the vernacular was struggling to overthrow the tyranny of Latin and to discover its essential identity. Nationalism was a phenomenon taking root every-where, and inevitably, the cultivation of native languages was seen as the logical instrument of expediting the development of national identity. Italy and France were under-going revolts against Latin, and Joachim du Bellay's *La Défense et illustration de lalangue française* (1549; *The Defence and Illustration of the French Language*, 1939) proclaimed explicitly that great works can be written in the vernacular. In England, the invention of new words was encouraged, and war was waged on "inkhornisms," terms of affectation usually held over from the old Latin or French, used liberally by Skelton. Thus, George Puttenham, an influential critical theorist of the period, discusses the question of whether



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a poet would be better advised to use “pierce” rather than “penetrate,” and Richard Mulcaster, Spenser’s old headmaster, was moved to announce, “I honor the Latin, but I worship English.”

It was no easy task, however, to legislate prescribed changes in something as malleable as language, and the grandeur of the effort nevertheless often produced comic results. Sixteenth century English vernacular, trying to weed out both Latin and French influences, produced such inelegant and uneasy bastardizations as “mannerlier,” “newel-ties,” “hable” (a hangover from Latin *habilis*), and “semblably,” leading William Webbe in his *Discourse of English Poetry* (1586) to rail in a sneering pun about “this brutish poetry,” with “brutish” looming as a veiled reference to “British.” Although the sixteenth century was constantly discovering that the subtleties of perfecting a new language could not be mastered overnight, the effort was nevertheless sustained and paved the way for a future confidence in what the vernacular could achieve. Words that often strike the modern reader as outdated, stodgy pedantry are, in fact, the uncertain by-products of innovative experimentation.

Thus, to understand sixteenth century poetry is to ignore the stability of language, which is taken for granted in later centuries, and to understand the challenge that the poets experienced in shaping the new language to fit their poetry. Working with new words meant changes in the old classical syntax, and, in turn, changes in the syntax meant changes in the old classical versifications. These changes often resulted in frustration for the poet (and for the reader), but, depending on the skills of the poet, the result of all this experimentation could mean new rhyme schemes, new meters, and new stanzaic structures. In the wake of all the excitement generated by this constant experimentation, the poets cannot be blamed for often judging innovations in content as secondary to the new prosody. The volatility and flux of the language siphoned all energies into perfecting new styles not into content.

Translations

The zeal for metrical experimentation that characterized the sixteenth century is manifested not only in the original poetry of the period but also in the numerous translations that were being turned out. The primary purpose of the translations was to record the works of the venerable authorities in the new vernacular, and it is significant that Webbe refers to these works not as being “translated” but as being “Englished.” Virgil’s *Aeneid* (c. 29-19 b.c.e.; English translation, 1553) was a favorite target for the translators, with Henry Howard, the earl of Surrey, publishing a translation in 1553, Thomas Phaer in 1558, and Richard Stanyhurst in 1582. Stanyhurst translated only the first four books, and he achieved a metrical monstrosity by attempting to translate Virgil in English hexameters, reflecting the tensions of cramming old subject matter into new forms. Ovid was another favorite of the translators. Arthur Golding translated the *Metamorphoses* (c. 8c.e.; English translation, 1567) in 1567, and also in that year, Turberville translated the *Heroides* (before 8c.e.; English translation, 1567), featuring elaborate experiments with the poulter’s measure, fourteeners, and blank verse. Most of the translations of the period may be dismissed as the works of versifiers, not poets (with the exception of George Chapman’s *Homer*, which has the power of an original poem), but they are valuable reflections



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of the constant metrical experimentations taking place and, subsequently, of the ongoing process of shaping the new vernacular.

Literary Theory

An overview of the poetry of the 1500's would be incomplete without an introduction to the critical theory of the period and the ways in which it recorded the successes and failures of the new vernacular experimentations. Not surprisingly, critical theory of the age was abundant. An obvious representative is Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*. The elegance and polish of this argument for the superiority of poetry over any other aesthetic pursuit has made it the most outstanding example of Renaissance critical theory. The easy grace of the work, however, tends to obscure the fact that the new experiments in prosody had created a lively, often nasty debate in critical theory between the guardians of the old and the spokespersons for the new. There were many other works of critical theory closer than the Defense of Poesie to the pulse rate of the arguments.

The turbulent nature of the critical theory of the period (and, by implications, the turbulence of the poetry itself) is reflected by Gascoigne, who in his "Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse" (1575) serves as a hearty spokesperson for the new vernacular, advocating a more widespread use of monosyllables in poetry and a rejection of words derived from foreign vocabularies so that "the truer Englishman you shall seem and the less you shall smell of the inkhorn," and decrying poets who cling to the old Latin syntax by placing their adjectives after the noun. In his *Art of English Poesy* (1589), Puttenham scolds those poets who "wrench" their words to fit the rhyme, "for it is a sign that such a maker is not copious in his own language." Not every critic, however, was so enchanted with the new experimentation. In his *Art of Rhetorique* (1553), Thomas Wilson called for continued practice of the old classical forms, and he sought to remind poets that words of Latin and Greek derivation are useful in composition. Contempt for new techniques in versification pervades Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1570). He condemns innovations in rhyming, which he dismisses as de-riued from the "Gothes and Hunnes," and calls for renewed imitation of classical forms. In his *Discourse of English Poetry* (1586), William Webbe is even less charitable. He scorns the new experiments in prosody as "this tinkerly verse," and he campaigns for keeping alive the old, classical quantitative verse, in which the meter is governed by the time required to pronounce a syllable, not by accentuation. Clearly the severity of the critical debate needs to be kept in the forefront as one begins consideration of the poetry of the period; to fail to do so is to overlook what the poets were trying to accomplish.

Allegories and Dream Visions

The opening of the sixteenth century, however, was anything but a harbinger of new developments to come. Like most centuries, the sixteenth began on a conservative, even reactionary note, looking backward to medieval literature, rather than forward to the new century. Allegories and dream visions written in seven-line stanzas, favorite vehicles of the



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medieval poets, dominated the opening years of the sixteenth century. Under Henry VII the best poets were Scottish—William Dunbar, Gavin Douglas, and Sir David Lyndsay—and they were devoted imitators of Geoffrey Chaucer. The first English poet to assert himself in the new century was Stephen Hawes, who published *The Pas-time of Pleasure* in 1509 which represented uninspired medievalism at its worst. The work is constructed as a dream-vision allegory. An almost direct imitation of John Lydgate's work, *The Pastime of Pleasure* narrates the hero Grand Amour's instruction in the *Tower of Doctrine*, employing a profusion of stock, allegorical characters reminiscent of the morality plays. The old medieval forms, especially those combining allegory and church satire, were hard to die. In 1536, Robert Shyngleton wrote *The Pilgrim's Tale*, a vulgar, anticlerical satire directly evocative of Chaucer, and as late as 1556, John Heywood wrote *The Spider and the Fly*, a lengthy allegory depicting the Roman Catholics as flies, the Protestants as spiders, and Queen Mary as wielding a cleaning broom.

John Skelton

Another heavy practitioner of the dream allegory was John Skelton (c. 1460-1529), one of the most puzzling figures of the century. Skelton has long been an object of negative fascination for literary historians—and with good reason. He deserves a close look, however, because, despite his reactionary themes, he was the first metrical experimenter of the century. His paradoxical undertaking of being both metrical innovator and medieval reactionary has produced some of the oddest, even comic, poetry in the English language. His infamous Skeltonic meter, a bewildering mixture of short, irregular lines and an array of varying rhyme schemes, relies on stress, alliteration, and rhyme, rather than on syllabic count, and as a result, the reader is left either outraged or amused. His subject matter was inevitably a throwback to earlier medieval themes. He wrote two dream-vision allegories, *The Bowge of Court* (1499), a court satire, and *The Garlande of Laurell* (1523). Skelton is still read today, however, because of his fractured meter. The theme of his *Collyn Clout* (1522), a savage satire on the corruption of the English clergy (whose title, incidentally, was the inspiration for Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, 1591), is of interest to the modern reader not so much for its content as for its versification. In the work, Skelton describes his own rhyme as being "Tatterèd and jagged/ Rudely rain-beaten/ Rusty and moth-eaten." Skelton's rhyme arrives fast and furious, and it is possible to conclude that he may have been the object of Puttenham's attack on poets who "wrench" their words to fit the rhyme.

Continental influences

Despite his original metrical experimentation, Skelton was still entrenched in inkhornisms and looked backward for his themes. Paradoxically, as is often the case, it can be the poet with the least talent who nevertheless injects into his poetry vague hints of things to come. Alexander Barclay wrote no poetry of the slightest worth, but embedded in the mediocrity lay the beginnings of a new respect for the vernacular. To the literary historian, Barclay is of interest for two reasons. First, he was the sixteenth century's first borrower from the Continent. Specifically, in his *Certayn Egloges* (1570), he was the first to imitate the eclogues of Mantuan, which were



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first printed in 1498 and which revolutionized the genre of the pastoral eclogue by making it a vehicle for anticlerical satire, although such satire was of course nothing new in England at that time. Barclay's second importance, however (and perhaps the more significant), lies in the fact that he was the first to use the vernacular for the pastoral.

Tottel's Miscellany

It was not until mid-century that English borrowings from the Continent were put on full display. In 1557, a collection of lyrics known as *Tottel's Miscellany* was published, and the importance of this work cannot be overemphasized. It was innovative not only in its function as a collection of poems by various authors, some of them anonymous, but also in the profusion of prosodic experimentation that it offered.

Tottel's Miscellany represented nothing less than England's many-faceted response to the Continental Renaissance. In this collection, every conceivable metrical style (including some strange and not wholly successful experiments with structural alliteration) was attempted in an array of genres, including sonnets, epigrams, elegies, eulogies, and poems of praise and Christian consolation, often resulting in changes in the older Continental forms. Truly there is no better representation of poets self-consciously watching themselves be poets.

Nevertheless, unfair stereotypes about the collection abound. Perhaps because of Lewis's distinction between "drab" age and "Golden" age poetry, students are often taught that the sole merit of *Tottel's Miscellany* is its inclusion of the lyrics of Wyatt and Surrey (which had been composed years earlier)—in particular, their imitations of the amatory verse of Petrarch. The standard classroom presentation lauds Wyatt and Surrey for introducing Petrarch and his sonnet form into England. Students are further taught that the long-range effects of *Tottel's Miscellany* proved to be disappointing since no poet was motivated to continue Wyatt's and Surrey's experiments with Petrarch for decades thereafter. Thus, *Tottel's Miscellany* is blamed for being essentially a flash-in-the-pan work lacking in any significant, literary influence. Such disappointment is absurdly unjustified, however, in view of what the publisher Richard Tottel and Wyatt and Surrey were trying to accomplish. Tottel published his collection "to the honor of the English tong," and in that sense the work was a success, as the conscious goal of all its contributors was to improve the vernacular. Furthermore, its most talented contributors, Wyatt and Surrey, accomplished what they set out to do: to investigate fully the possibilities of the short lyric, something that had never before been attempted in England, and, in Surrey's case, to experiment further with blank verse and the poulter's measure.

By no stretch of the imagination did Wyatt view himself as the precursor of a Petrarchan movement in England, and he made no attempt to cultivate followers. In fact, despite the superficial similarity of subject matter, Wyatt's poetry has little in common with the Petrarchan sonneteers of the close of the century, and he most assuredly would have resented any implication that his poetry was merely an unpolished harbinger of grander efforts to come. As



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Douglas L. Peterson has pointed out, Wyatt used Petrarch to suit his own purposes, mainly to perfect his “plain” style; and Yvor Winters maintains that Wyatt is closer to Gascoigne than Sidney. Whereas the sonneteers of the close of the century composed decidedly in the “eloquent” style, Wyatt expressed con-tempt for trussed-up images and pursued the virtues of a simple, unadorned style.

Plain Style

Thus, far from attempting to initiate a new “movement” of Petrarchan eloquence, many of the poems in *Tottel’s Miscellany* sought to refine the possibilities of the plain style. As Peterson defines it, the plain style is characterized by plain, proverbial, aphoristic sentiments. It is a style often unappreciated by modern readers because its obvious simplicity is often mistaken for simple-mindedness. The practitioners of the plain style, however, were very skilled in tailoring their verse to fit the needs of the poem’s message, the pursuit of simplicity becoming a challenge, not a symptom of flagging inspiration. Skelton unwittingly summarizes the philosophy of the plain style when, commenting on his rhyme in *Collyn Clout*, he instructs the reader: “If ye take well therewith/ It hath in it some pith.”

Thus, a plain-style poet expressing disillusionment with the excesses of love or extolling the virtues of frugality, rather than adorning his poem with an abundance of extravagant images, he instead pared his sentiments down to the minimum, with the intense restraint itself illuminating the poet’s true feelings about love or money. The desiderata of the plain style were tightness and disciplined restraint. In the hands of an untalented poet, such as Heywood, who wrote *A Dialogue of Proverbs* (1546, 1963), the aphoristic messages could easily become stultifying; but as practiced by a poet with the skill of Wyatt, the economy of rendering a truth simply could produce a pleasurable effect. Interestingly, near the close of the century, when the eloquent style was all the rage, Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Nashe, and Fulke Greville often employed the techniques of the plain style.

Further Anthologies

The three decades following the publication of *Tottel’s Miscellany* have been stereotyped as a wasteland when poetry languished desultorily until the advent of the sonneteers in the 1580’s. Nothing could be more unfair to the poetry of the period than to view it as struggling in an inspirational darkness. Amazingly, such a stereotype manages to overlook the profusion of poetry collections that *Tottel’s Miscellany* spawned. Though admittedly the poetry of some of these collections is forgettable, nevertheless the continual appearance of these collections for the next fifty years is an impressive indication of the extent to which Tottel’s philosophy of prosodic experimentation continued to exert an influence.

The first imitation of Tottel to be published was *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576), the most popular of the imitations. As its title would indicate, a number of amatory poems were included, but the predominant poems had didactic, often pious themes, which offered ample



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opportunity for further experimentation in the plain style. A number of reasonably accomplished poets contributed to the collection, including Sir Richard Grenville, Jasper Heywood, Thomas Churchyard, and Barnabe Rich. Another successful collection was *Brittons Bowre of Delights* (1591), interesting for its wide range of metrical experimentation, especially involving poulter's measure and the six-line iambic pentameter stanza.

Imitations of Tottel's works did not always prove successful. In 1577, *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* appeared, a monotonous collection of poems whose oppressive theme was the vanity of love and pleasure, and it was as plagued with affectations and jargon as Brittons Bowre of Delights was blessed with fresh experimentation. Not everyone was pleased, however, with the new direction the lyric was taking after Tottel. In 1565, John Hall published his *Court of Virtue*, an anti-Tottel endeavor designed to preach that literature must be moral. In his work the poet is instructed by Lady Arete to cease pandering to the vulgar tastes of the public and instead to write moral, instructive lyrics, an appeal which results in the poet's moralizing of Wyatt's lyrics.

The experimental spirit of Tottel carried over into the works of individual poets, as well. From such an unlikely source as Thomas Tusser's *A Hundreth Good Points of Husbandry* (1557), an unassuming almanac of farming tips, explodes a variety of metrical experimentation, including Skeltonics, acrostics, and other complicated stanzaic forms. Despite his willingness to experiment, however, Tusser was not an accomplished talent, and thus there are three poets, Googe, Turberville, and Gascoigne, to whom one must turn to refute the stereotype of the mid-century "wasteland." Too often viewed as bungling imitators of Tottel, these poets deserve a closer look as vital talents who were keeping poetry alive during the so-called wasteland years.

Barnabe Googe

In his *Eclogues, Epitaphs, and Sonnets* (1563), Barnabe Googe's explicit poetic mission was to imitate Tottel. Working mostly in the didactic tradition, he wrote some epitaphs and poems in praise of friends, but his eclogues are of primary interest to the literary historian. He revived the Mantuan eclogue, which had been lying dormant in England after Barclay, and his eclogues were good enough to offer anticipations of Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). Another noteworthy work is his *Cupido Conquered* (1563), a dream-vision allegory, which Lewis dismissed as "purely medieval." The dismissal is unfair, however, because, despite the throwback to medieval de-vices, the plot, in which the languishing, lovesick poet is chided by his muses for his shameful lack of productivity, reveals Googe's self-consciousness of himself as crafts-man, a characteristic pose for a poet of the sixteenth century.

George Turberville



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George Turberville's dexterity with metrics in his translation of Ovid has already been mentioned. Like Googe, Turberville, in his *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs, and Sonnets* (1567), carried on with Tottelian experimentation, primarily in didactic poems employing poulter's measure and fourteeners written in the plain style.

George Gascoigne

George Gascoigne has been late in receiving the attention that he deserves, his poetry serving as the most impressive evidence disproving the existence of a postTottel wasteland. Predictably, Lewis describes him as a precursor of golden age poetry, ignoring Gascoigne's contributions to the plain style. In his *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres Bounde up in One Small Poesie* (1573, poetry and prose; revised as *The Posies of George Gascoigne Esquire*, 1575), Gascoigne was the first to experiment with Petrarch and the sonnet form since Wyatt and Surrey, but he was no slavish imitator. Gascoigne's poetry is often coarser and more lewd than that of Petrarch, but he never sacrifices a robust wit. In addition, he is an interesting figure for his variations in the sonnet form, featuring the octave-sestet division of the Petrarchan form, but in an English, or *abab* rhyme scheme. Puttenham refers to his "good meter" and "plentiful vein."

Elizabethan Poetry

Thus, the poetry of the latter part of the century, the great age of the eloquent style, must not be viewed as a semi-miraculous phoenix, rising from the ashes between Wyatt's experiments with Petrarch and the advent of Sidney. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the Elizabethan era ranks as one of the outstanding poetic periods of any century, its development of the eloquent style ranking as an outstanding achievement. A valuable representative of what the eloquent style was trying to accomplish is Sir John Davies' *Orchestra: Or, A Poeme of Dauncing* (1596, 1622). In his *Elizabethan World Picture* (1943), E. M. W. Tillyard analyzes the poem at length as a fitting symbol of the Elizabethans' ob-session with cosmic order. Though accurate enough, Tillyard's discussion places too much emphasis on the poem's content and does not pay enough attention to the style in which the message is delivered. In the poem, the suitor Antinous launches an elaborate discourse designed to persuade Penelope, waiting for her Odysseus to return, to dance. Through Antinous's lengthy and involved encomium to cosmic order and rhythm, Davies was not attempting a literal plea to Penelope to get up and dance. Rather, he was using Antinous as a vehicle for an ingenious argument, ostentatious in its erudition and profusion of images; in effect, Antinous's argument is the repository of Davies' experiments in the eloquent style. It is the dazzling display of the process of argumentation itself, not the literal effort to persuade Penelope, that is the essence of the poem. The way in which the poem is written is more important than its content, and in that sense (but in that sense only) the goal of the eloquent style is no different from that of the plain style.

Petrarchan and "eloquent" Style

When one thinks of sixteenth century poetry and the eloquent style, however, one al-most immediately thinks of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence, and one explanation for the almost fanatic



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renewal of interest in Petrarch was the inevitable shift of interests in poetic style. The plain style, so dominant for almost half a century, was beginning to play itself out, a primary indication being the decline in use of the epigram, whose pithy withheld little appeal for Elizabethan poets. The more skillful among them were anxious to perfect a new style, specifically the “eloquent” style, almost the total antithesis of the plain style. Not particularly concerned with expressing universal truths, the eloquent style, as practiced by Davies, sought embellishment, rather than pithy restraint, and a profusion of images, rather than minimal, tight expression. The eloquent style effected some interesting changes in the handling of the old Petrarchan themes, as well. It should be noted that in his experiments with Petrarch, Wyatt chafed at the indignities suffered by the courtly lover. By contrast, the sonneteers emphasized with relish the travails of the lover, who almost luxuriates in his state of rejection. In fact, there is no small trace off in de siècle decadence in the cult of the spurned lover that characterized so many of the sonnets of the period, most notably Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), and it decidedly signaled the end of the plain style.

Analysis of William Shakespeare’s Poems

Sonnets and Sonnet Sequences

The sonnet sequence, a collection of sonnets recording the lover’s successes and failures in courting his frequently unsympathetic mistress, was practiced by the brilliant and mediocre alike. Of course, the two most outstanding poets of the century pioneered the form—Sidney in his *Astrophel and Stella*, who in the true spirit of the poetic self-consciousness of the century wrote sonnets about the writing of sonnets and wrote some sonnets entirely in Alexandrines, and Spenser in his *Amoretti* (1595), who, in addition to introducing refinements in the sonnet structure, also intellectualized the cult of the rejected lover by analyzing the causes of rejection.

In the next twenty years the contributions to the genre were dizzying: Greville’s *Caelica* (wr. 1577, pb. 1633); Thomas Watson’s *Passionate Century of Love* (1582); Samuel Daniel’s *Delia* (1592); Henry Constable’s *Diana* (1592); Thomas Lodge’s *Phyllis* (1593); Giles Fletcher’s *Licia* (1593); Barnabe Barnes’s *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593); Bartholomew Griffin’s *Fidessa* (1593); Michael Drayton’s *Idea Mirrour* (1594), noteworthy for its experiments with rhyme; *The Phoenix Nest* (1593), a collection of Petrarchan sonnets in a wide variety of meters by George Peele, Nicholas Breton, Thomas Lodge, and others—the list of accomplished poets and tinkering poetasters was almost endless.

By the close of the century, so many mediocre poets had turned out sonnet sequences, and the plight of the rejected lover had reached such lugubrious proportions that the form inevitably decayed. The cult of the masochistic lover was becoming tediously commonplace, and one of the major triumphs of the eloquent style, the Petrarchan paradox (for example, Wyatt’s “I burn, and freeze like ice”) lost its appeal of surprise and tension as it became overworked, predictable, and trite. The genre had lost all traces of originality, and it is interesting to consider the fact that the modern definition of a sonneteer is an inferior poet. As early as 1577, Greville in his *Caelica* had perceived how easily in the sonnet sequence numbing repetition could replace fresh invention,



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and to maintain some vitality in his sequence his subject matter evolves from the complaints of the rejected lover to a renunciation of worldly vanity and expressions of disappointment in the disparity between “ideal” love and the imperfect love that exists in reality. (For this reason, of all the sonneteers Greville is the only precursor of the themes so prevalent in seventeenth century devotional poetry.)

The success and subsequent decline of the sonnet sequence left it wide open to parody. Many of the sonnets of William Shakespeare, who himself revolutionized the son-net structure in England, are veiled satiric statements on the trite excesses of Petrarchan images (“My mistress’s eyes are nothing like the sun”), indicating his impatience with the old, worn-out sentiments. Davies’ collection of *Gulling Sonnets* (c. 1594) was an explicit parody of Petrarchan absurdities and weary lack of invention, and, following their publication, the genre spun into an irreversible decline.

Mythological-erotic Narrative

As the sonnet declined, however, another form of amatory verse was being developed: the mythological-erotic narrative. This form chose erotic themes from mythology, embellishing the narrative with sensuous conceits and quasipornographic descriptions. It was a difficult form to master because it required titillation without descending into vulgarity and light touches of sophisticated humor without descending into burlesque. Successful examples of the mythological-erotic narrative are Christopher Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* (1598; completed by Chapman), Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* (1593), Chapman’s *Ovid’s Banquet of Sense*(1595), Drayton’s *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595), and Lodge’s *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (1589). Like the sonnet, the mythological narrative fell into decline, as evidenced by John Marston’s *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion’s Image and Certain Satires* (1598), in which the decadence of the sculptor drooling lustfully over his statue was too absurdly indelicate for the fragile limits of the genre.