

## Lecture 1

### Introduction to History of English Literature

#### Objectives:

The main objective of this course is to make students aware of the historical development of English literature with its social, cultural and economical background and its impact on literature through different eras.

Another objective of teaching this course is to inform student about how English Literature has evolved historically and how socio-cultural and political events have influenced its development through the ages.

Although the scope of this course is quite expansive, starting from Anglo-Saxons, the readers shall focus on early 16<sup>th</sup> to late 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic Movement and then to the modern literature.

In its broader spectrum, the course covers a reference to the multiple factors from economic theories to religious, philosophical and metaphysical debates that overlap in these literary works of diverse nature and time periods under multiple contexts.

The reading of literature within its social- cultural context will help the readers become aware of the fact that literary works are basically a referential product of the practice that goes back to continuous interdisciplinary interaction.

#### Introduction to the course outline:

During the semester, we will focus on the following topics:

- Introduction to history of English Literature
- Literature in general
- Types of literature
- Literature communicates experience
- Imagination and literature
- Relation of literature to life
- Literature and society
- Literature and writer's personality
- English literature: A brief History
- Periods/ages in the history of English Literature
- Anglo-Saxons Literature
- Anglo-Norman literature
- Discussion on Literary Terms I
- Renaissance Literature

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- Seventeenth Century Literature
  - The Puritan Age (Age of Milton and Jacobean and Caroline period)
  - The Restoration Period
- Eighteenth Century Literature
  - The Age of Pope
  - The age of Johnson
  - 18<sup>th</sup> Century Novel
  - 18<sup>th</sup> century drama
- The romantic age
  - Poets
  - Prose writers
  - Novelists
- The Victorian Age
  - Poets
  - Prose writers
  - Novelists
- Modern Literature
  - Poets
  - Prose writers
  - Novelists
- Post Modern Literature
- Criticism in Literature
- 

## Lecture 2

### Outline of the lecture

1. Literature in general
2. Types of Literature (Applied and Pure)
3. Literature Communicates Experience
4. Imagination and Literature
5. Relation of Literature to Life
6. Literature and Society
7. Literature and Writer's Personality

8. English Literature : An Introduction
9. A brief critical survey of the background and development of English literature from the earliest times up to the present age.

### **Literature in General**

Literature is one of the Fine Arts like Music, Dance, Painting, Sculpture, as it is meant to give aesthetic pleasure rather than serve any utilitarian purpose.

It consists of great books which, whatever their subject, are notable for literary form or expression.

It is the aesthetic worth alone, or aesthetic worth combined with general intellectual excellence, which entitles a book to be considered as literature.

In the realms of poetry, drama and fiction, the greatest works are selected on the basis of aesthetic excellence or the beauty of expression.

Books dealing with other subjects as History, Biography, Natural Science, Religion, Politics are considered as literature.

### **Types of Literature**

#### **Applied Literature and Pure Literature**

The two terms can be properly explained by studying Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, and Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

The Origin of Species has certainly some literary merit in the form of expressive power, as Darwin has communicated certain information to the reader in an appropriate style.

But in this case the expression is not so important as the information.

Darwin expressed himself for the purpose of putting his readers in possession of a certain body of information, and thus persuading them of the clarity of a certain line of argument.

Even if the expressions were clumsy, the information nevertheless might be true and the argument reasonable.

The literary quality of the book has served a certain specific purpose.

Two elements in the book:

the merit of Darwin's purpose

the merit of expressive power

These two elements cannot be distinguished in Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

### **Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn***

It gives us no information which may be true and no argument which may or may not be cogent.

In this case the expression satisfies us simply by existing as an expression, and not as a means to an end.

Here art does not take us beyond the domain of art.

This is why it is called Pure Literature.

### **Applied Literature**

We have to ignore the purpose of the writer in order to appreciate its literary value.

The experience of the author has to be excluded or transformed into something pleasant, in order to enjoy it

### **Literature Communicates Experience**

#### **How?**

The experience which lived in the author's mind must live again in the reader's mind.

The writer has not merely to give the reader what he has experienced, or how the experience has been taken, but he must give to the reader his own experience, and transplant it from his own mind to the reader's.

The experience, whole and entire, must be communicated to the reader.

This is not easy to attain because writer's experience is his own. It is the very process of his own life, and by no possibility it can be shared by another person.

But the writer can do so by the power of imagination.

His experience may be actual or a sort of day-dreaming, but imagination can transform it into something, as a whole, to the reader

### **Literature Communicates Experience**

### **How?**

The experience which lived in the author's mind must live again in the reader's mind.

The writer has not merely to give the reader what he has experienced, or how the experience has been taken, but he must give to the reader his own experience, and transplant it from his own mind to the reader's.

The experience, whole and entire, must be communicated to the reader.

This is not easy to attain because writer's experience is his own. It is the very process of his own life, and by no possibility it can be shared by another person.

But the writer can do so by the power of imagination.

His experience may be actual or a sort of day-dreaming, but imagination can transform it into something, as a whole to the reader

### **Plato's view:**

'Poetry' as a mere 'Imitation' of life.

True reality consists in the ideas of things, of which individual objects are but reflection or imitation.

Plato developed his argument first with reference to the painter.

Painting is an imitation of a specific object or group of objects.

Painter only imitates what he sees and does not know how to make or to use what he sees.

For example, he could paint a bed, but cannot not make it.

Poet imitates reality without necessarily understanding it.

Poetry or literature as a whole is an imitation of imitation and thus twice removed from truth.

### **Aristotle's view:**

In *Poetics* he undertook to examine the nature and qualities of imaginative literature with a view to demonstrate that it is true and not false as Plato had shown it.

He agreed with Plato that Poetry is an imitation of reality.

This imitation is the objective representation of life in literature.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

This imitation is the imaginative reconstruction.

Poetry is not connected with the outside world in the simple and direct fashion supposed by Plato.

The poet first derives an inspiration from the world by the power of his imagination; the art of poetry then imitates this imaginative inspiration in language.

Literature shapes certain kind of imaginative impulse.

It is not just possible to imagine life exactly as it is.

The exciting thing is to imagine life as it might be.

Imagination becomes an impulse capable of inspiring poetry.

Art of literature is not a slavish imitation of reality twice removed from truth.

The poet's business is not to write about the events that have happened, but of what may happen, of the thing which are possible in the light of probability or necessity.

Poetry is a more philosophical, a more serious thing than history.

]history deals with the particular only, while poetry deals with the universal.

### **Dryden's view**

He pointed out that imaginative literature gives us a '**just and lively**' image of human nature by representing its '**passions and humours**'.

### **Dr. Johnson's view:**

Poet '**holds up a mirror to nature**'.

**'Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representation of general nature'**.

The way to please the greatest number over the longest time period, which is the duty of imaginative literature, is to provide accurate pictures of nature.

The poet must know the manners and customs of men of all times and conditions.

He should be able to penetrate to the common humanity underlying there.

### **Walter Pater's view:**

Just as in proportion as the writer's aim, consciously or unconsciously, comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of the mere fact, but his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work fine arts; and good art in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense.

**The literary artist does not give us the photographic imitation of reality, but a transcription of his vision of it.**

It is from reality or life from which the artist starts, but he tries to reconstruct it when he would 'see it steadily and see it whole'.

### **Conclusion:**

All great pieces of literature are 'true to life'.

Poet/writer concentrates on those characteristics and aspects of life which are permanent.

He clutches at anything which promises some permanence among what is always fleeting.

That is why he gives us a picture of reality which is more characteristic of life than anything which we discover by our own day-to-day life observation.

### **Literature and Society**

Literature is intimately related to society. Viewed as a whole, a body of literature is part of the entire culture of a people.

The qualities of a literature are dependent upon the people of that society.

Its themes and problems emerge from group activities and group situations.

Its significance lies in the extent to which it expresses and enriches the totality of culture.

It is an integral part of entire culture, tied by a tissue of connections with every other element in the culture.

Society influences literature in many ways, and the connections of literature with society are integral.

In fact, the range of social influences on literature is as broad as the entire range of operative social forces: the prevailing system of social organization – including the class structure, the

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

economic system, the political organization and the deeply rooted institutions; the dominant ideas, the characteristic emotional tone; the sense of past and the pattern of contemporary realities.

### **Complex Relation:**

It is very difficult to determine which element of society had exerted what influence on literature.

We cannot, therefore, afford to isolate a single element in society- whether economic or ideological- and assign to it a casual role in the final determination of literature.

The whole of the social process - including material, conceptual, emotional and institutional elements - may be regarded as containing the potential influences determining the direction the direction and character of literature of a period.

In each period in the history of a nation, a certain social situation is brought into the area of operative influence, which is different from any other social situation.

The writer of that period selects those elements of that social situation which have managed to produce an impact on him, and weaves them into a pattern which is compatible with his own standards of art and his views of human life.

A very fine example of the effect of social conditions on the literature of the periods is provided by the literature of **Shakespeare's** time,

The thing that strikes every reader today is the difference between the vivid **Elizabethan drama** which is its best example, stands still as nobly as on its first day, speaking directly to us,

The poetic literature or the narrative literature of the same time seems to us centuries older because it lives in the world of ideas that no longer has anything in common with our own.

The main factor is that the determining sociological factors differ in two cases.

Pure literature was dominated

.

### **Literature and Writer's Personality**

Every work of literature is intimately connected with the personality of the author who produces it.

There is always a man behind a book, and the judging of the quality of literature becomes vital to us if we try to think of the author not as a mysterious disembodied force but rather as a man who wrote to satisfy need and to resolve difficulties which are common to us.

Literature is a product of men and women who wrote it out of their lives.

Expressing the view that every book is a reflection of the personality of the author, Matthew Arnold wrote:

**“What is really precious and inspiring in all that we get from literature, except the sense of an immediate contact with genius itself? Objects could never be described except for the purpose of describing the feelings which they arouse in us, for language ought to represent at the same moment the thing and the author, the subject and the thought. Everything that we say ought to be dyed with us. This process is a long one, but it immortalizes us. For language is formed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it.”**

What **Matthew Arnold, Goethe and Pater** have expressed may be called the personal or subjective view of literature, which lays emphasis on the personal factor in all literature. But there are some critics who hold the opposite view—the impersonal or objective view about literature i.e., the personality of the author should have nothing to do with his writings; the author who like Shakespeare expresses the personality of others is greater than the one like Byron who projects his own personality in his writings.

**Flaubert**, the great champion of this view, wrote in one of his letters: “There are two kinds of poets. The greatest, the rare ones, the true masters, sum up humanity: they are not preoccupied with themselves or their own passions, they put their own personality into the background in order to absorb themselves in the personalities of others; they reproduce the universe, which is reflected in their works with all its glitter and variety and multiplicity... There are others who have only to create, and they achieve harmony; to weep, and they move us; to think about themselves, and they are immortal. Possibly if they were to do anything else they might not go quite so far; but while they lack breadth, they have ardour and dash: in short, if they had been born with a different temperament probably they would not have had genius at all. Byron was of this family, Shakespeare of other: who can tell me what Shakespeare loved, betrayed, or felt.”.

There is no doubt that Shakespeare hides his personality in his plays, but what about his Sonnets which are by universal admission among the most intimate of personal utterances? If we look at this problem of the relation of the personality of the author to his works, we come to the conclusion that ultimately they must bear the impress of his personality in some form or the other.

Though Milton wrote ***Paradise Lost*** with the purpose of subduing to the strict form of Epic, all things in heaven and earth and hell, he could not rule out his own personality out of it. In fact it becomes a reflection of his own personality. We find in this great poem Milton as Man, Milton as Archangel, Milton as God—but the most characteristic voice of all is that of Milton as Satan, truly a double personality.

## **English Literature: Background and Development**

### **Introduction**

English Literature is one of the richest literatures of the world. Being the literature of a great nation which, though inhabiting a small island off the west coast of Europe, has made its mark in the world on account of her spirit of adventure, perseverance and tenacity, it reflects these characteristics of a great people.

It has vitality, rich variety and continuity. As literature is the reflection of society, the various changes which have come about in English society, from the earliest to the modern time, have left their stamp on English literature. Thus in order to appreciate properly the various phases of English literature, knowledge of English Social and Political History is essential. For example, we cannot form a just estimate of Chaucer without taking into account the characteristics of the period in which he was living, or of Shakespeare without taking proper notice of the great events which were taking place during the reign of Elizabeth. The same is the case with other great figures and important movements in English literature.

When we study the history of English literature from the earliest to modern times, we find that it has passed through certain definite phases, each having marked characteristics.

These phases may be termed as 'Ages' or 'Periods', which are named after the central literary figures or the important rulers of England. Thus we have the 'Ages' of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Johnson. Wordsworth, Tennyson, Hardy; and, on the other hand, the Elizabethan Age, the Jacobean Period, the Age of Queen Anne, the Victorian Age, the Georgian Period. Some of these phases are named after certain literary movements, as the Classical Age, the Romantic Age; while others after certain important historical eras, as the Medieval Period, Anglo-Saxon Period, Anglo-Norman Period.

These literary phases are also named by some literary historians after the centuries, as the Seventeenth Century Literature, Eighteenth Century Literature, Nineteenth-Century Literature and Twentieth Century Literature.

These 'Ages' and 'Periods' naturally overlap each other, and they are not to be followed strictly, but it is essential to keep them in mind in order to follow the growth of English literature, and its salient and distinctive characteristics during the various periods of its development..

### **Lecture 3**

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

## **The Anglo-Saxon Or Old-English Period (670-1100)**

The earliest phase of English literature started with Anglo-Saxon literature of the Angles and Saxons (the ancestors of the English race) much before they occupied Britain. English was the common name and tongue of these tribes. Before they occupied Britain they lived along the coasts of Sweden and Denmark, and the land which they occupied was called Engle-land. These tribes were fearless, adventurous and brave, and during the later years of Roman occupation of Britain, they kept the British coast in terror. Like other nations they sang at their feasts about battles, gods and their ancestral heroes, and some of their chiefs were also bards. It was in these songs of religion, wars and agriculture, that English poetry began in the ancient Engle-land while Britain was still a Roman province.

## **Middle-English Or Anglo-Norman Period (1100-1500)**

The Normans, who were residing in Normandy (France) defeated the Anglo-Saxon King at the Battle of Hastings (1066) and conquered England.

The Norman Conquest inaugurated a distinctly new epoch in the literary as well as political history of England. The Anglo-Saxon authors were then as suddenly and permanently displaced as the Anglo-Saxon king.

.

## **The Renaissance Period (1500-1600)**

The *Renaissance Period* in English literature is also called the *Elizabethan Period* or the *Age of Shakespeare*. The middle Ages in Europe were followed by the Renaissance. Renaissance means the Revival of Learning, and it denotes in its broadest sense the gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the Middle Ages.

## **The Puritan Age (1600-1660)**

The Literature of the Seventeenth Century may be divided into two periods—*The Puritan Age* or the *Age of Milton* (1600-1660), which is further divided into the Jacobean and Caroline periods after the names of the ruled James I and Charles I, who rules from 1603 to 1625 and 1625 to 1649 respectively; and the Restoration Period or the Age of Dryden (1660-1700).

## **The Restoration Period (1660-1700)**

After the Restoration in 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, there was a complete repudiation of the Puritan ideals and way of living. In English literature the period from 1660 to

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

1700 is called the period of Restoration, because monarchy was restored in England, and Charles II, the son of Charles I who had been defeated and beheaded, came back to England from his exile in France and became the King.

### **Eighteenth-Century Literature**

The Eighteenth Century in England is called the Classical Age or the Augustan Age in literature. It is also called the Age of Good Sense or the Age of Reason. Though Dryden belonged to the seventeenth century, he is also included in the Classical or Augustan Age, as during his time the characteristics of his age had manifested themselves and he himself represented them to a great extent. Other great literary figures who dominated this age successively were Pope and Dr. Johnson, and so the Classical Age is divided into three distinct periods—the Ages of Dryden, Pope and Dr. Johnson. In this chapter which is devoted to the eighteenth-century literature in England, we will deal with the Ages of Pope and Johnson. The Age of Dryden has already been dealt with in the preceding chapter, entitled “The Restoration Period.”

### **The Age of Pope (1700-1744)**

The earlier part of the eighteenth century or the Augustan Age in English literature is called the Age of Pope, because Pope was the dominating figure in that period. Though there were a number of other important writers like Addison and Swift, but Pope was the only one who devoted himself completely to literature. Moreover, he represented in himself all the main characteristics of his age, and his poetry served as a model to others.

### **The Age of Johnson (1744-1784)**

The later half of the eighteenth century, which was dominated by Dr. Samuel Johnson, is called the *Age of Johnson*. Johnson died in 1784, and from that time the Classical spirit in English literature began to give place to the Romantic spirit, though officially the Romantic Age started from the year 1798 when Wordsworth and Coleridge published the famous *Lyrical Ballads*. Even during the Age of Johnson, which was predominantly classical, cracks had begun to appear in the solid wall of classicism and there were clear signs of revolt in favour of the Romantic spirit. This was specially noticeable in the field of poetry. Most of the poets belonging to the *Age of Johnson* may be termed as the precursors of the Romantic Revival. That is why the *Age of Johnson* is also called the *Age of Transition* in English literature.

## **The Eighteenth Century Novel**

The chief literary contribution of the eighteenth century was the discovery of the modern novel, which at present is the most widely read and influential type of literature. The novel in its elementary form as a work of fiction written in prose was at first established in England by two authors—Bunyan and Defoe, who took advantage of the public interest in autobiography. The books of Bunyan, whether they are told in the first person or not, were meant to be autobiographical and their interest is subjective. Bunyan endeavours to interest his readers not in the character of some other person he had imagined or observed, but in himself, and his treatment of it is characteristic of the awakening talent for fiction in his time. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is begun as an allegory, but in course of time the author is so much taken up with the telling of the story, that he forgets about the allegory, and it is this fact which makes Bunyan the pioneer of the modern novel.

## **Poets of the Romantic Age**

The poets of the Romantic age can be classified into three groups— (i) The Lake School, consisting of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey; (ii) The Scott group including Campbell and Moore; and (iii) The group comprising Byron, Shelley, and Keats. The first two groups were distinctly earlier than the third, so we have two eight years flood periods of supremely great poetry, namely 1798-1806 and 1816-1824, separated by a middle period when by comparison creative energy had ebbed.

## **Prose Writers of Romantic Age**

Though the Romantic period specialised in poetry, there also appeared a few prose-writers-Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey who rank very high. There was no revolt of the prose-writers against the eighteenth century comparable to that of the poets, but a change had taken place in the prose-style also.

## **Novelists of The Romantic Age**

The great novelists of the Romantic period are Jane Austen and Scott, but before them there appeared some novelists who came under the spell of medievalism and wrote novels of 'terror' or the 'Gothic novels'. The origin of this type of fiction can be ascribed to Horace Walpole's (1717-97) *The Castle of Otranto* (1746). Here the story is set in medieval Italy and it includes a gigantic helmet that can strike dead its victims, tyrants, supernatural intrusions, mysteries and secrets. There were a number of imitators of such a type of novel during the eighteenth century as well as in the Romantic period.

## **The Victorian Age (1832-1900)**

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

The Victorian Age in English literature began in second quarter of the nineteenth century and ended by 1900. Though strictly speaking, the Victorian age ought to correspond with the reign of Queen Victoria, which extended from 1837 to 1901, yet literary movements rarely coincide with the exact year of royal accession or death. From the year 1798 with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* till the year 1820 there was the heyday of Romanticism in England, but after that year there was a sudden decline.

### **Poets of the Early Victorian Period**

The most important poets during the early Victorian period were Tennyson and Browning, with Arnold occupying a somewhat lower position. After the passing away of Keats, Shelley and Byron in the early eighteenth twenties, for about fifteen years the fine frenzy of the high romantics subsided and a quieter mood ensued. With the abatement of the revolutionary fervor, Wordsworth's inspiration had deserted him and all that he wrote in his later years was dull and insipid.

### **Novelists of the Early Victorian Period**

In the early Victorian period the novel made a rapid progress. Novel-reading was one of the chief occupations of the educated public, and material had to be found for every taste. The result was that the scope of the novel, which during the eighteenth century dealt mainly with contemporary life and manners, was considerably enlarged. A number of brilliant novelists showed that it was possible to adapt the novel to almost all purposes of literature whatsoever. In fact, if we want to understand this intellectual life of the period.

### **Novelists of the Later Victorian Period**

The novel in the later Victorian period took a new trend, and the novels written during this period may be called 'modern' novels. George Eliot was the first to write novels in the modern style. Other important novelists of the period were Meredith and Hardy. The year 1859 saw the publication not only of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* but also of Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Though they are vastly different from each other, they stand in sharp contrast to the works of established novelists that appeared the same year—as Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Thackeray's *Virginians*.

### **Prose-Writers of the Later Victorian Period**

In the later Victorian period there were two great prose-writers—Newman and Pater. Newman was the central figure of the Oxford Movement, while Pater was an aesthete, who inspired the leaders of the Aesthetic Movement in English poetry.

### **Modern Literature (1900-1961)**

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

The Modern Age in English Literature started from the beginning of the twentieth century, and it followed the Victorian Age. The most important characteristic of Modern Literature is that it is opposed to the general attitude to life and its problems adopted by the Victorian writers and the public, which may be termed 'Victorian'. The young people during the first decade of the present century regarded the Victorian age as hypocritical, and the Victorian ideals as mean, superficial and stupid.

## **Modern Poetry**

Modern poetry, of which T. S. Eliot is the chief representative, has followed entirely a different tradition from the Romantic and Victorian tradition of poetry. Every age has certain ideas about poetry, especially regarding the essentially poetical subjects, the poetical materials and the poetical modes.

## **Modern Drama**

After the death of Shakespeare and his contemporaries drama in England suffered a decline for about two centuries. Even Congreve in the seventeenth, and Sheridan and Goldsmith in the eighteenth, could not restore drama to the position it held during the Elizabethan Age. It was revived, however, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and then there appeared dramatists who have now given it a respectable place in English literature.

## **The Modern Novel**

This is the most important and popular literary medium in the modern times. It is the only literary form which can compete for popularity with the film and the radio, and it is in this form that a great deal of distinguished work is being produced. The publication of a new novel by a great novelist is received now with the same enthusiastic response as a new comedy by Dryden or Congreve was received in the Restoration period, and a new volume of poems by Tennyson during the Victorian period. Poetry which had for many centuries held the supreme place in the realm of literature, has lost that position. Its appeal to the general public is now negligible, and it has been obviously superseded by fiction.

## **Post-Modern Literature**

### **Understanding Post-modernism**

Until the 1920's, the term "modern" used to mean new or contemporary, but thereafter it came to be used for a particular period, the one between the two World Wars (1914-1945). Then came up after about half a century the magic term, "post-modern," meaning the period after the modern.

## **Postmodern Drama (The New Theatre)**

Drama of the post-war period shares, in some ways, the dominant spirit of the age we have witnessed in novel and poetry from the 1950's onward. One thing that seems common to all the three is their concern with life at the elemental level—with life bare and bony, wholly demystified and demythologized, and with questions raised at the existential plane, and without any attempt to seek soothing escape or magic solution to the problems of existence.

## **POST-MODERN CRITICISM**

Until the time of the modernist period of English literature, literary criticism was a “literary” activity, with leading (call them policy) documents written by the leaders of the literary movements. We know how from Dryden and Pope and Johnson to Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keats to Arnold and Rossetti and Swinburne to Eliot and Auden and Spender, English poetics was theorized by the leading English poets.

## **Lecture 4**

### **Anglo-Saxons Literature**

- A brief history of early Britain
- What is Anglo-Saxon/Old English?
- Brief History of Anglo-Saxons
- Anglo-Saxon Poetry
- Anglo-Saxon Prose
- Literary works during the period

#### 1. A brief history of early Britain

##### a. The Earliest Settlers

In ancient times Britain was inhabited by Iberians of whom little is known. The beginning of settlement in Britain took place in about 2000 – 1200 B. C. The early settlers were certain Celtic-speaking tribes called Britons, from whom the island got its name--Britain ( the land of Britons ).

##### b. Pre-Historical/Pre-Roman

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

The Celts were Pagans and their religion was known as “animism” a Latin word for “spirit.” However, the Britons were primitive, bronze-age people. They lived in round, wooden huts and were mainly farmer They lived as tribes with a king or queen as their leader.

## 2. The Roman Conquest

- Conquest: according to Oxford dictionary, ‘Act of taking control of a country or city by force’.

In 55 B. C. Britain was invaded by the Roman general Julius Caesar. The Britons fought bitterly against the Roman conquerors (for about 100 years) and were not completely subjugated to the Roman Empire until 78 A. D. With the Roman Conquest, the Roman mode of life and civilization came across to Britain also. The Romans introduced their civilization and language and build towns, roads, baths and temples. For over a century they tried to conquer Caledonia, Scotland, but did not succeed. In the end King Hadrian ordered building of a wall across the north of England. The Roman Conquest ended in 410 A. D.

## The Most Important Results of the Roman Occupation

They Established camps that eventually became towns. They Maintained relative peace. Latin heavily influenced the English language. Christianity begins to replace Paganism, especially after St. Augustine converts King Aethelbert in 597.

## 3. What is Anglo-Saxon or Old English?

This is the earliest phase of English Literature. Anglo and Saxons were two tribes occupied Britain. English was a Common tongue of these tribe. Before the occupied Britain, they lived along the coasts of Sweden and Denmark. The land which they occupied was called Engle-land. These tribes were fearless, adventurous and brave. They sang at the feasts about battles, gods and their heroes. Some of their chiefs were also bards. Through their songs of religion---English poetry began in the ancient Engle-Land. Britain was still a Roman province. They first landed in England in the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century and by 670 A.D. they occupied almost whole country The came as conqueror. They made England their permanent home. They became ancestors of the English race. They ruled till 1066. Harold, the last Saxon king was defeated in the battle of Hasting by William the Conqueror of Normandy, France

### 3.1. Background of Anglo – Saxon Language

It is a branch if Indo-European family of languages. It has same root words for Father and mother, God and man, Common needs and common relations of life as we find in Sanskrit, Iranian, Greek and Latin

### 3.2. What is Anglo-Saxon or Old Literature?

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Much of the Anglo-Saxon poetry is lost but only some fragments are left

∞ Poems:

- ∞ Widsith describes continental courts visited in imagination by a far wandering poet
- ∞ The Flight at Fibbesburg deals with the same favorite theme of battle against fearful odds
- ∞ Complaint of Deor describes the disappointments of a lover
- ∞ Beowulf----the most important poem of this period

Themes in Anglo – Saxon Poetry

∞ Five great principles:

- ∞ Love of personal freedom
- ∞ Responsiveness to nature
- ∞ Religion
- ∞ Love for womanhood
- ∞ Struggle for glory

*All these principles are reflected in their literature.*

Beowulf

- ∞ Greatest Germanic epic in the world of Literature
- ∞ Tale of adventures of Beowulf-----the hero
  - ∞ A champion and slayer of monsters
  - ∞ Full of all sorts of references and allusions to great events
  - ∞ To the fortunes of kings and nations

Old English Poetry

- ∞ Few books were written; most of those were written in Latin, for religious purposes.  
What are the earliest works written in Old English? Four books of Old English poetry exist today.

1. Stories from the Old Testament turned into Old English poetry

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

2. Christian poems based on themes from the New Testament or lives of saints.
3. An anthology of different short poems
4. The fourth contains *Beowulf*. Badly burned in 1731; today it is carefully preserved in the British Museum, in London

## Old English Poetry

- ∞ Our ignorance about *Beowulf*.
  - ∞ Was it a traditional heroic story, written down by a monk and then recopied by other monks who added a thin veneer of Christian moralizing to a basically pagan tale?
  - ∞ Was it written by a scholar trying to create something like the great Latin epic, the *Aeneid*?

## Introduction

“The poem called *Beowulf* was composed sometime between the middle of the seventh and the end of the tenth century of the first millennium, in the language that is today called Anglo-Saxon or Old English. It is a heroic narrative, more than three thousand lines long, concerning the deeds of a Scandinavian prince, also called Beowulf, and it stands as one of the foundation works of poetry in English.”

- Seamus Heaney

(translator, poet)

## Background on *Beowulf*

- ∞ 3182 lines
- ∞ Chief literary monument of the Old English Period
- ∞ Author unknown - - likely composed in 8th century, by monk putting down oral tradition, with a mixture of Christian tenets (unique combo of Germanic pagan heroism + early Christian teaching/world-view)
  - ∞ first printed in the 19th century
- ∞ Setting: not in England, but in earlier period in Scandinavia (though it has been transformed into a uniquely English text)
  - ∞ in the heroic age of Germanic peoples (5th and 6th centuries)

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

∞ hence, celebrates a past centuries old, glorified by oral traditions

## Beowulf and Poetic Beginnings

1. Use of Contrast (man-filled Heorot vs. lonely Grendel stalking among corpses)
2. Early use of Symbolism (Beowulf hangs Grendel's arm on wall: symbol of victory)
3. Hyperbole (struggle so fierce even the mighty Heorot is threatened)

## Alliteration and Beowulf

- ∞ The most striking feature in *Beowulf* is the use of alliteration.
- ∞ In alliterative verse, certain accented words in a line begin with the same consonant sound.
- ∞ examples:

Of men he was the mildest and most beloved,

To his kin the kindest , keenest to praise.

(In modern translation)

- ∞ Metaphor and Beowulf
- ∞ Ring-giver is used for King
- ∞ Hearth-companions for his attendant warriors
- ∞ Swan's bath / whale's road for sea
- ∞ Sea-wood for ship

Such metaphors occur in great numbers in this work.

## Cynewulf

- ∞ His most important poem is the Crist
- ∞ Narrative of leading events of Christ's ministry upon earth
- ∞ Christ's return to judgment

## English Prose and Anglo – Saxon Period

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- ∞ Began in King Alfred's times
- ∞ Alfred's translations from Latin– a common available prose
- ∞ There was no break in prose of Anglo – Saxon Period and Middle English Period
- ∞ Comparatively easy to understand
- ∞ Prose– based on religious instructions
- ∞ Two great pioneers of English prose:
  - ∞ Alfred the Great
  - ∞ Aelfric

## Alfred the Great

- ∞ The glorious King of Wessex
- ∞ Translated a number of Latin works in English

## Aelfric

- A priest
- Wrote sermons in a sort of poetic prose

## Bede ( the Venerable Bede)

- Father of English History
- *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (631)
- later translated from Latin into Anglo-Saxon by King Alfred as *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 891
- covers from the Roman Invasion of Britain to AD731, 4 years before the author's death

## King Alfred's contributions to English literature

- ∞ Translations from Latin, including Bede's History
- ∞ his free way of translation helped him to write in a natural style in English, his contribution to the development of English prose

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- ∞ launching the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (also known as Old English Chronicle), a historical register of national events from dim past to his own age. This work was continued by monks long after his death.

## Lecturer 5

- ∞ Introduction to Anglo – Norman Period
- ∞ Anglo – Norman Literature
- ∞ Languages during this period
- ∞ Characteristics of Medieval Literature
- ∞ Conventions of Medieval Romance
- ∞ Chivalric Code and Introduction to Courtly Love
- ∞ The Romances in Anglo – Norman Period
- ∞ The Miracle plays
- ∞ Prominent Literary Figures---focus on Chaucer

### Introduction to Anglo – Norman Period

- ∞ The Norman---residing in Normandy (France)----defeated Anglo Saxon King at the Battle of Hastings (1066)----and conquered England
- ∞ Saxon King---Harold---defeated by William, the Duke of Normandy
- ∞ The Norman Conquest inaugurated a new era in the literary as well as political history of England
- ∞ The Anglo – Saxon writers are permanently displaced as their king

### Anglo – Norman Literature

- ∞ Transformation of Anglo – Saxon literature
- ∞ Artistic expression and religious service----Latin control

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

## Writings

Catholic clerics were the intellectual center of society in the Middle Ages, and it is their literature that was produced in the greatest quantity.

- ∞ Characteristics of Medieval Literature

- ∞ Romance

- ∞ A narrative in prose or verse that tells of the high adventures and heroic exploits of chivalric heroes

- ∞ Tells of exploits of knights

- ∞ often a supernatural element involved

- ∞ Christian message

- ∞ concern with salvation and the world to come

- ∞ no interest in social change, only spiritual change

- ∞ This was true until the late 14th century

- ∞ Geoffrey Chaucer and Dante Alighieri signal new thinking, try up-ending social order

- ∞ Heroism

- ∞ from both Germanic and Christian traditions, sometimes mingled

- ∞ *Beowulf*

- ∞ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- ∞ *Song of Roland*

- ∞ *The Nieblungenlied*

- ∞ Presentations of idealized behavior

- ∞ literature as moral lesson

- ∞ loyalty to king

- ∞ chivalry

- ∞ use of *kennings*

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- ∞ A figurative, usually compound expression used in place of a name or noun.  
Example, *storm of swords* is a kenning for *battle*.

## ∞ Characteristics of Medieval Literature – Use of Allegory

- ∞ An allegory is a figurative mode of representation conveying a meaning other than the literal.
- ∞ Much of medieval literature relied on allegory to convey the morals the author had in mind while writing--representations of abstract qualities, events, and institutions are thick in much of the literature of this time.
- ∞ We'll read Dante's *Inferno* this quarter – a classic example of medieval allegory!

## ∞ Conventions of Medieval Romance

We'll focus first on reading three Medieval Romance texts. The influence of Medieval romance, with its roots in epic poetry, winds through English literature: through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, in the literary Romantic movement, and, of course, in modern takes on romance from T.H. White, and of course, Monty Python.

Medieval Romances:

- ∞ Often have unprovoked and violent fighting!
- ∞ Are set in a mystical place and time (the Dark Ages)
- ∞ Present supernatural elements, and magical powers from the pagan world
- ∞ Have a hero who is on a noble adventure or quest
- ∞ Have a loose, episode-like structure
- ∞ Include elements of courtly love
- ∞ Embody ideals of chivalry

Time frame of a year and a day

- ∞ Chivalric Code and Introduction to Courtly Love
- ∞ *Chivalry* is from the French word, *chevalier*, meaning horseman, or knight.
- ∞ The Code of Chivalry influenced the formation of religious military orders during the period of the Crusades. The now famous Knights Templar and the Hospitalers are among the most noted knights of this period.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- ⌘ During the later middle ages, chivalry had become largely as system of manners for the knights and a source of entertainment during tournaments – which themselves gradually became less threatening to the participants than live battle.”

The chivalric code combined Christian virtues with military virtues:

- ⌘ Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice
- ⌘ Faith, Hope, Charity
- ⌘ Valor and strength in battle
- ⌘ Loyalty to God and King
- ⌘ Courtesy towards enemies
- ⌘ Generosity towards the sick, women, widows and the oppressed
- ⌘ Courtly Love\*
- ⌘ The Ideal of Courtly Love
- ⌘ This relationship was modeled on the feudal relationship between a knight and his liege lord.
- ⌘ The knight serves his courtly lady with the same obedience and loyalty which he owes to his liege lord.
- ⌘ She is in complete control; he owes her obedience and submission
- ⌘ The Miracle Plays
- ⌘ Very popular
- ⌘ From the growth and development of the Bible story, scene by scene, carried to its logical conclusion
- ⌘ Developed to an enormous cycle of sacred history:
  - ⌘ Beginning with the creation of man
  - ⌘ His fall and banishment from the garden of Eden
  - ⌘ Death of Christ
  - ⌘ Final day of Judgment

Miracle play----mystery play

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Flourished in England from the reign of Henry II to that of Elizabeth (1154-1603)

- ∞ Morality Plays

- ∞ The uniform theme is the struggle between the powers of good and evil for the mastery of the soul of man

- ∞ The life of the Christ

- ∞ Redemption of the world

- ∞ William Langland

- ∞ One of the greatest poets

- ∞ His poem --- *A Vision of Piers the Plowman*----very popular

- ∞ Classical work

- ∞ Satire on the corrupt religious practices

- ∞ Throws light on the ethical problems

- ∞ Assumed character----the prophet----denouncing the sins of society and encouraging men to aspire to a higher life

- ∞ He represents the dissatisfaction of the lower and more thoughtful class of English society

- ∞ John Gower

- ∞ Courtly medieval poetry

- ∞ Narrative poet

- ∞ Most important work

- ∞ *Confession Amantis*

- Form of conversation between poet and a divine interpreter

- Satire on the vanities of current time

- ∞ Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)

- ∞ Personal experience:

- ∞ 1. The father of the English poetry, the founder of modern English, Chaucer was born of a wine merchant family, with rising fortunes and some standing at the court.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

∞ 2. 1357 served as a court page (boy servant ), and in 1359 in an English arm fighting in France and was taken prisoner.

∞ 3. Probably in 1361 to 1367 studied at the Inner Temple where he received training for a career at the court.

∞ The Age of Chaucer  
(1340-1485)

∞ • He is an English poet regarded as the greatest literary figure of medieval England and the first great English poet.

∞ • His works include

∞ *The Book of the Duchess* (1369)

∞ *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1385)

∞ *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400)

∞ • He established the southern English dialect as the standard English literary language in his works.

∞ The Canterbury Tales

∞ • It is a work written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the late fourteenth century

∞ • It is a collection of stories, two of them in prose, the rest in verse.

∞ • The work uses a frame story structure in which a main story told by the writer himself organizes other shorter stories told by a group of pilgrims, of many different occupations and personalities.

∞ • Some of the stories are originals and others not.

∞ • The pilgrims meet at an inn near London as they are setting out for Canterbury.

∞ • Their host proposes a storytelling contest to make the journey more interesting.

∞ • The themes and genres of the tales vary, reflecting the diversity of the pilgrims.

∞ • Characters are real people with distinct personalities and human weaknesses.

∞ • The merits of the work are: sense of humour, sympathetic insight, and a sense of proportion.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- The work is incomplete: it was originally intended as a collection of one hundred twenty tales, but twenty-six tales were actually written.
- Collection of stories related to the pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury
- These people represent different sections of the contemporary English society
- A landmark in the history of English poetry.
- Chaucer's works fall into three periods.
- First Period
  - He imitated French models, particularly the famous and very long poem – *Le Roman de la Rose*
  - He translated it *Reaunt of the Rose*
    - Introduction to the medieval French romances and courtly love
    - He also wrote *the Book of Duchess*
      - religious tone
- Second Period
  - Influence of Italian Literature especially Dante's *Divine Comedy*
  - He wrote the *Parliament of Fowls*---contains very dramatic and satiric dialogues between the assembled birds; *Troilus and Criseyde*--- narrates the story of the Trojan prince Troilus and his love for Creseida
  - The Story of Griselda*– a pitiful picture of womanhood
  - The House of Fame*---master piece of comic fantasy
- Third Period
  - English period
  - He threw off foreign influences and showed native originality
  - Legend of Good Woman*-----heroic couplet
  - The Canterbury Tales*----the greatest poetic achievement which places us in the hear of London

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- ∞ After Chaucer
- ∞ There was a decline in English poetry for about 100 year from 1400 to the Renaissance.
- ∞ Only few minor poets, the imitators and successors of Chaucer---are called the English and Scottish Chaucerian

## Lecture 6

### Literary Terms I for Understanding Literature (Basics)

This is very much essential for English Literature students to have a broader knowledge of understanding literary terms in order to understand literature well. This lecture is on literary terms, an introduction to basic terminologies in literature. In another lecture, we these will be discusses in detail with the addition of new things.

There WILL be literary terms used throughout the course in order to understand History of English Literature

- We will use the following terms:

Character	Antagonist	Protagonist
Diction	Denotation	Connotation
Imagery	Mood	Plot
Exposition	Rising Action	Climax
Falling Action	Resolution	Conflict
Flashback	Foreshadowing	Suspense
Point of View	Setting	Style
Theme	Tone	Figures of Speech
Metaphor	Simile	Oxymoron
Personification	Alliteration	

- Character

A character is a person or an animal that takes part in the action of a literary work.

- Antagonist

The Antagonist is a character or force in conflict with a main character, or protagonist.

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- Protagonist

The Protagonist is the main character in a literary work.

- Diction
- Diction is the manner in which we express words; the wording used.
- Diction = enunciation
- Some easy examples are:

Don't say 'goin' – say 'going', Don't say 'wanna' – say 'want to'

- Denotation

The denotation of a word is its dictionary meaning, independent of other associations that the word may have.

- Connotation

The connotation of a word is the set of ideas associated with it in addition to its explicit meaning. The connotation of a word can be personal, based on individual experiences. More often, cultural connotations – those recognizable by most people in a group – determine a writer's word choices.

- Denotation versus Connotation

Some examples –

Cheap is “low in cost” (denotation) but “stingy” or “poorly made” are the connotations of *cheap*

- Imagery

Imagery is words or phrases that appeal to one or more of the five senses. Writers use imagery to describe how their subjects look, sound, feel, taste, and smell.

- MOOD

Mood, or atmosphere, is the feeling created in the reader by a literary work or passage. Writer's use many devices to create mood, including images, dialogue, setting, and plot. Often, a writer creates a mood at the beginning of a work and then sustains the mood throughout. Sometimes, however, the mood of the work changes dramatically.

- Plot

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Plot is the sequence of events. The first event causes the second, the second causes the third, and so forth.

In most novels, dramas, short stories, and narrative poems, the plot involves both characters and a central conflict.

The plot usually begins with an exposition that introduces the setting, the characters, and the basic situation. This is introduced and developed. The conflict then increases until it reaches a high point of interest or suspense, the climax. The climax is followed by the falling action, or end, of the central conflict. Any events that occur during the falling action make up the resolution.

- Exposition

The Exposition is the introduction. It is the part of the work that introduces the characters, setting, and basic situation.

- Rising Action

Rising Action is the part of the plot that begins to occur as soon as the conflict is introduced. The rising action adds complications to the conflict and increases reader interest.

- Climax

The Climax is the point of greatest emotional intensity, interest, or suspense in the plot of a narrative. The climax typically comes at the turning point in a story or drama.

- Falling Action

Falling Action is the action that typically follows the climax and reveals its results.

- Resolution

The Resolution is the part of the plot that concludes the falling action by revealing or suggesting the outcome of the conflict.

- Conflict

Conflict is the struggle between opposing forces in a story or play. There are two types of conflict that exist in literature.

- External Conflict

External conflict exists when a character struggles against some outside force, such as another character, nature, society, or fate.

Man vs. Man

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

## Man vs. Nature

Internal conflict exists within the mind of a character who is torn between different courses of action.

## Man vs. Himself

### Internal Conflict

- Flashback

A flashback is a literary device in which an earlier episode, conversation, or event is inserted into the sequence of events. Often flashbacks are presented as a memory of the narrator or of another character.

- Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is the author's use of clues to hint at what might happen later in the story. Writers use foreshadowing to build their readers' expectations and to create suspense. This is used to help readers prepare for what is to come.

- Suspense

Suspense is the growing interest and excitement readers experience while awaiting a climax or resolution in a work of literature. It is a feeling of anxious uncertainty about the outcome of events. Writers create suspense by raising questions in the minds of their readers.

- Point of View

Point of View is the perspective, or vantage point, from which a story is told. It is the relationship of the narrator to the story.

First-person is told by a character who uses the first-person pronoun "I".

Third-person limited point of view is the point of view where the narrator uses third-person pronouns such as "he" and "she" to refer to the characters.

- Setting

The setting of a literary work is the time and place of the action.

The setting includes all the details of a place and time – the year, the time of day, even the weather. The place may be a specific country, state, region, community, neighborhood, building, institution, or home.

Details such as dialect, clothing, customs, and modes of transportation are often used to establish setting.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

In most stories, the setting serves as a backdrop – a context in which the characters interact. The setting of a story often helps to create a particular mood, or feeling.

- Style

Style is the distinctive way in which an author uses language.

Word choice, phrasing, sentence length, tone, dialogue, purpose, and attitude toward the audience and subject can all contribute to an author's writing style.

- Theme

The theme of a literary work is its central message, concern, or purpose. A theme can usually be expressed as a generalization, or general statement, about people or life. The theme may be stated directly by the writer although it is more often presented indirectly. When the theme is stated indirectly, the reader must figure out the theme by looking carefully at what the work reveals about the people or about life.

- Tone

Tone is a reflection of a writer's or speaker's attitude toward a subject of a poem, story, or other literary work. Tone may be communicated through words and details that express particular emotions and that evoke an emotional response from the reader.

For example, word choice or phrasing may seem to convey respect, anger, lightheartedness, or sarcasm.

- Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a specific device or kind of figurative language, such as hyperbole, metaphor, personification, simile, or understatement.

Figurative language is used for descriptive effect, often to imply ideas indirectly. It is not meant to be taken literally. Figurative language is used to state ideas in vivid and imaginative ways.

- Metaphor

A Metaphor is a type of speech that compares or equates two or more things that have something in common. A metaphor does NOT use *like* or *as*.

Example: Life is a bowl of cherries.

- Simile

A Simile is another figure of speech that compares seemingly unlike things. Similes DO use the words *like* or *as*.

# History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Example: Her voice was like nails on a chalkboard.

- Oxymoron

An Oxymoron is a figure of speech that is a combination of seemingly contradictory words.

Examples:     Same difference

Pretty ugly

Roaring silence

- Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which an animal, object, force of nature, or idea is given human qualities or characteristics.

Example:     Tears began to fall from the dark clouds.

- Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of sounds, most often consonant sounds, at the beginning of words. Alliteration gives emphasis to words.

Example: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

## Lecture 7

### The Renaissance Period (1500-1600)

The *Renaissance Period* in English literature is also called the *Elizabethan Period* or the *Age of Shakespeare*. The middle Ages in Europe were followed by the Renaissance. Renaissance means the Revival of Learning, and it denotes in its broadest sense the gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the Middle Ages.

With the fall of Constantinople in 1453 A.D. by the invasion of the Turks, the Greek scholars who were residing there, spread all over Europe, and brought with them invaluable Greek manuscripts. The discovery of these classical models resulted in the Revival of Learning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The essence of this movement was that “man discovered himself and the universe”, and that “man, so long blinded had suddenly opened his eyes and seen”. The flood of Greek literature which the new art of printing carried swiftly to every school in Europe revealed a new world of poetry and philosophy. Along with the Revival of Learning, new discoveries took place in several other fields. Vasco da Gama circumnavigated the earth; Columbus discovered America; Copernicus discovered the Solar System and prepared the way for Galileo. Books were printed, and philosophy, science, and art were systematised. The Middle Ages were past, and the old world had become new. Scholars flocked to the universities, as adventurers to the new world of America, and there the old authority received a death blow.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Truth only was authority; to search for truth everywhere, as men sought for new lands and gold and the Fountain of Youth—that was the new spirit, which awoke in Europe with the Revival of Learning.

The chief characteristic of the Renaissance was its emphasis on Humanism, which means man's concern with himself as an object of contemplation. This movement was started in Italy by Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio in the fourteenth century, and from there it spread to other countries of Europe. In England it became popular during the Elizabethan period. This movement which focused its interest on 'the proper study of mankind' had a number of subordinate trends. The first in importance was the rediscovery of classical antiquity, and particularly of ancient Greece. During the medieval period, the tradition-bound Europe had forgotten the liberal tone of old Greek world and its spirit of democracy and human dignity. With the revival of interest in Greek Classical Antiquity, the new spirit of Humanism made its impact on the Western world. The first Englishman who wrote under the influence of Greek studies was Sir Thomas More. His *Utopia*, written in Latin, was suggested by Plato's *Republic*. Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poesie* accepted and advocated the critical rules of the ancient Greeks.

The second important aspect of Humanism was the discovery of the external universe, and its significance for man. But more important than this was that the writers directed their gaze inward, and became deeply interested in the problems of human personality. In the medieval morality plays, the characters are mostly personifications: Friendship, Charity, Sloth, Wickedness and the like. But now during the Elizabethan period, under the influence of Humanism, the emphasis was laid on the qualities which distinguish one human being from another, and give an individuality and uniqueness. Moreover, the revealing of the writer's own mind became full of interest. This tendency led to the rise of a new literary form—the Essay, which was used successfully by Bacon. In drama Marlowe probed down into the deep recesses of the human passion. His heroes, Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus and Barabas, the Jew of Malta, are possessed of uncontrolled ambitions. Shakespeare, a more consummate artist, carried Humanism to perfection. His genius, fed by the spirit of the Renaissance, enabled him to see life whole, and to present it in all its aspects.

It was this new interest in human personality, the passion for life, which was responsible for the exquisite lyrical poetry of the Elizabethan Age, dealing with the problems of death, decay, transitoriness of life etc.

Another aspect of Humanism was the enhanced sensitiveness to formal beauty, and the cultivation of the aesthetic sense. It showed itself in a new ideal of social conduct, that of the courtier. An Italian diplomat and man of letters, Castiglione, wrote a treatise entitled *Il Cortigiano* (The Courtier) where he sketched the pattern of gentlemanly behaviour and manners upon which the conduct of such men as Sir Phillip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh was modelled. This cult of elegance in prose writing produced the ornate style called *Euphuism* by Lyly. Though it suffered from exaggeration and pedantry, yet it introduced order and balance in English prose, and gave it pithiness and harmony.

Another aspect of Humanism was that men came to be regarded as responsible for their own actions, as Cassius says to Brutus in *Julius Caesar*:

*The Fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.*

Instead of looking up to some higher authority, as was done in The Middle Ages, during the Renaissance Period guidance was to be found from within. Lyly wrote his romance of *Euphues* not merely as an exercise in a new kind of prose, but with the serious purpose of inculcating righteousness of living, based on self-control. Sidney wrote his *Arcadia* in the form of fiction in order to expound an ideal of moral excellence. Spenser wrote his *Faerie Queene*, with a view “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle disposition”. Though we do not look for direct moral teaching in Shakespeare, nevertheless, we find underlying his work the same profoundly moral attitude.

### (a) Elizabethan Drama

During the Renaissance Period or the Elizabethan Period, as it is popularly called, the most memorable achievement in literature was in the field of drama. One of the results of the humanist teaching in the schools and universities had been a great development of the study of Latin drama and the growth of the practice of acting Latin plays by Terence, Plautus and Seneca, and also of contemporary works both in Latin and in English. These performances were the work of amateur actors, school boys or students of the Universities and the Inns of Court, and were often given in honour of the visits of royal persons or ambassadors. Their significance lies in the fact that they brought the educated classes into touch with a much more highly developed kind of drama, than the older English play. About the middle of the sixteenth century some academic writers made attempts to write original plays in English on the Latin model. The three important plays of this type are Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister*, John Still’s *Grummar Gurton’s Needle*, and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorbuduc or Ferrex and Porrex*—the first two are comedies and last one a tragedy. All these plays are monotonous and do not possess much literary merit.

The second period of Elizabethan drama was dominated by the “University Wits”, a professional set of literary men. Of this little constellations, Marlowe was the central sun, and round him revolved as minor stars, Lyly, Greene, Peele, Lodge and Nash.

#### Lyly (1554-1606)

The author of *Euphues*, wrote a number of plays, the best known of them are *Compaspe* (1581), *Sapho* and *Phao* (1584), *Endymion* (1591), and *Midas* (1592). These plays are mythological and pastoral and are nearer to the Masque (court spectacles intended to satisfy the love of glitter and novelty) rather than to the narrative drama of Marlowe. They are written in prose intermingled with verse. Though the verse is simple and charming prose is marred by exaggeration, a characteristic of *Euphuism*.

#### George Peele (1558-97?)

Formed, along with Marlowe, Greene and Nash, one of that band of dissolute young men endeavouring to earn a livelihood by literary work. He was an actor as well as writer of plays. He wrote some half dozen plays, which are richer in beauty than any of his group except Marlowe. His earnest work is *The Arraignment of Paris*, (1584); his most famous is *David and Bathsheba* (1599). The *Arraignment of Paris*, which contains an elaborate eulogy of Queen Elizabeth, is really a court play of the Masque order. *David and Bathsheba* contains many beautiful lines. Like Marlowe, Peele was responsible for giving the blank verse musical quality, which later attained perfection in the deft hands of Shakespeare.

#### Thomas Kyd (1558-95)

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Achieved great popularity with his first work, *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was translated in many European languages. He introduced the 'blood and thunder' element in drama, which proved one of the attractive features of the pre-Shakespearean drama. Though he is always violent and extravagant, yet he was responsible for breaking away from the lifeless monotony of *Gorboduc*.

Robert Greene (1560-1592)

He lived a most dissolute life, and died in distress and debt. His plays comprise *Orlando Furioso*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *Alphonsus King of Aragon* and *George a Greene*. His most effective play is *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, which deals partly with the tricks of the Friar, and partly with a simple love story between two men with one maid. Its variety of interest and comic, relief and to the entertainment of the audience. But the chief merit of the play lies in the lively method of presenting the story. Greene also achieves distinction by the vigorous humanity of his characterisation.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)

The dramatic work of Lodge and Nash is not of much importance. Of all the members of the group Marlowe is the greatest. In 1587 his first play *Tamburlaine* was produced and it took the public by storm on account of its impetuous force, its splendid command of blank verse, and its sensitiveness to beauty. In this play Marlowe dramatised the exploits of the Scythian shepherd who rose to be "the terror of the world", and "the scourge of God". *Tamburlaine* was succeeded by *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, in which Marlowe gave an old medieval legend a romantic setting. The story of the scholar who sells his soul to the Devil for worldly enjoyment and unlimited power, is presented in a most fascinating manner. Marlowe's *Faustus* is the genuine incarnation of the Renaissance spirit. *The Jew of Malta*, the third tragedy of Marlowe, is not so fine as *Doctor Faustus*, though it has a glorious opening. His last play, *Edward II*, is his best from the technical point of view. Though it lacks the force and rhythmic beauty of the earlier plays, it is superior to them on account of its rare skill of construction and admirable characterisation.

Marlowe's contributions to the Elizabethan drama were great. He raised the subject-matter of drama to a higher level. He introduced heroes who were men of great strength and vitality, possessing the Renaissance characteristic of insatiable spirit of adventure. He gave life and reality to the characters, and introduced passion on the stage. He made the blank verse supple and flexible to suit the drama, and thus made the work of Shakespeare in this respect easy. He gave coherence and unity to the drama, which it was formerly lacking. He also gave beauty and dignity and poetic glow to the drama. In fact, he did the pioneering work on which Shakespeare built the grand edifice. Thus he has been rightly called "the Father of English Dramatic Poetry."

Shakespeare (1564-1616)

The greatest of all Elizabethan dramatists was Shakespeare in whose hands the Romantic drama reached its climax. As we do not know much about his life, and it is certain that he did not have proper training and education as other dramatists of the period had, his stupendous achievements are an enigma to all scholars up to the present day. It is still a mystery how a country boy, poor and uneducated, who came to London in search of odd jobs to scrape a living, could reach such heights in dramatic literature. Endowed with a marvellous imaginative and

creative mind, he could put new life into old familiar stories and make them glow with deepest thoughts and tenderest feelings.

There is no doubt that Shakespeare was a highly gifted person, but without proper training he could not have scaled such heights. In spite of the meagre material we have got about his life, we can surmise that he must have undergone proper training first as an actor, second as a reviser of old plays, and the last as an independent dramatist. He worked with other dramatists and learned the secrets of their trade. He must have studied deeply and observed minutely the people he came in contact with. His dramatic output must, therefore, have been the result of his natural genius as well as of hard work and industry.

Besides non-dramatic poetry consisting of two narrative poems, *Venice and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and 154 sonnets, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays. His work as a dramatist extended over some 24 years, beginning about 1588 and ending about 1612. This work is generally divided into four periods.

**(i) 1577-93**

This was the period of early experimental work. To this period belong the revision of old plays as the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*; his first comedies—*Love's Labour Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; his first chronicle play—*Richard III*; a youthful tragedy—*Romeo and Juliet*.

**(ii) 1594-1600**

To the second period belong Shakespeare's great comedies and chronicle plays – *Richard II*, *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV*, Part I and II, *Henry V*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. These plays reveal Shakespeare's great development as a thinker and technician. They show the maturity of his mind and art.

**(iii) 1601-1608**

To the third period belong Shakespeare's greatest tragedies and sombre or bitter comedies. This is his peak period characterised by the highest development of his thought and expression. He is more concerned with the darker side of human experience and its destructive passions. Even in comedies, the tone is grave and there is a greater emphasis on evil. The plays of this period are—*Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*; *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*.

**(iv) 1608-1612**

To the fourth period belong the later comedies or dramatic romances. Here the clouds seem to have been lifted and Shakespeare is in a changed mood. Though the tragic passions still play their part as in the third period, the evil is now controlled and conquered by good. The tone of the plays is gracious and tender, and there is a decline in the power of expression and thought. The plays written during this period are—*Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, which were completely written in collaboration with some other dramatist.

The plays of Shakespeare are so full of contradictory thoughts expressed so convincingly in different contexts, that it is not possible to formulate a system of philosophy out of them. Each of his characters—from the king to the clown, from the most highly intellectual to the simpleton—judges life from his own angle, and utters something which is so profound and appropriate, that one is astonished at the playwright's versatility of genius. His style and versification are of the highest order. He was not only the greatest dramatist of the age, but also the first poet of the day,

and one of the greatest of all times. His plays are full of a large number of exquisite songs, and his sonnets glowing with passion and sensitiveness to beauty reach the high water mark of poetic excellence in English literature. In his plays there is a fine commingling of dramatic and lyric elements. Words and images seem to flow from his brain spontaneously and they are clothed in a style which can be called perfect.

Though Shakespeare belonged to the Elizabethan Age, on account of his universality he belongs to all times. Even after the lapse of three centuries his importance, instead of decreasing, has considerably increased. Every time we read him, we become more conscious of his greatness, like the charm of Cleopatra,

*Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety.*

the appeal of Shakespeare is perennial. His plays and poetry are like a great river of life and beauty.

Ben Jonson (1573-1637)

Ben Jonson a contemporary of Shakespeare, and a prominent dramatist of his times, was just the opposite of Shakespeare. Jonson was a classicist, a moralist, and a reformer of drama. In his comedies he tried to present the true picture of the contemporary society. He also made an attempt to have the 'unities' of time, place and action in his plays. Unlike Shakespeare who remained hidden behind his works, Jonson impressed upon the audience the excellence of his works and the object of his plays. He also made his plays realistic rather than romantic, and introduced 'humours' which mean some peculiar traits in character, which obsess an individual and govern all his faculties.

Jonson was mainly a writer of comedies, and of these the four which attained outstanding success are *Volpone*; *The Silent Woman*; *The Alchemist*; and *Bartholomew Fair*. Two other important comedies of his, which illustrate his theory of 'humour' are—*Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man Out of Humour*. *The Alchemist*, which is the most perfect in structure, is also the most brilliant realistic Elizabethan comedy. *Volpone* is a satirical study of avarice on the heroic scale. *Bartholomew Fair* presents a true picture of Elizabethan 'low life'. *The Silent Woman*, which is written in a lighter mood, approaches the comedy of manners. Ben Jonson wrote two tragic plays. *Sejanus* and *Cataline* on the classical model, but they were not successful.

Ben Jonson was a profound classical scholar who wanted to reform the Elizabethan drama, and introduce form and method in it. He resolved to fight against cheap romantic effects, and limit his art within the bounds of reason and common sense. He was an intellectual and satirical writer unlike Shakespeare who was imaginative and sympathetic. His chief contribution to dramatic theory was his practice to construct plays based on 'humour', or some master passion. In this way he created a new type of comedy having its own methods, scope and purpose. Though he drew his principles from the ancients, he depicted the contemporary life in his plays in a most realistic manner. In this way Jonson broke from the Romantic tendency of Elizabethan drama.

### (b) Elizabethan Poetry

Poetry in the Renaissance period took a new trend. It was the poetry of the new age of discovery, enthusiasm and excitement. Under the impact of the Renaissance, the people of

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

England were infused with freshness and vigour, and these qualities are clearly reflected in poetry of that age.

The poetry of the Elizabethan age opens with publications of a volume known as *Tottel's Miscellany* (1577). This book which contained the verse of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503?-1542) and the Earl of Surrey, (1577?-1547) marks the first English poetry of the Renaissance. Wyatt and Surrey wrote a number of songs, especially sonnets which adhered to the Petrarchan model, and which was later adopted by Shakespeare. They also attempted the blank verse which was improved upon by Marlowe and then perfected by Shakespeare. They also experimented a great variety of metres which influenced Spenser. Thus Wyatt and Surrey stand in the same relation to the glory of Elizabethan poetry dominated by Spenser and Shakespeare, as Thomson and Collins do to Romantic poetry dominated by Wordsworth and Shelley.

Another original writer belonging to the early Elizabethan group of poets who were mostly courtiers, was Thomas Sackville (1536-1608). In his *Mirror for Magistrates* he has given a powerful picture of the underworld where the poet describes his meetings with some famous Englishmen who had been the victims of misfortunes. Sackville, unlike Wyatt and Surrey, is not a cheerful writer, but he is superior to them in poetic technique.

The greatest of these early Elizabethan poets was Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586). He was a many-sided person and a versatile genius—soldier, courtier and poet—and distinguished himself in all these capacities. Like Dr. Johnson and Byron he stood in symbolic relation to his times. He may be called the ideal Elizabethan, representing in himself the great qualities of that great age in English history and literature. Queen Elizabeth called him one of the jewels of her crown, and at the age of twenty-three he was considered 'one of the ripest statesmen of the age'.

As a literary figure, Sidney made his mark in prose as well as in poetry. His prose works are *Arcadia* and the *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595). With *Arcadia* begins a new kind of imaginative writing. Though written in prose it is strewn with love songs and sonnets. The *Apologie for Poetrie* is first of the series of rare and very useful commentaries which some English poets have written about their art. His greatest work, of course, is in poetry—the sequence of sonnets entitled *Astrophel and Stella*, in which Sidney celebrated the history of his love for Penelope Devereaux, sister of the Earl of Essex, - a love which came to a sad end through the intervention of Queen Elizabeth with whom Sidney had quarrelled. As an example of lyrical poetry expressing directly in the most sincere manner an intimate and personal experience of love in its deepest passion, this sonnet sequence marks an epoch. Their greatest merit is their sincerity. The sequence of the poet's feelings is analysed with such vividness and minuteness that we are convinced of their truth and sincerity. Here we find the fruit of experience, dearly bought:

*Desire;            desire;            I            have            too            dearly            bought  
With            price            of            mangled            mind.            Thy            worthless            ware.  
Too            long,            too            long,            asleep            thou            hast            me            brought,  
Who should my mind to higher prepare.*

Besides these personal and sincere touches, sometimes the poet gives a loose reign to his imagination, and gives us fantastic imagery which was a characteristic of Elizabethan poetry.

Spenser (1552-1599)

The greatest name in non-dramatic Elizabethan poetry is that of Spenser, who may be called the poet of chivalry and Medieval allegory. The Elizabethan Age was the age of transition, when

the time-honoured institutions of chivalry, closely allied to Catholic ritual were being attacked by the zeal of the Protestant reformer and the enthusiasm for matters of the European humanists. As Spenser was in sympathy with both the old and the new, he tried to reconcile these divergent elements in his greatest poetic work—*The Faerie Queene*. Written in the form of an allegory, though on the surface it appears to be dealing with the petty intrigues, corrupt dealings and clever manipulations of politicians in the court of Elizabeth, yet when seen from a higher point of view, it brings before us the glory of the medieval times clothed in an atmosphere of romance. We forget the harsh realities of life, and lifted into a fairy land where we see the knights performing chivalric deeds for the sake of the honour Queen Gloriana. We meet with shepherds, sylvan nymphs and satyrs, and breathe the air of romance, phantasy and chivalry.

Though Spenser's fame rests mainly on *The Faerie Queene*, he also wrote some other poems of great merit. His *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) is a pastoral poem written in an artificial classical style which had become popular in Europe on account of the revival of learning. Consisting of twelve parts, each devoted to a month of the year, here the poet gives expression to his unfruitful love for a certain unknown Rosalind, through the mouth of shepherds talking and singing. It also deals with various moral questions and the contemporary religious issues. The same type of conventional pastoral imagery was used by Spenser in *Astrophel* (1586), an elegy which he wrote on the death of Sidney to whom he had dedicated the *Calendar*. *Four Hymns* which are characterized by melodious verse were written by Spenser in honour of love and beauty. His *Amoretti*, consisting of 88 sonnets, written in the Petrarchan manner which had become very popular in those days under the influence of Italian literature, describes beautifully the progress of his love for Elizabeth Boyle whom he married in 1594. His *Epithalamion* is the most beautiful marriage hymn in the English language.

The greatness of Spenser as a poet rests on his artistic excellence. Though his poetry is surcharged with noble ideas and lofty ideals, he occupies an honoured place in the front rank of English poets as the poet of beauty, music and harmony, through which he brought about a reconciliation between the medieval and the modern world. There is no harsh note in all his poetry. He composed his poems in the spirit of a great painter, a great musician. Above all, he was the poet of imagination, who, by means of his art, gave an enduring to the offsprings of his imagination. As a metrist his greatest contribution to English poetry is the Spenserian stanza which is admirably suited to descriptive or reflective poetry. It is used by Thomson in *The Castle of Indolence*, by Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, by Shelley in *The Revolt of Islam* and by Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. On account of all these factors, Spenser has been a potent influence on the English poets of all ages, and there is no exaggeration in the remark made by Charles Lamb that "Spenser is the poets' poet."

### (c) Elizabethan Prose

The Elizabethan period was also the period of the origin of modern English prose. During the reign of Elizabeth prose began to be used as a vehicle of various forms of amusement and information, and its popularity increased on account of the increased facility provided by the printing press. Books on history, travel, adventures, and translations of Italian stories appeared in a large number. Though there were a large number of prose-writers, there were only two—Sidney and Lyly who were conscious of their art, and who made solid contributions to the English prose style when it was in its infancy. The Elizabethan people were intoxicated with the use of the English language which was being enriched by borrowings from ancient authors. They took delight in the use of flowery words and graceful, grandiloquent phrases. With the new wave of

patriotism and national prestige the English language which had been previously eclipsed by Latin, and relegated to a lower position, now came to its own, and it was fully exploited. The Elizabethans loved decorative modes of expression and flowery style.

John Lyly (1554-1606)

The first author who wrote prose in the manner that the Elizabethans wanted, was Lyly, whose *Euphues*, popularized a highly artificial and decorative style. It was read and copied by everybody. Its maxims and phrases were freely quoted in the court and the market-place, and the word 'Euphuism' became a common description of an artificial and flamboyant style.

The style of *Euphues* has three main characteristics. In the first place, the structure of the sentence is based on antithesis and alliteration. In other words, it consists of two equal parts which are similar in sound but with a different sense. For example, *Euphues* is described as a young man "of more wit than wealth, yet of more wealth than wisdom". The second characteristic of this style is that no fact is stated without reference to some classical authority. For example, when the author makes a mention of friendship, he quotes the friendship that existed between David and Jonathan. Besides these classical allusions, there is also an abundance of allusion to natural history, mostly of a fabulous kind, which is its third characteristic. For example, "The bull being tied to the fig tree loseth his tale; the whole herd of deer stand at gaze if they smell sweet apple."

The purpose of writing *Euphues* was to instruct the courtiers and gentlemen how to live, and so it is full of grave reflections and weighty morals. In it there is also criticism of contemporary society, especially its extravagant fashions. Though Puritanic in tone, it inculcates, on the whole, a liberal and humane outlook.

Sidney's *Arcadia* is the first English example of prose pastoral romance, which was imitated by various English authors for about two hundred years. The story related in *Arcadia* in the midst of pastoral surrounding where everything is possible, is long enough to cover twenty modern novels, but its main attraction lies in its style which is highly poetical and exhaustive. One word is used again and again in different senses until its all meanings are exhausted. It is also full of pathetic fallacy which means establishing the connection between the appearance of nature with the mood of the artist. On the whole, *Arcadia* goes one degree beyond *Euphues* in the direction of Sfreedom and poetry.

Two other important writers who, among others, influenced Elizabethan prose were: Malory and Hakluyt. Malory wrote a great prose romance *Morte de Arthur* dealing with the romantic treasures of the Middle Ages. It was by virtue of the simple directness of the language, that it proved an admirable model to the prose story-tellers of the Renaissance England. Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages* and other such books describing sea adventures were written in simple and unaffected directness. The writer was conscious of only that he had something to tell that was worth telling.

## Seventeenth Century Literature

### The Puritan Age (1600-1660)

The Literature of the Seventeenth Century may be divided into two periods—*The Puritan Age* or the *Age of Milton* (1600-1660), which is further divided into the Jacobean and Caroline periods after the names of the ruled James I and Charles I, who rules from 1603 to 1625 and 1625 to 1649 respectively; and the Restoration Period or the Age of Dryden (1660-1700).

The Seventeenth Century was marked by the decline of the Renaissance spirit, and the writers either imitated the great masters of Elizabethan period or followed new paths. We no longer find great imaginative writers of the stature of Shakespeare, Spenser and Sidney. There is a marked change in temperament which may be called essentially modern. Though during the Elizabethan period, the new spirit of the Renaissance had broken away with the medieval times, and started a new modern development, in fact it was in the seventeenth century that this task of breaking away with the past was completely accomplished, and the modern spirit, in the fullest sense of the term, came into being. This spirit may be defined as the spirit of observation and of preoccupation with details, and a systematic analysis of facts, feelings and ideas. In other words, it was the spirit of science popularized by such great men as Newton, Bacon and Descartes. In the field of literature this spirit manifested itself in the form of criticism, which in England is the creation of the Seventeenth Century. During the Sixteenth Century England expanded in all directions; in the Seventeenth Century people took stock of what had been acquired. They also analysed, classified and systematised it. For the first time the writers began using the English language as a vehicle for storing and conveying facts.

One very important and significant feature of this new spirit of observation and analysis was the popularisation of the art of biography which was unknown during the Sixteenth Century. Thus whereas we have no recorded information about the life of such an eminent dramatist as Shakespeare, in the seventeenth century many authors like Fuller and Aubrey laboriously collected and chronicled the smallest facts about the great men of their own day, or of the immediate past. Autobiography also came in the wake of biography, and later on keeping of diaries and writing of journals became popular, for example Pepy's *Diary* and Fox's *Journal*. All these new literary developments were meant to meet the growing demand for analysis of the feelings and the intimate thoughts and sensations of real men and women. This newly awakened taste in realism manifested itself also in the 'Character', which was a brief descriptive essay on a contemporary type like a tobacco-seller, or an old shoe-maker. In drama the portrayal of the foibles of the fashionable contemporary society took a prominent place. In satire, it were not the common faults of the people which were ridiculed, but actual men belonging to opposite political and religious groups. The readers who also had become critical demanded facts from the authors, so that they might judge and take sides in controversial matters.

The Seventeenth Century upto 1660 was dominated by Puritanism and it may be called the Puritan Age or the Age of Milton who was the noblest representative of the Puritan spirit. Broadly speaking, the Puritan movement in literature may be considered as the second and greater Renaissance, marked by the rebirth of the moral nature of man which followed the intellectual awakening of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Though the Renaissance brought with it culture, it was mostly sensuous and pagan, and it needed some sort of moral sobriety and profundity which were contributed by the Puritan movement. Moreover,

during the Renaissance period despotism was still the order of the day, and in politics and religion unscrupulousness and fanaticism were rampant. The Puritan movement stood for liberty of the people from the shackles of the despotic ruler as well as the introduction of morality and high ideals in politics. Thus it had two objects—personal righteousness and civil and religious liberty. In other words, it aimed at making men honest and free.

Though during the Restoration period the Puritans began to be looked down upon as narrow-minded, gloomy dogmatists, who were against all sorts of recreations and amusements, in fact they were not so. Moreover, though they were profoundly religious, they did not form a separate religious sect. It would be a grave travesty of facts if we call Milton and Cromwell, who fought for liberty of the people against the tyrannical rule of Charles I, as narrow-minded fanatics. They were the real champions of liberty and stood for toleration.

The name Puritan was at first given to those who advocated certain changes in the form of worship of the reformed English Church under Elizabeth. As King Charles I and his councillors, as well as some of the clergymen with Bishop Laud as their leader, were opposed to this movement, Puritanism in course of time became a national movement against the tyrannical rule of the King, and stood for the liberty of the people. Of course the extremists among Puritans were fanatics and stern, and the long, protracted struggle against despotism made even the milder ones hard and narrow. So when Charles I was defeated and beheaded in 1649 and Puritanism came out triumphant with the establishment of the Commonwealth under Cromwell, severe laws passed. Many simple modes of recreation and amusement were banned, and an austere standard of living was imposed on an unwilling people. But when we criticize the Puritan for his restrictions on simple and innocent pleasures of life, we should not forget that it was the same very Puritan who fought for liberty and justice, and who through self-discipline and austere way of living overthrew despotism and made the life and property of the people of England safe from the tyranny of rulers.

In literature of the Puritan Age we find the same confusion as we find in religion and politics. The medieval standards of chivalry, the impossible loves and romances which we find in Spenser and Sidney, have completely disappeared. As there were no fixed literary standards, imitations of older poets and exaggeration of the 'metaphysical' poets replaced the original, dignified and highly imaginative compositions of the Elizabethan writers. The literary achievements of this so-called gloomy age are not of a high order, but it had the honour of producing one solitary master of verse whose work would shed lustre on any age or people—John Milton, who was the noblest and indomitable representative of the Puritan spirit to which he gave a most lofty and enduring expression.

### (a) Puritan Poetry

The Puritan poetry, also called the Jacobean and Caroline Poetry during the reigns of James I and Charles I respectively, can be divided into three parts –(i) Poetry of the School of Spenser; (ii) Poetry of the Metaphysical School; (iii) Poetry of the Cavalier Poets.

#### (i) The School of Spenser

The Spenserians were the followers of Spenser. In spite of the changing conditions and literary tastes which resulted in a reaction against the diffuse, flamboyant, Italianate poetry which Spenser and Sidney had made fashionable during the sixteenth century, they preferred to follow Spenser and considered him as their master.

The most thorough-going disciples of Spenser during the reign of James I were Phineas Fletcher (1582-1648) and Giles Fletcher (1583-1623). They were both priests and Fellows of Cambridge University. Phineas Fletcher wrote a number of Spenserian pastorals and allegories. His most ambitious poem *The Purple Island*, portrays in a minutely detailed allegory the physical and mental constitution of man, the struggle between Temperance and his foes, the will of man and Satan. Though the poem follows the allegorical pattern of the *Faerie Queene*, it does not lift us to the realm of pure romance as does Spenser's masterpiece, and at times the strain of the allegory becomes to unbearable.

Giles Fletcher was more lyrical and mystical than his brother, and he also made a happier choice of subjects. His *Christ's Victorie and Triumph in Heaven and Earth over and after Death* (1610), which is an allegorical narrative describing in a lyrical strain the Atonement, Temptation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ, is a link between the religious poetry of Spenser and Milton. It is written in a flamboyant, diffuse style of Spenser, but its ethical aspect is in keeping with the seventeenth century theology which considered man as a puny creature in the divine scheme of salvation.

Other poets who wrote under the influence of Spenser were William Browne (1590-1645). George Wither (1588-1667) and William Drummond (1585-1649).

Browne's important poetical work is *Britannia's Pastorals* which shows all the characteristics of Elizabethan pastoral poetry. It is obviously inspired by Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Sidney's *Arcadia* as it combines allegory with satire. It is a story of wooing and adventure, of the nymphs who change into streams and flowers. It also sings the praise of virtue and of poets and dead and living.

The same didactic tone and lyrical strain are noticed in the poetry of George Wither. His best-known poems are *The Shepherd's Hunting* a series of personal eulogues; *Fidella* an heroic epistle of over twelve hundred lines; and *Fair Virtue, the Mistress of Philarete*, a sustained and detailed lyrical eulogy of an ideal woman. Most of Wither's poetry is pastoral which is used by him to convey his personal experience. He writes in an easy, and homely style free from conceits. He often dwells on the charms of nature and consolation provided by songs. In his later years Wither wrote didactic and satirical verse, which earned for him the title of "our English Juvenal".

Drummond who was a Scottish poet, wrote a number of pastorals, sonnets, songs, elegies and religious poems. His poetry is the product of a scholar of refined nature, high imaginative faculty, and musical ear. His indebtedness to Spenser, Sidney and Shakespeare in the matter of fine phraseology is quite obvious. The greatest and original quality of all his poetry is the sweetness and musical evolution in which he has few rivals even among the Elizabethan lyricists. His well-known poems are *Tears on the Death of Maliades* (an elegy), *Sonnets*, *Flowers of Sion* and *Pastorals*.

### (ii) The Poets of the Metaphysical School

The metaphysical poets were John Donne, Herrick, Thomas Carew, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, George Herbert and Lord Herbert of Cherbury. The leader of this school was Donne. They are called the metaphysical poets not because they are highly philosophical, but because their poetry is full of conceits, exaggerations, quibbling about the meanings of words, display of learning and far-fetched similes and metaphors. It was Dr. Johnson who in his essay on Abraham Cowley in his *Lives of the Poets* used the term 'metaphysical'. There he wrote:

“About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets. The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour: but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.”

Though Dr. Johnson was prejudiced against the Metaphysical school of poets, and the above statement is full of exaggeration, yet he pointed out the salient characteristics of this school. One important feature of metaphysical school which Dr. Johnson mentioned was their “discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike.” Moreover, he was absolutely right when he further remarked that the Metaphysical poets were perversely strange and strained: ‘The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions... Their wish was only to say what had never been said before’.

Dr. Johnson, however, did not fail to notice that beneath the superficial novelty of the metaphysical poets lay a fundamental originality:

“If they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth; if the conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think, No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume to dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery, and volubility of syllables.”

The metaphysical poets were honest, original thinkers. They tried to analyse their feelings and experience—even the experience of love. They were also aware of the life, and were concerned with death, burial descent into hell etc. Though they hoped for immortality, they were obsessed by the consciousness of mortality which was often expressed in a mood of mawkish disgust.

John Donne (1537-1631), the leader of the Metaphysical school of poets, had a very chequered career until he became the Dean of St. Paul. Though his main work was to deliver religious sermons, he wrote poetry of a very high order. His best-known works are *The Progress of the Soul*; *An Anatomy of the World*, an elegy; and *Epithalamium*. His poetry can be divided into three parts: (1) Amorous (2) Metaphysical (3) Satirical. In his amorous lyrics which include his earliest work, he broke away from the Petrarchan model so popular among the Elizabethan poets, and expressed the experience of love in a realistic manner. His metaphysical and satirical works which form a major portion of his poetry, were written in later years. *The Progress of the Soul* and *Metempsychosis*, in which Donne pursues the passage of the soul through various transmigrations, including those of a bird and fish, is a fine illustration of his metaphysical poetry. A good illustration of his satire is his fourth satire describing the character of a bore. They were written in rhymed couplet, and influenced both Dryden and Pope.

Donne has often been compared to Browning on account of his metrical roughness, obscurity, ardent imagination, taste for metaphysics and unexpected divergence into sweet and delightful music. But there is one important difference between Donne and Browning. Donne is a poet of wit while Browning is a poet of ardent passion. Donne deliberately broke away from the Elizabethan tradition of smooth sweetness of verse, and introduced a harsh and stuccato method. His influence on the contemporary poets was far from being desirable, because whereas they imitated his harshness, they could not come up to the level of his original thought and sharp wit.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Like Browning, Donne has no sympathy for the reader who cannot follow his keen and incisive thought, while his poetry is most difficult to understand because of its careless versification and excessive terseness.

Thus with Donne, the Elizabethan poetry with its mellifluousness, and richly observant imagination, came to an end, and the Caroline poetry with its harshness and deeply reflective imagination began. Though Shakespeare and Spenser still exerted some influence on the poets, yet Donne's influence was more dominant.

Robert Herrick (1591-1674) wrote amorous as well as religious verse, but it is on account of the poems of the former type—love poems, for which he is famous. He has much in common with the Elizabethan song writers, but on account of his pensive fantasy, and a meditative strain especially in his religious verse, Herrick is included in the metaphysical school of Donne.

Thomas Carew (1598-1639), on whom the influence of Donne was stronger, was the finest lyric writer of his age. Though he lacks the spontaneity and freshness of Herrick, he is superior to him in fine workmanship. Moreover, though possessing the strength and vitality of Donne's verse, Carew's verse is neither rugged nor obscure as that of the master. His *Persuasions of Love* is a fine piece of rhythmic cadence and harmony.

Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649) possessed a temperament different from that of Herrick or Carew. He was a fundamentally religious poet, and his best work is *The Flaming Heart*. Though less imaginative than Herrick, and intellectually inferior to Carew, at times Crashaw reaches the heights of rare excellence in his poetry.

Henry Vaughan (1622-1695), though a mystic like Crashaw, was equally at home in sacred as well as secular verse. Though lacking the vigour of Crashaw, Vaughan is more uniform and clear, tranquil and deep.

George Herbert (1593-1633) is the most widely read of all the poets belonging to the metaphysical school, except, of course, Donne. This is due to the clarity of his expression and the transparency of his conceits. In his religious verse there is simplicity as well as natural earnestness. Mixed with the didactic strain there is also a current of quaint humour in his poetry.

Lord Herbert of Cherbury is inferior as a verse writer to his brother George Herbert, but he is best remembered as the author of an autobiography. Moreover, he was the first poet to use the metre which was made famous by Tennyson in *In Memoriam*.

Other poets who are also included in the group of Metaphysicals are Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), Andrew Marvel (1621-1672) and Edmund Waller (1606-1687). Cowley is famous for his 'Pindaric Odes', which influenced English poetry throughout the eighteenth century. Marvel is famous for his loyal friendship with Milton, and because his poetry shows the conflict between the two schools of Spenser and Donne. Waller was the first to use the 'closed' couplet which dominated English poetry for the next century.

The Metaphysical poets show the spiritual and moral fervour of the Puritans as well as the frank amorous tendency of the Elizabethans. Sometimes like the Elizabethans they sing of making the best of life as it lasts—*Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may*; and at other times they seek more permanent comfort in the delight of spiritual experience.

(iii) The Cavalier Poets

Whereas the metaphysical poets followed the lead of Donne, the cavalier poets followed Ben Jonson. Jonson followed the classical method in his poetry as in his drama. He imitated Horace by writing, like him, satires, elegies, epistles and complimentary verses. But though his verse possess classical dignity and good sense, it does not have its grace and ease. His lyrics and songs also differ from those of Shakespeare. Whereas Shakespeare's songs are pastoral, popular and 'artless', Jonson's are sophisticated, particularised, and have intellectual and emotional rationality.

Like the 'metaphysical', the label 'Cavalier' is not correct, because a 'Cavalier' means a royalist—one who fought on the side of the king during the Civil War. The followers of Ben Jonson were not all royalists, but this label once used has stuck to them. Moreover, there is not much difference between the Cavalier and Metaphysical poets. Some Cavalier poets like Carew, Suckling and Lovelace were also disciples of Donne. Even some typical poems, of Donne and Ben Jonson are very much alike. These are, therefore, not two distinct schools, but they represented two groups of poets who followed two different masters—Donne and Ben Jonson. Poets of both the schools, of course, turned away from the long, Old-fashioned works of the Spenserians, and concentrated their efforts on short poems and lyrics dealing with the themes of love of woman and the love or fear of God. The Cavalier poets normally wrote about trivial subjects, while the Metaphysical poets wrote generally about serious subjects.

The important Cavalier poets were Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling and Carew. Though they wrote generally in a lighter vein, yet they could not completely escape the tremendous seriousness of Puritanism. We have already dealt with Carew and Herrick among the metaphysical group of poets. Sir John Suckling (1609-1642), a courtier of Charles I, wrote poetry because it was considered a gentleman's accomplishment in those days. Most of his poems are trivial; written in doggerel verse. Sir Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) was another follower of King Charles I. His volume of love lyrics—*Lucasta*—are on a higher plane than Suckling's work, and some of his poems like "To Lucasta", and "To Althea, from Prison", have won a secure place in English poetry.

(iv) John Milton (1608-1674)

Milton was the greatest poet of the Puritan age, and he stands head and shoulders above all his contemporaries. Though he completely identified himself with Puritanism, he possessed such a strong personality that he cannot be taken to represent any one but himself. Paying a just tribute to the dominating personality of Milton, Wordsworth wrote the famous line:

*They soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.*

Though Milton praised Spenser, Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson as poets, he was different from them all. We do not find the exuberance of Spenser in his poetry. Unlike Shakespeare Milton is superbly egoistic. In his verse, which is harmonious and musical, we find no trace of the harshness of Ben Jonson. In all his poetry, Milton sings about himself and his own lofty soul. Being a deeply religious man and also endowed with artistic merit of a high degree, he combined in himself the spirits of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In fact no other English poet was so profoundly religious and so much an artist.

Milton was a great scholar of classical as well as Hebrew literature. He was also a child of the Renaissance, and a great humanist. As an artist he may be called the last Elizabethan. From his young days he began to look upon poetry as a serious business of life; and he made up his

mind to dedicate himself to it, and, in course of time, write a poem “which the world would not let die.”

Milton's early poetry is lyrical. The important poems of the early period are: *The Hymn on the Nativity* (1629); *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso* (1632); *Lycidas* (1637); and *Comus* (1634). *The Hymn*, written when Milton was only twenty-one, shows that his lyrical genius was already highly developed. The complementary poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, are full of very pleasing descriptions of rural scenes and recreations in Spring and Autumn. *L'Allegro* represents the poet in a gay and merry mood and it paints an idealised picture of rustic life from dawn to dusk. *Il Penseroso* is written in serious and meditative strain. In it the poet praises the passive joys of the contemplative life. The poet extols the pensive thoughts of a recluse who spends his days contemplating the calmer beauties of nature. In these two poems, the lyrical genius of Milton is at its best.

*Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy and it is the greatest of its type in English literature. It was written to mourn the death of Milton's friend, Edward King, but it also contains serious criticism of contemporary religion and politics.

*Comus* marks the development of the Milton's mind from the merely pastoral and idyllic to the more serious and purposive tendency. The Puritanic element antagonistic to the prevailing looseness in religion and politics becomes more prominent. But in spite of its serious and didactic strain, it retains the lyrical tone which is so characteristic of Milton's early poetry.

Besides these poems a few great sonnets such as *When the Assault was intended to the City*, also belong to Milton's early period. Full of deeply-felt emotions, these sonnets are among the noblest in the English language, and they bridge the gulf between the lyrical tone of Milton's early poetry, and the deeply moral and didactic tone of his later poetry.

When the Civil War broke out in 1642, Milton threw himself heart and soul into the struggle against King Charles I. He devoted the best years of his life, when his poetical powers were at their peak, to this national movement. Finding himself unfit to fight as a soldier he became the Latin Secretary to Cromwell. This work he continued to do till 1649, when Charles I was defeated and Commonwealth was proclaimed under Cromwell. But when he returned to poetry to accomplish the ideal he had in his mind, Milton found himself completely blind. Moreover, after the death of Cromwell and the coming of Charles II to the throne, Milton became friendless. His own wife and daughters turned against him. But undaunted by all these misfortunes, Milton girded up his loins and wrote his greatest poetical works—*Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*.

“The subject-matter of *Paradise Lost* consists of the casting out from Heaven of the fallen angels, their planning of revenge in Hell, Satan's flight, Man's temptation and fall from grace, and the promise of redemption. Against this vast background Milton projects his own philosophy of the purposes of human existence, and attempts “to justify the ways of God to men.” On account of the richness and profusion of its imagery, descriptions of strange lands and seas, and the use of strange geographical names, *Paradise Lost* is called the last great Elizabethan poem. But its perfectly organized design, its firm outlines and Latinised diction make it essentially a product of the neo—classical or the Augustan period in English Literature. In *Paradise Lost* the most prominent is the figure of Satan who possesses the qualities of Milton himself, and who represents the indomitable heroism of the Puritans against Charles I.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

What                    though                    the                    field                    be                    lost?  
All                    is                    not                    lost;                    the                    unconquerable                    will,  
And                    study                    of                    revenge,                    immortal                    hate,  
And                    courage                    never                    to                    submit                    or                    yield  
And what is else, not to be overcome.

It is written in blank verse of the Elizabethan dramatist, but it is hardened and strengthened to suit the requirements of an epic poet.

*Paradise Regained* which deals with subject of *Temptation in the Wilderness* is written, unlike *Paradise Lost*, in the form of discussion and not action. Not so sublime as *Paradise Lost*, It has a quieter atmosphere, but it does not betray a decline in poetic power. The mood of the poet has become different. The central figure is Christ, having the Puritanic austere and stoic qualities rather than the tenderness which is generally associated with him.

In *Samson Agonistes* Milton deals with an ancient Hebrew legend of Samson, the mighty champion of Israel, now blind and scorned, working as a slave among Philistines. This tragedy, which is written on the Greek model, is charged with the tremendous personality of Milton himself, who in the character of the blind giant, Samson, surrounded by enemies, projects his own unfortunate experience in the reign of Charles II.

*Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves.*

The magnificent lyrics in this tragedy, which express the heroic faith of the long suffering Puritans, represent the summit of technical excellence achieved by Milton.

### (b) Jacobean and Caroline Drama

After Shakespeare the drama in England suffered and a decline during the reigns of James I and Charles I. The heights reached by Shakespeare could not be kept by later dramatists, and drama in the hands of Beaumont and Fletcher and others became, what may be called, 'decadent'. In other words, the real spirit of the Elizabethan drama disappeared, and only the outward show and trappings remained. For example, sentiment took the place of character; eloquent and moving speeches, instead of being subservient to the revelation of the fine shades of character, became important in themselves; dreadful deeds were described not with a view to throwing light on the working of the human heart as was done by Shakespeare, but to produce rhetorical effect on the audience. Moreover, instead of fortitude and courage, and sterner qualities, which were held in high esteem by the Elizabethan dramatists, resignation to fate expressed in the form of broken accents of pathos and woe, became the main characteristics of the hero. Whereas Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists took delight in action and the emotions associated with it, the Jacobean and Caroline dramatists gave expression to passive suffering and lack of mental and physical vigour. Moreover, whereas the Elizabethan dramatists were sometimes, coarse and showed bad taste, these later dramatists were positively and deliberately indecent. Instead of devoting all their capacity to fully illuminating the subject in hand, they made it as an instrument of exercising their own power of rhetoric and pedantry. Thus in the hands of these dramatists of the inferior type the romantic drama which had achieved great heights during the Elizabethan period, suffered a terrible decline, and when the Puritans closed the theatres in 1642, it died a natural death.

The greatest dramatist of the Jacobean period was Ben Jonson who has already been dealt with in the Renaissance Period, as much of his work belongs to it. The other dramatists of the

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Jacobean and Caroline periods are John Marston (1575-1634); Thomas Dekker (1570-1632); Thomas Heywood (1575-1650); Thomas Middleton (1580-1627); Cyril Tourneur (1575-1626); John Webster (1575-1625?); John Fletcher (1579-1625); Francis Beaumont (1584-1616); Philip Massinger (1583-1640); John Ford (1586-1639); and James Shirley (1596-1666).

John Marston wrote in a violent and extravagant style. His melodramas *Antonia and Mellida* and *Antonia's Revenge* are full of forceful and impressive passages. In *The Malcontent*, *The Dutch Courtezán*, and *Parasitaster, or Fawne*, Marston criticised the society in an ironic and lyrical manner. His best play is *Eastward Hoe*, an admirable comedy of manners, which portrays realistically the life of a tradesman, the inner life of a middle class household, the simple honesty of some and the vanity of others.

Thomas Dekker, unlike Marston, was gentle and free from coarseness and cynicism. Some of his plays possess grace and freshness which are not to be found even in the plays of Ben Jonson. He is more of a popular dramatist than any of his contemporaries, and he is at his best when portraying scenes from life, and describing living people with an irresistible touch of romanticism. The gayest of his comedies is *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, in which the hero, Simon Eyre, a jovial London shoemaker, and his shrewish wife are vividly described. In *Old Fortunates* Dekker's poetical powers are seen at their best. The scene in which the goddess Fortune appears with her train of crowned beggars and kings in chains, is full of grandeur. His best-known work, however, is *The Honest Whore*, in which the character of an honest courtesan is beautifully portrayed. The most original character in the play is her old father, Orlando Friscoboldo, a rough diamond. This play is characterised by liveliness, pure sentiments and poetry.

Thomas Heywood resembles very much Dekker in his gentleness and good temper. He wrote a large number of plays—two hundred and twenty—of which only twenty-four are extant. Most of his plays deal with the life of the cities. In *The Foure Prentices of London*, with the *Conquest of Jerusalem*, he flatters the citizens of London. The same note appears in his *Edward VI*, *The Troubles of Queene Elizabeth* and *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*. In the *Fair Maid of the West*, which is written in a patriotic vein, sea adventures and the life of an English port are described in a lively fashion. His best known play is *A Woman Kilde with Kindness*, a domestic tragedy written in a simple form, in which he gives us a gentle picture of a happy home destroyed by the wife's treachery, the husband's suffering and his banishment of his wife, her remorse and agony, and death at the moment when the husband has forgiven her. Instead of the spirit of vengeance as generally prevails in such domestic plays, it is free from any harshness and vindictiveness. In *The English Traveller* we find the same generosity and kindness. On account of his instinctive goodness and wide piety, Heywood was called by Lamb as a "sort of prose Shakespeare."

Thomas Middleton, like Dekker and Heywood, wrote about the city of London. But instead flattering the citizens, he criticised and ridiculed their follies like Ben Jonson. He is mainly the writer of comedies dealing the seamy side of London life, and the best-known of them are: *Michaelmas Terms*; *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *A Mad World*, *My Masters*, *Your Five Gallants*, *A Chaste Mayd in Cheapside*. They are full of swindlers and dupes. The dramatist shows a keen observation of real life and admirable dexterity in presenting it. In his later years Middleton turned to tragedy. *Women beware Women* deals with the scandalous crimes of the Italian courtesan Bianca Capello. Some tragedies or romantic dramas as *A Faire Quarrel*, *The Changeling* and *The Spanish Gipsie*, were written by Middleton in collaboration with the actor William Rowley.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Cyril Tourneur wrote mostly melodramas full of crimes and torture. His two gloomy dramas are: *The Revenge Tragedies*, and *The Atheist's Tragedie*, which, written in a clear and rapid style, have an intense dramatic effect.

John Webster wrote a number of plays, some in collaboration with others. His best-known plays are *The White Devil* or *Vittoria Corombona* and the *Duchess of Malfi* which are full of physical horrors. In the former play the crimes of the Italian beauty Vittoria Accorambona are described in a most fascinating manner. *The Duchess of Malfi* is the tragedy of the young widowed duchess who is driven to madness and death by her two brothers because she has married her steward Antonio. The play is full of pathos and touches of fine poetry. Though a melodrama full of horror and unbearable suffering, it has been raised to a lofty plane by the truly poetic gift of the dramatist who has a knack of coining unforgettable phrases.

John Fletcher wrote a few plays which made him famous. He then exploited his reputation to the fullest extent by organising a kind of workshop in which he wrote plays more rapidly in collaboration with other dramatists in order to meet the growing demand. The plays which he wrote in collaboration with Francis Beaumont are the comedies such as *The Scornful Ladie* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*; tragi-comedies like *Philaster*; pure tragedies such as *The Maides Tragedy* and *A King and no King*. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is the gayest and liveliest comedy of that time and it has such freshness that it seems to have been written only yesterday. *Philaster* and *The Maides Tragedy* are written in Shakespearean style, but they have more outward charm than real merit.

Fletcher alone wrote a number of plays of which the best known are *The Tragedies of Vanentinian*, *The Tragedie of Bonduca*, *The Loyal Subject*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*. His *Monsieur Thomas* and *The Wild Goose Chase* are fine comedies.

Philip Massinger wrote tragedies as *Thierry* and *Theodoret* and *The False One*; comedies as *The Little French Lawyer*, *The Spanish Curate* and *The Beggar's Bush*, in collaboration with Fletcher. Massinger combined his intellectualism with Fletcher's lively ease. It was Massinger who dominated the stage after Fletcher. He wrote thirty seven plays of which eighteen are extant. In his comedies we find the exaggerations or eccentricities which are the characteristics of Ben Jonson. In his tragedies we notice the romanticism of Fletcher. But the most individual quality of Massinger's plays is that they are plays of ideas, and he loves to stage oratorical debates and long pleadings before tribunals. His best comedies are *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, *The City Madam* and *The Guardian*; his important serious plays are *The Fatal Dowry*, *The Duke of Millaine*, *The Unnatural Combat*, *The Main of Honour*, *The Bond-Man*, *The Renegado*, *The Roman Actor*, and *The Picture*. Of all these *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is his most successful play, in which the chief character, the usurer, Sir Charles Overreach reminds us of Ben Jonson's Volpone. All the plays of Massinger show careful workmanship, though a great deterioration had crept in the art of drama at the time when he was writing. When not inspired he becomes monotonous, but he is always a conscientious writer.

John Ford, who was the contemporary of Massinger, collaborated with various dramatists. He was a true poet, but a fatalist, melancholy and gloomy person. Besides the historical play, *Perkin Warbeck*, he wrote *The Lover's Melancholy*, *'Tis Pity Shee's a Whore*, *The Broken Heart* and *Love's Sacrifice*, all of which show a skilful handling of emotions and grace of style. His decadent attitude is seen in the delight he takes in depicting suffering, but he occupies a high place as an artist.

James Shirley, who as Lamb called him, ‘the last of a great race’, though a prolific writer, shows no originality. His best comedies are *The Traytor*, *The Cardinall*, *The Wedding*, *Changes*, *Hyde Park*, *The Gamester* and *The Lady of Pleasure*, which realistically represent the contemporary manners, modes and literary styles. He also wrote tragi-comedies or romantic comedies, such as *Young Admirall*, *The Opportunitie*, and *The Imposture*. In all these Shirley continued the tradition formed by Fletcher, Tourneur and Webster, but he broke no new ground.

Besides these there were a number of minor dramatists, but the drama suffered a serious setback when the theatres were closed in 1642 by the order of the Parliament controlled by the Puritans. They were opened only after eighteen years later at the Restoration.

### (c) Jacobean and Caroline Prose

This period was rich in prose. The great prose writers were Bacon, Burton, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Tayler and Clarendon. English prose which had been formed into a harmonious and pliable instrument by the Elizabethans, began to be used in various ways, as narrative as well as a vehicle for philosophical speculation and scientific knowledge. For the first time the great scholars began to write in English rather than Latin. The greatest single influence which enriched the English prose was the Authorised Version of the Bible (English translation of the Bible), which was the result of the efforts of scholars who wrote in a forceful, simple and pure Anglo-Saxon tongue avoiding all that was rough, foreign and affected. So the Bible became the supreme example of earlier English prose-style—simple, plain and natural. As it was read by the people in general, its influence was all-pervasive.

Francis Bacon (1561-1628). Bacon belongs both to the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. He was a lawyer possessing great intellectual gifts. Ben Jonson wrote of him, ‘no man ever coughed or turned aside from him without a loss’. As a prose-writer he is the master of the aphoristic style. He has the knack of compressing his wisdom in epigrams which contain the quintessence of his rich experience of life in a most concentrated form. His style is clear, lucid but terse and that is why one has to make an effort to understand his meaning. It lacks spaciousness, ease and rhythm. The reader has always to be alert because each sentence is packed with meaning.

Bacon is best-known for his *Essays*, in which he has given his views about the art of managing men and getting on successfully in life. They may be considered as a kind of manual for statesmen and princes. The tone of the essay is that of a worldly man who wants to secure material success and prosperity. That is why their moral standard is not high.

Besides the *Essays*, Bacon wrote *Henry VII* the first piece of scientific history in the English language; and *The Advancement of Learning* which is a brilliant popular exposition of the cause of scientific investigation. Though Bacon himself did not make any great scientific discovery, he popularized science through his writings. On account of his being the intellectual giant of his time, he is credited with the authorship of the plays of Shakespeare.

Robert Burton (1577-1640) is known for his *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which is a book of its own type in the English language. In it he has analysed human melancholy, described its effect and prescribed its cure. But more than that the book deals with all the ills that flesh is heir to, and the author draws his material from writers, ancient as well as modern. It is written in a straightforward, simple and vigorous style, which at times is marked with rhythm and beauty.

Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) belonged entirely to a different category. With him the manner of writing is more important than the substance. He is, therefore, the first deliberate

stylist in the English language, the forerunner of Charles Lamb and Stevenson. Being a physician with a flair for writing, he wrote *Religio Medici* in which he set down his beliefs and thoughts, the religion of the medical man. In this book, which is written in an amusing, personal style, the conflict between the author's intellect and his religious beliefs, gives it a peculiar charm. Every sentence has the stamp of Browne's individuality. His other important prose work is *Hydriotaphia* or *The Urn Burial*, in which meditating on time and antiquity Browne reaches the heights of rhetorical splendour. He is greater as an artist than a thinker, and his prose is highly complex in its structure and almost poetic in richness of language.

Other writers of his period, who were, like Browne, the masters of rhetorical prose, were Milton, Jeremy Taylor and Clarendon. Most of Milton's prose writings are concerned with the questions at issue between the Parliament and the King. Being the champion of freedom in every form, he wrote a forceful tract *On the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, in which he strongly advocated the right to divorce. His most famous prose work is *Areopagitica* which was occasioned by a parliamentary order for submitting the press to censorship. Here Milton vehemently criticised the bureaucratic control over genius. Though as a pamphleteer Milton at times indulges in downright abuse, and he lacks humour and lightness of touch, yet there is that inherent sublimity in his prose writings, which we associate with him as a poet and man. When he touches a noble thought, the wings of his imagination lift him to majestic heights.

Opposed to Milton, the greatest writer in the parliamentary struggle was the Earl of Clarendon (1609-1674). His prose is stately, and he always writes with a bias which is rather offensive, as we find in his *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*.

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667), a bishop, made himself famous by his literary sermons. On account of the gentle charm of his language, the richness of his images, and his profoundly human imagination, Taylor is considered as one of the masters of English eloquence. His best prose famous book of devotion among English men and women.

Thus during this period we find English prose developing into a grandiloquent and rich instrument capable of expressing all types of ideas—scientific, religious, philosophic, poetic, and personal.

### Lecture 9

#### **The Restoration Period (1660-1700)**

After the Restoration in 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, there was a complete repudiation of the Puritan ideals and way of living. In English literature the period from 1660 to 1700 is called the period of Restoration, because monarchy was restored in England, and Charles II, the son of Charles I who had been defeated and beheaded, came back to England from his exile in France and became the King.

It is called the Age of Dryden, because Dryden was the dominating and most representative literary figure of the Age. As the Puritans who were previously controlling the country, and were supervising her literary and moral and social standards, were finally defeated, a reaction was

launched against whatever they held sacred. All restraints and discipline were thrown to the winds, and a wave of licentiousness and frivolity swept the country. Charles II and his followers who had enjoyed a gay life in France during their exile, did their best to introduce that type of foppery and looseness in England also. They renounced old ideals and demanded that English poetry and drama should follow the style to which they had become accustomed in the gaiety of Paris. Instead of having Shakespeare and the Elizabethans as their models, the poets and dramatists of the Restoration period began to imitate French writers and especially their vices.

The result was that the old Elizabethan spirit with its patriotism, its love of adventure and romance, its creative vigour, and the Puritan spirit with its moral discipline and love of liberty, became things of the past. For a time in poetry, drama and prose nothing was produced which could compare satisfactorily with the great achievements of the Elizabethans, of Milton, and even of minor writers of the Puritan age. But then the writers of the period began to evolve something that was characteristic of the times and they made two important contributions to English literature in the form of realism and a tendency to preciseness.

In the beginning realism took an ugly shape, because the writers painted the real pictures of the corrupt society and court. They were more concerned with vices rather than with virtues. The result was a coarse and inferior type of literature. Later this tendency to realism became more wholesome, and the writers tried to portray realistically human life as they found it—its good as well as bad side, its internal as well as external shape.

The tendency to preciseness which ultimately became the chief characteristic of the Restoration period, made a lasting contribution to English literature. It emphasised directness and simplicity of expression, and counteracted the tendency of exaggeration and extravagance which was encouraged during the Elizabethan and the Puritan ages. Instead of using grandiloquent phrases, involved sentences full of Latin quotations and classical allusions, the Restoration writers, under the influence of French writers, gave emphasis to reasoning rather than romantic fancy, and evolved an exact, precise way of writing, consisting of short, clear-cut sentences without any unnecessary word. The Royal Society, which was established during this period enjoined on all its members to use ‘a close, naked, natural way of speaking and writing, as near the mathematical plainness as they can’. Dryden accepted this rule for his prose, and for his poetry adopted the easiest type of verse-form—the heroic couplet. Under his guidance, the English writers evolved a style—precise, formal and elegant—which is called the classical style, and which dominated English literature for more than a century.

### (a) Restoration Poetry

John Dryden (1631-1700). The Restoration poetry was mostly satirical, realistic and written in the heroic couplet, of which Dryden was the supreme master. He was the dominating figure of the Restoration period, and he made his mark in the fields of poetry, drama and prose. In the field of poetry he was, in fact, the only poet worth mentioning. In his youth he came under the influence of Cowley, and his early poetry has the characteristic conceits and exaggerations of the metaphysical school. But in his later years he emancipated himself from the false taste and artificial style of the metaphysical writers, and wrote in a clear and forceful style which laid the foundation of the classical school of poetry in England.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

The poetry of Dryden can be conveniently divided under three heads—Political Satires, Doctrinal Poems and The Fables. Of his political satires, *Absolem and Achitophel* and *The Medal* are well-known. In *Absolem and Achitophel*, which is one of the greatest political satires in the English language, Dryden defended the King against the Earl of Shaftesbury who is represented as Achitophel. It contains powerful character studies of Shaftesbury and of the Duke of Buckingham who is represented as Zimri. *The Medal* is another satirical poem full of invective against Shaftesbury and MacFlecknoe. It also contains a scathing personal attack on Thomas Shadwell who was once a friend of Dryden.

The two great doctrinal poems of Dryden are *ReligioLaici* and *The Hind and the Panther*. These poems are neither religious nor devotional, but theological and controversial. The first was written when Dryden was a Protestant, and it defends the Anglican Church. The second written when Dryden had become a Catholic, vehemently defends Catholicism. They, therefore, show Dryden's power and skill of defending any position he took up, and his mastery in presenting an argument in verse.

The Fables, which were written during the last years of Dryden's life, show no decrease in his poetic power. Written in the form of a narrative, they entitle Dryden to rank among the best story-tellers in verse in England. *The Palamon and Arcite*, which is based on Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, gives us an opportunity of comparing the method and art of a fourteenth century poet with one belonging to the seventeenth century. Of the many miscellaneous poems of Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis* is a fine example of his sustained narrative power. His *Alexander's Feast* is one of the best odes in the English language.

The poetry of Dryden possess all the characteristics of the Restoration period and is therefore thoroughly representative of that age. It does not have the poetic glow, the spiritual fervour, the moral loftiness and philosophical depth which were sadly lacking in the Restoration period. But it has the formalism, the intellectual precision, the argumentative skill and realism which were the main characteristics of that age. Though Dryden does not reach great poetic heights, yet here and there he gives us passages of wonderful strength and eloquence. His reputation lies in his being great as a satirist and reasoner in verse. In fact in these two capacities he is still the greatest master in English literature. Dryden's greatest contribution to English poetry was his skilful use of the heroic couplet, which became the accepted measure of serious English poetry for many years.

### (b) Restoration Drama

In 1642 the theatres were closed by the authority of the parliament which was dominated by Puritans and so no good plays were written from 1642 till the Restoration (coming back of monarchy in England with the accession of Charles II to the throne) in 1660 when the theatres were re-opened. The drama in England after 1660, called the Restoration drama, showed entirely new trends on account of the long break with the past. Moreover, it was greatly affected by the spirit of the new age which was deficient in poetic feeling, imagination and emotional approach to life, but laid emphasis on prose as the medium of expression, and intellectual, realistic and critical approach to life and its problems. As the common people still under the influence of Puritanism had no love for the theatres, the dramatists had to cater to the taste of the aristocratic class which was highly fashionable, frivolous, cynical and sophisticated. The result was that unlike the Elizabethan drama which had a mass appeal, had its roots in the life of the common people and could be legitimately called the national drama, the Restoration drama had none of

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

these characteristics. Its appeal was confined to the upper strata of society whose taste was aristocratic, and among which the prevailing fashions and etiquettes were foreign and extravagant.

As imagination and poetic feelings were regarded as ‘vulgar enthusiasm’ by the dictators of the social life. But as ‘actual life’ meant the life of the aristocratic class only, the plays of this period do not give us a picture of the whole nation. The most popular form of drama was the Comedy of Manners which portrayed the sophisticated life of the dominant class of society—its gaiety, foppiness, insolence and intrigue. Thus the basis of the Restoration drama was very narrow. The general tone of this drama was most aptly described by Shelley:

Comedy loses its ideal universality: wit succeeds humour; we laugh from self-complacency and triumph; instead of pleasure, malignity, sarcasm and contempt, succeed to sympathetic merriment; we hardly laugh, but we smile. Obscenity, which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty of life, becomes, from the very veil which it assumes, more active if less disgusting; it is a monster for which the corruption of society for ever brings forth new food, which it devours in secret.

These new trends in comedy are seen in Dryden’s *Wild Gallant* (1663), Etherege’s (1635-1691) *The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub* (1664), Wycherley’s *The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer*, and the plays of Vanbrugh and Farquhar. But the most gifted among all the Restoration dramatist was William Congreve (1670-1720) who wrote all his best plays he was thirty years of age. His well-known comedies are *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700).

It is mainly on account of his remarkable style that Congreve is put at the head of the Restoration drama. No English dramatist has even written such fine prose for the stage as Congreve did. He balances, polishes and sharpens his sentences until they shine like chiselled instruments for an electrical experiment, through which passes the current in the shape of his incisive and scintillating wit. As the plays of Congreve reflect the fashions and foibles of the upper classes whose moral standards had become lax, they do not have a universal appeal, but as social documents their value is very great. Moreover, though these comedies were subjected to a very severe criticism by the Romantics like Shelley and Lamb, they are now again in great demand and there is a revival of interest in Restoration comedy.

In tragedy, the Restoration period specialised in Heroic Tragedy, which dealt with themes of epic magnitude. The heroes and heroines possessed superhuman qualities. The purpose of this tragedy was didactic—to inculcate virtues in the shape of bravery and conjugal love. It was written in the ‘heroic couplet’ in accordance with the heroic convention derived from France that ‘heroic metre’ should be used in such plays. In it declamation took the place of natural dialogue. Moreover, it was characterised by bombast, exaggeration and sensational effects wherever possible. As it was not based on the observations of life, there was no realistic characterisation, and it inevitably ended happily, and virtue was always rewarded.

The chief protagonist and writer of heroic tragedy was Dryden. Under his leadership the heroic tragedy dominated the stage from 1660 to 1678. His first experiment in this type of drama was his play *Tyrannic love*, and in *The Conquest of Granada* he brought it to its culminating point. But then a severe condemnation of this grand manner of writing tragedy was started by certain critics and playwrights, of which Dryden was the main target. It has its effect on Dryden who in his next play *Aurangzeb* exercised greater restraint and decorum, and in the Prologue to

this play he admitted the superiority of Shakespeare's method, and his own weariness of using the heroic couplet which is unfit to describe human passions adequately: He confesses that he:

*Grows weary of his long-loved mistress Rhyme,  
Passions too fierce to be in fetters bound,  
And Nature flies him like enchanted ground;  
What verse can do, he has performed in this  
Which he presumes the most correct of his;  
But spite of all his pride, a secret shame  
Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name.*

Dryden's altered attitude is seen more clearly in his next play *All for Love* (1678). Thus he writes in the preface: "In my style I have professed to imitate Shakespeare; which that I might perform more freely, I have disencumbered myself from rhyme." He shifts his ground from the typical heroic tragedy in this play, drops rhyme and questions the validity of the unities of time, place and action in the conditions of the English stage. He also gives up the literary rules observed by French dramatists and follows the laws of drama formulated by the great dramatists of England. Another important way in which Dryden turns himself away from the conventions of the heroic tragedy, is that he does not give a happy ending to this play.

### (c) Restoration Prose

The Restoration period was deficient in poetry and drama, but in prose it holds its head much higher. Of course, it cannot be said that the Restoration prose enjoys absolute supremacy in English literature, because on account of the fall of poetic power, lack of inspiration, preference of the merely practical and prosaic subjects and approach to life, it could not reach those heights which it attained in the preceding period in the hands of Milton and Browne, or in the succeeding ages in the hands of Lamb, Hazlitt, Ruskin and Carlyle. But it has to be admitted that it was during the Restoration period that English prose was developed as a medium for expressing clearly and precisely average ideas and feelings about miscellaneous matters for which prose is really meant. For the first time a prose style was evolved which could be used for plain narrative, argumentative exposition of intricate subjects, and the handling of practical business. The elaborate Elizabethan prose was unsuited to telling a plain story. The epigrammatic style of Bacon, the grandiloquent prose of Milton and the dreamy harmonies of Browne could not be adapted to scientific, historical, political and philosophical writings, and, above all, to novel-writing. Thus with the change in the temper of the people, a new type of prose, as was developed in the Restoration period, was essential.

As in the fields of poetry and drama, Dryden was the chief leader and practitioner of the new prose. In his greatest critical work *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden presented a model of the new prose, which was completely different from the prose of Bacon, Milton and Browne. He wrote in a plain, simple and exact style, free from all exaggerations. His Fables and the Preface to them are fine examples of the prose style which Dryden was introducing. This style is, in fact, the most admirably suited to strictly prosaic purposes—correct but not tame, easy but not slipshod, forcible but not unnatural, eloquent but not declamatory, graceful but not lacking in vigour. Of course, it does not have charm and an atmosphere which we associate with imaginative writing, but Dryden never professed to provide that also. On the whole, for general purposes, for which prose medium is required, the style of Dryden is the most suitable.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Other writers, of the period, who came under the influence of Dryden, and wrote in a plain, simple but precise style, were Sir William Temple, John Tillotson and George Saville better known as Viscount Halifax. Another famous writer of the period was Thomas Sprat who is better known for the distinctness with which he put the demand for new prose than for his own writings. Being a man of science himself he published his *History of the Royal Society* (1667) in which he expressed the public demand for a popularised style free from “this vicious abundance of phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of tongue.” The Society expected from all its members “a close, natural way of speaking—positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of artisans, country men and merchants before that of wits and scholars.”

Though these writers wrote under the influence of Dryden, they also, to a certain extent, helped in the evolution of the new prose style by their own individual approach. That is why the prose of the Restoration period is free from monotony.

John Bunyan (1628-1688). Next to Dryden, Bunyan was the greatest prose-writer of the period. Like Milton, he was imbued with the spirit of Puritanism, and in fact, if Milton is the greatest poet of Puritanism, Bunyan is its greatest story-teller. To him also goes the credit of being the precursor of the English novel. His greatest work is *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Just as Milton wrote his *Paradise Lost* “to justify the ways to God to men”, Bunyan's aim in *The Pilgrim's Progress* was “to lead men and women into God's way, the way of salvation, through a simple parable with homely characters and exciting events”. Like Milton, Bunyan was endowed with a highly developed imaginative faculty and artistic instinct. Both were deeply religious, and both, though they distrusted fiction, were the masters of fiction. *Paradise Lost* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* have still survived among thousands of equally fervent religious works of the seventeenth century because both of them are masterpieces of literary art, which instruct as well please even those who have no faith in those instructions.

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan has described the pilgrimage of the Christian to the Heavenly City, the trials, tribulations and temptations which he meets in the way in the form of events and characters, who abstract and help him, and his ultimately reaching the goal. It is written in the form of allegory. The style is terse, simple and vivid, and it appeals to the cultured as well as to the unlettered. As Dr. Johnson remarked: “This is the great merit of the book, that the most cultivated man cannot find anything to praise more highly, and the child knows nothing more amusing.” *The Pilgrim's Progress* has all the basic requirements of the traditional type of English novel. It has a good story; the characters are interesting and possess individuality and freshness; the conversation is arresting; the descriptions are vivid; the narrative continuously moves towards a definite end, above all, it has a literary style through which the writer's personality clearly emanates. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a work of superb literary genius, and it is unsurpassed as an example of plain English.

Bunyan's other works are: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), a kind of spiritual autobiography; *The Holy War*, which like *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory, but the characters are less alive, and there is less variety; *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680) written in the form of a realistic novel, gives a picture of low life, and it is second in value and literary significance to *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The prose of Bunyan shows clearly the influence of the English translation of the Bible (The Authorized Version). He was neither a scholar, nor did he belong to any literary school; all that

he knew and learned was derived straight from the English Bible. He was an unlettered country tinker believing in righteousness and in disgust with the corruption and degradation that prevailed all around him. What he wrote came straight from his heart, and he wrote in the language which came natural to him. Thus his works born of moral earnestness and extreme sincerity have acquired true literary significance and wide and enduring popularity. It is quite true to call him the pioneer of the modern novel, because he had the qualities of the great storyteller, deep insight into character, humour, pathos, and the visualising imagination of a dramatic artist.

### Lecture 10

#### Eighteenth-Century Literature

The Eighteenth Century in England is called the Classical Age or the Augustan Age in literature. It is also called the Age of Good Sense or the Age of Reason. Though Dryden belonged to the seventeenth century, he is also included in the Classical or Augustan Age, as during his time the characteristics of his age had manifested themselves and he himself represented them to a great extent. Other great literary figures who dominated this age successively were Pope and Dr. Johnson, and so the Classical Age is divided into three distinct periods—the Ages of Dryden, Pope and Dr. Johnson. In this chapter which is devoted to the eighteenth-century literature in England, we will deal with the Ages of Pope and Johnson. The Age of Dryden has already been dealt with in the preceding chapter, entitled “The Restoration Period.”

The Eighteenth Century is called the Classical Age in English literature on account of three reasons. In the first place, the term ‘classic’, refers in general, applies to writers of the highest rank in any nation. This term was first applied to the works of the great Greek and Roman writers, like Homer and Virgil. As the writers of the eighteenth century in England tried to follow the simple and noble methods of the great ancient writers, they began to be called Classical writers. In the second place, in every national literature there is a period when a large number of writers produce works of great merit; such a period is often called the Classical Period or Age. For example, the reign of Augustus is called the Classical Age of Rome; and the Age of Dante is called the Classical Age of Italian literature. As during the eighteenth century in England there was an abundance of literary productions, the critics named it the Classical Age in English literature. In the third place, during this period the English writers rebelled against the exaggerated and fantastic style of writing prevalent during the Elizabethan and Puritan ages, and they demanded that poetry, drama and prose should follow exact rules. In this they were influenced by French writers, especially by Boileau and Rapin, who insisted on precise methods of writing poetry, and who professed to have discovered their rules in the classics of Horace and Aristotle. The eighteenth century is called the Classical Age, because the writers followed the ‘classicism’ of the ancient writers, which was taken in a narrow sense to imply fine polish and external elegance. But as the eighteenth century writers in England followed the ancient classical writers only in their external performance, and lacked their sublimity and grandeur, their classicism is called pseudo-classicism i.e., a false or sham classicism.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

As the term Classical Age is, therefore, too dignified for writers of the eighteenth century in England, who imitated only the outward trapping of the ancient classical writers, and could not get at their inner spirit, this age is preferably called the Augustan Age. This term was chosen by the writers of the eighteenth century themselves, who saw in Pope, Addison, Swift, Johnson and Burke the modern parallels to Horace, Virgil, Cicero, and other brilliant writers who made Roman literature famous during the reign of Emperor Augustus. Of course, to term this as the *Augustan Age* is also not justified because the writers of this period could not compare favourable with those of the Augustan Age in Latin literature. But these terms—the Classical Age and the Augustan Age—have become current, and so this age is generally called by these terms.

The eighteenth century is also called the Age of Reason or the Age of Good Sense, because the people thought that they could stand on their own legs and be guided in the conduct of their affairs by the light of their own reason unclouded by respect for Ancient precedent. They began to think that undue respect for authority of the Ancients was a great source of error, and therefore in every matter man should apply his own reason and commonsense. Even in literature where the prospect for classical art forms and the rules for writing in those forms gave the defenders of the Ancients a decided advantages, critics could declare that the validity of the rules of art was derived from Reason rather than from Ancient Authority. Though in the seventeenth century Sir Thomas Browne who stood against Ancient Authority in secular matters, declared that in religion “haggard and unreclaimed Reason must stoop unto the lure of Faith”. John Locke, the great philosopher, had opined that there was no war between Faith and Reason. He declared in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690), “Faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind; which if it be regulated as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it.”

It was widely assumed during the eighteenth century that since every man is competent to decide, by reference to his own reason, on any point of natural or moral philosophy, every man becomes his own philosopher. So the need of the expert or specialist vanishes. Moreover, as all men were assumed to be equally endowed with the power of reasoning, it followed that when they reasoned on any given premises they must reach the same conclusion. That conclusion was believed to have universal value and direct appeal to everyone belonging to any race or age. Moreover, it should be the conclusion reached by earlier generation since reason must work the same way in every period of history. When Pope said of wit that it is “Nature to advantage dress’d, what oft was thought but n’er so well express’d,” and when Dr. Johnson remarked about Gray’s *Elegy* that “it abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo”, they were simply giving the literary application of this belief that the highest type of art is that which can be understood immediately, which has the widest appeal, which is free from the expression of personal idiosyncrasy, and which deals with what is general and universal rather than with what is individual and particular.

This was the temper of the eighteenth century. If it is called The Age of Reason or The Age of Good Sense, it is because in this age it was assumed that in reasoning power all men are and have always been equal. It was an age which took a legitimate pride in modern discoveries based upon observation and reason, and which delighted to reflect that those discoveries had confirmed the ancient beliefs that there is an order and harmony in the universe, that it is worked on rational principles, that each created thing has its allowed position and moved in its appointed spheres. It

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

was, in short, an age which implicitly believed in the Biblical saying: "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good."

Now let us consider the literary characteristics of this age. In the previous ages which we have dealt with, it were the poetical works which were given prominence. Now, for the first time in the history of English literature, prose occupies the front position. As it was the age of social, political religious and literary controversies in which the prominent writers took an active part, and a large number of pamphlets, journals and magazines were brought out in order to cater to the growing need of the masses who had begun to read and take interest in these controversial matters, poetry was considered inadequate for such a task, and hence there was a rapid development of prose. In fact the prose writers of this age excel the poets in every respect. The graceful and elegant prose of Addison's essays, the terse style of Swift's satires, the artistic perfection of Fielding's novels, the sonorous eloquence of Gibbon's history, and the oratorical style of Burke, have no equal in the poetical works of the age. In fact, poetry also had become prosaic, because it was no longer used for lofty and sublime purposes, but, like prose, its subject-matter had become criticism, satire, controversy and it was also written in the form of the essay which was the common literary form: Poetry became polished, witty and artificial, but it lacked fire, fine feelings, enthusiasm, the poetic glow of Elizabethan Age and the moral earnestness of Puritanism. In fact, it became more interested in the portrayal of actual life, and distrusted inspiration and imagination. The chief literary glory of the age was, therefore, not poetry, but prose which in the hands of great writers developed into an excellent medium capable of expressing clearly every human interest and emotion.

The two main characteristics of the Restoration period—Realism and Precision—were carried to further perfection during the eighteenth century. They are found in their excellent form in the poetry of Pope, who perfected the heroic couplet, and in the prose of Addison who developed it into a clear, precise and elegant form of expression. The third characteristic of this age was the development of satire as a form of literature, which resulted from the unfortunate union of politics with literature. The Whigs and the Tories—members of two important political parties which were constantly contending to control the government of the country—used and rewarded the writers for satirising their enemies and undermining their reputation. Moreover, as a satire is concerned mainly with finding fault with the opponents, and is destructive in its intention, it cannot reach the great literary heights. Thus the literature of the age, which is mainly satirical cannot be favourably compared with great literature. One feels that these writers could have done better if they had kept themselves clear of the topical controversies, and had devoted their energies to matters of universal import.

Another important feature of this age was the origin and development of the novel. This new literary form, which gained great popularity in the succeeding ages, and which at present holds the prominent place, was fed and nourished by great masters like Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollet and others who laid its secure foundations. The realism of the age and the development of an excellent prose style greatly helped in the evolution of the novel during the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth century was deficient in drama, because the old Puritanic prejudice against the theatre continued, and the court also withdrew its patronage. Goldsmith and Sheridan were the only writers who produced plays having literary merit.

Another important thing which is to be considered with regard to the eighteenth century literature is that it was only during the early part of it—the Age of Pope, that the classical rules and ideals reigned supreme. In the later part of it—the Age of Johnson—cracks began to appear in the edifice of classicism, in the form of revolts against its ideals, and a revival of the Romantic tendency which was characteristic of the Elizabethan period.

As the eighteenth century is a long period, it will be dealt with in different chapters entitled—The Age of Pope, The Age of Johnson, Eighteenth Century Novel and Eighteenth Century Drama.

### **The Age of Pope (1700-1744)**

The earlier part of the eighteenth century or the Augustan Age in English literature is called the Age of Pope, because Pope was the dominating figure in that period. Though there were a number of other important writers like Addison and Swift, but Pope was the only one who devoted himself completely to literature. Moreover, he represented in himself all the main characteristics of his age, and his poetry served as a model to others.

#### **(a) Poetry**

It was the Classical school of poetry which dominated the poetry of the Age of Pope. During this age the people were disgusted with the profligacy and frivolity of the Restoration period, and they insisted upon those elementary decencies of life and conduct which were looked at with contempt by the preceding generation. Moreover, they had no sympathy for the fanaticism and religious zeal of the Puritans who were out to ban even the most innocent means of recreation. So they wanted to follow the middle path in everything and steer clear of the emotional as well as moral excesses. They insisted on the role of intelligence in everything. The poets of this period are deficient on the side of emotion and imagination. Dominated by intellect, poetry of this age is commonly didactic and satirical, a poetry of argument and criticism, of politics and personalities.

In the second place, the poets of this age are more interested in the town, and the ‘cultural’ society. They have no sympathy for the humbler aspects of life—the life of the villagers, the shepherds; and no love for nature, the beautiful flowers, the songs of birds, and landscape as we find in the poets of the Romantic period. Though they preached a virtuous life, they would not display any feeling which smacked of enthusiasm and earnestness. Naturally they had no regard for the great poets of the human heart—Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. They had no attachment for the Middle Ages and their tales of chivalry, adventure and visionary idealism. Spenser, therefore, did not find favour with them.

In the poetry of this age, form became more important than substance. This love of superficial polish led to the establishment of a highly artificial and conventional style. The closed couplet became the only possible form for serious work in verse. Naturally poetry became monotonous, because the couplet was too narrow and inflexible to be made the vehicle of high passion and strong imagination. Moreover, as great emphasis was laid on the imitation of ancient writers, originality was discouraged, and poetry lost touch with the real life of the people.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Prose being the prominent medium of expression, the rules of exactness, precision and clarity, which were insisted in the writing of prose, also began to be applied to poetry. It was demanded of the poet to say all that he had to say in a plain simple and clear language. The result was that the quality of suggestiveness which adds so much to the beauty and worth of poetry was sadly lacking in the poetry of this age. The meaning of poetry was all on the surface, and there was nothing which required deep study and varied interpretation.

Alexandar Pope (1688-1744). Pope is considered as the greatest poet of the Classical period. He is 'prince of classicism' as Prof. Etton calls him. He was an invalid, of small stature and delicate constitution, whose bad nerves and cruel headaches made his life, in his own phrase, a 'long disease'. Moreover, being a Catholic he had to labour under various restrictions. But the wonder is that in spite of his manifold handicaps, this small, ugly man has left a permanent mark on the literature of his age. He was highly intellectual, extremely ambitious and capable of tremendous industry. These qualities brought him to the front rank of men of letters, and during his lifetime he was looked upon as a model poet.

The main quality of Pope's poetry is its correctness. It was at the age of twenty-three that he published his *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and since then till the end of his life he enjoyed prodigious reputation. In this essay Pope insists on following the rules discovered by the Ancients, because they are in harmony with Nature:

*Those rules of old discovered, not devised  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodised.*

Pope's next work, *The Rape of the Lock*, is in some ways his masterpiece. It is 'mock heroic' poem in which he celebrated the theme of the stealth, by Lord Petre of lock of hair from the head of Miss Arabella. Though the poem is written in a jest and deals with a very insignificant event, it is given the form of an epic, investing this frivolous event with mock seriousness and dignity.

By this time Pope had perfected the heroic couplet, and he made use of his technical skill in translating Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* which meant eleven years' very hard work. The reputation which Pope now enjoyed created a host of jealous rivals whom he severely criticised and ridiculed in *The Dunciad*. This is Pope's greatest satire in which he attacked all sorts of literary incompetence. It is full of cruel and insulting couplets on his enemies. His next great poem was *The Essay on Man* (1732-34), which is full of brilliant oft-quoted passages and lines. His later works—*Imitations of Horace and Epistle*—are also satires and contain biting attacks on his enemies.

Though Pope enjoyed a tremendous reputation during his lifetime and for some decades after his death, he was so bitterly attacked during the nineteenth century that it was doubted whether Pope was a poet at all. But in the twentieth century this reaction subsided, and now it is admitted by great critics that though much that Pope wrote is prosaic, not of a very high order, yet a part of his poetry is undoubtedly indestructible. He is the supreme master of the epigrammatic style, of condensing an idea into a line or couplet. Of course, the thoughts in his poetry are commonplace, but they are given the most appropriate and perfect expression. The result is that many of them have become proverbial sayings in the English language. For example:

*Who shall decide when doctors disagree?  
Thou wert my guide, philosopher, and friend.*

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Know        then        thyself,        presume        not        God        to        scan;  
The        proper        study        of        mankind        is        man.  
Hope        springs        eternal        in        the        human        breast;  
*Man never is, but always to be, blest.*

Minor Poets of the Age of Pope. During his age Pope was by far the greatest of all poets. There were a few minor poets—Matthew Prior, John Gay, Edward Young, Thomas Parnell and Lady Winchelsea.

Matthew Prior (1664-1721), who was a diplomat and active politician wrote two long poems: *Solomon on the Vanity of The World* and *Alma or the Progress of the Mind*. These are serious poems, but the reputation of Prior rests on ‘light verse’ dealing with trifling matters. He is not merely a light-hearted jester, but a true humanist, with sense of tears as well as laughter as is seen in the “Lines written in the beginning of Mezeray’s *History of France*’.

John Gay (1685-1732) is the master of vivid description of rural scenes as well of the delights of the town. Like Prior he is full of humour and good temper. As a writer of lyrics, and in the handling of the couplet, he shows considerable technical skill. His best-known works are: - *Rural Sports*; *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*; *Black-Eyed Susan* and some *Fables*.

Prior and Gay were the followers of Pope, and after Pope, they are the two excellent guides to the life of eighteenth century London. The other minor poets, Edward Young, Thomas Parnell and Lady Winchelsea, belonged more to the new Romantic spirit than to the classical spirit in their treatment of external nature, though they were unconscious of it.

Edward Young (1683-1765) in his *Universal Passions* showed himself as skilful a satirist as Pope. His best-known work is *The Night Thoughts* which, written in blank verse, shows considerable technical skill and deep thought.

Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) excelled in translations. His best known works are the *The Night-Piece on Death* and *Hymn to Contentment*, which have a freshness of outlook and metrical skill.

Lady Winchelsea (1660-1725), though a follower of Pope, showed more sincerity and genuine feeling for nature than any other poet of that age. Her *Nocturnal Reverie* may be considered as the pioneer of the nature poetry of the new Romantic age.

To sum up, the poetry of the age of Pope is not of a high order, but it has distinct merits—the finished art of its satires; the creation of a technically beautiful verse; and the clarity and succinctness of its expression.

### (b) Prose of the Age of Pope

The great prose writers of the Age of Pope were Defoe, Addison, Steele and Swift. The prose of this period exhibits the Classical qualities—clearness, vigour and direct statement.

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731) is the earliest literary journalist in the English language. He wrote on all sorts of subjects—social, political, literary, and brought out about 250 publications. He owes his importance, in literature, however, mainly to his works of fiction which were simply the offshoots of his general journalistic enterprises. As a journalist he was fond of writing about the lives of famous people who had just died, and of notorious adventurers and criminals. At the age of sixty he turned his attention to the writing of prose fiction, and published his first novel—

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

*Robinson Crusoe*—the book by which he is universally known. It was followed by other works of fiction—*The Memoirs of a Cavalier*, *Captain Singleton*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, *Roxana* and *Journal of the Plague Year*.

In these works of fiction Defoe gave his stories an air of reality and convinced his readers of their authenticity. That is why they are appropriately called by Sir Leslie Stephen as 'Fictitious biographies' or "History minus the Facts'. All Defoe's fictions are written in the biographical form. They follow no system and are narrated in a haphazard manner which give them a semblance of reality and truth. His stories, told in the plain, matter-of-fact, business-like way, appropriate to stories of actual life, hence they possess extraordinary minute realism which is their distinct feature. Here his homely and colloquial style came to his help. On account of all these qualities Defoe is credited with being the originator of the English novel. As a writer of prose his gift of narrative and description is masterly. As he never wrote with any deliberate artistic intention, he developed a natural style which made him one of the masters of English prose.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was the most powerful and original genius of his age. He was highly intellectual but on account of some radical disorder in his system and the repeated failures which he had to face in the realisation of his ambition to rise in public life, made him a bitter, melancholy and sardonic figure. He took delight in flouting conventions, and undermining the reputation of his opponents. His best-known work, *Gulliver's Travels*, which is a very popular children's book, is also a bitter attack on contemporary political and social life in particular, and on the meanness and littleness of man in general. *The Tale of a Tub* which, like *Gulliver's Travels*, is written in the form of an allegory, and exposes the weakness of the main religious beliefs opposed to Protestant religion, is also a satire upon all science and philosophy. His *Journal to Stella* which was written to Esther Johnson whom Swift loved, is not only an excellent commentary on contemporary characters and political events, by one of the most powerful and original minds of the age, but in love passages, and purely personal descriptions, it reveals the real tenderness which lay concealed in the depths of his fierce and domineering nature.

Swift was a profound pessimist. He was essentially a man of his time in his want of spiritual quality, in his distrust of the visionary and the extravagant, and in his thoroughly materialistic view of life. As a master of prose-style, which is simple, direct and colloquial, and free from the ornate and rhetorical elements, Swift has few rivals in the whole range of English literature. As a satirist his greatest and most effective weapon is irony. Though apparently supporting a cause which he is really opposing, he pours ridicule upon it until its very foundations are shaken. The finest example, of irony is to be found in his pamphlet—*The Battle of Books*, in which he championed the cause of the Ancients against the Moderns. The mock heroic description of the great battle in the King's Library between the rival hosts is a masterpiece of its kind.

Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) who worked in collaboration, were the originators of the periodical essay. Steele who was more original led the way by founding *The Tatler*, the first of the long line of eighteenth century periodical essays. This was followed by the most famous of them *The Spectator*, in which Addison, who had formerly contributed to Steele's *Tatler*, now became the chief partner. It began on March 1, 1711, and ran till December 20, 1714 with a break of about eighteen months. In its complete form it

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

contains 635 essays. Of these Addison wrote 274 and Steele 240; the remaining 121 were contributed by various friends.

The Characters of Steele and Addison were curiously contrasted. Steele was an emotional, full-blooded kind of man, reckless and dissipated but fundamentally honest and good-hearted. What there is of pathos and sentiment, and most of what there is of humour in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* are his. Addison, on the other hand, was an urbane, polished gentleman of exquisite refinement of taste. He was shy, austere, pious and righteous. He was a quiet and accurate observer of manners of fashions in life and conversation.

The purpose of the writings of Steele and Addison was ethical. They tried to reform society through the medium of the periodical essay. They set themselves as moralistic to break down two opposed influences—that of the profligate Restoration tradition of loose living and loose thinking on the one hand, and that of Puritan fanaticism and bigotry on the other. They performed this work in a gentle, good-humoured manner, and not by bitter invective. They made the people laugh at their own follies and thus get rid of them. So they were, to a great extent, responsible for reforming the conduct of their contemporaries in social and domestic fields. Their aim was moral as well as educational. Thus they discussed in a light-hearted and attractive manner art, philosophy, drama, poetry, and in so doing guided and developed the taste of the people. For example, it was by his series of eighteen articles on *Paradise Lost*, that Addison helped the English readers have a better appreciation of Milton and his work.

In another direction the work of Addison and Steele proved of much use. Their character studies in the shape of the members of the Spectator Club—Sir Roger de Coverley and others—presented actual men moving amid real scenes and taking part in various incidents and this helped in the development of genuine novel.

Both Steele and Addison were great masters of prose. Their essays are remarkable as showing the growing perfection of the English language. Of the two, Addison was a greater master of the language. He cultivated a highly cultured and graceful style—a style which can serve as a model. Dr. Johnson very aptly remarked: “Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.” And again he said: “Give nights and days, Sir, to the study of Addison if you mean to be a good writer, or what is more worth, an honest man.”

### Lecturer 11

#### The Age of Johnson (1744-1784)

The later half of the eighteenth century, which was dominated by Dr. Samuel Johnson, is called the *Age of Johnson*. Johnson died in 1784, and from that time the Classical spirit in English literature began to give place to the Romantic spirit, though officially the Romantic Age started from the year 1798 when Wordsworth and Coleridge published the famous *Lyrical Ballads*. Even during the Age of Johnson, which was predominantly classical, cracks had begun to appear in the solid wall of classicism and there were clear signs of revolt in favour of the Romantic spirit. This was specially noticeable in the field of poetry. Most of the poets belonging to the *Age of Johnson* may be termed as the precursors of the Romantic Revival. That is why the *Age of Johnson* is also called the *Age of Transition* in English literature.

### (a) Poets of the Age of Johnson

As has already been pointed out, the Age of Johnson in English poetry is an age of transition and experiment which ultimately led to the Romantic Revival. Its history is the history of the struggle between the old and the new, and of the gradual triumph of the new. The greatest protagonist of classicism during this period was Dr. Johnson himself, and he was supported by Goldsmith. In the midst of change these two held fast to the classical ideals, and the creative work of both of them in the field of poetry was imbued with the classical spirit. As Macaulay said, "Dr. Johnson took it for granted that the kind of poetry which flourished in his own time and which he had been accustomed to hear praised from his childhood, was the best kind of poetry, and he not only upheld its claims by direct advocacy of its canons, but also consistently opposed every experiment in which, as in the ballad revival, he detected signs of revolt against it." Johnson's two chief poems, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, are classical on account of their didacticism, their formal, rhetorical style, and their adherence to the closed couplet.

Goldsmith was equally convinced that the classical standards of writing poetry were the best and that they had attained perfection during the Augustan Age. All that was required of the poets was to imitate those standards. According to him "Pope was the limit of classical literature." In his opposition to the blank verse, Goldsmith showed himself fundamentally hostile to change. His two important poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, which are versified pamphlets on political economy, are classical in spirit and form. They are written in the closed couplet, are didactic, and have pompous phraseology. These poems may be described as the last great work of the outgoing, artificial eighteenth century school, though even in them, if we study them minutely, we perceive the subtle touches of the new age of Romanticism especially in their treatment of nature and rural life.

Before we consider the poets of the Age of Johnson, who broke from the classical tradition and followed the new Romantic trends, let us first examine what Romanticism stood for. Romanticism was opposed to Classicism on all vital points. For instance, the main characteristics of classical poetry were: (i) it was mainly the product of intelligence and was especially deficient in emotion and imagination; (ii) it was chiefly the town poetry; (iii) it had no love for the mysterious, the supernatural, or what belonged to the dim past; (iv) its style was formal and artificial; (v) it was written in the closed couplet; (vi) it was fundamentally didactic; (vii) it insisted on the writer to follow the prescribed rules and imitate the standard models of good writing. The new poetry which showed romantic leanings was opposed to all these points. For instance, its chief characteristics were: (i) it encouraged emotion, passion and imagination in place of dry intellectuality; (ii) it was more interested in nature and rustic life rather than in town life; (iii) it revived the romantic spirit—love of the mysterious, the supernatural, the dim past; (iv) it opposed the artificial and formal style, and insisted on simple and natural forms of expression; (v) it attacked the supremacy of the closed couplet and encouraged all sorts of metrical experiments; (vi) its object was not didactic but the expression of the writer's experience for its own sake; (vii) it believed in the liberty of the poet to choose the theme and the manner of his writing.

The poets who showed romantic leanings, during the Age of Johnson, and who may be described as the precursors or harbingers of the Romantic Revival were James Thomson,

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Thomas Gray, William Collins, James Macpherson, William Blake, Robert Burns, William Cowper and George Crabbe.

James Thomson (1700-1748) was the earliest eighteenth century poet who showed romantic tendency in his work. The main romantic characteristic in his poetry is his minute observation of nature. In *The Seasons* he gives fine sympathetic descriptions of the fields, the woods, the streams, the shy and wild creatures. Instead of the closed couplet, he follows the Miltonic tradition of using the blank verse. In *The Castle of Indolence*, which is written in form of dream allegory so popular in medieval literature, Thomson uses the Spenserian stanza. Unlike the didactic poetry of the Augustans, this poem is full of dim suggestions.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) is famous as the author of *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, “the best-known in the English language.” Unlike classical poetry which was characterised by restraint on personal feelings and emotions, this poem is the manifestation of deep feelings of the poet. It is suffused with the melancholy spirit which is a characteristic romantic trait. It contains deep reflections of the poet on the universal theme of death which spare no one. Other important poems of Gray are *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard*. Of these *The Bard* is more original and romantic. It emphasises the independence of the poet, which became the chief characteristic of romantic poetry. All these poems of Gray follow the classical model so far as form is concerned, but in spirit they are romantic.

William Collins (1721-1759). Like the poetry of Gray, Collin’s poetry exhibits deep feelings of melancholy. His first poem, *Oriental Eclogues* is romantic in feeling, but is written in the closed couplet. His best-known poems are the odes *To Simplicity*, *To Fear*, *To the Passions*, the small lyric *How Sleep The Brave*, and the beautiful “*Ode to Evening*”. In all these poems the poet values the solitude and quietude because they afford opportunity for contemplative life. Collins in his poetry advocates return to nature and simple and unsophisticated life, which became the fundamental creeds of the Romantic Revival.

James Macpherson (1736-1796) became the most famous poet during his time by the publication of Ossianic poems, called the *Works of Ossian*, which were translations of Gaelic folk literature, though the originals were never produced, and so he was considered by some critics as a forger. In spite of this Macpherson exerted a considerable influence on contemporary poets like Blake and Burns by his poetry which was impregnated with moonlight melancholy and ghostly romantic suggestions.

William Blake (1757-1827). In the poetry of Blake we find a complete break from classical poetry. In some of his works as *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* which contain the famous poems—*Little Lamb who made thee?* and *Tiger, Tiger burning bright*, we are impressed by their lyrical quality. In other poems such as *The Book of Thel*, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, it is the prophetic voice of Blake which appeals to the reader. In the words of Swinburne, Blake was the only poet of “supreme and simple poetic genius” of the eighteenth century, “the one man of that age fit, on all accounts, to rank with the old great masters”. Some of his lyrics are, no doubt, the most perfect and the most original songs in the English language.

Robert Burns (1759-96), who is the greatest song writer in the English language, had great love for nature, and a firm belief in human dignity and quality, both of which are characteristic of romanticism. He has summed up his poetic creed in the following stanza:

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Give me a spark of Nature's fire,  
That is all the learning I desire;  
Then, though I trudge through dub and mire  
At plough or cart,  
My Muse, though homely in attire,  
May touch the heart.

The fresh, inspired songs of Burns as *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *To a Mouse*, *To a Mountain Daisy*, *Man was Made to Mourn* went straight to the heart, and they seemed to be the songs of the birds in spring time after the cold and formal poetry for about a century. Most of his songs have the Elizabethan touch about them.

William Cowper (1731-1800), who lived a tortured life and was driven to the verge of madness, had a genial and kind soul. His poetry, much of which is of autobiographical interest, describes the homely scenes and pleasures and pains of simple humanity—the two important characteristics of romanticism. His longest poem, *The Task*, written in blank verse, comes as a relief after reading the rhymed essays and the artificial couplets of the Age of Johnson. It is replete with description of homely scenes, of woods and brooks of ploughmen and shepherds. Cowper's most laborious work is the translation of Homer in blank verse, but he is better known for his small, lovely lyrics like *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, beginning with the famous line, 'Oh, that those lips had language', and *Alexander Selkirk*, beginning with the oft-quoted line, 'I am monarch of all I survey'.

George Crabbe (1754-1832) stood midway between the Augustans and the Romantics. In form he was classical, but in the temper of his mind he was romantic. Most of his poems are written in the heroic couplet, but they depict an attitude to nature which is Wordsworthian. To him nature is a "presence, a motion and a spirit," and he realizes the intimate union of nature with man. His well-known poem, *The Village*, is without a rival as a picture of the working men of his age. He shows that the lives of the common villager and labourers are full of romantic interest. His later poems, *The Parish Register*, *The Borough*, *Tales in Verse*, and *Tales of the Hall* are all written in the same strain.

Another poet who may also be considered as the precursor of the Romantic Revival was Thomas Chatterton (1752-70), the Bristol boy, whose *The Rowley Poems*, written in pseudo-Chaucerian English made a strong appeal of medievalism. The publication of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in 1765 also made great contribution to the romantic mood reviving interest in ballad literature.

### (b) Prose of the Age of Johnson

In the Age of Johnson the tradition established by prose writers of the earlier part of the eighteenth century—Addison, Steele and Swift—was carried further. The eighteenth century is called the age of aristocracy. This aristocracy was no less in the sphere of the intellect than in that of politics and society. The intellectual and literary class formed itself into a group, which observed certain rules of behaviour, speech and writing. In the field of prose the leaders of this group established a literary style which was founded on the principles of logical and lucid thought. It was opposed to what was slipshod, inaccurate, and trivial. It avoided all impetuous enthusiasm and maintained an attitude of aloofness and detachment that contributed much to its mood of cynical humour. The great prose writers, the pillars of the Age of Johnson, who

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

represented in themselves, the highest achievements of English prose, were Johnson, Burke and Gibbon.

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was the literary dictator of his age, though he was not its greatest writer. He was a man who struggled heroically against poverty and ill-health; who was ready to take up cudgels against anyone however high he might be placed, but who was very kind and helpful to the poor and the wretched. He was an intellectual giant, and a man of sterling character, on account of all these qualities he was honoured and loved by all, and in his poor house gathered the foremost artists, scholars, actors, and literary men of London, who looked upon him as their leader.

Johnson's best-known works are his *Dictionary* and *Lives of Poets*. He contributed a number of articles in the periodicals, *The Rambler*, *The Idler* and *Rasselas*. In them his style is ponderous and verbose, but in *Lives of Poets*, which are very readable critical biographies of English poets, his style is simple and at times charming. Though in the preceding generations Dryden, Addison, Steele and Swift wrote elegant, lucid and effective prose, none of them set up any definite standard to be followed by others. What was necessary in the generation when Johnson wrote, was some commanding authority that might set standard of prose style, lay down definite rules and compel others to follow them. This is what was actually done by Johnson. He set a model of prose style which had rhythm, balance and lucidity, and which could be imitated with profit. In doing so he preserved the English prose style from degenerating into triviality and feebleness, which would have been the inevitable result of slavishly imitating the prose style of great writers like Addison by ordinary writers who had not the secret of Addison's genius. The model was set by Johnson.

Though Johnson's own style is often condemned as ponderous and verbose, he could write in an easy and direct style when he chose. This is clear from *Lives of Poets* where the formal dignity of his manner and the ceremonial stateliness of his phraseology are mixed with touches of playful humour and stinging sarcasm couched in very simple and lucid prose. The chief characteristic of Johnson's prose-style is that it grew out of his conversational habit, and therefore it is always clear, forceful and frank. We may not some time agree to the views he expresses in the *Lives*, but we cannot but be impressed by his boldness, his wit, wide range and brilliancy of his style.

Burke (1729-1797) was the most important member of Johnson's circle. He was a member of the Parliament for thirty years and as such he made his mark as the most forceful and effective orator of his times. A man of vast knowledge, he was the greatest political philosopher that ever spoke in the English Parliament.

Burke's chief contributions to literature are the speeches and writings of his public career. The earliest of them were *Thoughts on the Present Discontent* (1770). In this work Burke advocated the principle of limited monarchy which had been established in England since the Glorious Revolution in 1688, when James II was made to quit the throne, and William of Orange was invited by the Parliament to become the king of England with limited powers. When the American colonies revolted against England, and the English government was trying to suppress that revolt, Burke vehemently advocated the cause of American independence. In that connection he delivered two famous speeches in Parliament. *On American Taxation* (1774) and *on Conciliation with America*, in which are embodied true statesmanship and political wisdom. The greatest speeches of Burke were, however, delivered in connection with the French Revolution, which were published as *The Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790). Here

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Burke shows himself as prejudiced against the ideals of the Revolution, and at time he becomes immoderate and indulges in exaggerations. But from the point of view of style and literary merit the *Reflections* stand higher, because they brought out the poetry of Burke's nature. His last speeches delivered in connection with the impeachment of Warren Hastings for the atrocities he committed in India, show Burke as the champion of justice and a determined foe of corruption, high-handedness and cruelty.

The political speeches and writings of Burke belong to the sphere of literature of a high order because of their universality. Though he dealt in them with events which happened during his day, he gave expression to ideas and impulses which were true not for one age but for all times. In the second place they occupy an honourable place in English literature on account of excellence of their style. The prose of Burke is full of fire and enthusiasm, yet supremely logical; eloquent and yet restrained; fearless and yet orderly; steered by every popular movement and yet dealing with fundamental principles of politics and philosophy. Burke's style, in short, is restrained, philosophical, dignified, obedient to law and order, free from exaggeration and pedantry as well as from vulgarity and superficiality.

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) was the first historian of England who wrote in a literary manner. His greatest historical work—*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which is an authoritative and well-documented history, can pass successfully the test of modern research and scholarship. But its importance in literature is on account of its prose style which is the very climax of classicism. It is finished, elegant, elaborate and exhaustive. Though his style is sometimes marred by affectations and undue elaboration, yet on account of his massive intellect, and unflinching sense of literary proportion, he towers above all competitors as the model historian.

### The Eighteenth Century Novel

The chief literary contribution of the eighteenth century was the discovery of the modern novel, which at present is the most widely read and influential type of literature. The novel in its elementary form as a work of fiction written in prose was at first established in England by two authors—Bunyan and Defoe, who took advantage of the public interest in autobiography. The books of Bunyan, whether they are told in the first person or not, were meant to be autobiographical and their interest is subjective. Bunyan endeavours to interest his readers not in the character of some other person he had imagined or observed, but in himself, and his treatment of it is characteristic of the awakening talent for fiction in his time. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is begun as an allegory, but in course of time the author is so much taken up with the telling of the story, that he forgets about the allegory, and it is this fact which makes Bunyan the pioneer of the modern novel.

But it was Defoe who was the real creator of autobiographical fiction as a work of art. He was the first to create psychological interest in the character of the narrator. Moreover, he was the first to introduce realism or verisimilitude by observing in his writing a scrupulous and realistic fidelity and appropriateness to the conditions in which the story was told. For example, the reader is told about Crusoe's island as gradually as Crusoe himself comes to know of it. Besides introducing the elements of autobiography and realism, Defoe also fixed the peculiar form of the historical novel—the narrative of an imaginary person in a historical setting as in his *Memories of a Cavalier*. On account of all these reasons Defoe is rightly termed the originator of the modern novel.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

In spite of this, it can be safely said that until the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740, no true novel had appeared in English literature. By a true novel we mean simply a work of fictions which relates the story of a plain human life, under stress of emotions, and the interest of which does not depend on incident or adventure, but on its truth to nature. During the eighteenth century a number of English novelists—Goldsmith, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne—all developed simultaneously the form of the novel as presenting life, as it really is, in the form of a story. The new middle class which was rising and getting into power demanded a new type of literature, which must express the new ideal of the eighteenth century, that is, the value and the importance of individual life. Moreover, on account of the spread of education and the appearance of newspapers and magazines there was an immense increase in the reading public to whom the novelist could directly appeal without caring for the patronage of the aristocratic class which was losing power. It was under these circumstances that the novel was born in the eighteenth century expressing the same ideals of personality and of the dignity of command life which became the chief themes of the poets of the Romantic Revival, and which were proclaimed later by the American and French Revolutions. The novelists of the eighteenth century told the common people not about the grand lives of knights, princes and heroes, but about their own plain and simple lives, their ordinary thoughts and feelings, and their day-to-day actions and their effects on them and others. The result was that such works were eagerly read by the common people, and the novel became a popular form of literature appealing to the masses, because it belonged to them and reflected their lives.

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731) was, as has already been pointed out, the originator of the novel, though none of his works can be placed under the category of novel in the modern sense of the term. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe, has described the experiences of Alexander Selkirk who spent five years in solitude in the island of Juan Fernandez. Though the whole story is fictitious, it has been described most realistically with the minute accuracy of an eyewitness. From that point of view we can say that in *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe brought the realistic adventure story to a very high stage of its development, better than in his other works of fiction *Captain Singleton*, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* which are just like picaresque stories (current at that time, about the adventures of rogues) to which were added unnatural moralising and repentance. But we cannot call *Robinson Crusoe*, strictly speaking, a novel, because here the author has not produced the effect of subordinating incident to the faithful portrayal of human life and character, which is the criterion of the real novel.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) is credited with the writing of the first modern novel—*Pamela or Virtue Rewarded*. It tells the trials, tribulations and the final happy marriage of a young girl. Written in the form of 'Familiar Letters, on how to think and act justly and prudently, in the common concerns of Human Life', it is sentimental and boring on account of its wearisome details. But the merit of it lies in the fact that it was the first book which told in a realistic manner the inner life of a young girl. Its psychological approach made it the first modern novel in England. Richardson here gave too much importance to physical chastity, and 'prudence' which was the key to the middle class way of life during the eighteenth century. It enjoyed tremendous popularity on account of being in tune with the contemporary standards of morality.

Richardson's second novel, *Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady*, is also written in the form of letters and is as sentimental as *Pamela*. In the heroine of this novel, Clarissa, Richardson has painted a real woman, portraying truthfully her doubts, scruples, griefs

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

and humiliations. In his next novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, which is also written in the form of letters, Richardson told the story of an aristocrat of ideal manners and virtues.

In all his novels Richardson's purpose was didactic, but he achieved something more. He probed into the inner working of the human mind. It was this achievement that made Dr. Johnson say of Richardson that he "enlarged the knowledge of human nature, and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue". Of *Clarissa* he said that "it was the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human heart." Richardson's main contribution to the English novel was that for the first time he told stories of human life from within, depending for their interest not on incidents or adventures but on their truth to human nature.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) was the greatest of the eighteenth century novelists. He wrote his first great novel *Joseph Andrews* in order to satirise and parody the false sentimentality and conventional virtues of Richardson's heroine, Pamela. The hero of this novel is a supposed brother of Pamela, a domestic servant, who has vowed to follow the example of his sister. He is also exposed to the same kinds of temptations, but instead of being rewarded for his virtues, he is dismissed from service by his mistress. The satiric purpose of Fielding ends here, because then he describes the adventures of Joseph with his companion Parson Adams, and tells the story of a vagabond life, with a view "to laugh men out of their follies". Instead of the sentimentality and feminine niceties of Richardson, in Fielding's novel we find a coarse, vigorous, hilarious and even vulgar approach to life. The result is broad realism not in the portrayal of inner life but of outer behaviour and manners. The characters in the novels are drawn from all classes of society, and they throb with life.

Fielding's next novel, *Jonathan Wild*, is a typical picaresque novel, narrating the story of a rogue. His greatest novel, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1746-1749), has epic as well as dramatic qualities. It consists of a large number of involved adventures, which are very skillfully brought towards their climax by the hand of a dramatist. Behind all chance happenings, improbabilities and incognuities there exists a definite pattern which gives the complicated plot of *Tom Jones* a unity which we find nowhere in English novel or drama except in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemists*. Without making a deliberate effort at moralising like Richardson Fielding suggests a deeper moral lesson that one should do good not for reward but for the satisfaction of doing so. It is the generous impulses, rooted in unselfishness and respect for others, which are the best guarantee of virtue.

Fielding's last novel, *Amelia* (1751), which is the story of a good wife in contrast with an unworthy husband, is written in a milder tone. Here instead of showing a detached and coarse attitude to life, Fielding becomes soft-hearted and champions the cause of the innocent and the helpless. It is also written in a homely and simple narrative.

Fielding's great contribution to the English novel is that he put it on a stable footing. It became free from its slavery to fact, conscious of its power and possibilities, and firmly established as an independent literary form. He is called the Father of the English novel, because he was the first to give genuine pictures of men and women of his age, without moralising over their vices and virtues. It was through his efforts that the novel became immensely popular with the reading public, and a large number of novels poured from the press.

Tobias Smollett (1721-1771) followed the example of Fielding in writing picaresque novels, which are full of intrigue and adventure. But he lacks the genius of Fielding, for his novels are just a jumble of adventures and incidents without any artistic unity. Instead of Fielding's broad

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

humour and his inherent kindness, we find horrors and brutalities in the novels of Smollett, which are mistaken for realism.

Smollett's best-known novels are *Roderick Random* (1748) in which the hero relates a series of adventures; *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) in which are related the worst experiences at sea; and *Humphrey Clinker* (1771) in which is related the journey of a Welsh family through England and Scotland. In all these novels Smollett excites continuous laughter by farcical situations and exaggeration in portraying human eccentricities. Unlike the realistic and pure comedy which Fielding presents in his novels, Smollett is the originator of the *funny novel*, which was brought to a climax by Dickens in his satirical and hearty caricatures.

Lawrence Sterne (1713-1768) was the opposite of Smollett in the sense that whereas we find horrors and brutalities in the novels of Smollett, in Sterne's we find whims, vagaries and sentimental tears. His best-known novels are *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The former was started in 1760; its ninth volume appeared in 1767, but the book was never finished. In it are recorded in a most digressive and aimless manner the experiences of the eccentric Shandy family. The main achievements of this book lie in the brilliancy of its style and the creation of eccentric characters like Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim. *The Sentimental Journey*, which is a strange mixture of fiction, descriptions of travel, and a number of essays on all sorts of subjects, is also written in a brilliant style, and is stamped with Sterne's false and sentimental attitude to life.

These novels are written in the first person, and while Sterne speaks of one thing, it reminds him of another, with which it has no apparent, logical connection. So he is forced into digression, and in this manner he follows the wayward movements of his mind. This method is very much like that of the *Stream of Consciousness* novelists, though there is a difference, because the hero in Sterne's novels is Sterne himself. Another peculiarity of Sterne is his power of sentimentality, which along with his humour and indecency, is part and parcel of his way of interpreting life. Whenever he makes us smile, he hopes that there will be a suspicion of a tear as well. In fact the main contribution of Sterne to the English novel was his discovery of the delights of sensibility, the pleasures of the feeling heart, which opened up a vast field of experience, and which was followed by many eighteenth century writers.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) wrote only one novel—*The Vicar of Wakefield*. This is the best novel in the English language, in which domestic life has been given an enduring romantic interest. It is free from that vulgarity and coarseness which we find in the novels of Smollett and Sterne. In it domestic virtues and purity of character are elevated. It is the story of Dr. Primrose, a simple English clergyman, who passes through various misfortunes, but ultimately comes out triumphant, with his faith in God and man reaffirmed. Without introducing romantic passion, intrigue and adventure which were freely used by other novelists, Goldsmith by relating a simple story in a simple manner has presented in *The Vicar of Wakefield* the best example of the novel, the new literary form which was becoming immensely popular.

Summing up the development of the English novel during the eighteenth century, we can say that the novel from a humble beginning evolved into a fully developed form. Defoe gave it the realistic touch; Richardson introduced analysis of the human heart; Fielding made it full of vitality and animal vigour; Smollett introduced exaggerated and eccentric characters; Sterne contributed sentimentality and brilliancy of style; and Goldsmith emphasised high principles and purity of domestic life. In the hands of these early masters the novel took a definite shape and

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

came to be recognised as an important literary form with vast possibilities of further development.

### The Eighteenth Century Drama

The dramatic literature of the eighteenth century was not of a high order. In fact there was a gradual deterioration and during the last quarter of the century drama was moving towards its lowest ebb. One of the reasons of the decline of drama during the eighteenth century was the Licensing Act of 1737 which curtailed the freedom of expression of dramatists. The result was that a number of writers like Fielding, who could make their marks as dramatists, left the theatre and turned towards the novel. Moreover, the new commercial middle classes which were coming into prominence imposed their own dull and stupid views on the themes that would be acceptable to the theatre. Naturally this was not liked by first-rate writers who wanted to write independently.

In the field of tragedy two opposing traditions—Romantic and Classical—exercised their influence on the dramatists. The Romantic tradition was the Elizabethan way of writing tragedy. Those who followed this tradition made use of intricate plots and admitted horror and violence on the open stage. The Classical tradition which was mainly the French tradition of writing tragedy was characterised by the unfolding of a single action without any sub-plot, and long declamatory speeches delivered by the actors. The traditional English pattern of drama was exemplified by Otway's *Venice Preserved*, while the Classical tradition was strictly upheld in Addison's *Cato* (1713), which is written in an unemotional but correct style, and has a pronounced moralising tone. Other tragedies which were written according to the Classical pattern were James Thomson's *Sophonisba* (1729) and Dr. Johnson's *Irene* (1749). But none of these tragedies, whether following the Romantic or the Classical tradition came up to a respectable dramatic standard, because the creative impulse seems to have spent itself. Though a very large number of tragedies were written during the eighteenth century, they had literary, but no dramatic value. Mostly there were revivals of old plays, which were adapted by writers who were not dramatists in the real sense of the term.

In the field of comedy, the same process of disintegration was noticeable. Comedy was deteriorating into farce. Moreover, sentimentality which was opposed to the authority of reason, came to occupy an important place in comedy. This 'sentimental' comedy which gained in popularity was criticised by Goldsmith thus:

*"A new species of dramatic composition has been introduced under the name of sentimental comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the pieces. These comedies have had of late great success, perhaps from their novelty, and also from their flattering every man in his favourite foible. In these plays almost all the characters are good and exceedingly generous; they are lavish enough of their tin money on the stage; and though they want humour, have abundance of sentiment and feeling. If they happen to have faults or foibles, the spectator is taught, not only to pardon, but to applaud them, in consideration of the goodness of their hearts; so that folly, instead of being ridiculed, is commended, and the comedy aims at touching our passions without the power of being truly pathetic."*

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Steele was the first exponent of the sentimental comedy in the eighteenth century. In his plays, such as *The Funeral*, *The Lying Lover*, *The Tender Husband*, *The Conscious Lovers*, Steele extolled the domestic virtues. His object was didactic, and he tried to prove that morality and sharpness of intelligence can go together. In his plays in which tears of pity and emotion flowed profusely, Steele held that Simplicity of mind, Good nature, Friendship and Honour were the guiding principles of conduct.

Other dramatists who wrote sentimental comedies were Colley Cibber, Hugh Kelley and Richard Cumberland. In their hands comedy was so much drenched in emotions and sentiments that the genuine human issues were completely submerged in them. Thus there was a need to rescue the drama from such depths to which it had fallen.

The two great dramatists of the eighteenth century, who led the revolt against sentimental comedy were Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74) and Richard Sheridan (1751-1861). Though in his novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and in his poem, *The Deserted Village*, Goldsmith showed clear marks of a sentimental attitude to life, in his *Good-Natured Man* he covers it with ridicule by portraying the character of Honeywood as unadulterated 'good-nature'. Though the play is a feeble one, his intentions of mocking the excess of false charity are obvious. His next play, *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), which is his masterpiece, was an immediate success. It has always remained one of the half-dozen most popular comedies in the English language. In spite of the obvious improbabilities of the plot, the play moves naturally in a homely atmosphere, full of genuine humour which provokes unrestrained laughter. Here there is no artificiality of sentimental comedy. The main characters—Hardcastle and Tony Lumpkin are very clearly delineated. They are at once types and individuals. They are the images of their age, and yet recognizable as human figures. *She Stoops to Conquer* went a long way in restoring comedy to its own province of mirth and laughter and rescuing it from too much sentimentality.

Richard Brinsely Sheridan is best known for his two comedies—*The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777). Sheridan brought back the brilliance of the witty and elegant Restoration comedy, purged of its impurities and narrowness. He created, instead, a more genial and romantic atmosphere associated with the comedies of Shakespeare. His characters are as clearly drawn as those of Ben Jonson, but they move in a gayer atmosphere. The only defect that we find in these comedies of Sheridan is that there is all gaiety, but no depth, no new interpretation of human nature.

The intrigue in *The Rivals*, though not original, is skilfully conducted. The audience heartily laugh at humours of Mrs. Malaprop, Sir Anthony, and Bab Acres. In *The School for Scandal* Sheridan showed himself as a mature dramatist. Here the dialogue has the exquisite Congreve-like precision, and wit reigns supreme. Even the stupid characters, the servants, are witty. Though the main characters, the quarrelsome couple and the plotting brothers; the 'scandal-club' of Lady Sneerwell; and the intrigue leading inevitably to the thrilling resolution in the famous screen scene, are all familiar, and can be found in many other plays, yet they are invested with novelty. In both these plays Sheridan reversed the trend of sentimentalism by introducing realism tinged with the geniality of romance. He had no message to convey, except that the most admirable way of living is to be generous and open-hearted.

## Lecture 12

### Literary Terms II in English Literature Understanding English Literature

- **Allegory:** A story in which the characters represent abstract qualities or ideas. *Avatar film*
- **Alliteration:** The repetition of first consonants in a group of words as in “Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers.”
- **Allusion:**  
A reference to something or someone often literary. For instance, if you were trying to instill confidence in a friend and said, “Use the force,” that would be an allusion to Stars Wars. The verb form of allusion is to allude.
- **Antagonist:**  
A major character who opposes the protagonist in a story or play.
- **Archetype:**  
A character who represents a certain type of person. For example, Daniel Boone is an archetype of the early American frontiersman.
- **Assonance:**  
The repetition of vowel sounds as in “Days wane away.”
- **Atmosphere:**  
The overall feeling of a work, which is related to tone and mood.
- **Blank verse:**  
Unrhymed lines of poetry usually in iambic pentameter. Plenty of modern poetry is written in blank verse.
- **Characterization:**  
The means by which an author establishes character. An author may directly describe the appearance and personality of character or show it through action or dialogue.
- **Climax:**  
The point at which the action in a story or play reaches its emotional peak.
- **Conflict:**  
The elements that create a plot. Traditionally, every plot is built from the most basic elements of a conflict and an eventual resolution. The conflict can be internal (within one character) or external (among or between characters, society, and/or nature).

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- **Contrast:**  
To explain how two things differ. To compare and contrast is to explain how two things are alike and how they are different.
- **Couplets:**  
A pair of rhyming lines in a poem often set off from the rest of the poem. Shakespeare's sonnets all end in couplets.
- **Denouement:**  
The resolution of the conflict in a plot after the climax. It also refers to the resolution of the action in a story or play after the principal drama is resolved—in other words, tying up the loose ends or wrapping up a story.
- **Dramatic Monologue:**  
A poem with a fictional narrator addressed to someone whose identity the audience knows, but who does not say anything.
- **Elegy:**  
A poem mourning the dead.
- **End rhyme:**  
Rhyming words that are at the ends of their respective lines—what we typically think of as normal rhyme.
- **Epic:**  
A long poem narrating the adventures of a heroic figure—for example, Homer's *The Odyssey*.
- **Fable:**  
A story that illustrates a moral often using animals as the character—for example, *The Tortoise and the Hare*.
- **Figurative Language:**  
Language that does not mean exactly what it says. For example, you can call someone who is very angry “steaming.” Unless steam was actually coming out of your ears, you were using figurative language.
- **First Person Point of View:** The point of view of writing which the narrator refers to himself as “I.”
- **Foreshadowing:**  
A technique in which an author gives clues about something that will happen later in the story.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- Free Verse:  
Poetry with no set meter (rhythm) or rhyme scheme.
- Genre:  
A kind of style usually art or literature. Some literary genres are mysteries, westerns, and romances.
- Hyperbole:  
A huge exaggeration. For example, “Dan’s the funniest guy on the planet!” or “That baseball card is worth a zillion dollars!”
- Iambic pentameter:  
Ten-syllable lines in which every other syllable is stressed. For example: “With eyes like stars upon the brave night air.”
- Imagery:  
The use of description that helps the reader imagine how something looks, sounds, feels, smells, or taste. Most of the time, it refers to appearance. For example, “The young bird’s white, feathered wings flutter as he made his way across the nighttime sky.”
- Internal rhyme:  
A rhyme that occurs within one line such as “He’s King of the Swing.”
- Irony:  
Language that conveys a certain ideas by saying just he opposite.
- Literal Language:     Language that means exactly what it says.
- Lyric:  
A type of poetry that expresses the poet’s emotions. It often tells some sort of brief story, engaging the reading in the experience.
- Metaphor:  
A comparison that doesn’t use “like” or “as”—such as “He’s a rock” or “I am an island.”
- Meter:  
The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in the lines of a poem.
- Monologue:  
A long speech by one character in a play or story.
- Mood:  
The emotional atmosphere of a given piece of writing.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- **Motif:**  
A theme or pattern that recurs in a work.
- **Myth:**  
A legend that embodies the beliefs of people and offers some explanation for natural and social phenomena.
- **Onomatopoeia:**  
The use of words that sound like what they mean such as “buzz.”
- **Paradox:**  
A seeming contradiction.  
For example, “It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.”
- **Parody:**  
A humorous, exaggerated imitation of another work.
- **Personification:**  
Giving inanimate object human characteristics. For example, “The flames reached for the child hovering in the corner.”
- **Plot:**  
The action in the story.
- **Prose:**  
Writing organized into sentences and paragraphs. In other words, normal writing—not poetry.
- **Protagonist:**  
The main character of a novel, play, or story.
- **Quatrain:**  
A four-line stanza.
- **Rhetorical Question:**  
A question not meant to be answered such as “Why can’t we just get along?”
- **Sarcasm:**  
Language that conveys a certain idea by saying just the opposite such as if it’s raining outside and you say, “My what a beautiful day.”
- **Satire:**  
A work that makes fun of something or someone.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

- **Sensory imagery:**  
Imagery that has to do with something you can see, hear, taste, smell, or feel. For example, “The stinging, salty air drenched his face.”
- **Simile:**  
A comparison that uses “like” or “as” For example, “I’m as hungry as a wolf,” or “My love is like a rose.”
- **Soliloquy:**  
A monologue in which a character expresses his or her thoughts to the audience and does not intend the other characters to hear them.
- **Sonnet:**  
A fourteen-line poem written iambic pentameter. Different kinds of sonnets have different rhyme schemes.
- **Stanza:**  
A section of poetry separated from the sections before and after it; a verse “paragraph.”
- **Subplot:**  
A line of action  
secondary to the main story.
- **Symbolism:**  
The use of one things to represent another. For example, a dove is a symbol of peace.
- **Theme:**  
The central idea of a work.
- **Tone:**  
The author’s attitude toward his or her subject. For example, a tone could be pessimistic, optimistic, or angry.
- **Voice:**  
The narrative point of view whether it’s in the first, second, or third person.

### **Lecture 13**

#### **The Romantic Age (1798-1824)**

The Romantic period is the most fruitful period in the history of English literature. The revolt against the Classical school which had been started by writers like Chatterton, Collins, Gray, Burne, Cowper etc. reached its climax during this period, and some of the greatest and

By attacking the supremacy of the heroic couplet as the only form of writing poetry, and substituting it by simple and natural diction; by diverting the attention of the poet from the artificial town life to the life in the woods, mountains and villages inhabited by simple folk; and by asserting the inevitable role of imagination and emotions in poetry as against dry intellectualism which was the chief characteristic of the Classical school, Wordsworth not only emancipated the poet from the tyranny of literary rules and conventions which circumscribed his freedom of expression, but he also opened up before him vast regions of experience which in the eighteenth century had been closed to him. His revolt against the Classical school was in keeping with the political and social revolutions of the time as the French Revolution and the American War of Independence which broke away with the tyranny of social and political domination, and which proclaimed the liberty of the individual or nation to be the master of its own destiny. Just as liberty of the individual was the watchword of the French Revolution, liberty of a nation from foreign domination was the watchword of the American War of Independence; in the same manner liberty of the poet from the tyranny of the literary rules and conventions was the watchword of the new literary movement which we call by the name of Romantic movement. It is also termed as the Romantic Revival, because all these characteristics—the liberty of the writer to choose the theme and form of his literary production, the importance given to

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and Scott belong to the first romantic generation. Though they were in their youth filled with great enthusiasm by the outburst of the French Revolution which held high hope for mankind, they became conservatives and gave up their juvenile ideas when the French Republic converted itself into a military empire resulting in Napoleonic wars against England and other European countries. The revolutionary ardour, therefore, faded away, and these poets instead of championing the cause of the oppressed section of mankind, turned to mysticism, the glory of the past, love of natural phenomena, and the noble simplicity of the peasant race attached to the soil and still sticking to traditional virtues and values. Thus these poets of the first romantic generation were not in conflict with the society of which they were a

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

part. They sang about the feelings and emotions which were shared by a majority of their countrymen.

The second generation of Romantic writers—Byron, Shelley, Keats, Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt and others—who came to the forefront after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, revolted from the reactionary spirit which was prevailing at that time in England against the ideals of the French Revolution. The result was that the second generation came in conflict with the social environment with which their predecessors were in moral harmony. Moreover, the victorious struggle with the French empire had left England impoverished, and the political and social agitations which had subsided on account of foreign danger, again raised their head. The result was that there was a lot of turmoil and perturbation among the rank and file, which was being suppressed by those who were in power. In such an atmosphere the younger romantic generation renewed the revolutionary ardour and attacked the established social order. Thus Romanticism in the second stage became a literature of social conflict. Both Byron and Shelley rebelled against society and had to leave England.

But basically the poets of the two generations of Romanticism shared the same literary beliefs and ideals. They were all innovators in the forms well as in the substance of their poetry. All, except, Byron, turned in disgust from the pseudo-classical models and condemned in theory and practice the “poetical diction” prevalent throughout the eighteenth century. They rebelled against the tyranny of the couplet, which they only used with Elizabethan freedom, without caring for the mechanical way in which it was used by Pope. To it they usually preferred either blank verse or stanzas, or a variety of shorter lyrical measures inspired by popular poetry are truly original.

The prose-writers of the Romantic Revival also broke with their immediate predecessors, and discarded the shorter and lighter style of the eighteenth century. They reverted to the ponderous, flowery and poetical prose of the Renaissance and of Sir Thomas Browne, as we find in the works of Lamb, and De Quincey. Much of the prose of the Romantic period was devoted to the critical study of literature, its theory and practice. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and De Quincey opened up new avenues in the study of literature, and gradually prepared the way for the understanding of the new type of literature which was being produced.

As the Romantic Age was characterised by excess of emotions, it produced a new type of novel, which seems rather hysterical, now, but which was immensely popular among the multitude of readers, whose nerves were somewhat excited, and who revelled in extravagant stories of supernatural terror. Mrs. Anne Radcliffe was one of the most successful writers of the school of exaggerated romances. Sir Walter Scott regaled the readers by his historical romances. Jane Austen, however, presents a marked contrast to these extravagant stories by her enduring work in which we find charming descriptions of everyday life as in the poetry of Wordsworth.

Whereas the Classical age was the age of prose, the Romantic age was the age of poetry, which was the proper medium for the expression of emotions and imaginative sensibility of the artist. The mind of the artist came in contact with the sensuous world and the world of thought at countless points, as it had become more alert and alive. The human spirit began to derive new richness from outward objects and philosophical ideas. The poets began to draw inspiration from several sources—mountains and lakes, the dignity of the peasant, the terror of the supernatural, medieval chivalry and literature, the arts and mythology of Greece, the prophecy of the golden

age. All these produced a sense of wonder which had to be properly conveyed in literary form. That is why some critics call the Romantic Revival as the Renaissance of Wonder. Instead of living a dull, routine life in the town, and spending all his time and energy in the midst of artificiality and complexity of the cities, the poets called upon man to adopt a healthier way of living in the natural world in which providence has planted him of old, and which is full of significance for his soul. The greatest poets of the romantic revival strove to capture and convey the influence of nature on the mind and of the mind on nature interpenetrating one another.

The essence of Romanticism was that literature must reflect all that is spontaneous and unaffected in nature and in man, and be free to follow its own fancy in its own way. The result was that during the Romantic period the young enthusiasts turned as naturally to poetry as a happy man to singing. The glory of the age is the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley and Keats. In fact, poetry was so popular that Southey had to write in verse in order to earn money, what he otherwise would have written in prose.

Summing up the chief characteristics of Romanticism as opposed to Classicism, we can say that Classicism laid stress upon the impersonal aspects of the life of the mind; the new literature, on the other hand, openly shifts the centre of art, bringing it back towards what is most proper and particular in each individual. It is the product of the fusion of two faculties of the artist—his sensibility and imagination. The Romantic spirit can be defined as an accentuated predominance of emotional life, and Romantic literature was fed by intense emotion coupled with the intense desire to display that emotion through appropriate imagery. Thus Romantic literature is a genuinely creative literature calling into play the highest creative faculty of man.

### Romantic Poetry

Romantic poetry which was the antithesis of Classical poetry had many complexities. Unlike Classical poets who agreed on the nature and form of poetry, and the role that the poet is called upon to play, the Romantic poets held different views on all these subjects. The artistic and philosophic principles of neo-classical poetry were completely summarised by Pope, and they could be applied to the whole of Augustan poetry. But it is difficult to find a common denominator which links such poets as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. The reason of this was that there was abundance and variety of genius. No age in English literature produced such great giants in the field of poetry. Moreover, it was the age of revolutionary change, not only in the view of the character and function of poetry but in the whole conception of the nature of man and of the world in which he found himself. The evenness, equanimity and uniformity of the Classical age was broken, and it was replaced by strong currents of change flowing in various directions. One poet reacted to a particular current more strongly or sympathetically than the other poet. Thus each poet of the Romantic period stands for himself, and has his own well-defined individuality. The only common characteristic that we find in them is their intense faith in imagination, which could not be controlled by any rules and regulations.

In fact the most distinctive mark which distinguished the Romantic poets from the Classical poets was the emphasis which the former laid on imagination. In the eighteenth century imagination was not a cardinal point in poetical theory. For Pope, Johnson and Dryden the poet was more an interpreter than a creator, more concerned with showing the attractions of what we already know than with expeditions into the unfamiliar and the unseen. They were less interested in the mysteries of life than in its familiar appearances, and they thought that their task was to

display this with as much charm and truth as they could command. But for the Romantics imagination was fundamental, because they thought that without that poetry was impossible. They were conscious of a wonderful capacity to create imaginary worlds, and they could not believe that this was idle or false. On the contrary, they thought that to curb it was to deny something vitally necessary to the whole being.

Whereas the Classical poets were more interested in the visible world, the Romantic poets obeyed an inner call to explore more fully the world of the spirit. They endeavoured to explore the mysteries of life, and thus understand it better. It was this search for the unseen world that awoke the inspiration of the Romantics and made poets of them. They appealed not to the logical mind, but to the complete self, in the whole range of intellectual faculties, senses and emotions.

Though all the Romantic poets believed in an ulterior reality and based their poetry on it, they founded it in different ways and made different uses of it. They varied in the degree of importance which they attached to the visible world and in their interpretation of it. Coleridge conceived of the world of facts as an “inanimate cold world”, in which “object, as objects, are essentially fixed and dead”. It was the task of the poet to transform it by his power of imagination, to bring the dead world back to life. When we turn to *The Ancient Mariner and Christable* it seems clear that Coleridge thought that the task of poetry is to convey the mystery of life by the power of imagination. He was fascinated by the notion of unearthly powers at work in the world, and it was this influence which he sought to catch. The imagination of the poet is his creative, shaping spirit, and it resembles the creative power of God. Just as God creates this universe, the poet also creates a universe of his own by his imagination.

Wordsworth also thought with Coleridge that the imagination was the most important gift that the poet can have. He agreed with Coleridge that this activity resembles that of God. But according to Wordsworth imagination is a comprehensive faculty comprising many faculties. So he explains that the imagination:

*Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.*

Wordsworth differs from Coleridge in his conception of the external world. For him the world is not dead but living and has its own soul. Man's task is to enter into communion with this soul. Nature was the source of his inspiration, and he could not deny to it an existence at least as powerful as man's. But since nature lifted him out of himself, he sought for a higher state in which the soul of nature and the soul of man could be united in a single harmony.

Shelley was no less attached to the imagination and gave it no less a place in his theory of poetry. He saw that the task of reason is simply to analyse a given thing and to act as an instrument of the imagination, which uses its conclusions to create a synthetic and harmonious whole. He called poetry “the Expression of the Imagination”, because in it diverse things are brought together in harmony instead of being separated through analysis. Shelley tried to grasp the whole of things in its essential unity, to show is real and what is merely phenomenal, and by doing this to display how the phenomenal depends on the real. For him the ultimate reality is the eternal mind, and this holds the universe together. In thought and feeling, in consciousness and spirit, Shelley found reality. He believed that the task of the imagination is to create shapes by which this reality can be revealed.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Keats had passionate love for the visible world and at times his approach was highly sensuous. But he had a conviction that the ultimate reality is to be found only in the imagination. What is meant to him can be seen from some lines in *Sleep and Poetry*, in which he asks why imagination has lost its power and scope:

*Is there so small a range  
In the present strength of manhood, that the high  
Imagination cannot freely fly  
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds  
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds  
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?  
From the clear space of ether, to the small  
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning  
Of Jove's eyebrow, to the tender greenings  
Of April meadows.*

Through the imagination Keats sought an ultimate reality to which a door was opened by his appreciation of beauty through the senses. For him imagination is that absorbing and exalting faculty which opens the way to an unseen spiritual order.

Thus the great Romantic poets agreed that their task was to find through the imagination some transcendental order, some inner and ultimate reality which explains the outward appearance of things in the visible world and the effect which they produce on us. Each one gave his own interpretation of the universe, the relation of God, the connection between the visible and the invisible, nature and man, as he saw it through the power of his imagination. Each set forth his own vision through the power of his imagination. Each set forth his own vision through the richness of his poetry, and gave it a concrete individual shape. They refused to accept the ideas of other men on trust or to sacrifice imagination to argument. By means of their creative art they tried to awaken the imagination of the reader to the reality that lies behind and in familiar things, to rouse him from the dead and dull routine of custom, and make him conscious of the unfathomable mysteries of life. They tried to show that mere reason is not sufficient to understand the fundamental problems of life; what is required is inspired intuition. Thus their view of life and poetry was much wider and deeper than that of their predecessors in the eighteenth century, because they appealed to the whole spiritual nature of man and not merely to his reason and common sense whose scope is limited.

### Lecture 14

#### Poets of the Romantic Age

The poets of the Romantic age can be classified into three groups— (i) The Lake School, consisting of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey; (ii) The Scott group including Campbell and Moore; and (iii) The group comprising Byron, Shelley, and Keats. The first two groups were distinctly earlier than the third, so we have two eight years flood periods of supremely great poetry, namely 1798-1806 and 1816-1824, separated by a middle period when by comparison creative energy had ebbed.

### (a) The Lake Poets

The Lake Poets formed a 'school' in the sense that they worked in close cooperation, and their lives were spent partly in the Lake district. Only Wordsworth was born there, but all the three lived there for a shorter or longer period. Linked together by friendship, they were still further united by the mutual ardour of their revolutionary ideas in youth, and by the common reaction which followed in their riper years. They held many of the poetic beliefs in common. Wordsworth and Coleridge lived together for a long time and produced the *Lyrical Ballads* by joint effort in 1798. They had original genius and what they achieved in the realm of poetry was supported by Southey who himself did not possess much creative imagination. The literary revolution which is associated with their name was accomplished in 1800, when in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge explained further their critical doctrines.

Describing the genesis of the poems contained the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge wrote later in his greatest critical work—*Biographia Literaria* (1817):

*During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversation turned frequently on two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination...The thought suggested itself that a series of poems may be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real...For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents, were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves. In this idea originated the plan of Lyrical Ballads, in which it was agreed that my endeavour should be directed to persons and characters supernatural...Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to give charm of novelty to things of every day.*

This was the framework of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Regarding the style, Wordsworth explained in the famous preface:

*The poems were published which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement, a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart...Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language.*

Wordsworth thus registered a protest against the artificial 'poetic diction' of the classical school, which was separated from common speech. He declared emphatically: "There is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." Thus it was in the spirit of a crusader that Wordsworth entered upon his poetic career. His aim was to lift poetry from its depraved state and restore to it its rightful position.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was the greatest poet of the Romantic period. The credit of originating the Romantic movement goes to him. He refused to abide by any poetic convention and rules, and forged his own way in the realm of poetry. He stood against many

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

generations of great poets and critics, like Dryden, Pope and Johnson, and made way for a new type of poetry. He declared: "A poet is a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind." The truth of this statement struck down the ideal of literary conventions based on reason and rationality, which had been blindly worshipped for so long. By defining poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" he revolted against the dry intellectuality of his predecessors. By giving his ideas about the poetic language as simple and natural, he opposed the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" of the affected classical style.

Wordsworth wrote a large number and variety of lyrics, in which he can stir the deepest emotions by the simplest means. There we find the aptness of phrase and an absolute naturalness which make a poem once read as a familiar friend. Language can scarcely be at once more simple and more full of feeling than in the following stanza from one of the 'Lucy poems':

Thus                Nature                spoke—The                work                was                done,  
How                soon                my                Lucy's                race                was                run.  
She                died,                and                left                to                me  
This                health,                this                calm,                and                quiet                scene,  
The                memory                of                what                has                been,  
And never more will be.

Besides lyrics Wordsworth wrote a number of sonnets of rare merit like *To Milton*, *Westminster Bridge*, *The World is too much with us*, in which there is a fine combination of the dignity of thought and language. In his odes, as *Ode to Duty* and *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, he gives expression to his high ideals and philosophy of life. In the *Immortality Ode*, Wordsworth celebrates one of his most cherished beliefs that our earliest intuitions are the truest, and that those are really happy who even in their mature years keep themselves in touch with their childhood:

Hence,                in                a                season                of                calm                weather,  
Though                inland                far                we                be,  
Our                souls                have                sight                of                that                immortal                sea  
Which                brought                us                hither.  
Can                in                a                moment                travel                thither,  
And                see                the                children                sport                upon                the                shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling ever more.

But Wordsworth was not merely a lyrical poet; he justly claims to be the poet of Man of Nature, and of Human Life. Though in his youth he came under the influence of the ideals of the French Revolution, he was soon disillusioned on account of its excesses, and came to the conclusion that the emancipation of man cannot be effected by poetical upheavals, but by his living a simple, natural life. In the simple pieties of rustic life he began to find a surer foundation for faith in mankind than in the dazzling hopes created by the French Revolution. Moreover, he discovered that there is an innate harmony between Nature and Man. It is when man lives in the lap of nature that he lives the right type of life. She has an ennobling effect on him, and even the simplest things in nature can touch a responsive cord in man's heart:

To                me                the                meanest                flower                that                blooms                can                give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

According to Wordsworth man is a part of Nature. In his poem *Resolution and Independence* the old man and the surroundings make a single picture:

Himself      he      propped,      limbs,      body,      and      pale      face,  
Upon      a      long      grey      staff      of      shaven      wood;  
And,      still      as      I      drew      near      with      gentle      pace  
Upon      the      margin      of      that      moorish      flood,  
Motionless      like      a      cloud      the      old      man      stood  
That      heareth      not      the      loud      winds      when      they      call;  
And moveth all together, if it move at all.

Besides the harmony between Man and Nature, the harmony of Wordsworth's own spirit with the universe is the theme of Wordsworth's greatest Nature poems: *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, *Yew Trees* and *The Simploton Pass*.

Wordsworth is famous for his lyrics, sonnets, odes and short descriptive poems. His longer poems contain much that is prosy and uninteresting. The greater part of his work, including *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* was intended for a place in a single great poem, to be called *The Recluse*, which should treat of nature, man and society. *The Prelude*, treating of the growth of poets' mind, was to introduce this work. *The Excursion* (1814) is the second book of *The Recluse*; and the third was never completed. In his later years, Wordsworth wrote much poetry which is dull and unimaginative. But there is not a single line in his poetry which has not got the dignity and high moral value which we associate with Wordsworth who, according to Tennyson, "uttered nothing base."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). The genius of Coleridge was complementary to that of Wordsworth. While Wordsworth dealt with naturalism which was an important aspect of the Romantic movement, Coleridge made the supernatural his special domain, which was an equally important aspect. In his youth Coleridge came under the spell of French Revolution and the high hope which it held out for the emancipation of the oppressed section of mankind. He gave poetic expression to his political aspiration in *Religious Musings*, *Destiny of Nations* and *Ode to the Departing Year* (1796). But like Wordsworth, he also began to think differently after the excesses of the Revolution. This change of thought is shown in his beautiful poem *France: an Ode* (1798) which he himself called his 'recantation'. After that he, like Wordsworth, began to support the conservative cause.

Coleridge was a man of gigantic genius, but his lack of will power and addiction to opium prevented him from accomplishing much in the realm of poetry. Whatever he has written, though of high quality, is fragmentary. It was, however, in the fields of theology, philosophy and literary criticism that he exercised a tremendous and lasting influence. His two best-known poems are *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, which represent the high watermark of supernaturalism as some of the best poems of Wordsworth represent the triumph of naturalism, in English poetry. In these two poems Coleridge saved supernaturalism from the coarse sensationalism then in vogue by linking it with psychological truth. He had absorbed the spells of medievalism within himself and in these poems they appeared rarely distilled and inextricably blinded with poets' exquisite perception of the mysteries that surround the commonplace things of everyday life.

In the *Ancient Mariner*, which is a poetic masterpiece, Coleridge introduced the reader to a supernatural realm, with a phantom ship, a crew of dead men, the overwhelming curse of the albatross, the polar spirit, the magic breeze, and a number of other supernatural things and

happenings, but he manages to create a sense of absolute reality concerning these manifest absurdities. With that supreme art which ever seems artless, Coleridge gives us glimpses from time to time of the wedding feast to which the mariner has been invited. The whole poem is wrought with the colour and glamour of the Middle Ages and yet Coleridge makes no slavish attempt to reproduce the past in a mechanical manner. The whole poem is the baseless fabric of a vision; a fine product of the ethereal and subtle fancy of a great poet. But in spite of its wildness, its medieval superstitions and irresponsible happening, *The Ancient Mariner* is made actual and vital to our imagination by its faithful pictures of Nature, its psychological insight and simple humanity. In it the poet deals in a superb manner with the primal emotions of love, hate, pain, remorse and hope. He prayeth best who loveth best is not an artificial ending of the poem in the form of a popular saying, but it is a fine summing up in a few lines of the spirit which underlies the entire poem. Its simple, ballad form, its exquisite imagery, the sweet harmony of its verse, and the aptness of its phraseology, all woven together in an artistic whole, make this poem the most representative of the romantic school of poetry.

*Christabel*, which is a fragment, seems to have been planned as the story of a pure young girl who fell under the spell of a sorcer in the shape of the woman Gerldine. Though it has strange melody and many passages of exquisite poetry, and in sheer artistic power it is scarcely inferior to *The Ancient Mariner*, it has supernatural terrors of the popular hysterical novels. The whole poem is suffused in medieval atmosphere and everything is vague and indefinite. Like *The Ancient Mariner* it is written in a homely and simple diction and in a style which is spontaneous and effortless.

*Kubla Khan* is another fragment in which the poet has painted a gorgeous Oriental dream picture. The whole poem came to Coleridge in a dream one morning when he had fallen asleep, and upon awakening he began to write hastily, but he was interrupted after fifty-four lines were written, and it was never finished.

Though Coleridge wrote a number of other poems—*Love, The Dark Ladie, Youth and Age, Dejection: an Ode*, which have grace, tenderness and touches of personal emotion, and a number of poems full of very minute description of natural scenes, yet his strength lay in his marvellous dream faculty, and his reputation as a poet rest on *The Ancient Mariner, Christabel and Kubla Khan* where he touched the heights of romantic poetry.

Robert Southey (1774-1843) was the third poet of the group of Lake Poets. Unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge he lacked higher qualities of poetry, and his achievement as a poet is not much. He was a voracious reader and voluminous writer. His most ambitious poems *Thalaba, The Curse of Kehama, Madoc and Roderick* are based on mythology of different nations. He also wrote a number of ballads and short poems, of which the best known is about his love for books (*My days among the Dead are past.*) But he wrote far better prose than poetry, and his admirable *Life of Nelson* remains a classic. He was made the *Poet Laureate* in 1813, and after his death in 1843 Wordsworth held this title.

### (b) The Scott Group

The romantic poets belonging to the Scott group are *Sir Walter Scott, Campbell and Thomas Moore*. They bridged the years which preceded the second outburst of high creative activity in the Romantic period.

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was the first to make romantic poetry popular among the masses. His *Marmion* and *Lady of the Lake* gained greater popularity than the poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge which were read by a select few. But in his poetry we do not find the deeply imaginative and suggestive quality which is at the root of poetic excellence. It is the story element, the narrative power, which absorbs the reader's attention. That is why they are more popular with young readers. Moreover, Scott's poetry appeals on account of its vigour, youthful abandon, vivid pictures, heroic characters, rapid action and succession of adventures. His best known poems are *The Lady of the Last Ministrel*, *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, *Rokeby*, *The Lord of the Isles*. All of them recapture the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, and breathe an air of supernaturalism and superstitions. After 1815 Scott wrote little poetry and turned to prose romance in the form of the historical novel in which field he earned great and enduring fame.

Thomas Campbell (1774-1844) and Thomas Moore (1779-1852) were prominent among a host of minor poets who following the vogue of Scott wrote versified romance. Campbell wrote *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809) in the Spenserian stanza, which does not hold so much interest today as his patriotic war songs—*Ye Mariners of England*, *Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, and ballads such as *Lord Ullin's Daughter*. The poems of Moore are now old-fashioned and have little interest for the modern reader. He wrote a long series of *Irish Melodies*, which are musical poems, vivacious and sentimental. His *Lalla Rookh* is a collection of Oriental tales in which he employs lucious imagery. Though Moore enjoyed immense popularity during his time, he is now considered as a minor poet of the Romantic Age.

### (c) The Younger Group

To the younger group of romantic poets belong Byron, Shelley and Keats. They represent the second Flowering of English Romanticism, the first being represented by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. Though the younger group was in many ways indebted to the older group and was in many ways akin to it, yet the poets of the younger group show some sharp differences with the poets of older group, it was because the revolutionary ideals which at first attracted Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey and then repelled them, had passed into the blood of Byron and Shelley. They were the children of the revolution and their humanitarian ardour affected even Keats who was more of an artist. Moreover, compared to the poets of the older group, the poets of the younger group were not only less national, but they were also against the historic and social traditions of England. It is not without significance that Byron and Shelley lived their best years, and produced their best poetry in Italy; and Keats was more interested in Greek mythology than in the life around him. Incidentally, these three poets of second generation of Romanticism died young—Byron at the age of thirty-six, Shelley thirty, and Keats twenty-five. So the spirit of youthful freshness is associated with their poetry.

### (i) Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824)

During his time Byron was the most popular of all Romantic poets, and he was the only one who made an impact on the continent both in his own day and for a long time afterwards. This was mainly due to the force of his personality and the glamour of his career, but as his poetry does not possess the high excellence that we find in Shelley's and Keats', now he is accorded a lower positions in the hierarchy of Romantic poets. He is the only Romantic poet who showed regard for the poets of the eighteenth century, and ridiculed his own contemporaries in his early satirical poem, *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers* (1809). That is why, he is called the 'Romantic Paradox'.

Byron who had travelled widely captured the imagination of his readers by the publications of the first two Cantos of *Childe Harold Pilgrimage* (1812). This work made him instantly famous. As he said himself, "I woke one morning and found myself famous." In it he described the adventures of a glamorous but sinister hero through strange lands. He also gave an air of authenticity to these adventures and a suggestion that he himself had indulged in such exploits. Such a hero, called the Byronic hero, became very popular among the readers and there was greater and greater demand for such romances dealing with his exploits. Under the pressure of the popular demand Byron wrote a number of romances which began with *The Giaour* (1813), and in all of them he dealt with the exploits of the Byronic hero. But whereas these romances made his reputation not in England alone but throughout Europe, the pruder section of the English society began to look upon him with suspicion, and considered him a dangerous, sinister man. The result was that when his wife left him in 1816, a year after his marriage, there was such a turn in the tide of public opinion against him that he left England under a cloud of distrust and disappointment and never returned.

It was during the years of his exile in Italy that the best part of his poetry was written by him. The third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold* (1816-1818) have more sincerity, and are in every way better expressions of Byron's genius. He also wrote two sombre and self-conscious tragedies—*Manfred* and *Cain*. But the greatness of Byron as a poet lies, however, not in these poems and tragedies, but in the satires which begin with *Beppo* (1818) and include *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) and *Don Juan* (1819-24). Of these *Don Juan*, which is a scathing criticism of the contemporary European society, is one of the greatest poems in the English language. In it humour, sentiment, adventure and pathos are thrown together in a haphazard manner as in real life. It is written in a conversational style which subtly produces comic as well as satirical effect.

Of all the romantic poets Byron was the most egoistical. In all his poems his personality obtrudes itself, and he attaches the greatest importance to it. Of the romantic traits, he represents the revolutionary iconoclasm at its worst, and that is why he came in open conflict with the world around him. His last great act, dying on his way to take part in the Greek War of Independence, was a truly heroic act; and it vindicated his position for all times and made him a martyr in the cause of freedom.

Byron does not enjoy a high reputation as a poet because of his slipshod and careless style. He was too much in a hurry to revise what he had written, and so there is much in his poetry which is artistically imperfect. Moreover his rhetorical style, which was admirably suited to convey the force and fire of his personality, often becomes dull and boring.

### (ii) Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Whereas Byron was the greatest interpreter of revolutionary iconoclasm, Shelley was the revolutionary idealist, a prophet of hope and faith. He was a visionary who dreamed of the Golden Age. Unlike Byron's genius which was destructive, Shelley's was constructive and he incarnated that aspect of the French Revolution which aimed at building up a new and beautiful edifice on the ruins of the old and the ugly. Whereas Byron's motive impulse was pride, Shelley's was love.

In his early days Shelley came under the influence of William Godwin's *Political Justice*. He saw that all established institutions, kings and priests were diverse forms of evil and obstacles to happiness and progress. So he began to imagine the new world which would come into existence when all these forms of error and hatred had disappeared. The essence of all his

poetical works is his prophecy of the new-born age. In his first long poem, *Queen Mab*, which he wrote when he was eighteen, he condemns kings, governments, church, property, marriage and Christianity. *The Revolt of Islam* which followed in 1817, and is a sort of transfigured picture of the French Revolution is charged with the young poet's hopes for the future regeneration of the world. In 1820 appeared *Prometheus Unbound*, the hymn of human revolt triumphing over the oppression of false gods. In this superb lyrical drama we find the fullest and finest expression of Shelley's faith and hope. Here Prometheus stands forth as the prototype of mankind in its long struggle against the forces of despotism, symbolised by love. At last Prometheus is united to Asia, the spirit of love and goodness in nature, and everything gives promise that they shall live together happy ever afterwards.

Shelley's other great poems are *Alastor* (1816), in which he describes his pursuit of an unattainable ideal of beauty; *Julian and Meddalo* (1818) in which he draws his own portrait contrasted with that of Byron; *The Cenci*, a poetic drama which deals with the terrible story of Beatrice who, the victim of father's lust, takes his life in revenge; the lyrical drama *Hellas* in which he sings of the rise of Greece against the Ottoman yoke; *Epipsychidion* in which he celebrates his Platonic love for a beautiful young Italian girl; *Adonais*, the best-known of Shelley's longer poems, which is an elegy dedicated to the poet Keats, and holds its place with Milton's *Lycidas* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* as one of the three greatest elegies in the English language; and the unfinished masterpiece, *The Triumph of Life*.

Shelley's reputation as a poet lies mainly in his lyrical power. He is in fact the greatest lyrical poet of England. In all these poems mentioned above, it is their lyrical rapture which is unique. In the whole of English poetry there is no utterance as spontaneous as Shelley's and nowhere does the thought flow with such irresistible melody. Besides these longer poems Shelley wrote a number of small lyrics of exquisite beauty, such as 'To Constantia Singing', the 'Ozymandias' sonnet, the 'Lines written among the Euganean Hills', the 'Stanzas written in Dejection', the 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Cloud', 'Skylark'; 'O World! O life! O time'. It is in fact on the foundation of these beautiful lyrics, which are absolutely consummate and unsurpassed the whole range of English lyrical poetry, that Shelley's real reputation as a poet lies.

As the poet of Nature, Shelley was inspired by the spirit of love which was not limited to mankind but extended to every living creature—to animals and flowers, to elements, to the whole Nature. He is not content, like Wordsworth, merely to love and revere Nature; his very being is fused and blended with her. He, therefore, holds passionate communion with the universe, and becomes one with the lark (*To a Skylark*), with the cloud (*The Cloud*), and west wind (*Ode to the West Wind*) to which he utters forth this passionate, lyrical appeal:

Make        me        thy        lyre,        even        as        the        forest        is;  
What        if        my        leaves        are        falling        like        its        own!  
The        tumult        of        thy        mighty        harmonies  
Will        take        from        both        a        deep,        autumnal        tone,  
Sweet        though        in        sadness.        Be        thou,        spirit        fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one.

(iii) John Keats (1795-21)

Of all the romantic poets, Keats was the pure poet. He was not only the last but the most perfect of the Romanticists. He was devoted to poetry and had no other interest. Unlike Wordsworth who was interested in reforming poetry and upholding the moral law; unlike

Shelley who advocated impossible reforms and prophesied about the golden age; and unlike Byron who made his poetry a vehicle of his strongly egoistical nature and political discontents of the time; unlike Coleridge who was a metaphysician, and Scott who relished in story-telling, Keats did not take much notice of the social, political and literary turmoils, but devoted himself entirely to the worship of beauty, and writing poetry as it suited his temperament. He was, about all things, a poet, and nothing else. His nature was entirely and essentially poetical and the whole of his vital energy went into art.

Unlike Byron who was a lord, and Shelley who belonged to an aristocratic family, Keats came of a poor family, and at an early age he had to work as a doctor's assistant. But his medical studies did not stand in the way of his passion for writing poetry which was roused by his reading of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which revealed to him the vast world of poetry. He also became interested in the beauty of nature. His first volume of poems appeared in 1817 and his first long poem *Endymion* in 1818, which opened with the following memorable lines:

A        thing        of        beauty        is        a        joy        for        ever;  
Its        loveliness        increases;        it        will        never  
Pass        into        nothingness;        but        still        will        keep  
A        bower        quiet        for        us;        and        sleep  
*Full of sweet dreams, and healthy, and quiet breathing.*

This poem was severely criticised by contemporary critics, which must have shocked Keats. Besides this a number of other calamities engulfed him. He had lost his father when he was only nine; his mother and brother died of tuberculosis, and he himself was suffering from this deadly disease. All these misfortunes were intensified by his disappointment in love for Fanny Brawne whom Keats loved passionately. But he remained undaunted, and under the shadow of death and in midst of most excruciating sufferings Keats brought out his last volume of poems in the year 1820 (which is called the 'Living Year' in his life.) *The Poems* of 1820 are Keats' enduring monument. They include the three narratives, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia*; the unfinished epic *Hyperion*; the Odes, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and a few sonnets.

In *Isabella* Keats made an attempt to turn a somewhat repellent and tragic love story of Isabella and Lorenzo, who was murdered by Isabella's brothers, into a thing of beauty by means of fine narrative skill and beautiful phraseology. In *Lamia* Keats narrated the story of a beautiful enchantress, who turns from a serpent into a glorious woman and fills every human sense with delight, until as the result of the foolish philosophy of old Apollonius, she vanishes for ever from her lover's sight. *The Eve of St. Agnes*, which is the most perfect of Keats' medieval poems, is surpassingly beautiful in its descriptions. *Hyperion* which is a magnificent fragment deals with the overthrow of the Titans by the young sun-god Apollo. This poem shows the influence of Milton as *Endymion* of Spenser. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, which captures the spirit of the Middle Ages, has a haunting melody. Though small, it is a most perfect work of art.

Of the odes, those *To a Nightingale*, *On a Grecian Urn* and *To Autumn* stand out above the rest, and are among the masterpieces of poetic art. In *Ode to a Nightingale* we find a love of sensuous beauty, and a touch of pessimism. In *Ode on a Grecian Urn* we see Keats' love for Greek mythology and art. It is this Ode which ends with the following most memorable lines in the whole of Keats' poetry.

'Beauty        is        Truth,        and        Truth        Beauty',--that        is        all  
*Yea know on earth, and all ye need to know.*

The Ode to Autumn, in which Keats has glorified Nature, is a poem which for richness and colour has never been surpassed. Though Keats died young, when he had attained barely the age of twenty-five, and had only a few years in which he could effectively write poetry, his achievement in the field of poetry is so great, that we wonder what he might have accomplished if he had lived longer. For a long time his poetry was considered merely as sensuous having no depth of thought. But with the help of his letters critics have reinterpreted his poems, and now it has been discovered that they are based on mature thinking, and that there is a regular line of development from the point of thought and art. He was not an escapist who tried to run away from the stark realities of life, but he faced life bravely, and came to the conclusion that sufferings play an important part in the development of the human personality. As a worshipper of beauty, though his first approach was sensuous, his attitude suddenly became philosophic, and he discovered that there is beauty in everything, and that Beauty and Truth are one. As an artist there are few English poets who come near him. As a poet he had very high ideals before him. He wanted to become the poet of the human heart, one with Shakespeare. For him the proper role of poetry is ‘to be a friend to sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of men’, and the real poet is that “to whom the miseries of the world are misery, and will not let him rest.”

And Keats sincerely and persistently lived up to these high ideals. Taking into account all these factors and the very short span of life that was given to him by the Providence, it is no exaggeration to say that of all the English poets he comes nearest to Shakespeare.

### Lecture 15

#### **Prose-Writers of the Romantic Age**

Though the Romantic period specialised in poetry, there also appeared a few prose-writers—Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey who rank very high. There was no revolt of the prose-writers against the eighteenth century comparable to that of the poets, but a change had taken place in the prose-style also.

Whereas many eighteenth century prose-writers depended on assumptions about the suitability of various prose styles for various purposes which they shared with their relatively small but sophisticated public; writers in the Romantic period were rather more concerned with subject matter and emotional expression than with appropriate style. They wrote for an ever-increasing audience which was less homogeneous in its interest and education than that of their predecessors. There was also an indication of a growing distrust of the sharp distinction between matter and manner which was made in the eighteenth century, and of a Romantic preference for spontaneity rather than formality and contrivance. There was a decline of the ‘grand’ style and of most forms of contrived architectural prose written for what may be called public or didactic purposes. Though some Romantic poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron—wrote excellent prose in their critical writings, letters and journals, and some of the novelists like Scott and Jane Austen were masters of prose-style, those who wrote prose for its own sake in the form of the essays and attained excellence in the art of prose-writing were Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey.

#### (i) Charles Lamb (1775-1834)

Charles Lamb is one of the most lovable personalities in English literature. He lived a very humble, honest, and most self-sacrificing life. He never married, but devoted himself to the care

of his sister Mary, ten years his senior, who was subject to mental fits, in one of which she had fatally wounded her mother. In his *Essays of Elia* (1823) and *Last Essays* (1833), in which is revealed his own personality, he talks intimately to the readers about himself, his quaint whims and experiences, and the cheerful and heroic struggle which he made against misfortunes. Unlike Wordsworth who was interested in natural surroundings and shunned society, Lamb who was born and lived in the midst of London street, was deeply interested in the city crowd, its pleasures and occupations, its endless comedies and tragedies, and in his essays he interpreted with great insight and human sympathy that crowded human life of joys and sorrows.

Lamb belongs to the category of intimate and self-revealing essayists, of whom Montaigne is the original, and Cowley the first exponent in England. To the informality of Cowley he adds the solemn confessional manner of Sir Thomas Browne. He writes always in a gentle, humorous way about the sentiments and trifles of everyday. The sentimental, smiling figure of 'Elia' in his essays is only a cloak with which Lamb hides himself from the world. Though in his essays he plays with trivialities, as Walter Pater has said, "We know that beneath this blithe surface there is something of the domestic horror, of the beautiful heroism, and devotedness too, of the old Greek tragedy."

The style of Lamb is described as 'quaint', because it has the strangeness which we associate with something old-fashioned. One can easily trace in his English the imitations of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century writers he most loved—Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, Fuller, Burton, Isaac Walton. According to the subject he is treating, he makes use of the rhythms and vocabularies of these writers. That is why, in every essay Lamb's style changes. This is the secret of the charm of his style and it also prevents him from ever becoming monotonous or tiresome. His style is also full of surprises because his mood continually varies, creating or suggesting its own style, and calling into play some recollection of this or that writer of the older world.

Lamb is the most lovable of all English essayists, and in his hand the Essay reached its perfection. His essays are true to Johnson's definition; 'a loose sally of the mind.' Though his essays are all criticisms or appreciations of the life of his age and literature, they are all intensely personal. They, therefore, give us an excellent picture of Lamb and of humanity. Though he often starts with some purely personal mood or experience he gently leads the reader to see life as he saw it, without ever being vain or self-assertive. It is this wonderful combination of personal and universal interest together with his rare old style and quaint humour, which have given his essays his perennial charm, and earned for him the covetable title of "The Prince among English Essayists".

### (ii) William Hazlitt (1778-1830)

As a personality Hazlitt was just the opposite of Lamb. He was a man of violent temper, with strong likes and dislikes. In his judgment of others he was always downright and frank, and never cared for its effect on them. During the time when England was engaged in a bitter struggle against Napoleon, Hazlitt worshipped him as a hero, and so he came in conflict with the government. His friends left him one by one on account of his aggressive nature, and at the time of his death only Lamb stood by him.

Hazlitt wrote many volumes of essays, of which the most effective is *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) in which he gives critical portraits of a number of his famous contemporaries. This was a work which only Hazlitt could undertake because he was outspoken and fearless in the expression of his opinion. Though at times he is misled by his prejudices, yet taking his criticism

of art and literature as a whole there is not the least doubt that there is great merit in it. He has the capacity to see the whole of his author most clearly, and he can place him most exactly in relation to other authors. In his interpretation of life in the general and proper sense, he shows an acute and accurate power of observation and often goes to the very foundation of things. Underneath his light and easy style there always flows an undercurrent of deep thought and feeling.

The style of Hazlitt has force, brightness and individuality. Here and there we find passages of solemn and stately music. It is the reflection of Hazlitt's personality—outspoken, straightforward and frank. As he had read widely, and his mind was filled with great store of learning, his writings are interspersed with sentences and phrases from other writers and there are also echoes of their style. Above all, it vibrates with the vitality and force of his personality, and so never lapses into dullness.

### (iii) Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859)

De Quincey is famous as the writer of 'impassioned prose'. He shared the reaction of his day against the severer classicism of the eighteenth century, preferring rather the ornate manner of Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne and their contemporaries. The specialty of his style consists in describing incidents of purely personal interest in language suited to their magnitude as they appear in the eyes of the writer. The reader is irresistibly attracted by the splendour of his style which combines the best elements of prose and poetry. In fact his prose works are more imaginative and melodious than many poetical works. There is revealed in them the beauty of the English language. The defects of his style are that he digresses too much, and often stops in the midst of the fine paragraph to talk about some trivial thing by way of jest. But in spite of these defects his prose is still among the few supreme examples of style in the English language.

De Quincey was a highly intellectual writer and his interests were very wide. Mostly he wrote in the form of articles for journals and he dealt with all sorts of subjects—about himself and his friends, life in general, art, literature, philosophy and religion. Of his autobiographical sketches the best-known is his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, in which he has given us, in a most interesting manner, glimpses of his own life under the influence of opium. He wrote fine biographies of a number of classical, historical and literary personages, of which the most ambitious attempt is *The Caesars*. His most perfect historical essay is on *Joan of Arc*. His essays on principle of literature are original and penetrating. The best of this type is the one where he gives the distinction between the literature of knowledge and of power. *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth* is the most brilliant. He also wrote very scholarly articles on Goethe, Pope, Schiller and Shakespeare. Besides these he wrote a number of essays on science and theology.

In all his writings De Quincey asserts his personal point of view, and as he is a man of strong prejudices, likes and dislikes, he often gives undue emphasis on certain points. The result is that we cannot rely on his judgment entirely. But there is no doubt that his approach is always original and brilliant which straightway captures the attention of the reader. Moreover, the splendour of his 'poetic prose' which is elaborate and sonorous in its effects, casts its own special spell. The result is that De Quincey is still one of the most fascinating prose-writers of England.

### Novelists of The Romantic Age

The great novelists of the Romantic period are Jane Austen and Scott, but before them there appeared some novelists who came under the spell of medievalism and wrote novels of 'terror' or the 'Gothic novels'. The origin of this type of fiction can be ascribed to Horace Walpole's (1717-97) *The Castle of Otranto* (1746). Here the story is set in medieval Italy and it includes a gigantic helmet that can strike dead its victims, tyrants, supernatural intrusions, mysteries and secrets. There were a number of imitators of such a type of novel during the eighteenth century as well as in the Romantic period.

#### (i) The Gothic Novel

The most popular of the writers of the 'terror' or 'Gothic' novel during the Romantic age was Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), of whose five novels the best-known are *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and the *Italian*. She initiated the mechanism of the 'terror' tale as practiced by Horace Walpole and his followers, but combined it with sentimental but effective description of scenery. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* relates the story of an innocent and sensitive girl who falls in the hands of a heartless villain named Montoni. He keeps her in a grim and isolated castle full of mystery and terror. The novels of Mrs. Radcliffe became very popular, and they influenced some of the great writers like Byron and Shelley. Later they influenced the Bronte sisters whose imagination was stimulated by these strange stories.

Though Mrs. Radcliffe was the prominent writer of 'Gothic' novels, there were a few other novelists who earned popularity by writing such novels. They were Mathew Gregory ('Monk') Lewis (1775-1818). Who wrote *The Monk*, *Tales of Terror and Tales of Wonder*; and Charles Robert Maturin whose *Melmoth the Wanderer* exerted great influence in France. But the most popular of all 'terror' tales was *Frankenstein* (1817) written by Mrs. Shelley. It is the story of a mechanical monster with human powers capable of performing terrifying deeds. Of all the 'Gothic' novels it is the only one which is popular even today.

#### (ii) Jane Austen (1775-1817)

Jane Austen brought good sense and balance to the English novel which during the Romantic age had become too emotional and undisciplined. Giving a loose rein to their imagination the novelist of the period carried themselves away from the world around them into a romantic past or into a romantic future. The novel, which in the hands of Richardson and Fielding had been a faithful record of real life and of the working of heart and imagination, became in the closing years of the eighteenth century the literature of crime, insanity and terror. It, therefore, needed castigation and reform which were provided by Jane Austen. Living a quiet life she published her six novels anonymously, which have now placed her among the front rank of English novelists. She did for the English novel precisely what the Lake poets did for English poetry—she refined and simplified it, making it a true reflection of English life. As Wordsworth made a deliberate effort to make poetry natural and truthful, Jane Austen also from the time she started writing her first novel—*Pride and Prejudice*, had in her mind the idea of presenting English country society exactly as it was, in opposition to the romantic extravagance of Mrs. Radcliffe and her school. During the time of great turmoil and revolution in various fields, she quietly went on with her work, making no great effort to get a publisher, and, when a publisher

was got, contenting herself with meagre remuneration and never permitting her name to appear on a title page. She is one of the sincerest examples in English literature of art for art's sake.

In all Jane Austen wrote six novels—*Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Mansefield Park*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Of these *Pride and Prejudice* is the best and most widely read of her novels. *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma* and *Mansefield* are now placed among the front rank of English novels. From purely literary point of view *Northanger Abbey* gets the first place on account of the subtle humour and delicate satire it contains against the grotesque but popular 'Gothic' novels.

As a novelist Jane Austen worked in a narrow field. She was the daughter of a humble clergyman living in a little village. Except for short visits to neighbouring places, she lived a static life but she had such a keen power of observation that the simple country people became the characters of her novels. The chief duties of these people were of the household, their chief pleasures were in country gatherings and their chief interest was in matrimony. It is the small, quiet world of these people, free from the mighty interests, passions, ambitious and tragic struggles of life, that Jane Austin depicts in her novels. But in spite of these limitations she has achieved wonderful perfection in that narrow field on account of her acute power of observation, her fine impartiality and self-detachment, and her quiet, delicate and ironical humour. Her circumstances helped her to give that finish and delicacy to her work, which have made them artistically perfect. Novel-writing was a part of her everyday life, to be placed aside should a visitor come, to be resumed when he left, to be pursued unostentatiously and tranquilly in the midst of the family circle. She knew precisely what she wanted to do, and she did it in the way that suited her best. Though in her day she did not receive the appreciation she deserved, posterity has given her reward by placing this modest, unassuming woman who died in her forties, as one of the greatest of English novelists.

Among her contemporaries only Scott, realised the greatness and permanent worth of her work, and most aptly remarked: "That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big bowbow strain I can do myself, like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me, What a pity such a gifted creature died so early!"

(iii) Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

Walter Scott's qualities as a novelist were vastly different from those of Jane Austen. Whereas she painted domestic miniatures, Scott depicted pageantry of history on broader canvases. Jane Austen is precise and exact in whatever she writes; Scott is diffusive and digressive. Jane Austen deals with the quiet intimacies of English rural life free from high passions, struggles and great actions; Scott, on the other hand, deals with the chivalric, exciting, romantic and adventurous life of the Highlanders—people living on the border of England and Scotland, among whom he spent much of his youth, or with glorious scenes of past history.

During his first five or six years of novel-writing Scott confined himself to familiar scenes and characters. The novels which have a local colour and are based on personal observations are *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality* and *The Heart of Midlothian*. His first attempt at a historical novel was *Ivanhoe* (1819) followed by *Kenilworth* (1821), *Quentin Durward* (1823), and *The Talisman* (1825). He returned to Scottish antiquity from time to time as in *The Monastery* (1820) and *St. Ronan's Well* (1823).

In all these novels Scott reveals himself as a consummate storyteller. His leisurely unfolding of the story allows of digression particularly in the descriptions of natural scenes or of interiors. Without being historical in the strict sense he conveys a sense of the past age by means of a wealth of colourful descriptions, boundless vitality and with much humour and sympathy. The historical characters which he has so beautifully portrayed that they challenge comparison with the characters of Shakespeare, include Queen Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots. Besides these he has given us a number of imperishable portraits of the creatures of his imagination. He is a superb master of the dialogue which is invariably true to character.

The novels of Scott betray the same imaginative joy in the recreation of the past as his poetry, but the novel offered him a more adaptable and wider field than the narrative poem. It gave him a better opportunity for the display of his varied gifts, his antiquarian knowledge, his observation of life and character, his delight in popular as well as courtly scenes, and his rich humour.

Scott is the first English writer of the historical novel, and he made very enduring contributions to its development in England as well as in Europe. He was by temperament and training perfectly suited to the accomplishment of this task. In the first place he had acquired a profound knowledge of history by his copious reading since his earliest youth. He had the zest of the story-teller, and a natural heartiness which made him love life in all its manifestations. He had an innate sense of the picturesque, developed by his passion for antiquarianism. His conservative temper which turned him away from the contemporary revolutionary enthusiasm, gave him a natural sympathy for the days of chivalry. In the Romantic age, Scott was romantic only in his love of the picturesque and his interest in the Middle Ages.

Scott was the first novelist in Europe who made the scene an essential element in action. He knew Scotland, and loved it, and there is hardly an event in any of his Scottish novels in which we do not breathe the very atmosphere of the place, and feel the presence of its moors and mountains. He chooses the place so well and describes it so perfectly, that the action seems almost to be result of natural environment.

Though the style of Scott is often inartistic, heavy and dragging; the love interest in his novels is apt to be insipid and monotonous; he often sketches a character roughly and plunges him into the midst of stirring incidents; and he has no inclinations for tracing the logical consequences of human action—all these objections and criticisms are swept away in the end by the broad, powerful current of his narrative genius. Moreover, Scott's chief claim to greatness lies in the fact that he was the first novelist to recreate the past in such a manner that the men and women of the bygone ages, and the old scenes became actually living, and throbbing with life. Carlyle very pertinently remarked about Scott's novels: "These historical novels have taught this truth unknown to the writers of history, that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state papers, controversies, and abstractions of men."

### **Lecture 17**

#### **The Victorian Age (1832-1900)**

The Victorian Age in English literature began in second quarter of the nineteenth century and ended by 1900. Though strictly speaking, the Victorian age ought to correspond with the

reign of Queen Victoria, which extended from 1837 to 1901, yet literary movements rarely coincide with the exact year of royal accession or death. From the year 1798 with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* till the year 1820 there was the heyday of Romanticism in England, but after that year there was a sudden decline.

Wordsworth who after his early effusion of revolutionary principles had relapsed into conservatism and positive opposition to social and political reforms, produced nothing of importance after the publication of his *White Doe of Rylstone* in 1815, though he lived till 1850. Coleridge wrote no poem of merit after 1817. Scott was still writing after 1820, but his work lacked the fire and originality of his early years. The Romantic poets of the younger generation unfortunately all died young—Keats in 1820, Shelley in 1822, and Byron in 1824.

Though the Romantic Age in the real sense of the term ended in 1820, the Victorian Age started from 1832 with the passing of the first Reform Act, 1832. The years 1820-1832 were the years of suspended animation in politics. It was a fact that England was fast turning from an agricultural into a manufacturing country, but it was only after the reform of the Constitution which gave right of vote to the new manufacturing centres, and gave power to the middle classes, that the way was opened for new experiments in constructive politics. The first Reform Act of 1832 was followed by the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 which gave an immense advantage to the manufacturing interests, and the Second Reform Act of 1867. In the field of literature also the years 1820-1832 were singularly barren. As has already been pointed out, there was sudden decline of Romantic literature from the year 1820, but the new literature of England, called the Victorian literature, started from 1832 when Tennyson's first important volume, *Poems*, appeared. The following year saw Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, and Dickens' earliest work, *Sketches by Boz*. The literary career of Thackeray began about 1837, and Browning published his *Dramatic Lyrics* in 1842. Thus the Victorian period in literature officially starts from 1832, though the Romantic period ended in 1820, and Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837.

The Victorian Age is so long and complicated and the great writers who flourished in it are so many, that for the sake of convenience it is often divided into two periods—Early Victorian Period and Later Victorian Period. The earlier period which was the period of middle class supremacy, the age of 'laissez-faire' or free trade, and of unrestricted competition, extended from 1832 to 1870. The great writers of this period were Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens and Thackeray. All these poets, novelists and prose-writers form, a certain homogenous group, because in spite of individual differences they exhibit the same approach to the contemporary problems and the same literary, moral and social values. But the later Victorian writers who came into prominence after 1870—Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, George Eliot, Meredith, Hardy, Newman and Pater seem to belong to a different age. In poetry Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris were the protagonists of new movement called the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, which was followed by the Aesthetic Movement. In the field of novel, George Eliot is the pioneer of what is called the modern psychological novel, followed by Meredith and Hardy. In prose Newman tried to revolutionise Victorian thought by turning it back to Catholicism, and Pater came out with his purely aesthetic doctrine of 'Art for Art's Sake', which was directly opposed to the fundamentally moral approach of the prose-writers of the earlier period—Carlyle Arnold and Ruskin. Thus we see a clear demarcation between the two periods of Victorian literature—the early Victorian period (1832-1870) and the later Victorian period (1870-1900).

But the difference between the writers of the two periods is more apparent than real. Fundamentally they belong to one group. They were all the children of the new age of democracy, of individualism, of rapid industrial development and material expansion, the age of doubt and pessimism, following the new conceptions of man which was formulated by science under the name of Evolution. All of them were men and women of marked originality in outlook and character or style. All of them were the critics of their age, and instead of being in sympathy with its spirit, were its very severe critics. All of them were in search of some sort of balance, stability, a rational understanding, in the midst of the rapidly changing times. Most of them favoured the return to precision in form, to beauty within the limits of reason, and to values which had received the stamp of universal approval. It was in fact their insistence on the rational elements of thought, which gave a distinctive character to the writings of the great Victorians, and which made them akin, to a certain extent, to the great writers of the neo-Classical school. All the great writers of the Victorian Age were actuated by a definite moral purpose. Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold wrote with a superb faith in their message, and with the conscious moral purpose to uplift and to instruct. Even the novel broke away from Scott's romantic influence. Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot wrote with a definite purpose to sweep away error and reveal the underlying truth of humanity. For this reason the Victorian Age was fundamentally an age of realism rather than of romance.

But from another point of view, the Victorian Age in English literature was a continuation of the Romantic Age, because the Romantic Age came to a sudden and unnatural and mainly on account of the premature deaths of Byron, Shelley and Keats. If they had lived longer, the Age of Romanticism would have extended further. But after their death the coherent inspiration of romanticism disintegrated into separate lines of development, just as in the seventeenth century the single inspiration of the Renaissance broke into different schools. The result was that the spirit of Romanticism continued to influence the innermost consciousness of Victorian Age. Its influence is clearly visible on Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Dickens, Thackeray, Ruskin, Meredith, Swinburne, Rossetti and others. Even its adversaries, and those who would escape its spell, were impregnated with it. While denouncing it, Carlyle does so in a style which is intensely charged with emotional fire and visionary colouring. In fact after 1870 we find that the romantic inspiration was again in the ascendent in the shape of the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements.

There was also another reason of the continuation of Romanticism in the Victorian Age. There is no doubt that the Reform Act set at rest the political disturbances by satisfying the impatient demand of the middle classes, and seemed to inaugurate an age of stability. After the crisis which followed the struggle against the French Revolution and Napoleon, England set about organizing herself with a view to internal prosperity and progress. Moreover, with the advent to power of a middle class largely imbued with the spirit of Puritanism, and the accession of a queen to the throne, an era of self-restraint and discipline started. The English society accepted as its standard a stricter conventional morality which was voiced by writers like Carlyle. But no sooner had the political disturbances subsided and a certain measure of stability and balance had been achieved then there was fresh and serious outbreak in the economic world. The result was that the Victorian period, quiet as it was, began to throb with the feverish tremors of anxiety and trouble, and the whole order of the nation was threatened with an upheaval. From 1840 to 1850 in particular, England seemed to be on the verge of a social revolution, and its disturbed spirit was reflected, especially in the novel with a purpose. This special form of Romanticism which was fed by the emotional unrest in the social sphere, therefore, derived a

renewed vitality from these sources. The combined effect of all these causes was the survival and prolongation of Romanticism in the Victorian Age which was otherwise opposed to it.

Moreover, Romanticism not only continued during the Victorian Age, but it appeared in new forms. The very exercise of reason and the pursuit of scientific studies which promoted the spirit of classicism, stirred up a desire for compensation and led to a reassertion of the imagination and the heart. The representatives of the growing civilization of the day—economists, masters of industry, businessmen—were considered as the enemies of nobility and beauty and the artisans of hopeless and joyless materialism. This fear obsessed the minds of those writers of the Victorian Age, to whom feelings and imagination were essentials of life itself. Thus the rationalistic age was rudely shaken by impassioned protestations of writers like Newman, Carlyle and Ruskin who were in conflict with the spirit of their time.

The Victorian Age, therefore, exhibits a very interesting and complex mixture of two opposing elements—Classicism and Romanticism. Basically it was inclined towards classicism on account of its rational approach to the problems of life, a search for balance and stability, and a deeply moral attitude; but on account of its close proximity to the Romantic Revival which had not completely exhausted itself, but had come to a sudden end on account of the premature deaths of Byron, Shelley and Keats, the social and economic unrest, the disillusionment caused by industrialization and material prosperity, the spirit of Romanticism also survived and produced counter currents.

### Lecture 18

#### Poets of the Early Victorian Period

The most important poets during the early Victorian period were Tennyson and Browning, with Arnold occupying a somewhat lower position. After the passing away of Keats, Shelley and Byron in the early eighteen twenties, for about fifteen years the fine frenzy of the high romantics subsided and a quieter mood ensued. With the abatement of the revolutionary fervour, Wordsworth's inspiration had deserted him and all that he wrote in his later years was dull and insipid.

There appeared a host of writers of moderate talent like John Clare, Thomas Love Peacock, Walter Savage Landor and Thomas Hood. The result was that from 1820 till the publication of Tennyson's first important work in 1833 English poetry had fallen into the hands of mediocrities. It was in fact by the publication of his two volumes in 1842 that Tennyson's position was assured as, in Wordsworth's language, "decidedly the greatest of our living poets." Browning's recognition by the public came about the same time, with the appearance of *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), although *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* had already been published. The early Victorian poetry which started in 1833, therefore, came to its own, in the year 1842.

The early poetry of both Tennyson and Browning was imbued with the spirit of romanticism, but it was romanticism with a difference. Tennyson recognised an affinity with Byron and Keats; Browning with Shelley, but their romanticism no longer implied an attitude of revolt against conventional modes. It had itself become a convention. The revolutionary fervour which inspired the poetry of the great Romantic poets had now given place to an evolutionary conception of

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

progress propagated by the writings of Darwin, Bentham and their followers. Though the writers of the new age still persisted in deriving inspiration from the past ages, yet under the spell of the marvels of science, they looked forward rather than backward. The dominant note of the early Victorian period was therefore, contained in Browning's memorable lines: "The best is yet to be." Tennyson found spiritual consolation in contemplating the

One far off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

Faith in the reality of progress was thus the main characteristic of the early Victorian Age. Doubt, scepticism and questioning became the main characteristic of the later Victorian Age.

(a) Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)

Tennyson is the most representative poet of the Victorian Age. His poetry is a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. Being a careful student of science and philosophy he was deeply impressed by the new discoveries and speculations which were undermining the orthodox religion and giving rise to all sorts of doubts and difficulties. Darwin's theory of Evolution which believed in the "struggle for existence" and "the survival of the fittest" specially upset and shook the foundations of religious faith. Thus there was a conflict between science and religion, doubt and faith, materialism and spirituality. These two voices of the Victorian age are perpetually heard in Tennyson's work. In *In Memoriam*, more than in any other contemporary literary work, we read of the great conflict between faith and doubt. Though he is greatly disturbed by the constant struggle going on in Nature which is "red in tooth and claw", his belief in evolution steadies and encourages him, and helps him to look beyond the struggle towards the "one far off divine event to which the whole creation moves."

Tennyson's poetry is so much representative of his age that a chronological study of it can help us to write its history. Thus his *Locksley Hall* of 1842 reflects the restless spirit of 'young England' and its faith in science, commerce and the progress of mankind. In *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* (1866) the poet gives expression to the feeling of revulsion aroused against the new scientific discoveries which threatened the very foundations of religion, and against commerce and industry which had given rise of some very ugly problems as a result of the sordid greed of gain. In *The Princess*, Tennyson dealt with an important problem of the day—that of the higher education of women and their place in the fast changing conditions of modern society. In *Maud*, he gave expression to the patriotic passion aroused on account of the Crimean War. In *Idylls of Kings*, in spite of its medieval machinery, contemporary problems were dealt with by the poet. Thus in all these poems the changing moods of the Victorian Age are successively represented—doubts, misgivings, hopefulness etc.

Taking Tennyson's poetry as a whole, we find that in spite of varieties of moods, it is an exposition of the cautious spirit of Victorian liberalism. He was essentially the poet of law and order as well as of progress. He was a great admirer of English traditions, and though he believed in divine evolution of things:

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfills himself in many ways  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,

he was, like a true Englishman, against anything that smacked of revolution.

But the real greatness of Tennyson as a poet lies in his being a supreme artist. The ideas contained in his poems are often condemned by his critics as commonplace, and he is berated as a shallow thinker. But no one can deny his greatness as an artist. He is, perhaps, after Milton, the most conscientious and accomplished poetic artist in English literature. He is noteworthy for the even perfection of his style and his wonderful mastery of language which is at once simple and ornate. Moreover, there is an exquisite and varied music in his verse. In poetic style he has shown a uniform mastery which is not surpassed by any other English poet except Shakespeare. As an artist, Tennyson has an imagination less dramatic than lyrical, and he is usually at his best when he is kindled by personal emotion, personal experience. It is his fine talent for lyric which gives him a high place among the masters of English verse. Some of his shorter pieces, such as *Break, break, break*; *Tear, idle tears*; *Crossing the Bar* are among the finest English songs on account of their distinction of music and imagery.

Tennyson is a master of imaginative description, which is seen at its best in *The Lotos Eaters*. Words can hardly be more beautiful or more expressive than in such a stanza as this:

A land of stream! some, like a downward smoke,  
Slow-dropping, veils of thinnest lawn did go;  
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,  
Rolling a slumberous sheet of foam below.  
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow  
From the inner land; for off, three mountain tops,  
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,  
Stood sunset flush'd and dew'd with showery drops.  
*Up clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.*

During his lifetime Tennyson was considered as the greatest poet of his age, but after his death a reaction started against him, and he was given a much lower rank among the English poets. But with the passage of time Tennyson's poetry regained its lost position, and at present his place as one of the greatest poets of England is secure mainly on account of the artistic perfection of his verse.

### (b) Robert Browning (1812-1889)

During his lifetime Browning was not considered as great a poet as Tennyson, but after that the opinion of the critics has changed in favour of Browning, who, on account of his depth and originality of thoughts, is ranked superior to Tennyson. Browning and Tennyson were contemporaries and their poetic careers ran almost parallel to each other, but as poets they presented a glaring contrast. Whereas Tennyson is first the artist and then the teacher, with Browning the message is always the important thing, and he is very careless of the form in which it is expressed. Tennyson always writes about subjects which are dainty and comely; Browning, on the other hand, deals with subjects which are rough and ugly, and he aims to show that truth lies hidden in both the evil and the good. In their respective messages the two poets differed widely. Tennyson's message reflects the growing order of the age, and is summed up in the word 'law'. He believes in disciplining the individual will and subordinating it to the universal law. There is a note of resignation struck in his poetry, which amounts to fatalism. Browning, on the other hand, advocates the triumph of the individual will over the obstacles. In his opinion self is not subordinate but supreme. There is a robust optimism reflected in all his poetry. It is in fact because of his invincible will and optimism that Browning is given preference over Tennyson.

whose poetry betrays weakness and helpless pessimism. Browning's boundless energy, his cheerful courage, his faith in life and in the development that awaits beyond the portals of death, give a strange vitality to his poetry. It is his firm belief in the immortality of the soul which forms the basis of his generous optimism, beautifully expressed in the following lines of *Pippa Passes*:

The                      year's                      at                      the                      spring,  
And                      day's                      at                      the                      morn;  
Morning's                      at                      seven;  
The                      hill                      side's                      dew                      pearled;  
The                      lark's                      on                      the                      wing;  
The                      snails                      on                      the                      thorn,  
God's                      in                      his                      heaven—  
*All's right with the world.*

Thus is an age when the minds of men were assailed by doubt, Browning spoke the strongest words of hope and faith:

Grow                      old                      along                      with                      me!  
The                      best                      is                      yet                      to                      be.  
*The last of life, for which the first was made.*

(Rabbi Ben Ezra)

In another way also Browning presents a contrast to Tennyson. Whereas Tennyson's genius is mainly lyrical. Browning's is predominantly dramatic, and his greatest poems are written in the form of the dramatic monologue. Being chiefly interested in the study of the human soul, he discusses in poem after poem, in the form of monologue or dialogue, the problems of life and conscience. And in all of them Browning himself is the central character, and he uses the hero as his own mouthpiece. His first poem *Pauline* (1833) which is a monologue addressed to Pauline, on "the incidents in the development of a soul", is autobiographical—a fragment of personal confession under a thin dramatic disguise. His *Paracelsus* (1835) which is in form a drama with four characters, is also a story of 'incidents in the development of a soul', of a Renaissance physician in whom true science and charlatanism were combined. Paracelsus has the ambition of attaining truth and transforming the life of man. For this purpose he discards emotion and love, and fails on account of this mistake. Browning in this poem also uses the hero as a mouthpiece of his own ideas and aspiration. *Paracelsus* was followed by *Sordello*, (1840) which is again 'the study of a soul'. It narrates in heroic verse the life of a little-known Italian poet. On account of its involved expression its obscurity has become proverbial. In *Pippa Passes* (1841) Browning produced a drama partly lyrical and consisting of isolated scenes. Here he imagined the effect of the songs of a little working girl, strolling about during a holiday, on the destiny of the very different persons who hear them in turn.

It was with the publication of a series of collections of disconnected studies, chiefly monologues, that Browning's reputation as a great poet was firmly established. These volumes were—*Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Men and Women* (1855), *Dramatis Personae* (1864), *Dramatic Idylls* (1879-80). The dramatic lyrics in these collections were a poetry of a new kind in England. In them Browning brings the most varied personages to make their confessions to us. Some of them are historical, while others are the product of Browning's imagination, but all of them while unravelling the tangled web of their emotions and

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

thoughts give expression to the optimistic philosophy of the poet. Some of the important dramatic lyrics are *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, *Two in a Gondola*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *The last Ride Together*, *Childe Roland to a Dark Tower Came*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Prospice* and *My Last Duchess*. All of them have won for Browning the applause of readers who value "thought" in poetry. In (1868-69) Browning brought out four successive volumes of *The Ring and the Book*, which is his masterpiece. Here different persons concerned in a peculiarly brutal set of murders, and many witnesses give their own versions of the same events, varying them according to their different interests and prejudices. The lawyers also have their say, and at the end the Pope sums up the case. The ten long successive monologues contain the finest psychological studies of characters ever attempted by a poet.

During the last twenty years of his life Browning wrote a number of poems. Though they do not have much poetic merit, yet they all give expression to his resolute courage and faith. In fact Browning is mainly remembered for the astonishing vigour and hope that characterise all his work. He is the poet of love, of life, and of the will to live, here and beyond the grave, as he says in the song of David in his poem *Soul*:

*How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ  
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy.*

The chief fault of Browning's poetry is obscurity. This is mainly due to the fact that his thought is often so obscure or subtle that language cannot express it perfectly. Being interested in the study of the individual soul, never exactly alike in any two men, he seeks to express the hidden motives and principles which govern individual action. Thus in order to understand his poems, the reader has always to be mentally alert; otherwise he fails to understand his fine shades of psychological study. To a certain extent, Browning himself is to be blamed for his obscurity, because he is careless as an artist. But in spite of his obscurity, Browning is the most stimulating poet, in the English language. His influence on the reader who is prepared to sit up, and think and remain alert when he reads his poetry, is positive and tremendous. His strength, his joy of life, his robust faith and his invincible optimism enter into the life of a serious reader of his poetry, and make him a different man. That is why, after thirty years of continuous work, his merit was finally recognised, and he was placed beside Tennyson and even considered greater. In the opinion of some critics he is the greatest poet in English literature since Shakespeare.

(c) Matthew Arnold (1822-88)

Another great poet of the early Victorian period is Matthew Arnold, though he is not so great as Tennyson and Browning. Unlike Tennyson and Browning who came under the influence of Romantic poets, Arnold, though a great admirer of Wordsworth, reacted against the ornate and fluent Romanticism of Shelley and Keats. He strove to set up a neo-classical ideal as against the Romantic. He gave emphasis on 'correctness' in poetry, which meant a scheme of literature which picks and chooses according to standards, precedents and systems, as against one which gives preference to an abundant stream of original music and representation. Besides being a poet, Arnold was a great critic of poetry, perhaps the greatest critics during the Victorian period, and he belongs to that rare category of the critic who is a poet also.

Though Arnold's poetry does not possess the merit of the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, when it is at its best, it has wonderful charm. This is especially the case with his early poetry when his thought and style had not become stereotyped. Among his early poems the sonnet on Shakespeare deserves the highest place. It is the most magnificent epigraph and introduction to

the works of Shakespeare. Another poem of great charm and beauty is *Requiescat*, which is an exquisite dirge. In his longer poems—*Strayed Reveller*, *Empedocles on Etna*, *Sohrab and Rustum*, *The Scholar Gypsy*, *Thyrsis* (an elegy on Clough, which is considered of the same rank as Milton's *Lycidas* and Shelley's *Adonais*)—it is the lyrical strain into which the poet breaks now and then, which gives them a peculiar charm. It is the same lyrical note in the poems—*The Forsaken Morman*, which is a piece of exquisite and restrained but melodious passionate music; *Dover Beach* which gives expression to Arnold's peculiar religious attitude in an age of doubt; the fine *Summer Night*, the *Memorial Verses* which immediately appeals to the reader.

Most of the poetry of Arnold gives expression to the conflict of the age—between spontaneity and discipline, emotion and reason, faith and scepticism. Being distressed by the unfaith, disintegration, complexity and melancholy of his times, Arnold longed for primitive faith, wholeness, simplicity, and happiness. This melancholy note is present throughout his poetry. Even in his nature poems, though he was influenced by the 'healing power' of Wordsworth, in his sterner moods he looks upon Nature as a cosmic force indifferent to, or as a lawless and insidious foe of man's integrity. In his most characteristic poem *Empedocles on Etna* Arnold deals with the life of a philosopher who is driven to suicide because he cannot achieve unity and wholeness; his sceptical intellect has dried up the springs of simple, natural feeling. His attitude to life is very much in contrast with the positive optimism of Browning whose Ben Ezra grows old on the belief that "The best is yet to be!"

As a critic Arnold wants poetry to be plain, and severe. Though poetry is an art which must give aesthetic pleasure, according to Arnold, it is also a criticism of life. He looks for 'high seriousness' in poetry, which means the combination of the finest art with the fullest and deepest insight, such as is found in the poetry of Homer, Dante and Shakespeare. Arnold's own poetry was greatly affected by his critical theories, and we find that whereas Tennyson's poetry is ornate and Browning's grotesque, Arnold's poetry on the whole is plain and prosaic. In setting forth his spiritual troubles Arnold seeks first of all to achieve a true and adequate statement, devoid of all non-essential decorations. The reader gets the impression that the writing is neither inspired nor spontaneous. It is the result of intellectual effort and hard labour. But there are occasions in the course of his otherwise prosaic poems, when Arnold suddenly rises from the ground of analysis and diagnosis into sensuous emotion and intuitions, and then language, imagery, and rhythm fuse into something which has an incomparable charm and beauty.

### (d) Some Minor Poets

Besides Tennyson, Browning and Arnold there were a number of minor poets during the early Victorian period. Of these Mrs. Browning and Clough are well-known. Elizabeth Barrett (1806-61) became Mrs. Browning in 1846. Before her marriage she had won fame by writing poems about the Middle Ages in imitation of Coleridge. She also gave voice to sensitive pity in *Cowper's Grave* and to passionate indignation in *The Cry of Children* which is an eloquent protest against the employment of children in factories. But she produced her best work after she came in contact with Browning. Her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, which were written before her marriage with Browning, tell in a most delicate and tender manner her deep love for, and passionate gratitude to Browning who brought her, who was sick and lonely, back to health of life. The rigid limit of the sonnet form helped her to keep the exuberance of her passion under the discipline of art. Her other great work, *Aurora Leigh* (1857), is written in the form of an epic on a romantic theme. Written in blank verse which is of unequal quality, the poem is full of long

stretches of dry, uninteresting verse, but here and there it contains passages of rare beauty, where sentiment and style are alike admirable.

Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861), a friend of Arnold, came under the influence of Wordsworth in his early years, but later he cut himself off from Wordsworthian narrow piety, and moved towards a religious faith free from all dogma. He searched for a moral law which was in consonance with the intellectual development of the age. In his *Dipsychus*, 'the double-sould' (1850), he attempted to reconcile the special and the idealistic tendencies of the soul. His best known work, however, is *The Bothie of Toberna Vuolich*, in which he has given a lively account of an excursion of Oxford students in the Highlands. Here he, like Wordsworth, emphasises the spiritualising and purifying power of Nature. The importance of Clough as a poet lies mainly in the quality of his thought and the frank nobility of his character which is beautifully expressed in the following memorable lines:

*It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishment the scroll:  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul!*

### Lecture 19

#### Novelists of the Early Victorian Period

In the early Victorian period the novel made a rapid progress. Novel-reading was one of the chief occupations of the educated public, and material had to be found for every taste. The result was that the scope of the novel, which during the eighteenth century dealt mainly with contemporary life and manners, was considerably enlarged. A number of brilliant novelists showed that it was possible to adapt the novel to almost all purposes of literature whatsoever. In fact, if we want to understand this intellectual life of the period.

We need hardly go outside the sphere of fiction. The novels produced during the period took various shapes—sermons, political pamphlets, philosophical discourses, social essays, autobiographies and poems in prose. The theatre which could rival fiction had fallen on evil days, and it did not revive till the later half of the nineteenth century. So the early Victorian period saw the heyday of the English novel.

The two most outstanding novelists of the period were Dickens and Thackeray. Besides them there were a number of minor novelists, among whom the important ones were Disraeli, Bronte Sisters, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins and Trollope. All these novelists had a number of points of similarity. In the first place, they identified themselves with their age, and were its spokesmen, whereas the novelists of the latter Victorian period were critical, and even hostile to its dominant assumptions. This sense of identity with their time is of cardinal importance in any consideration of the early Victorian novelists. It was the source alike of their strengths and their weaknesses, and it distinguished them from their successors. It is not that these novelists were uncritical of their country and age, but their criticisms are much less radical than those of Meredith and Hardy. They accepted the society in which they criticised it as

many of their readers were doing in a light hearted manner. They voiced the doubts and fears of the public, but they also shared their general assumptions.

Now let us examine these general assumptions of the early Victorians which these novelists shared. In the first place, in spite of the fact that they were conscious of the havoc caused by the industrial revolution, the presence of mass poverty, and accumulation of riches in a few hands, yet they believed like the common Victorians that these evils would prove to be temporary, that on the whole England was growing prosperous, which was evident from the enormous increase in material wealth and the physical amenities of civilization, and that there was no reason why this progress should not continue indefinitely.

Another important view which these novelists shared with the public was the acceptance of the idea of respectability, which attached great importance to superficial morality in business as well as in domestic and sexual relations. 'Honesty is the best policy', 'Nothing for nothing' were the dictums which the Victorians honoured in their business relations. Their attitude to sex had undergone a great change. Frank recognition and expression of sex had become tabooed. Fielding's *Tom Jones* was kept out of way of women and children, and in 1818 Thomas Bowdler published his *Family Shakespeare* which contained the original text of Shakespeare's plays from which were omitted those expressions which could not be with propriety read aloud in a family. The novelists were not far behind in propagating the Victorian ideal. Trollop wrote in his *Autobiography*:

The writer of stories must please, or he will be nothing. And he must teach whether he wish to teach or not. How shall he teach lessons of virtue and at the same time make himself a delight to his readers? But the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergymen, and must have his own system of ethics. If he can do this efficiently, if he can do this efficiently, if he can make virtue alluring and vice ugly, while he charms his readers instead of wearying them, then I think Mr. Carlyle need not call him distressed...

I think that many have done so; so many that we English novelists may boast as a class that such has been the general result of our own work...I find such to have been the teaching of Thackeray, of Dickens and of George Eliot. Can anyone by search through the works of the great English novelists I have named, find a scene, a passage or a word that would teach a girl to be immodest, or a man to be dishonest? When men in their pages have been described as dishonest and women as immodest, have they not ever been punished?

The reading public of the early Victorian period was composed of 'respectable' people, and it was for them that the novelists wrote. As the novelists themselves shared the same views of 'respectability' with the public, it gave them great strength and confidence. As they were artists as well as public entertainers, they enjoyed great power and authority. Moreover, as they shared the pre-occupations and obsessions of their time, they produced literature which may be termed as truly national.

### (a) Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

Dickens is the chief among the early Victorian novelists and is in fact the most popular of all English novelists so far. It was at the age of twenty-five with the publication of *Pickwick Papers* that Dickens suddenly sprang into fame, and came to be regarded as the most popular of English novelists. In his early novels, *Pickwick* (1837) and *Nickolas Nickleby* for instance, Dickens followed the tradition of Smollett. Like Smollett's novels they are mere bundles of adventure

connected by means of character who figure in them. In his *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843), *Domby and Son* (1846-48), and *David Copperfield* (1849-50) he made some effort towards unifications but even here the plots are loose. It was in *Bleak House* (1852-53) that he succeeded in gathering up all the diverse threads of the story in a systematic and coherent plot. His later novels—*Dorrit* (1855-57), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1864-65), and the unfinished *Edwin Drood*—were also like *Bleak House* systematically planned. But, on the whole Dickens was not every successful in building up his plots, and there is in all of them a great deal of mere episodic material.

During the early Victorian period there was a swing from romance or a coldly picturesque treatment of life to depicting the heart had the affections. The novels which during the Romantic period and passed through a phase of adventure, reverted in the hands of Dickens to the literature of feeling. Too much emphasis on feelings often led Dickens to sentimentalism as it happened in the case of Richardson. His novels are full of pathos, and there are many passages of studied and extravagant sentiment. But Dickens's sentimentalism, for which he is often blamed, is a phase of his idealism. Like a true idealist Dickens seeks to embody in his art the inner life of man with a direct or implied moral purpose. His theme is the worth of man's thought, imaginings, affections, and religious instincts, the need of a trust in his fellowmen, a faith in the final outcome of human endeavour and a belief in immortality. He values qualities like honour, fidelity, courage magnanimity. The best example of Dickens's idealism is found in *A Tale of Two Cities*, where he preaches a sermon on the sublime text: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Another phase of Dickens's idealism was his implicit belief that this is the best of all possible worlds. In spite of pain, dirt and sin with which his novels are full, they leave an impression on the reader of the unwavering optimism and buoyant temper of Dickens. He shared to the full, the sanguine spirit of his age, and despite the hardness of heart and the selfishness of those in high places, their greed and hypocrisy, and the class prejudices which had divided man from man, Dickens believed that the world was still a very good world to live in. He had faith in the better element of human beings who live and struggle for a period, and then fall unremembered to give place to other. All his characters come out of the pit of suffering and distress as better men, uncontaminated and purer than before.

But the most delightful manifestation of the idealism of Dickens is his humour, which is almost irresistible. It is clearly manifest in his first novel, *Pickwick*, and in the succeeding novels it broadened and deepened. Dickens has the knack of uniting humour with pathos in a sort of tragic-comedy, which is especially noticeable in certain sections of *Old Curiosity Shop* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The best examples of Dickens pure comedy are the Peggotty and Barkis episodes in *David Copperfield*.

It is especially in the delineations of characters that the humour of Dickens is supreme. Like Smollett he was on the lookout for some oddity which for his purpose he made more odd than it was. All his characters are humours highly idealised and yet retaining so much of the real that we recognise in them some disposition of ourselves and of the men and women we met. The number of these humorous types that Dickens contributed to fiction runs into thousands. In fact there is no other writer in English literature, except only Shakespeare, who has created so many characters that have become permanent elements of the humorous tradition of the English race.

Besides being an idealist, Dickens was also a realist. He began his literary career as a reporter, and his short *Sketches by Boz* have the air of the eighteenth century quiet observer and

news writer. This same reportorial air is about his long novels, which are groups of incidents. The main difference is that, while in his sketches he writes down his observation fresh from experience, in his novels he draws upon his memory. It is his personal experiences which underlie the novels of Dickens, not only novels like *David Copperfield* where it is so obvious, but also *Hard Times* where one would least expect to find them. One very important aspect of Dickens's realism is this richness of descriptive detail, based upon what Dickens had actually seen.

It was Dickens's realism which came as a check to medievalism which was very popular during the Romantic period. He awakened the interest of the public in the social conditions of England. The novels of Dickens were full of personal experiences, anecdotes, stories from friends, and statistics to show that they were founded upon facts. The result was that after Dickens began writing, knights and ladies and tournaments became rarer in the English novel. They were replaced by agricultural labourers, miners, tailors and paupers.

The novels of Dickens were also the most important product and expression in fiction of the humanitarian movement of the Victorian era. From first to last he was a novelist with a purpose. He was a staunch champion of the weak, the outcast and the oppressed, and in almost all his novels he attacked one abuse or the other in the existing system of things. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that humanitarianism is the key-note of his work, and on account of the tremendous popularity that he enjoyed as a novelist, Dickens may justly be regarded as one of the foremost reformers of his age.

(b) William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863)

Thackeray who was Dickens's contemporary and great rival for popular favour, lacked his weaknesses and his genius. He was more interested in the manners and morals of the aristocracy than in the great upheavals of the age. Unlike Dickens who came of a poor family and had to struggle hard in his boyhood, Thackeray was born of rich parents, inherited a comfortable fortune, and spent his young days in comfort. But whereas Dickens, in spite of his bitter experiences retained a buoyant temperament and a cheerful outlook on life, Thackeray, in spite of his comfortable and easy life, turned cynical towards the world which used him so well, and found shames, deceptions, vanities everywhere because he looked for them. Dickens was more interested in plain, common people; Thackeray, on the other hand, was more concerned with high society. The main reason of this fundamental difference between the two was not, however, of environment, but of temperament. Whereas Dickens was romantic and emotional and interpreted the world largely through his imagination; Thackeray was the realist and moralist and judged solely by observation and reflection. Thus if we take the novels of both together, they give us a true picture of all classes of English society in the early Victorian period.

Thackeray is, first of all, a realist, who paints life as he sees it. As he says of himself, "I have no brains above my eyes; I describe what I see." He gives in his novels accurate and true picture especially of the vicious elements of society. As he possesses an excessive sensibility, and a capacity for fine feelings and emotions like Dickens, he is readily offended by shams, falsehood and hypocrisy in society. The result is that he satirises them. But his satire is always tempered by kindness and humour. Moreover, besides being a realist and satirist, Thackeray is also a moralist. In all his novels he definitely aims at creating a moral impression and he often behaves in an inartistic manner by explaining and emphasising the moral significance of his work. The beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice in his character is so obvious on every page that we do not have

to consult our conscience over their actions. As a writer of pure, simple and charming prose Thackeray the reader by his natural, easy and refined style. But the quality of which Thackeray is most remembered as a novelist is the creation of living characters. In this respect he stands supreme among English novelists. It is not merely that he holds up the mirror to life, he presents life itself.

It was with the publication of *Vanity Fair* in 1846 that the English reading public began to understand what a star had risen in English letters. *Vanity Fair* was succeeded in 1849 by *Pendennis* which, as an autobiography, holds the same place among his works as *David Copperfield* does among those of Dickens. In 1852 appeared the marvellous historical novel of *Henry Esmond* which is the greatest novel in its own special kind ever written. In it Thackeray depicted the true picture of the Queen Anne period and showed his remarkable grasp of character and story. In his next novel *Newcomes* (1853-8) he returned to modern times, and displayed his great skill in painting contemporary manners. By some critics *Newcomes* is considered to be his best novel. His next novel, *The Virginians*, which is a sequel of *Esmond*, deals with the third quarter of the eighteenth century. In all these novels Thackeray has presented life in a most realistic manner. Every act, every scene, every person in his novels is real with a reality which has been idealised up to, and not beyond, the necessities of literature. Whatever the acts, the scenes and the personages may be in his novels, we are always face to face with real life, and it is there that the greatness of Thackeray as a novelist lies.

### (c) Minor Novelists

Among the minor novelists of the early Victorian period, Benjamin Disraeli, the Brontes, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Charles Reede, Wilkie Collins and Trollope are well known.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81) wrote his first novel *Vivian Grey* (1826-27), in which he gave the portrait of a dandy, a young, intelligent adventurer without scruples. In the succeeding novels *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847) Disraeli was among the first to point out that the amelioration of the wretched lot of the working class was a social duty of the aristocracy. Being a politician who became the Prime Minister of England, he has given us the finest study of the movements of English politics under Queen Victoria. All his novels are written with a purpose, and as the characters in them are created with a view to the thesis, they retain a certain air of unreality.

The Bronte Sisters who made their mark as novelists were Charlotte Bronte (1816-55) and Emily Bronte (1818-48). Charlotte Bronte depicted in her novels those strong romantic passions which were generally avoided by Dickens and Thackeray. She brought lyrical warmth and the play of strong feeling into the novel. In her masterpiece, *Jane Eyre* (1847), her dreams and resentments kindle every page. Her other novels are *The Professor*, *Villette* and *Shirley*. In all of them we find her as a mistress of wit, irony, accurate observation, and a style full of impassioned eloquence.

Emily Bronte was more original than her sister. Though she died at the age of thirty, she wrote a strange novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which contains so many of the troubled, tumultuous and rebellious elements of romanticism. It is a tragedy of love at once fantastic and powerful, savage and moving, which is considered now as one of the masterpieces of world fiction.

Mrs. Gaskell (1810-65) as a novelist dealt with social problems. She had first-hand knowledge of the evils of industrialisation, having lived in Manchester for many years. Her

novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) give us concrete details of the miserable plight of the working class. In *Ruth* (1853) Mrs. Gaskell shows the same sympathy for unfortunate girls. In *Cranford* (1853) she gave a delicate picture of the society of a small provincial town, which reminds us of Jane Austen.

Charles Kingsley (1819-75) who was the founder of the Christian Socialists, and actively interested in the co-operative movement, embodied his generous ideas of reform in the novels *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850). As a historical novelist he returned to the earliest days of Christianity in *Hypatia* (1853). In *Westward Ho!* (1855) he commemorated the adventurous spirit of the Elizabethan navigators, and in *Hereward the Wake* (1865) of the descendants of the Vikings.

Charles Reade (1814-84) wrote novels with a social purpose. *It is Never too Late to Mend* (1853) is a picture of the horrors of prison life; *Hard Cash* (1863) depicts the abuses to which lunatic asylums gave rise; *Put Yourself in his place* is directed against trade unions. His *A Terrible Temptation* is a famous historical novel. His *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1867) shows the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

Wilkie Collins (1824-89) excelled in arousing the sense of terror and in keeping in suspense the explanation of a mystery or the revelation of crime. His best-known novels are *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* in which he shows his great mastery in the mechanical art of plot construction.

Anthony Trollope (1815-88) wrote a number of novels, in which he presented real life without distorting or idealising it. His important novels are *The Warden* (1855), *Barchester Towers* (1857) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) in which he has given many truthful scenes of provincial life, without poetical feeling, but not without humour. Trollope has great skill as a story-teller and his characters are lifelike and shrewdly drawn. His novels present a true picture of middle class life, and there is neither heroism nor villainy there. His style is easy, regular, uniform and almost impersonal.

### Lecture 20

#### Novelists of the Later Victorian Period

The novel in the later Victorian period took a new trend, and the novels written during this period may be called 'modern' novels. George Eliot was the first to write novels in the modern style. Other important novelists of the period were Meredith and Hardy. The year 1859 saw the publication not only of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* but also of Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Though they are vastly different from each other, they stand in sharp contrast to the works of established novelists that appeared the same year—as Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Thackeray's *Virginians*.

The novelists of the early Victorian period—Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope and others—had followed the tradition of English novel established by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. Their conception of themselves was modest, and their conscious aim nothing much more elevated than Wilkie Collins's "make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait." Set against this innocent

notion of the novelist's function, the new novelists of England as well of other countries of Europe, began to have high ambitions of making the novel as serious as poetry. The Russian novelists—Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and the French novelists like Flaubert, all began to look upon the novel as a medium of conveying profound thoughts. Flaubert especially arrogated to himself the rights and privileges of the poet, and he talked about his talent and medium as seriously as poets do theirs. He stated his ambition as a novelist thus: "To desire to give verse rhythm to prose, yet to leave it prose and very much prose, and to write about ordinary life as histories and epics are written, yet without falsifying the subject. It is perhaps an absurd idea. But it may also be a great experiment and very original". These words of Flaubert show that the European novelists in the middle of the nineteenth century were making the same claims about their vocation as the Romantic poets in England did in the beginning of the century. The seriousness of these European novelists was both moral and aesthetic, and it came to English fiction with George Eliot and Meredith. Both of them were intellectuals and philosophers and had associates among such class of people. On the other hand, their predecessors, Dickens and Thackeray, had association with journalists, artists and actors, and they themselves belonged to their group. George Eliot lived in a much larger world of ideas. These ideas conditioned her views of fiction, determined the shape of her novels and the imagery of her prose. Meredith who was partly educated in Germany and was influenced by French writers, developed a highly critical view of England and its literature. Thus specially equipped, these two novelists—George Eliot and Meredith—gave a new trend to the English novel, and made it 'modern'. They were followed by Hardy who extended the scope of the novel still further.

(a) George Eliot (1819-1880)

The real name of George Eliot was Mary Ann Evans. For a long time her writings were exclusively critical and philosophic in character, and it was when she was thirty-eight that her first work of fiction *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) appeared. It was followed by *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), and *Middlemarch* (1871-72).

George Eliot was born in Warwickshire, where she lived till her father's death in 1849. It was her Warwickshire experience—the life of an English village before the railway came to disturb it, which provided the substance of most of her novels. Gifted with a wonderful faculty of observation, she could reproduce faithfully the mannerism of rustic habit and speech. Having a thorough knowledge of the countryside and the country people, their hierarchies and standards of value, she could give a complete picture of their life. Moreover, she could beautifully portray the humour and pathos of these simple folk as no English novelist had done before. Just as we look to Dickens for pictures of the city streets and to Thackeray for the vanities of society, we look to George Eliot for the reflection of the country life in England.

In George Eliot the novel took its modern form. Every story derives its unity from its plot. The different episodes are all related to one another and subordinated to the main story. The chief appeal to the emotions of the reader is made by the inevitable catastrophe towards which the whole action moves. This unity of plot construction was lacking in the English novel before George Eliot appeared on the scene. This was a singular contribution of hers to the development of the English novel. Another important feature of George Eliot's novels is that they reflect more clearly than any other Victorian novels the movement of contemporary thought. They specially appeal to the mind which is troubled by religious and ethical difficulties. The mood of much of

her work is like that of Matthew Arnold's poems. She shares also with him his melancholy and depressing mood.

In her novels George Eliot takes upon herself the role of a preacher and moraliser. Though profoundly religious at heart, she was greatly affected by the scientific spirit of the age; and finding no religious creed or political system satisfactory, she fell back upon duty as the supreme law of life. In all her novels she shows in individuals the play of universal moral forces, and establishes the moral law as the basis of human society. The principle of law which was in the air during the Victorian era and which deeply influenced Tennyson, is with George Eliot like fate. It is to her as inevitable and automatic as gravitation and it overwhelms personal freedom and inclination.

All the novels of George Eliot are examples of psychological realism. She represents in them, like Browning in his poetry, the inner struggle of a soul, and reveals the motives, impulses and hereditary influences which govern human action. But unlike Browning who generally stops short when he tells a story, and either lets the reader draw his own conclusion or gives his in a few striking lines, George Eliot is not content until she has minutely explained the motives of her characters and the moral lessons to be learned from them. Moreover, the characters in her novels, unlike in the novels of Dickens, develop gradually as we came to know them. They go from weakness to strength, or from strength to weakness, according to the works that they do and the thoughts that they cherish. For instance, in *Romola* we find that Tito degenerates steadily because he follows selfish impulses, while Romola grows into beauty and strength with every act of self-renunciation.

(b) George Meredith (1829-1909)

Another great figure not only in fiction, but in the general field of literature during the later Victorian period, was Meredith who, though a poet at heart expressed himself in the medium of the novel, which was becoming more and more popular. The work of Meredith as a novelist stands apart from fiction of the century. He did not follow any established tradition, nor did he found a school. In fact he was more of a poet and philosopher than a novelist. He confined himself principally to the upper classes of society, and his attitude to life is that of the thinker and poet. In his novels, he cared little for incident or plot on their account, but used them principally to illustrate the activity of the 'Comic Spirit'. Comedy he conceives of as a Muse watching the actions of men and women, detecting and pointing out their inconsistencies with a view to their moral improvement. She never laughs loud, she only smiles at most; and the smile is of the intellect, for she is the handmaid of philosophy. Meredith loves to trace the calamities which befall those who provoke Nature by obstinately running counter to her laws. A certain balance and sanity, a fine health of body and soul are, in his view, the means prescribed by Nature for the happiness of man.

*The Ordeal of Richard Fernal*, which is one of the earliest of Meredith's novels, is also one of his best. Its theme is the ill-advised bringing up of an only son, Richard Fernal, by his well-meaning and officious father, Sir Austen Fernal. In spite of his best intentions, the father adopts such methods as are unsuited to the nature of the boy, with the result that he himself becomes the worst enemy of his son, and thus an object of ridicule by the Comic Spirit. Besides containing Meredith's philosophy of natural and healthy development of the human personality the novel also has some fine passages of great poetic beauty. *Evan Harrington* (1861) is full of humorous situations which arise out of the social snobbery of the Harrington family. *Rhoda Fleming* (1865),

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

*Sandra Belloni* (1864), *Harry Richmond* (1871) and *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) all contain the best qualities of Meredith's art—intellectual brilliance, a ruthless exposure of social weaknesses, and an occasional poetic intensity of style. In all of them Meredith shows himself as the enemy of sentimentality. In *The Egoists* which is the most perfect illustration of what he meant by 'comedy', Meredith reached the climax of his art. The complete discomfiture of Sir Willoughby Patterne, the egoist, is one of the neatest things in English literature. This novel also contains Meredith's some of the best drawn characters—the Egoist himself, Clara Middleton, Laetitia Dale, and Crossjay Patterne.

Like George Eliot, Meredith is a psychologist. He tries to unravel the mystery of the human personality and probe the hidden springs there. Being at heart a poet, he introduced in his earlier novels passages of unsurpassable poetic beauty. A master of colour and melody when he wills, Meredith belongs to the company of Sterne, Carlyle and Browning who have whimsically used the English language. He seldom speaks directly, frequently uses maxims and aphorisms in which are concentrated his criticism of contemporary life. Like Browning, Meredith preaches an optimistic and positive attitude to life. Influenced by the theory of Evolution, he believes that the human race is evolving towards perfection. This process can be accelerated by individual men and women by living a sane balanced and healthy life. They should follow the golden mean and steer clear of 'the ascetic rocks and sensual whirlpools'. On account of this bracing and refreshing philosophy, the novels of Meredith, though written in a difficult style, have a special message for the modern man who finds himself enveloped in a depressing atmosphere.

### (c) Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

The greatest novelist of the later Victorian period was Thomas Hardy. Like Meredith, he was at heart a poet, and expressed himself also in verse. But unlike Meredith whose attitude to life is optimistic, and who has written comedies, Hardy's attitude to life is rather pessimistic and he has written tragedies. Hardy thinks that there is some malignant power which controls this universe, and which is out to thwart and defeat man in all his plans. It is especially hostile to those who try to assert themselves and have their own way. Thus his novels and poems are, throughout, the work of a man painfully dissatisfied with the age in which he lived. He yearned for England's past, and he distrusted modern civilisation because he suspected that its effect was frequently to decivilise and weaken those to whom Nature and old custom had given stout hearts, clear heads and an enduring spirit. In his books, ancient and modern are constantly at war, and none is happy who has been touched by 'modern' education and culture. Hardy also resists the infiltration of aggressive modernity in the quiet village surroundings.

Hardy passed the major portion of his life near Dorchester, and his personal experiences were bound up with the people and customs, the monuments and institutions of Dorset and the contiguous countries of south-western England, which he placed permanently on the literary map by the ancient name "Wessex". Thus Hardy has left a body of fiction unique in its uniformity. No other novelist in England has celebrated a region so comprehensively as Hardy has done. Though he has dealt with a limited world, he has created hundreds of characters, many of whom are mere choral voices as in Greek drama.

On account of Hardy's philosophy of a malignant power ruling the universe which thwarts and defeats man at every step, his novels are full of coincidences. In fact, chance plays too large a part in them. For this Hardy has been blamed by some critics who believe that he deliberately

introduces coincidences which always upset the plans of his characters. In real life chance sometimes helps a man also, but in Hardy's novel chance always comes as an upsetting force.

The great novels of Hardy are *The Woodlanders*, *The Return of the Native*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Though most of Hardy's novels are tragedies, yet the role of tragedy becomes intensified in *The Return of the Native*, *Tess* and *Jude*. The last chapter of *Tess* outraged the religious conscience of 1891; to-day it offends the aesthetic conscience by its violation of our critical sense of order and imaginative sufficiency. Hardy had said enough in *Tess* before the beginning of the last chapter. As it stands, the novel is a masterpiece, but it is scarred by an unhappy final stroke, the novel is a masterpiece, but it is scarred by an unhappy final stroke. *Jude the Obscure*, though a very powerful novel is spoiled by Hardy's ruthlessness. At no time are Sue and Jude permitted to escape the shadowing hand of malignant destiny. They are completely defeated and broken.

As a writer of tragedies Hardy can stand comparison with the great figures in world literature, but he falls short of their stature because he is inclined to pursue his afflicted characters beyond the limits of both art and nature. In the use of pathos Hardy is a past master. As for Hardy's style, his prose is that of a poet in close contact with things. In his evocation of scenes and persons, his senses bring into play a verbal incantation that relates him to the pre-Raphaelites. He describes characters and scenes in such a manner that they get imprinted on the memory.

The main contribution of Hardy to the history of the English novel was that he made it as serious a medium as poetry, which could deal with the fundamental problems of life. His novels can be favourably compared to great poetic tragedies, and the characters therein rise to great tragic heights. His greatest quality as a writer is his sincerity and his innate sympathy for the poor and the down-trodden. If at times he transgressed the limits of art, it was mainly on account of his deep compassion for mankind, especially those belonging to the lower stratum.

### (d) Some Other Novelists

Besides George Eliot, Meredith and Hardy there were a number of other Victorian novelists during the later Victorian period. Of these Stevenson and Gissing are quite well-known.

#### (i) Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94)

Stevenson was a great story-teller and romancer. He took advantage of the reader's demand for shorter novels. His first romance entitled *Treasure Island* became very popular. It was followed by *New Arabian Nights*, *Kidnapped*, *The Black Arrow*, which contain romances and mystery stories. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* he departed from his usual manner to write a modern allegory of the good and evil in the human personality. In *The Master of Ballantre* Stevenson described the story of a soul condemned to evil. At his death he was working on unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston*, which is considered by some critics as the most finished product of his whole work. In it he dramatised the conflict between father and son—the Lord Justice-Clerk, the hanging judge, and his son Archie who has the courage to face him.

The contribution of Stevenson to the English novel is that he introduced into it romantic adventure. His rediscovery of the art of narrative, of conscious and clever calculation in telling a story so that the maximum effect of clarity and suspense is achieved, meant the birth of the novel of action. He gave a wholly new literary dignity and impetus to light fiction whose main aim is entertainment.

(ii) George Gissing (1857-1903)

Gissing has never been a popular novelist, yet no one in English fiction faced the defects of his times with such a frank realism. Like Dickens he paints generally the sordid side of life, but he lacks Dickens's gusto and humour and Dickens's belief that evil can be conquered. Working under the influence of French realists and Schopenhauer's philosophy, he sees the world full of ignoble and foolish creatures. He considers the problem of poverty as insoluble; the oppressed lower classes cannot revolt successfully and the rich will not voluntarily surrender their power. Under such circumstances it is the intellectuals who suffer the most, because they are more conscious of the misery around them. This is the moral of all Gissing's novels, chief among which are *Worker in the Dawn* (1880), *The Unclassed* (1884), *Domes* (1886), *The Emancipated* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), *Born in Exile* (1892). One can guess the subjects treated in them from their titles.

All Gissing's novels bear unmistakable traces of his many years of struggle against poverty, obstruction and depreciation. He drew his inspiration from Dickens, but he made the mistake of omitting altogether that which is present in Dickens even to excess—the romance and poetry of poverty. He saw the privations of the poor, but unlike Dickens, he was blind and deaf to their joyousness. In his later years he discovered his mistake, and in 1903 he brought out *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, a great autobiographic fiction, which is written in a most delightful manner revealing his inner life.

### Lecture 21

#### Prose-Writers of the Early Victorian Period

The early Victorian prose is in keeping with the energetic temperament of the time. An expansive energy seems to be characteristic of the whole period, displaying itself as freely in literature as in the development of science, geographical exploration and the rapidity of economic change.

This energetic mood prescribes the inventiveness and fertility of the prose-writers of the period and explains the vitality of so many of their works. Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* are not modest and light-hearted compositions, but they represent the aesthetic equivalent of self-assertion and an urgent 'will to survive' which was characteristic of the early Victorians. Their prose is not, as a rule, flawless in diction and rhythm, or easily related to a central standard of correctness or polished to a uniform high finish, but it is a prose which is vigorous, intricate and ample, and is more conscious of vocabulary and imagery than of balance and rhythm. The dominant impression of zestful and workmanlike prose.

As the number of prose-writers during the period is quite large, there is a greater variety of style among them than to be found in any other period. In the absence any well-defined tradition of prose-writing, each writer cherishes his oddities and idiosyncrasies and is not prepared to sacrifice his peculiarities in deference to a received tradition. Victorian individualism, the 'Doing As One Likes', censured by Matthew Arnold, reverberates in prose style.

Taking the Victorian prose as a whole, we can say that it is Romantic prose. Though Romanticism gave a new direction to English poetry between 1780 and 1830, its full effects on prose were delayed until the eighteen-thirties when all the major Romantic poets were either dead or moribund. That is why, early Victorian prose is, properly speaking, Romantic prose, and Carlyle is the best example of a Romantic prose-artist. In fact it were the romantic elements—unevenness, seriousness of tone, concreteness and particularity—which constitute the underlying unity of the prose of the early Victorian period. All the great prose writers of period—Carlyle, Ruskin, Macaulay and Matthew Arnold have these qualities in common.

(a) Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

Carlyle was the dominant figure of the Victorian period. He made his influence felt in every department of Victorian life. In the general prose literature of his age he was incomparably the greatest figure, and one of the greatest moral forces. In his youth he suffered from doubts which assailed him during the many dark years in which he wandered in the 'howling wilderness of infidelity,' striving vainly to recover his lost belief in God. Then suddenly there came a moment of mystical illumination, or 'spiritual new birth', which brought him back to the mood of courage and faith. The history of these years of struggle and conflict and the ultimate triumph of his spirit is written with great power in the second book of *Sartor Resartus* which is his most characteristic literary production, and one of the most remarkable and vital books in the English language. His other works are: *French Revolution* (1837); his lectures on *Heroes and Hero-Worship*; *Past and Present* (1843); the *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1845); *Latter-day Pamphlets* (1850); the *Life of John Sterling* (1851); the *History of Frederick the Great* (1858-65).

Basically Carlyle was a Puritan, and in him the strenuous and uncompromising spirit of the seventeenth century Puritanism found its last great exponent. Always passionately in earnest and unyielding in temper, he could not tolerate any moral weakness or social evil. He wanted people to be sincere and he hated conventions and unrealities. In the spheres of religion, society and politics he sought reality and criticised all sham and falsehood. To him history was the revelation of God's righteous dealings with men and he applied the lessons derived from the past to the present. He had no faith in democracy. He believed in the 'hero' under whose guidance and leadership the masses can march to glory. This is the theme of his lectures on *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. He proclaimed a spiritual standard of life to a generation which had started worshipping the 'mud-gods of modern civilisation'. He denounced scientific materialism and utilitarianism in *Past and Present*. He preached to his contemporaries in a most forceful manner that spiritual freedom was the only life-giving truth. Carlyle could not turn back the currents of his age, but he exerted a tremendous influence.

Carlyle's style is the reflection of his personality. In fact in hardly any English writer are personal and literary characters more closely and strongly blended. He twists the language to suit his needs. In order to achieve this he makes use of strange 'tricks'—the use of capital initials, the dropping of conjunctions, pronouns, verbs, the quaint conversion of any noun into a verb, free use of foreign words or literal English translations of foreign words. Thus his language is like a mercenary army formed of all sorts of incongruous and exotic elements. His personifications and abstractions sometimes become irritating and even tiresome. At times he deliberately avoids simplicity, directness, proportion and form. He is in fact the most irregular and erratic of English writers. But in spite of all these faults, it is impossible to read him at his best without the sentiment of enthusiasm. In his mastery of vivid and telling phraseology he is unrivalled and his

powers of description and characterisation are remarkable. His style with its enormous wealth of vocabulary, its strangely constructed sentences, its breaks, abrupt turns, apostrophes and exclamations, is unique in English prose literature, and there is no doubt that he is one of the greatest literary artists in the English language.

(b) John Ruskin (1819-1900)

In the general prose literature of the early Victorian period Ruskin is ranked next to Carlyle. Of all the Victorian writers who were conscious of the defeats in contemporary life, he expressed himself most voluminously. Being one of the greatest masters of English he became interested in art and wrote *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) in five volumes in order to vindicate the position of Turner as a great artist. Being a man of deeply religious and pious nature he could not separate Beauty from Religion, and he endeavoured to prove that 'all great art is praise'. Examination of the principles of art gradually led Ruskin to the study of social ethics. He found that architecture, even more than painting, indicated the state of a nation's health. In his *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) he tried to prove that the best type of architecture can be produced only in those ages which are morally superior.

The year 1860 when Ruskin published *Unto this Last* marks a great change in him. From this time onward he wrote little on art and devoted himself to the discussing of the ills of society. In this book he attacked the prevalent system of political economy, and protested against unrestricted competition, the law of 'Devil-take-the-hindmost', as Ruskin called it. In his later books—*Sesame and Lilies* (1865) and *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866), Ruskin showed himself as a popular educator, clear in argument and skilful in illustration. His last work, an autobiography called *Praterita*, is full of interesting reminiscences.

Ruskin was a great and good man who himself is more inspiring than any of his books. In the face of drudgery and poverty of the competitive system he wrote: "I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my best to abate this misery." It was with this object that leaving the field of art criticism, where he was the acknowledged leader, he began to write of labour and justice. Though as a stylist he is one of the masters of English prose, he is generally studied not as a literary man but as an ethical teacher, and every line that he wrote, bears the stamp of his sincerity. He is both a great artist as well as a great ethical teacher. We admire him for his richly ornate style, and for his message to humanity.

The prose of Ruskin has a rhythmic, melodious quality which makes it almost equal to poetry. Being highly sensitive to beauty in every form, he helps the reader to see and appreciate the beauty of the world around us. In his economic essays he tried to mitigate the evils of the competitive system; to bring the employer and the employed together in mutual trust and helpfulness; to seek beauty, truth, goodness as the chief ends of life. There is no doubt that he was the prophet in an age of rank materialism, utilitarianism and competition, and pointed out the solution to the grave problems which were confronting his age.

(c) Thomas Babington Lord Macaulay (1800-59)

Though Carlyle and Ruskin are now considered to be the great prose-writers of the Victorian period, contemporary opinion gave the first place to Macaulay, who in popularity far exceeded both of them. He was a voracious reader, and he remembered everything he read. He could repeat from memory all the twelve books of *Paradise Lost*. At the age of twenty-five he wrote his essay on poetry in general and on Milton as poet, man and politician in particular, which

brought him immediate popularity as Byron's *Childe Harold* had done. Besides biographical and critical essays which won for him great fame and popularity, Macaulay, like Carlyle; wrote historical essays as well as *History of England*. As early as 1828, he wrote, 'a perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque.' That power of imagination he possessed and exercised so delightfully that his *History* was at once purchased more eagerly than a poem of romance.

Macaulay was the representative of the popular sentiments and prejudices of the common English man of the first half of the nineteenth century. But his popularity was based mainly on the energy and capacity of his mind, and the eloquence with which he enlivened whatever he wrote. By the resources and the quickness of his memory, by his wide learning which was always at his command, he rose to the high rank as the exponent of the matter of history, and as a critic of opinions.

The chief quality which makes Macaulay distinct from the other prose writers of the period is the variety and brilliance of details in his writings. There is a fondness for particulars in his descriptions which distinguished the poems and novels of the new age from the more generalised and abstract compositions of the old school. Though he may be more extravagant and profuse in his variety of details than is consistent with the 'dignity' of history, this variety is always supported by a structure of great plainness. The only fault of his style is that at times it becomes too rhetorical and so the continuity of the narrative is sacrificed. His short sentences, and his description of particular interference with the flow of the narrative, and so the cumulative effect of the story is not always secured. Besides this weakness of style, Macaulay is now given a rank lower than that of Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold on account of his lack of originality and depth as a thinker. But on the whole he still remains as one of the most enjoyable of all Victorian prose-writers.

(d) Matthew Arnold (1822-88)

Besides being a poet, Matthew Arnold was a prose-writer of a high order. He was also a great literary as well as social critic. Like Carlyle and Ruskin, he was vehement critic of his age. According to him, the Englishmen needed classical qualities in order to attain harmonious perfection in morals and in literature. It was not to the Hebrews or the Germans (as suggested by Carlyle), or to the men of the Middle Age (as suggested by Ruskin) that England could with advantage look for teaching, but to the Greeks or to that people which among the moderns had imbibed most of Hellenic culture, the French.

In literature Arnold strove to rehabilitate and to propagate the classical spirit in his country. England had reason to be proud of the literary splendour of the Elizabethan period, or of the glories of her Romantic movement, but according to Arnold, she had to long condemned or disdained the "indispensable eighteenth century." From 1855 onwards Arnold wrote incessantly in order to raise the intellectual and cultural level of his countrymen. All his prose works are directed to this end: *On Translating Homer* (1861), *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), *Essays in Criticism* (1865 and 1888) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) in which he declared that "culture is the minister of the sweetness and light essential to the perfect character". Being a poet himself, he looked upon poetry as "a criticism of life", and laid great emphasis on the part it played in the formation of character and the guidance of conduct. He always attacked "the Philistines", by whom he meant the middle class indifferent to the disinterested joys of pure intelligence. Arnold

also attempted to eliminate the dogmatic element from Christianity in order to preserve its true spirit and bring it into the line with the discoveries of science and the progress of liberal thought.

Unlike the teachings of Carlyle and Ruskin, which appealed to the masses, Arnold's teaching appealed mainly to the educated classes. As a writer of prose he is simply superb. His style is brilliant and polished to a nicety, possessing the virtues of quietness and proportion which we associate with no other English writer except Dryden. As his object was to bring home to his countrymen certain fundamental principles of cultured and intellectual life, he has the habit of repeating the same word and phrase with a sort of refrain effect. It was no wonder that critics first and the public afterwards, were attracted, irritated, amused or charmed by his writings. His loud praise of 'sweetness' and 'culture', his denunciation of the 'Philistine', the 'Barbarian', and so forth, were ridiculed by some unkind critics. But rightly considered we find that there is something of justice in all that he wrote, and on every line there is the stamp of his sincerity.

When Arnold returned from religion and politics to his natural sphere of literature, then the substance of his criticism is admirably sound and its expression always delightful and distinguished. In spite of its extreme mannerism and the apparently obvious tricks by which that mannerism is reached, the style of Arnold is not easy to imitate. It is almost perfectly clear with a clearness rather French than English. It sparkles with wit which seldom diverts or distracts the attention. Such a style was eminently fitted for the purposes of criticism. As a writer of essays he had no superior among the writers of his time, and he can probably never be surpassed by any one in a certain mild ironic handling of a subject which he disapproves. He may not be considered as one of the strongest writers of English prose, but he must always hold a high rank in it for grace, for elegance, and for an elaborate and calculated charm.

### **Lecture22**

#### **Poets of the Later Victorian Period**

##### **(a) Pre-Raphaelite Poets**

In the later Victorian period a movement took place in English poetry, which resembled something like a new Romantic Revival. It was called the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and was dominated by a new set of poets-Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris, who were interested simply in beauty. They were quite satisfied with the beauty of diction, beauty of rhythm, and the beauty of imagery in poetry.

They were not interested in the contemporary movements of thought which formed the substance of Arnold's poetry, and had influenced Tennyson a good deal. They made use of the legends of the Middle Ages not as a vehicle for moral teaching or as allegories of modern life, as Tennyson had done, but simply as stories, the intrinsic beauty of which was their sufficient justification. There was no conscious theory underlying their work as there was in the case of Arnold's poetry.

It was in 1847 that a young artist named Holman Hunt came under the influence of Ruskin's first volume of *Modern Painters*. He along with his friends, Millais and D.G. Rossetti, who were also painters, determined to find a club or brotherhood which should be styled Pre-Raphaelite, and whose members should bind themselves to study Nature attentively with the object of expressing genuine ideas in an unconventional manner, in sympathy with what was 'direct and serious and heart-felt' in early Italian painting before the artificial style of Raphael. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood lasted for a very short time, but its effect upon the plastic arts was far-

reaching and revolutionary. D.G. Rossetti who was a painter as well as poet, introduced these principles in the field of poetry also. As early as 1848, in his twentieth year, Rossetti began to write the sonnets long afterwards collected as *The House of Life*, in the opening of which he urges the poets not to be satisfied with a repetition of the worn-out forms of current literature, but to turn back to the earliest masters:

*Unto the lights of the great-past, new-lit  
Fair for the Future's track.*

Rossetti displayed in those earliest pieces the passion for material beauty, and the love of rich language, magnificent even in simplicity, which were always to characterise his poetry. He also showed a complete detachment from ethical curiosity, from that desire to mend the world, which occupied almost all his Victorian contemporaries, and was to obsess his successors. Being a painter he was able to express his poetic genius more exclusively concentrated on the hues and forms of phenomena, than any other English poet. He withdrew poetry from its wide field, and concentrated it on the intensity of passion, and the richness of light on an isolated object. His earliest volume of *Poems* (1870), which spread thrills of aesthetic excitement far and wide, attracted a number of young enthusiasts, in spite of some faint protests by the older generation against the 'Fleshly School' of English poetry. Other poets who followed him and belong to the Pre-Raphaelite group of poets are—Christiana Rossetti, William Morris, and Swinburne.

The Pre-Raphaelite school of poetry did not regard poetry as being prophetic, or as being mainly philosophical. Their poetry did not concern itself with intellectual complications after the manner of Browning, nor with social conditions. Thus it divided itself sharply from the great writers of the time—Tennyson, Browning and Arnold. It was not an intellectual movement at all, but it brought back the idea that poetry deals with modes of thought and feeling that cannot be expressed in prose. Moreover, it gave greater importance to personal feeling over thought. It also introduced symbolism which was so far rare in English poetry, and insisted on simplicity of expression and directness of sensation. The fleshly images used by the Pre-Raphaelite poets were full of mysticism, but the Victorians who considered them as merely sensuous were shocked by them.

(i) Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)

Rossetti was the chief force behind the Pre-Raphaelite movement. He was the son of Gabriel Rossetti, an Italian refugee, who was a poet himself and a man of sterling character. D.G. Rossetti studied drawing, and as a young man became one of the most enthusiastic members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was at the middle of the century to convert England from conventional art. His own form of painting never admitted reconciliation with convention, and possessed far greater charm than that of the other members of pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—Millais and Holman Hunt. Though his drawings were severely criticised, no one with eyes could doubt the magnificence of his colour. The same pictorial quality became the chief characteristic of his poetry, which lies apart from the main current of contemporary verse, both in its highly specialised quality of thought and language and in the condition and circumstances of its production, Rossetti openly followed the profession of a painter, pursuing poetry, for the most part, as a recreative rather than a principal study.

In his poetry Rossetti assumes for ever the reality and immanence of spiritual and moral world. But he is not a consciously didactic poet. On the other hand, the form and substance of his utterance are so perfected in truth and virility of thought, in majesty and grace of speech, that the

reader is unconsciously affected by them. Rossetti's poetry can be roughly divided into two groups—the personal and the impersonal poems. In the *House of Life* sonnets, *Dante at Verona*, *The Streams Secret*, *The Portrait*, and many of the shorter lyrics, the personal note of love or grief, of memory or hope, is wholly dominant. The poet's soul is absorbed with its individual being, and sees in all the life around him the illustration and interpretation of his own. In the second group, in the great romantic ballads, in *Rose Mary*, and *The Blessed Damozel*, in *The White Ship* and *The King's Tragedy*, in *The Bride's Pleasure* and *Sister Helen*, the imagination takes a higher and larger range. Here the art becomes impersonal in this sense only that the thought of self is merged in the full and immense life of humanity laying hold of the universal consciousness through its own experience.

Rossetti was a supreme master of rhythm and music. He cast his great historical lyrics in the highest narrative—that is to say, the ballad form; and chose the sonnet—the most chastened and exclusive vehicle for the meditative and yet sensuous, self-delineative love poetry. But whether written in the form of ballad or sonnet, Rossetti's verse remains fully charged with the very essence of romance. As a poet, he is neither less nor more pre-Raphaelite than as painter. The vivid and intense simplicity of his diction, the verbal flashes of his ballad style, seem to correspond with the tone and method of his water-colour painting, and the more laboured splendour of the sonnets with the qualities of his oil paintings.

### (ii) Christiana Rossetti

Though Christiana Rossetti naturally displayed a temperament akin to her brother's and sometimes undoubtedly wrote to some extent under his inspiration, large parts, and some of the best parts, of her poetical accomplishments, are quite distinct from anything of his. Her sonnet sequences have the same Italian form and the same characteristics of colour, music, and meditation, as those of Rossetti, because the sonnet form exercised its strong restraint. But her lyrics have lighter, more bird-like movement and voice than the stately lyrics of Rossetti. Her range was distinctly wide. She had, unlike Mrs. Browning, and perhaps unlike the majority of her sex, a very distinct sense of humour. Moreover, her pathos has never been surpassed except in the great single strokes of Shakespeare. But her most characteristic strain is where this pathos blends with or passes into, the utterance of religious awe, unstained and un-weakened by any fear. The great devotional poets of the seventeenth century, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert are more artificial than she is in their expression of this.

Christiana Rossetti began with *Goblin Market and Other Poems* in 1861, followed it with another volume, *The Prince's Progress* in 1866 and after a much longer interval with *A Pageant and Other Poems* in 1881. Later her verse was collected more than once, and it was supplemented by a posthumous volume after her death. But a good deal of it remains in two books of devotion, entitled *Time Flies* (1885) and *The Face of the Deep* (1892).

### (iii) William Morris (1834-96)

William Morris who was an eminent designer and decorator besides being a poet, was chiefly interested in the Middle Ages. His first volume of poems—*The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858)—gives expression to his enthusiasm for the Middle Ages. His object of writing poetry was to revive the true Gothic spirit, and these poems interpreted ardours and mysteries of the Middle Ages which the Victorians had forgotten. Though Tennyson also drew inspiration for his 'Idylls' from medieval sources, he used medieval stories as a vehicle for

contemporary moralising. Morris, on the other hand tried to bring back to life the true spirit of the Middle Ages.

For nine years after *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris did not write anything, as Rossetti under whose influence he had come, wanted him to be a painter. When he did resume his literary work, his style had entirely changed. *The Life and Death of Jason* is the first of a long series of narrative poems which forms the bulk of his contribution to literature. In it he followed Chaucer whom he knew and loved best. In 1868-1870 were published the greatest collection of his stories in *Earthly Paradise*. These stories which are in Medieval setting, are written in an easy and simple style, and their diction is always graceful and suited to the subject.

In the later parts of *Earthly Paradise* there is an indication of a change in Morris's interests and methods. Tales such as the 'Lover of Gudrun' which are derived from the mythologies of northern Europe are treated in a different manner. This new interest was intensified by his visits to Iceland in 1871 and 1873, and the greater part of Morris's subsequent work is based on the study of the sagas, and has a spirit of Epic poetry. He translated the 'Grettis and Volsunga' Sagas; but the new spirit is found at its best in the poems *Sigurd the Volsung*.

Morris is a pre-Raphaelite in the sense that he wrote poetry mainly with the object of creating beauty. He is a past master in producing languorous effects bathed in an atmosphere of serenity and majesty. He, therefore, belongs to the lineage of Spenser in combining virile strength with the greatest refinement of touch. His poems have a harmonious and musical flow, the variety and suppleness of which recall at once the styles of Chaucer and Spenser. In whatever form he writes—blank verse, rhymed verse, the complicated or the simple stanza—he can produce exquisite music which casts its fascinating spell on the readers. In all his poetry the love of adventure, the attraction of an imaginary world, where beautiful human lives bloom out in open nature and unrestricted liberty, where unhappiness, suffering and death have themselves a dignity unknown in the real world made ugly by industrialisation, inspired Morris. The charm of his poems lies mainly in their indefiniteness and their remote atmosphere which soothe the aching of a mind disturbed and tortured by the tyranny of a vulgar present. His poetry is the result of the reaction of a wounded sensibility against the sordidness and ugliness of the real world.

#### (iv) Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909)

Besides Rossetti and Morris, Swinburne was another Victorian poet who is reckoned with the pre-Raphaelites, though his association with them was personal rather than literary, and he belonged to the later styles of the movement. Unlike the other members of the group, Swinburne was a musician rather than a painter. The poetry of Rossetti and Morris, however musical it may be, is primarily pictorial. Swinburne's poetry lacks the firm contours and sure outlines of the poetry of Rossetti and Morris, but it has the sonority of the rhymes which links the verses together. From his youth Swinburne displayed an extraordinary skill in versification and a gift of imitating widely different rhythms, not only those of English poets, but also those of the Latin, the Greeks, and the French. It is in fact in the music of verse that Swinburne is pre-eminent. When once asked at an Oxford gathering, which English poet had the best ear, he answered, "Shakespeare, without doubt; then Milton; then Shelley; then, I do not know what other people would do, but 'I should put myself.'" This claim, though made in all simplicity, is quite justified, and there is no doubt that Swinburne is one of the great masters in metrical technique. He

handled the familiar forms, of verse with such freedom that he revealed their latent melody for the first time.

Swinburne's poetry deals with great romantic themes—like Shelley's revolt against society, the hatred of kings and priests and the struggle against conventional morality. He was also inspired by the French romantics, Victor Hugo and Baudelaire. The appearance of his *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 created great excitement. The Victorians who had accepted Tennyson as the great poet of the age, resented the audacity of this upstart who, though possessing high technical skill, cared nothing for restraint and dignity. Arnold found many of his lines meaningless, and called him "a young pseudo-Shelly". Serious persons were perturbed by his downright heterodoxy. His violent paganism was the first far-heard signal of revolt that was to become general till a generation later. The young, however, were carried away by the passion of his verse, his intoxicating rhythms, and the new prospects of beauty which seemed to be opening in English poetry.

Swinburne first became known by his *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), a poetic drama, distinguished by some great choruses, especially the one that opens, 'Before the beginning of the years'. Swinburne was essentially lyrical even when he attempted drama, and the success of *Atalanta in Calydon* was due to the choral passages possessing great lyrical quality. Dramatic movement and the creation of characters were outside Swinburne's range. He wrote other dramas—*Bothwell* (1874), and *Mary Stuart* (1881) both on a period of history in which he was passionately interested. But, above all, Swinburne is a lyrical poet and he never surpassed or equalled the *Poems and Ballads*, (1886). In his later poems—*Laus Veneris*, *The Garden of Proserpine*, *The Tumn to Proserpine*, *The Triumph of Time*, *Ltulus and Dolores*, there is a repetition of images and ideas already familiar. These songs of love were succeeded by poems dedicated to national liberty, especially that of Italy, for Swinburne was an ardent admirer of Mazzini. In *A Song of Italy* (1867) and *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) he gave lyrical expression to his passion for freedom. Two other volumes of *Poems and Ballads* appeared in 1878 and 1889. His later poems—*Studies in Song* (1880), *A Century of Roundels* (1883) and *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882) show more of metrical skill than lyrical power.

Though much of Swinburne's poetry, especially that of his later years, seems unsubstantial and almost empty of meaning, he is not merely a technician in verse. His love of liberty, hatred of tyranny in all forms and voluptuous paganism were quite genuine impulses which inspired much of his poetry. At his best, when he sings in *Hertha* of the birth and destiny of man, no one can deny him the title of a great-poet.

### (b) The Decadent or Aesthetic Movement

The Pre-Raphaelite Movement in English poetry was followed by Decadent or Aesthetic Movement, though it is not so well defined. In the later part of the nineteenth century (1890-1900) there was a tendency among the literary artists to lay greater emphasis on the idea of Art for Art's sake. They were obviously influenced by Walter Pater and the French authors like Baudelaire and Verlaine, who tried to break with conventional values. They believed that all themes must be excluded from poetry except the record of the few deeply moving movements of passion or sadness of emotional exaltation or distress. They sought themes from pleasures which the virtuous forbid, and inflicted agonies upon themselves to achieve perfection of form. These they conveyed for their own sake with exquisite brevity. They found this conception not only in the study of French models but in the critical work of Walter Pater, and their adherence to these

self-imposed limitations separates them from earlier English romanticism and from pre-Raphaelite verse. Swinburne had already been subjected to similar influence, but he had wider interests—enthusiasm for medieval legends, for Elizabethan drama and his love of liberty and hatred for tyranny. The Decadents, on the other hand, were not interested in any great subject, theme or idea. They showed anxiety about the right word and were fussy about vowel and consonant patterns. Moreover, they emphasised the passion rather than the intellect. Pater, in his essay on the pre-Raphaelites, and above all in his *Conclusions to Studies in the Renaissance*, had given a double suggestion which greatly affected this group of poets. First, there accompanies life an inevitable mortality, “the undefinable taint of death is upon all things”; and, secondly, “out of life may be seized some few moments of deep passion or high intellectual endeavour.” The poets belonging to the Aesthetic Movement attempted to express in a most beautiful manner such evanescent moods of pleasure and pain for their own sake without any extraneous motive of conveying any moral. In fact they were pitted against all conventional morality and rebelled against established social and moral laws. They knew neither philosophy nor religion but were the worshippers of Beauty for its own sake. Their object was to afford the readers merely aesthetic pleasure.

(i) Oscar Wilde (1856-1900)

Oscar Wilde was the first to come under the influence of Walter Pater. Though in his early poems he had dealt with religious and spiritual experiences, in *New Helen* he declared himself as the votary of Beauty.

*Of heaven or hell I have no thought or fear  
Seeing I know no other god but thee.*

In *The Garden of Eros* he reaffirmed his belief that the pursuit of beauty is the only desirable form of human activity. Like the pre-Raphaelites he also pointed out that modern civilisation opposes this ideal:

*Spirit of beauty, tarry yet awhile  
Although the cheating merchants of the mart  
With iron rods profane our lovely isle,  
And break on whirling wheels the limbs of art.*

In the short poem, *Panthea*, Wilde almost gives a paraphrase of Pater’s aesthetic creed:

*Nay, let us walk from fire to fire,  
From passionate pain to deadlier delight.  
I am too young to live without desire,  
Too young art thou to waste this summer night  
Asking those idle questions which of old  
Man sought to see and oracle made no reply.*

(ii) Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)

Ernest Dowson symbolises in his work the Aesthetic Movement of the eighteen nineties. He came under the influence of Rossetti, Swinburne and the French romanticists who believed in the doctrine of Art for Art’s sake. Following Pater’s artistic principles the recorded in his poetry moments of sensations to the utter exclusion of all moral and philosophical comment. He dealt mainly with the theme of the brevity of life and the fading of things that once were beautiful:

*They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,  
Love and desire and hate;  
I think they have no portions in us after we pass the gate.*

Dowson possessed a love of words for their very shape and appearance on the page, apart from their values of sound and association. He also possessed an unusual prosodic skill. His *Cynara* holds a pre-eminent place in his work mainly on account of the sweet melody of its verse. His central poetic theme is most profoundly treated in *Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration* knowing that the 'world is wild and passionate; and that the rose of the world would fade', the poet views with sad admiration those whose asceticism allows them to stand aside and make their nights and days, 'Into a long returning rosary':

*Calm, sad, secure; behind high convent walls,  
These watch the sacred lamp, these watch and pray;  
And it is one with them when evening falls,  
And one with them the cold return of day.*

(iii) Lionel Pigot Johnson (1867-1902)

Lionel Johnson was an associate of Oscar Wilde and Dowson who created the aesthetic poetry of the eighteen nineties. Though he was greatly influenced by old Christianity and wrote a good deal of religious verse, yet along with passages of religious enthusiasm can be found paragraphs marked by aestheticism.

(iv) Arthur Symons

Next to Dowson the most consistent follower of the Aesthetic Movement was Arthur Symons. Though he did not possess the unfaltering artistic perfection of Dowson's poetry where the images burn clearly and steadily, yet his poetic range was wider, and he was a great critic.

(c) Other Important Poets

Other important poets of the Later Victorian Period were Patmore, Meredith and Hardy, though the last two are better known as novelists. Coventry Patmore was a pre-Raphaelite in the sense that he believed in 'the simplicity of art' theory, but much of his poetry expresses his own individuality rather than any literary or aesthetic doctrine. His most popular poem is *The Angel in the House* which contains some very fine things. His great Odes covered by the title *The Unknown Eros* convey in beautiful, controlled free verse, the mysticism of love combined with an intense religious feeling as no other poems in the English language do.

Though George Meredith was associated with Rossetti and Swinburne, as a poet he had nothing in common with the pre-Raphaelite group except his belief that art should not be the handmaid of morality. He looked upon life as glorious, increasingly exciting and always worth while. The tremendous vigour and metrical skill of his long lyrics—*The Lark Ascending* and *Love in the Valley* remind one of Swinburne. His greatest poetical work, *Modern Love* written in sonnets of sixteen lines, is a novel in verse, and is of its own kind in English literature. It is no doubt the most successful long poem written during the later Victorian period.

Thomas Hardy, though a novelist, expressed himself, like Meredith, in verse also. His greatest work, *The Dynasts*, is written in the form of an epic in which the immense Napoleonic struggle unrolls itself as drama, novel, tragedy, and comedy. In his verse sometimes he is as prosaic as Wordsworth in his later poetry, but at times his poems like 'Only a man harrowing clods' he gives expression to his pessimistic philosophy, but in others he gives a true picture of human experience with a queer sense of super reality. *Moments of Vision*, the title of one of his volumes, is an apt description of his poems as a whole, because most of them give us visions of

emotional moments charged with the inheritance of past ages of emotions, combined with irrational half-conscious feelings which are recognized by the contemplative mind as being part of every-day experience.

### Lecture 23

#### Prose writers of the Later Victorian Period

In the later Victorian period there were two great prose-writers—Newman and Pater. Newman was the central figure of the Oxford Movement, while Pater was an aesthete, who inspired the leaders of the Aesthetic Movement in English poetry.

##### (a) Newman and the Oxford Movement

The Oxford Movement was an attempt to recover a lost tradition. England had become a Protestant country in the 16<sup>th</sup> century under the reign of Elizabeth, and had her own Church, called the Anglican Church, which became independent of the control of the Pope at Rome. Before that England was a Catholic country. The Anglican Church insisted on simplicity, and did not encourage elaborate ceremonies. In fact it became too much rational having no faith in rituals and old traditions. Especially in the eighteenth century in England religion began to be ruthlessly attacked by philosophers as well as scientists. The protagonists of the Oxford Movement tried to show that the Middle Ages had qualities and capacities which the moderns lacked. They wished to recover the connection with the continent and with its own past which the English Church had lost at the Reformation in the sixteenth century. They recognised in the medieval and early Church a habit of piety and genius of public worship which had both disappeared. They, therefore, made an attempt to restore those virtues by turning the attention of the people to the history of the Middle Ages, and by trying to recover the rituals and art of the medieval Church.

From another point of view the Oxford Movement was an attempt to meet the rationalist attack by emphasising the importance of tradition, authority, and the emotional element in religion. It sought to revive the ancient rites, with all their pomp and symbolism. It exalted the principle of authority the hierarchy and dogmatic teaching. Instead of being inspired by the doctrines of liberalism which were being preached in the Victorian period, it resumed its connection with the medieval tradition. It was favourable to mystery and miracles and appealed to the sensibility and imagination which during the eighteenth century had been crushed by the supremacy of intellect.

The aesthetic aspect of the Oxford Movement, or the Catholic Reaction, had a much wider appeal. Even those who were not convinced by the arguments advanced by the supporters of the Movement, were in sympathy with its aesthetic side. The lofty cathedrals aglow with the colours of painting, stately processions in gorgeous robes, and all the pomp and circumstance of a ceremonial religion, attract even such puritanic minds as Milton's and are almost the only attraction to the multitudes whose God must take a visible shape and be not too far removed from humanity. Thus many who were only alienated by the arguments in favour of the Catholic

Reaction, were in sympathy with this aspect of the reaction, with the bringing back of colour and beauty into religious life, with the appeal to the imagination and the feelings.

The germ of the Oxford Movement is to be found in 1822 in Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sketches*. Although Wordsworth here showed himself a follower Catholic past which survived there. He regretted the suppressions of the ritual, lamented the dissolution of the monasteries, the end of the worship of saints and the virgin, the disappearance of the ancient abbeys, and admired the splendours of the old Cathedrals. It was one of Wordsworth's disciples, John Keble, professor of poetry at Oxford, who some years later started the Oxford Movement. The first impulse towards reaction was given by his sermon on 'national apostasy' in 1833. In this movement which Keble heralded there were two phases. The first was the High Church revival within the framework of the Anglican Church. The second was reverting to Roman Catholicism. But both laid emphasis on ceremonies, dogmatism and attachment to the past.

Others who took up this movement were E. B. Pusey and John Henry Newman, both belonging to Oxford. (In fact this movement was called the Oxford Movement, because its main supports came from Oxford.) To explain their point of view they wrote pamphlets called *Tracts for the Times* (1833-41) whence the movement got its name the 'Tractarian Movement' E.B. Pusey (1800-82) who was a colleague of Keble originated 'Puseyism', the form of Anglicanism which came nearest to Rome without being merged into Romanism.

John Henry Newman (1801-90) who joined later, became soon the moving force in the movement. He was, in fact, the once great man, the one genius, of Oxford Movement. Froude calls him the 'indicating number', all the rest but as ciphers. This judgment is quite sound. It was he who went to the length of breaking completely with Protestantism and returning to the bosom of the Roman Church. Newman, the most important personality of the movement, is also its most conspicuous writer. He dreamt of a free and powerful Church, and aspired to a return to the spirit of the Middle Ages. At first he believed that this reform could be accomplished by Anglicanism, but he was distressed to find lack of catholicity in the Anglican Church. Universality and the principle of authority he could find only in Rome. So after a period of hesitation he was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845. In 1879 he was made a Cardinal.

Newman was great writer of prose and verse. His greatest contribution to English prose is his *Apologia*, in which he set forth the reasons for his conversion. This fascinating book is the great prose document of the Oxford Movement, and it is eminently and emphatically literature. From first to last it is written in pure, flawless and refined prose. His style is a clear reflection of his character. Refinement, severity, strength, sweetness, all of these words are truly descriptive of the style as well as of the character of Newman. Another special characteristic of Newman's style is its wide range. He can express himself in any manner he pleases, and that most naturally and almost unconsciously. In his writings sarcasm, biting irony glowing passion are seen side by side, and he can change from one to the other without effort. His art of prose writing is, therefore, most natural and perfectly concealed.

(b) Walter Pater (1839 – 1894)

Pater belongs to the group of great Victorian critics like Ruskin and Arnold, though he followed a new line of criticism, and was more akin to Ruskin than to Arnold. He was also the leader of the Aesthetes and Decadents of the later part of the nineteenth century. Like Ruskin, Pater was an Epicurean, a worshipper of beauty, but he did not attach much importance to the moral and ethical side of it as Ruskin did. He was curiously interested in the phases of history;

and chiefly in those, like the Renaissance and the beginnings of Christianity, in which men's minds were driven by a powerful eagerness, or stirred by proud conflicts. He thus tried to trace the history of man through picturesque surroundings as his life developed, and he laid great stress on artistic value. From these studies – *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), *Greek Studies* and others – it becomes clear that Pater considered that the secret principle of existence that actually possesses and rules itself is to gather as many occasions of psychical intensity which life offers to the knowing, and to taste them all at their highest pitch, so that the flame of consciousness should burn with its full ardour. Far from giving itself away, it shall suck in the whole world and absorb it for its own good. Pater's most ambitious and, on the whole, his greatest work, *Marius the Epicurean*, the novel in which most of his philosophy is to be found also spiritualises the search for pleasure. Pater's aestheticism was thus spent in tasting and intensifying the joys to be reaped from the knowledge of the past and the understanding of the human soul.

As a critic Pater stands eminent. His method is that impressionism which Hazlitt and Lamb had brilliantly illustrated. His approach is always intuitional and personal, and, therefore, in his case one has to make a liberal allowance for the 'personal equation'. His studies are short 'appreciations' rather than judgments. But few writers have written more wisely upon style, and the sentence in which he concentrates the essence of his doctrine is unimpeachable: "Say what you have to say, what you have a will to say, in the simplest, the most direct and exact manner possible, and with no surplusage; there is the justification of the sentence so fortunately born, entire, smooth and round, that it needs no punctuation, and also (that is the point) of the most elaborate period, if it be right in its elaboration." Few again have more wisely discriminated between the romantic and classical elements in literature. According to him the essential elements of the romantic spirit are "curiosity and the love of beauty," that of the classical spirit – "a comely order". He believes that "all good art was romantic in its day", and his love for and affinity to the romantic spirit is obvious. But he attempts to make romantic more classical, to superimpose the "comely order" upon beauty, so that its strangeness may be reduced. His point of view, therefore, is similar to that of Arnold, but he lacks Arnold's breadth of outlook, and his attitude is more of a recluse who has no part to play in the world.

As a writer of prose, Pater is of the first rank, but he does not belong to the category of the greatest, because there is such an excess of refinement in his style that the creative strength is impoverished. Moreover, he does not possess the capacity of producing the impression of wholeness in his work. His chief merit, however, lies in details, in the perfection of single pages, though occasionally some chapters or essays are throughout remarkable for the robustness of ideas. Like a true romanticist Pater gives flexibility to his prose which beautifully corresponds to his keen sensitive perception and vivid imagination. He is capable of producing more intense and acute effects in his poetic prose than other great masters of this art – Sir Thomas Browne, De Quincey and Ruskin. And more than any other prose-writer he brushed aside the superficial barrier between prose and poetical effects and he clothed his ideas in the richly significant garb of the most harmonious and many-hued language.

### Lecture 24

#### Modern Literature

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

The Modern Age in English Literature started from the beginning of the twentieth century, and it followed the Victorian Age. The most important characteristic of Modern Literature is that it is opposed to the general attitude to life and its problems adopted by the Victorian writers and the public, which may be termed 'Victorian'. The young people during the first decade of the present century regarded the Victorian age as hypocritical, and the Victorian ideals as mean, superficial and stupid.

This rebellious mood affected modern literature, which was directed by mental attitudes moral ideals and spiritual values diametrically opposed to those of the Victorians. Nothing was considered as certain; everything was questioned. In the field of literary technique also some fundamental changes took place. Standards of artistic workmanship and of aesthetic appreciations also underwent radical changes.

What the Victorians had considered as honourable and beautiful, their children and grandchildren considered as mean and ugly. The Victorians accepted the Voice of Authority, and acknowledged the rule of the Expert in religion, in politics, in literature and family life. They had the innate desire to affirm and confirm rather than to reject or question the opinions of the experts in their respective fields. They showed readiness to accept their words at face value without critical examinations. This was their attitude to religion and science. They believed in the truths revealed in the Bible, and accepted the new scientific theories as propounded by Darwin and others. On the other hand, the twentieth century minds did not take anything for granted; they questioned everything.

Another characteristic of Victorianism was an implicit faith in the permanence of nineteenth century institutions, both secular and spiritual. The Victorians believed that their family life, their Constitution, the British Empire and the Christian religion were based on sound footings, and that they would last for ever. This Victorian idea of the Permanence of Institutions was replaced among the early twentieth century writers by the sense that nothing is fixed and final in this world. H. G. Wells spoke of the flow of things and of "all this world of ours being no more than the prelude to the real civilisation". The simple faith of the Victorians was replaced by the modern man's desire to probe and question, Bernard Shaw, foremost among the rebels, attacked not only the 'old' superstitions of religion, but also the 'new' superstitions of science. The watchwords of his creed were: *Question! Examine! Test!* He challenged the Voice of Authority and the rule of the Expert. He was responsible for producing the interrogative habit of the mind in all spheres of life. He made the people question the basic conceptions of religion and morality. Andrew Undershaft declares in Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*: "That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political institutions". Such a radical proclamation invigorated some whereas others were completely shaken, as Barbara herself: "I stood on the rock I thought eternal; and without a word it reeled and crumbled under me."

The modern mind was outraged by the Victorian self-complacency. The social and religious reformers at first raised this complaint, and they were followed by men of letters, because they echo the voice around them. Of course, the accusation of self-complacency cannot be rightly levelled against many of the Victorian writers, especially the authors of *Vanity Fair*, *David Copperfield*, *Maud*, *Past and Present*, *Bishop Blouhram*, *Culture and Anarchy*, *Richard Feverel* and *Tess*. But there was felt the need of a change in the sphere of literature also because the

idiom, the manner of presentment, the play of imagination, and the rhythm and structure of the verse, of the Victorian writers were becoming stale, and seemed gradually to be losing the old magic. Their words failed to evoke the spirit.

Thus a reaction was even otherwise overdue in the field of literature, because art has to be renewed in order to revitalise it. The Victorian literature had lost its freshness and it lacked in the element of surprise which is its very soul. It had relapsed into life of the common day, and could not give the reader a shock of novelty. At the end of the Victorian era it was felt that the ideas, experiences, moods and attitudes had changed, and so the freshness which was lacking in literature had to be supplied on another level.

Besides the modern reaction against the attitude of self-complacency of the Victorians, there was also failure or disintegration of values in the twentieth century. The young men who were being taught by their elders to prize 'the things of the spirit' above worldly prosperity, found in actual experience that nothing could be attained without money. Material prosperity had become the basis of social standing. Whereas in 1777 Dr. Johnson affirmed that 'opulence excludes but one evil Poverty', in 1863, Samuel Butler who was much ahead of his time, voiced the experience of the twentieth century, when he wrote: "Money is like antennae; without it the human insect loses touch with its environment. He who would acquire scholarship or gentility must first acquire cash. In order to make the best of himself, the average youth must first make money. He would have to sacrifice to possessiveness the qualities which should render possession worthwhile."

Besides the immense importance which began to be attached to money in the twentieth century, there was also a more acute and pressing consciousness of the social life. Whereas some of the Victorians could satisfy themselves with the contemplation of cosmic order, identification with some Divine Intelligence or Superhuman plan which absorbs and purifies our petty egoisms, and with the merging of our will in a higher will, their successors in the twentieth century could not do so. They realised every day that man was more of a social being than a spiritual being, and that industrial problems were already menacing the peace of Europe. Instead of believing in the cult of self-perfection as the Victorians did, they were ready to accept the duty of working for others. A number of twentieth century writers began to study and ponder seriously over the writings of Karl Marx, Engels, Ruskin, Morris, and some of them like Henry James, discussed practical suggestions for the reconstruction of society.

The Victorians believed in the sanctity of home life, but in the twentieth century the sentiments for the family circle declined. Young men and women who realised the prospect of financial independence refused to submit to parental authority, and considered domestic life as too narrow. Moreover, young people who began early to earn their living got greater opportunity of mixing with each other, and to them sex no longer remained a mystery. So love became much less of a romance and much more of an experience.

These are some of the examples of the disintegration of values in the twentieth century. The result was that the modern writers could no longer write in the old manner. If they played on such sentiments as the contempt for money, divine love, natural beauty, the sentiments of home and life, classical scholarship, and communication with the spirit of the past, they were running the risk of striking a false note. Even if they treated the same themes, they had to do it in a different manner, and evoke different thoughts and emotions from what were normally

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

associated with them. The modern writer had, therefore, to cultivate a fresh point of view, and also a fresh technique.

The impact of scientific thought was mainly responsible for this attitude of interrogations and disintegration of old values. The scientific truths which were previously the proud possessions of the privileged few, were now equally intelligible to all. In an age of mass education, they began to appeal to the masses. The physical and biological conclusions of great scientists like Darwin, Lyell and Huxley, created the impression on the new generation that the universe looks like a colossal blunder, that human life on our inhospitable globe is an accident due to unknown causes, and that this accident had led to untold misery. They began to look upon Nature not as a system planned by Divine Architect, but as a powerful, but blind, pitiless and wasteful force. These impressions filled the people of the twentieth century with overwhelming pity, despair or stoicism. A number of writers bred and brought up in such an atmosphere began to voice these ideas in their writings.

The twentieth century has become the age of machine. Machinery has, no doubt, dominated every aspect of modern life, and it has produced mixed response from the readers and writers. Some of them have been alarmed at the materialism which machinery has brought in its wake, and they seek consolation and self-expression in the bygone unmechanised and pre-mechanical ages. Others, however, being impressed by the spectacle of mechanical power producing a sense of mathematical adjustment and simplicity of design, and conferring untold blessings on mankind, find a certain rhythm and beauty in it. But there is no doubt, that whereas machinery has reduced drudgery, accelerated production and raised the standard of living, it has given rise to several distressing complications. The various scientific appliances confer freedom and enslavement, efficiency and embarrassment. The modern man has now to live by the clock applying his energies not according to mood and impulse, but according to the time scheme. All these ideas are found expressed in modern literature, because the twentieth century author has to reflect this atmosphere, and he finds little help from the nineteenth century.

Another important factor which influenced modern literature was the large number of people of the poor classes who were educated by the State. In order to meet their demand for reading the publishers of the early twentieth century began whole series of cheaply reprinted classics. This was supplemented by the issue of anthologies of Victorian literature, which illustrated a stable society fit for a governing class which had established itself on the economic laws of wealth, the truth of Christianity and the legality of the English Constitution. But these failed to appeal to the new cheaply educated reading public who had no share in the inheritance of those ideals, who wanted redistribution of wealth, and had their own peculiar codes of moral and sexual freedom. Even those who were impressed by the wit and wisdom of the past could not shut their eyes to the change that had come about on account of the use of machinery, scientific development, and the general atmosphere of instability and flux in which they lived. So they demanded a literature which suited the new atmosphere. The modern writers found in these readers a source of power and income, if they could only appeal to them, and give them what they wanted. The temptation to do so was great and it was fraught with great dangers, because the new reading public were uncertain of their ideologies, detached from their background, but desperately anxious to be impressed. They wanted to be led and shown the way. The result was that some of the twentieth century authors exploited their enthusiasm and tried to lead their innocent readers in the quickest, easiest way, by playing on their susceptibilities. In some cases the clever writer might end as a prophet of a school in which he did not believe. Such was the power wielded by the reading public.

One great disadvantage under which the modern writers labour is that there is no common ground on which they and their readers meet. This was not so during the Victorian period, where the authors and the reading public understood each other, and had the common outlook on and attitude to life and its problems. In the atmosphere of disillusionment, discontent and doubt, different authors show different approaches to life. Some lament the passing of old values, and express a sense of nostalgia. Some show an utter despair of the future; while others recommend reverting to an artificial primitivism. Some concentrate on sentiment, style or diction in order to recover what has been lost. Thus among the twentieth century writers are sometimes found aggressive attempts to retain or revitalise old values in a new setting or, if it is not possible, to create new values to take their place.

The twentieth century literature which is the product of this tension is, therefore, unique. It is extremely fascinating and, at the same time, very difficult to evaluate, because, to a certain extent, it is a record of uncoordinated efforts. It is not easy to divide it into school and types. It is full of adventures and experiments peculiar to the modern age which is an age of transition and discovery. But there is an undercurrent in it which runs parallel to the turbulent current of ideas which flows with great impetuosity. Though it started as a reaction against 'Victorianism' in the beginning of the twentieth century, it is closely bound up with the new ideas which are agitating the mind of the modern man.

### **Lecture 25**

#### **Modern Poets/Modern Poetry**

##### **Modern Poetry**

Modern poetry, of which T. S. Eliot is the chief representative, has followed entirely a different tradition from the Romantic and Victorian tradition of poetry. Every age has certain ideas about poetry, especially regarding the essentially poetical subjects, the poetical materials and the poetical modes.

These preconceptions about poetry during the nineteenth century were mainly those which were established by great Romantic poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. According to them the sublime and the pathetic were the two chief nerves of all genuine poetry. That is why Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton were given a higher place as poets than Dryden and Pope, who were merely men of wit and good sense, and had nothing of the transcendently sublime or pathetic in them. During the Victorian Age, Matthew Arnold, summing up these very assumptions about poetry stated:

Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.

The difference between genuine poetry and the poetry of Dryden and Pope and all their school is briefly this; their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits; genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul.

Arnold shared with the age the prejudice in favour of poetry which in Milton's phrase was "simple, sensuous and passionate." It was generally assumed that poetry must be the direct expression of the simple, tender, exalted, poignant and sympathetic emotions. Wit, play of

Arnold, therefore, was not qualified to give a new direction to poetry. Browning on the other hand, though a greater poet, was unaware of the disharmonies of his time. He was too optimistic to face the realities of life and new problems which had crept in. He was a poet of simple emotions and sentiments, and though he could understand psychologically the past ages, he had

no aptitude to understand the complexities of modern life. He was also, therefore, not in a position to provide the impulse to bring back poetry to the proper and adequate grappling with the new problems which had arisen.

William Morris, though a practical socialist, reserved poetry for his day-dreams. Moreover, some of the distinguished authors like Meredith and Hardy turned to the novel, and during the early part of the twentieth century it was left to the minor poets like Houseman and Rupert Brooke to write in the poetic medium. Thus there was the greatest need for some great poets to make poetry adequate to modern life, and escape from the atmosphere which the established habits had created. For generations owing to the reaction of aesthetes against the new scientific, industrial and largely materialistic world, the people in England had become accustomed to the idea that certain things are 'not poetical,' that a poet can mention a rose and not the steam engine, that poetry is an escape from life and not an attack on life, and that a poet is sensitive to only certain beautiful aspects of life, and not the whole life. So the twentieth century needed poets who were fully alive to what was happening around them, and who had the courage and technique to express it.

The great poetical problem in the beginning of the twentieth century was, therefore, to invent technique that would be adequate to the ways of feeling, or modes of experience of the modern adult sensitive mind. The importance of T. S. Eliot lies in the fact that, gifted with a mind of rare distinction, he has solved his own problem as a poet. Moreover, being a poet as well as a critic his poetical theories are re-inforced by his own poetry, and thus he has exerted a tremendous influence on modern poetry. It is mainly due to him that all serious modern poets and critics have realised that English poetry must develop along some other line than that running from the Romantics to Tennyson, Swinburne and Rupert Brooke.

Of the other important poets of the twentieth century Robert Bridges belonged to the transitional period. He was an expert literary technician, and it was his "inexhaustible satisfaction of form" which led him to poetry. His metrical innovations were directed to the breaking down of the domination of the syllabic system of versification, overruling it by a stress prosody wherein natural speech rhythms should find their proper values. He was convinced that it was only through the revival of the principle of quantitative stress that any advances in English versification could be expected. A. E. Houseman a classical scholar like Robert Bridges, rejected the ecstasies of romantic poetry, and in his expression of the mood of philosophic despair, used a style characterised by Purity, Simplicity, restraint and absence of all ornamentation. W. B. Yeats, the founder of the Celtic movement in poetry and drama, a phase of romanticism which had not been much exploited hitherto, gave expression to the intellectual mood of his age.

The twentieth century poets who were in revolt against Victorianism and especially against the didactic tendency of poets like Tennyson, Browning, Arnold and even Swinburne and Meredith, felt that the poet's business was to be uniquely himself, and to project his personality through the medium of his art. Poetry to them was not a medium for philosophy and other extraneous matters; nor was it singing for its own sake. It was a method first of discovering one's self, and then a means of projecting this discovery. Thus the problem before each of them was how to arrive at a completely individual expression of oneself in poetry. Naturally it could not be solved by using the common or universally accepted language of poetry. On account of the change in the conceptions of the function of poetry, it was essential that a new technique of communicating meaning be discovered. It was this necessity which brought about the movements known as imagism and symbolism in modern poetry.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

Symbolism was first started in France in the nineteenth century. The business of the symbolist poet is to express his individual sensations and perceptions in language which seems best adapted to convey his essential quality without caring for the conventional metres and sentence structures. He aims at inducing certain states of mind in the reader rather than communicating logical meaning. The imagists, on the other hand, aim at clarity of expression through hard, accurate, and definite images. They believe that it is not the elaborate similes of Milton or extended metaphors of Shakespeare which can express the soul of poetry. This purpose of poetry can be best served by images which by their rapid impingement on the consciousness, set up in the mind fleeting complexes of thought and feeling. In poetry which is capable of capturing such instantaneous state of mind, there is no scope for Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity". In it suggestion plays the paramount part and there is no room for patient, objective descriptions.

The symbolist poetry in England came into prominence with the appearance of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. But it had actually started right during the Victorian Age, which is evident from the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), a Jesuit priest whose poems were published thirty years after his death. It was the poetry of Hopkins and T. S. Eliot which exerted the greatest influence on English poetry between the two wars.

The technique of the symbolist is impressionistic and not representational. In order to prevent any obstruction in the way of emotive suggestion by any direct statement of experience, he gives a covering of obscurity to his meaning. There is also in symbolist poetry a strong element of charm or incantation woven by the music of words. Repetition is often resorted to by the symbolist poets as we find in Tennyson's *The Marriage of Geraint*:

*Forgetful of his promise to the king*  
*Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,*  
*Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,*  
*Forgetful of his glory and his name*  
*Forgetful of the princedom and its cares.*

But the repetitive rhythms which the symbolists use have in them a hypnotic quality. They also recall the texture of dreams of the subconscious states of mind, and because of absence of punctuation they can express the continuous "stream of consciousness".

The symbolists also give more importance to the subjective vision of an object or situation rather than the object or the situation itself. Moreover, unlike the Romantics who create beauty out of things which are conventionally beautiful, like natural objects, works of art etc., the symbolists find beauty in every detail of normal day-to-day life. Naturally to accomplish that and create beauty out of such prosaic material requires a higher quality of art and a more sensitive approach to life. Moreover, besides including all sorts of objects and situations in the poetical fold, the symbolist has broken fresh grounds in language also. He considers that every word in the language has a potentiality for being used in poetry as well in prose. For him the language of poetry is not different from that of prose. As he uses all sorts of words which were never used in poetry by the Romantics, the symbolist has to invent a new prosody to accommodate such words as were banned previously from the domain of poetry. Thus the symbolist does not consider any particular topic, diction or rhythm specially privileged to be used in poetry.

### Modern Poets

### 1. Robert Bridges (1840-1930)

Robert Bridges, though a twentieth century poet, may be considered as the last of the Great Victorians as he carried on the Victorian tradition. He is not a poet of the modern crisis except for his metrical innovations. Belonging to the aristocracy his work is also concerned with the leisured and highly cultivated aristocratic class of society.

In his poetry we find beautiful descriptions of English landscapes, clear streams, gardens, songs of birds. The world that he depicts is haunted by memories of the classics, of music and poetry and decorous love making. He carries on the tradition of Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson, against which the young men of his times were in open revolt. We do not find in his poetry any bold attempt to face the critical problems facing his generation. Even his greatest poem, *The Testament of Beauty*, does not contain any consistent treatment of deep philosophy. That is why Yeats remarked that there is emptiness everywhere in the poetry of Bridges.

The importance of Bridges in modern poetry, however, is in his metrical innovations. He was lover of old English music and many of his early lyrics are obviously influenced by the Elizabethan lyricists, especially Thomas Campion. He was a remarkable prosodist, the first English poet who had a grasp of phonetic theory. He was tireless experimenter in verse form. He himself admitted: "What led me to poetry was the inexhaustible satisfaction of form, the magic of speech, lying as it seemed to be in the masterly control of the material." Working under the influence of his friend, Hopkins, to whom he dedicated the second book of shorter poems, Bridges wrote his poems following the rules of new prosody. The best of Bridges' metrical experiment is the sprung rhythm, a kind of versification which is not, as usual, based on speech rhythm, but on "the hidden emotional pattern that makes poetry." And it was a definite contribution to the development of English verse.

The lyrics of Bridges like *A Passer-By*, *London Snow*, *The Downs*, are marked by an Elizabethan simplicity. In the sonnets of *The Growth of Love*, we find the calm, the mediative strain of Victorian love poetry. A believer in Platonic love, he exalts the ethical and intellectual principle of beauty. In his greatest poem, *The Testament of Beauty*, he has given beautiful expression to his love for 'the mighty abstract idea of beauty in all things' which he received from Keats. Here he has also sought to 'reconcile Passion with peace and show desire at rest.' In his poetry Bridges thus transcended rather than solved the modern problems by his faith in idealism and the evolutionary spirit. He has no sympathy for the down-trodden and less fortunate members of humanity, and so whenever he deals with a simple human theme, as in the poem *The Villager*, he reflects the mind of the upper class which has lost touch with common humanity. Bridges is, therefore, rightly called the last Great Victorian, and his greatest poem, *The Testament of Beauty*, the final flower of the Victorian Spirit.

### 2. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Hopkins who died in 1889, but whose poems were not issued during his lifetime, and who only became widely known after his friend Robert Bridges edited the collection in 1918, exerted a great influence on modern English poetry. The poems of Hopkins were so eccentric in style that Bridges dared not publish them till thirty years after his death. Hopkins had tried to revive the 'sprung rhythm', the accentual and alliterative measure of Langland and Skelton, which had dropped out of use since the sixteenth century. In this rhythm there are two currents, the undercurrent and the overcurrent, which are intertwined. This effect is produced by inducing the

metre to run back on itself, sometimes making a second line reverse the movement of one before; sometimes in the same line confronting a metric foot by its opposite, for instance, an iambic followed by a trochee. As these variations produce the momentary effect of a break or split, Hopkins called this device *sprung rhythm*. This rhythm follows the system of beats and stresses unlike the quantitative metres where every syllable is counted. As in conversation we stress significant words and syllables with so much emphasis that accompanying syllables and words are left to take care of themselves, the 'sprung' rhythm is nearer to natural speech. That is why it has appealed to the modern poets who in their poetry attempt to convey the everyday experience of modern life and its multifarious problem in a most natural manner. The 'sprung' rhythm of Hopkins, therefore, is his greatest contribution to modern poetry. Of course he was not the first to invent it; there are examples of it in the poetry of all great poets, especially Milton. But Hopkins revived it and laid special emphasis on it, and exerted a great influence because the twentieth century needed it.

Hopkins, like Keats, was endowed with a highly sensuous temperament, but being a deeply religious man having an abiding faith in God, he refined his faculty and offered it to God. He avoided all outward and sensuous experiences, but enjoyed them in a deeply religious mood as intimations of the Divine Presence. He could perceive God in every object, and tried to find its distinctive virtue of design or pattern the inner kernel of its being, or its very soul which was expressed by its outer form. This peculiarity or the immanent quality in each thing which is the manifestation of Beauty was called by Hopkins as *inscape*, a term which he borrowed from Don Scotus. For example, the *inscape* of the flower called 'blue bell', according to Hopkins, is mixed strength and grace. Thus to him not only trees, grass, flower, but each human spirit had its personal *inscape*, a mystic, creative force which shapes the mind. This '*inscape*' Hopkins expressed in a style also which was peculiar to himself, because he could not be satisfied with the conventional rhythms and metres which were incapable of conveying what came straight from his heart.

The poems of Hopkins are about God, Nature and Man, and all of them are pervaded with the immanence of God. His greatest poem is *The Wreck of Deutschland*, which is full of storm and agony revealing the mystery of God's way to men. All his poetry is symbolic, and he means more than he says. Some of his lyrics are sublime, but the majority of his poems are obscure. It is mainly on account of his theory—*sprung rhythm*, and *inscape*, that he has exerted such a tremendous influence on modern poets.

### 3. A. E. Houseman (1859-1936)

Alfred Edward Houseman was a great classical scholar. He wrote much of his poetry about Shropshire, which like Hardy's Wessex, is a part of England, full of historic memories and still comparatively free from the taint of materialism. Out of his memories of this place, Houseman created a dream world, a type of arcadia. His most celebrated poem, *Shropshire Lad*, which is a pseudo-pastoral fancy, deals with the life of the Shropshire lad who lives a vigorous, care-free life.

Houseman was disgusted with the dismal picture which the modern world presented to him, but he did not possess a sufficiently acute intellect to solve its problems. However, in some of his poems he gives an effective and powerful expression to the division in the modern consciousness caused by the contrast between the development of the moral sense and the dehumanised world picture provided by scientific discoveries. In one of his poems based on his memories of Shropshire, he has achieved tragic dignity:

*Men loved unkindness then, but lightless in the quarry  
I slept and saw not; tears fell down, I did not mourn;  
Sweat ran and blood sprang and I was never sorry;  
Then it was well with me, in days ere I was born*

Housemen also wrote a few poems expressing the horrible destruction caused by modern wars, and their utter futility and inhumanity. But he was on the whole a minor poet who could not attain the stature of T. S. Eliot or W. B. Yeats.

#### 4. The “Georgian” Poets

Besides Bridges and Houseman, who did not belong to any group, there was in the first quarter of the twentieth century a group of poets called the “George Group.” These poets flourished in the reign of George V (1911-1936). They possessed various characteristics and were not conscious of belonging to a particular group. In reality they were imitators of the parts, who shut their eyes against the contemporary problems. But they were presumptuous enough to think of themselves as the heralds of a new age. Robert Graves who first claimed to belong to this group, and subsequently broke away with it, wrote about the Georgian poets. “The Georgians’ general recommendations were the discarding of archaistic diction such as ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ and ‘flower’d’ and ‘when’er’, and of poetical construction such as ‘winter clear’ and ‘host on armed host’ and of pomposities generally... In reaction to Victorianism their verse should avoid all formally religious, philosophic or improving themes; and all sad, wrecked cafe-table themes in reaction to the nineties. Georgian poets were to be English but not aggressively imperialistic, pantheistic rather than atheistic; and as simple as a child’s reading book. Their subjects were to be Nature, love, leisure, old age, childhood, animals, sleep... unemotional subject.”

This is rather a severe account of the Georgian poets but it is not wholly unjustified. Though the quantity of work produced by the Georgian poets is great, the quality is not of a high order. The poets generally attributed to this group are roughly those whose work was published in the five volumes of *Georgian Poetry*, dated respectively 1911-12, 1913-15, 1916-17, 1918-19 and 1920-22. The important poets who contributed to these volumes were Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, G. K. Chesterton, W. H. Davis; Walter De La Mare, John Masefield, J. E. Flecker, W. W. Gibson; D. H. Lawrence, John Drinkwater, Sturge Moore, Laurence Binyon, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen.

Among these the poets whose work has some lasting value are Walter De la Mare, W. H. Davis, Laurence Binyon and John Masefield. The greatest of them is Walter De La Mare (1873-1957) who writes in a simple, pure, lyrical style about beautiful sights and sounds of the country, about children and old people but there is always in his poetry a strange enchantment produced by the apprehension of another world existing side by side with the everyday world. His poetry has the atmosphere of dreamland, as he himself says in his introduction to *Behold, This Dreamer*: “Every imaginative poem resembles in its onset and its effect the experience of dreaming.” He has the faculty of bridging the gulf between waking and dreaming, between reality and fantasy. Besides this he has great skill in the management of metre, and successfully welding the grotesque with the profoundly pathetic.

William Henry Davies (1871-1940) is one of the natural singers in the English language. Being immensely interested in Nature, the experiences which he describes about natural objects and scenes are authentic. His lyrics remind us of the melodies of Herrick and Blake. Though

living in the twentieth century, he remained wholly unsophisticated, and composing his poems without much conscious effort, he could not give them polish and finish. But in spite of this he has left quite a number of lyrics which on account of their lively music have an enduring appeal to sensitive ears.

Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), a scholar and poet who translated Dante into English had a sense of just word and its sound. Generally he wrote about classical themes. The most notable of such poems is his *Attila*, a dramatic poem which is a well-constructed play. Its vehement blank verse and speed of action remind the readers of Shakespeare. The First World War stirred him to profound feelings and he wrote some very moving poems, for example, the one beginning with the unforgettable line—

*They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old.*

The Second World War had a great saddening effect on him, and in his last years he wrote poems in which he contrasted old pleasures and dreams with the horrible war oppressed present. They were posthumously published in 1944 under the title *The Burning of the Leaves and other Poems*. Though these poems were written under the shadow of war and they deal with the transient nature of things and their tendency to decay, yet they express the hope, like Browning's poetry, that nothing that is past is ultimately gone.

John Masefield (born 1878) who has been Poet Laureate since 1930, has been composing poems for the last forty years, but he has not attained real greatness as a poet. As a young man he was a sailor, and so most of his early poetry deals with life at sea and the various adventures that one meets there. The poems which give expression to this experience are contained in the volumes *Salt Water Ballads* (1902) and *Ballads* (1906). In 1909 he produced his best poetic tragedy—*The Tragedy of Nan*. After that he gave up writing on imaginative themes, and produced poems dealing with the graver aspects of modern life in a realistic manner, e.g. *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), *The Widow in the Bye-Street* (1913), *The Daffodil Fields* (1913). All these poems narrate a stirring story with an excellent moral. Now he is looked upon as one of the 'prophets' of modern England.

### 5. The Imagists

The first revolt against the Victorian Romantic poetic tradition came from a group of poets called the Imagists. Their activities extended for about ten years—from 1912 to 1922. They realized that the poetry of the Georgians did not introduce any new vitality in English poetry. At its best it displayed both power and individuality, but it did not alter the fact that each of the Georgian poets was content to delimit or modify the poetic inheritance of the nineteenth century rather than abandon it in favour of a radically different approach. Neither Masefield, whose poetry is realistic in subject and vocabulary, nor De la Mare, who is the last of the true romantic poets of England, pointed to the new paths in English poetry.

The poetic revolution engineered by the Imagists, which began in the years immediately preceding the First World War, and which was both produced and further encouraged by T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, preferred the older tradition in English poetry to the Victorian Romantic tradition. The Romantic and the Victorian poets tried to express their personalities in their poems. For them poetry was a means of self-expression and they appealed to the cultivated sensibility of their reader. They treated of themes dealing with their personal hopes and fears and often indulged in the emotions of nostalgia and self-pity. That is why the Victorian poetry especially

had a tendency of running to elegy. The Imagists believed that the function of poetry is not self-expression, but the proper fusion of meaning in language. According to them poems are works of art and not pieces of emotional autobiography or rhetorical prophecy. As the purpose of poetry is the exploration of experience, the poet must strive after a kind of poetic statement, which is both precise and passionate, profoundly felt and desperately accurate, even if it means the twisting of the language into a new shape. There must be the fusion of thought and emotion which is found among the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. The Imagists did not look upon the poet as the sweet singer whose function was to render in sweet verse and conventional imagery some personal emotions, but he was the explorer of experience. Therefore, he must use the language in order to build up rich patterns of meaning which required very close attention before they were communicated. The rebels were conscious of the fact that the poetry of their own time represented the final ebb of the Victorian Romantic tradition, and that the time was ripe to give a new direction to English poetry.

The new movement began with a revolt against every kind of sweet verbal impression and romantic egotism which persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Its originator, T. E. Hulme, who was killed in war in 1917, in an article which he wrote in 1909, declared his preference for precise and disciplined classicism to sloppy romanticism. He advocated hardness and precision of imagery “in order to get the exact curve of the thing” together with subtler and more flexible rhythms. He with the help of Ezra Pound, who had come from America, founded the movement called Imagism. Defining the Imagists, Pound wrote in 1912: “They are in opposition to the numerous and unassembled writers who busy themselves with dull and interminable effusions, and who seem to think that a man can write a good long poem before he learns to write a good short one, or even before he learns to produce a good single line.” Giving a fuller statement of the aims of the Imagist movement, F. S. Flint pointed out in 1913 that three rules the Imagists observed were—(a) “direct treatment of the “thing”, (b) “to use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation”, and (c) “to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.” Pound emphasised that the Imagists should “use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something”, and that they should avoid abstraction. The Imagist movement spread in England and America, and it was helped by the seventeenth century metaphysical poetry and the nineteenth century symbolists, who contributed their techniques and attitudes to the revolution.

The leader of the Imagists was Ezra Pound. Other poets who were included in this group were F. S. Flint, Richard Aldington, F. M. Hueffer, James Joyce, Allan Upward, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, Instead of imitating the English romantics like the Georgians, the Imagists attempted to reproduce the qualities of Ancient Greek and Chinese poetry. They aimed at hard, clear, brilliant effects instead of the soft, dreamy vagueness of the English nineteenth century. Their aims which were expressed in the introduction to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), can be summarised as follows:

- (1) To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.
- (2) To produce poetry that is hard and clear, and not deal in vague generalities, however, magnificent and sonorous.
- (3) To create new rhythms and not to copy old rhythms which merely echo old ones.

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

The Imagists were greatly influenced by the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, which appeared in 1918, thirty years after the death of the poet. It was the complete absence of any sign of laxness in Hopkins' poetry, the clear signs of words and rhythms which were perfectly controlled by the poet to produce the desired effect, with no dependence at all on the general poetic feeling, which made an immediate appeal to the new poets.

Regarding the subject matter of poetry, the Imagists, believing that there was no longer a general public of poetry lovers, concentrated on expressing the modern consciousness for their own satisfaction and that of their friends. They gave up the old pretence that humanity was steadily progressing towards a millennium. Instead they recognised that in the new dark age of barbarism and vulgarity, it is the duty of the enlightened few to protect culture and escape the spiritual degradation of a commercialised world. This attitude seems to be similar to that of the aesthetes of the last decade of the nineteenth century, but it is not so. Whereas the aesthetes hating the vulgarity of the contemporary world tried to lose themselves among beautiful fantasies by withdrawing into an ivory tower, the Imagists, on the contrary, faced the new problems and tried to create a very precise and concentrated expression, a new sort of consciousness because the traditional poetic techniques were inadequate for that purpose. Opposed to the romantic view of man as "an infinite reservoir of possibilities", they looked upon him as a very imperfect creature "intrinsically limited but disciplined by order." Unlike the romantics who regarded the world as a glorious place with which man was naturally in harmony, the Imagists regarded it "as landscape with occasional oasis...But mainly deserts of dirt, ash-pits of cosmos, grass on ashpits". They did believe in the words of Hulme, in "no universal ego, but a few definite persons gradually built up". In his essay on *Romanticism and Classicism*, he predicted that "a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming" and expressed the opinion that "there is an increasing proportion of people who simply can't stand Swinburne."

The Imagists could not adequately tackle the contemporary problems, because they lived too much among books, were rather irresponsible in their conduct, did not possess sharp intellect, and were not in close contact with actualities. The result is that their poetry is as nerveless and artificial as the neo-romantic poetry of the Georgians. But they certainly deserve the credit of showing that English poetry needed a new technique, and that unnecessary rules and a burdensome mass of dead associations must be removed.

The poets belonging to the Imagist group did not produce great poetry on account of the reasons stated above. Ezra Pound is a poet of real originality, but his too much and rather undigested learning which he tries to introduce in his poems, makes them difficult to understand, and also gives them an air of pedantry. His greatest contribution to modern poetry is his development of an unrhymed 'free verse', and other metrical experiments which influenced T. S. Eliot.

The most important writer, who in spite of his being not a regular member of their group, was directly connected with the Imagists, was David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930). He contributed both to Georgian poetry and the Imagist anthologies. Most of his mature poetry deals with the theme of duel of sex, a conflict of love and hate between man and wife, and expresses an annihilation of the ego and a sort of mystical rebirth or regeneration. His most remarkable poem *Manifesto* ends with a beautiful description of universe where all human beings have completely realised their individualities, where

All men detach themselves and become unique;  
Every human being will then be like a flower, untrammelled,  
Every movement will be direct  
Only to be will be such delight, we cover our faces when we think of it,  
Lest our faces betray us to some untimely end.

The poems which he wrote in the last year of his life when he was dying of consumption, deal with the themes of death and eternity. Lawrence did a lot in rebuilding English poetry, and as a critic he set before the English poets the following ideal, which has greatly influenced the modern English poets.

*“The essence of poetry with us in this age of stark unlovely actualities is a stark directness, without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow of deflection anywhere. Everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry to-day.”*

### 6. Trench Poets

The First World War (1914-18) gave rise to war poetry, and the poets who wrote about the war and its horrors especially in the trenches are called the War Poets, or the “Trench Poets.” The war poetry was in continuation of Georgian poetry, and displayed its major characteristics, namely, an escape from actuality. For example, E. W. Tennant describes the soldiers in *Home Thoughts in Laventie*, as

*Dancing with a measured step from wrecked and shattered town.  
Away upon the Downs.*

Instead of facing squarely the horrors of war, these poets looked upon the terrible present as a mere dream and the world of imagination the only reality. Following the Georgian tradition with its fanciful revolution from the drabness of urban life and its impressionistic description of the commonplace in a low emotional tone, a number of poets who wrote about the war, described incidents of war and the ardours and pathos of simple men caught in the catastrophe. Their method was descriptive and impressionistic, and on account of lack of any intense, sincere and realistic approach, they failed to arouse the desired emotions in the readers.

Out of a number of these war poets, only two—Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen – attained some poetic standard. Though Sassoon in his early period belonged to the Georgian group, his predominant mood was not lyrical but satiric, not ‘escapist’ but rebellious, because he felt that the soldier was being sacrificed for a false idealism. He looked upon him as

a decent chap  
*Who did his work and hadn't much to say*

*(A Working Party)*

In his *Suicide in Trenches* he described the horrors of trench warfare. In *Song Books of the War* he dwelt on the short memory of the public who forget those who suffered and died for them during the war. Sassoon, who is still living, wrote some poems between the two great wars, in which he attacked the shallow complacency of his contemporaries, and gave voice to the disillusionment.

Wilfred Owen wrote war poems under the influence of Sassoon. He admired Sassoon because the latter expressed in a harsh manner the truth about war. Speaking about his own poetry he remarked, “Above all, I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is War and the

poetry of War. The poetry is in the pity ... all a poet can do today is to warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful." Though in his poems we find the mood of disillusioned irony, yet, unlike Sassoon, he does not completely lose his hope for man. His poems are free from bitterness and he rejoices in the exultation of battle as well as in the fellowship of comrades. Whereas in Sassoon's poetry we find a mood of indignation and satire, in Owen's poetry the mood is of reconciliation and elegy. The following remarkable lines in his poem *Strange Meeting* reveal Owen's typical approach to War.

*I            am            the            enemy            you            killed,            my            fried...*  
*Let us sleep now.*

As an experimenter in metre Owen's contribution to modern English poetry is great. Against the Georgian laxity, he introduced accumulative use of balance and parallelism. And above all, he brought a new dignity to war poetry.

### 7. W. B. Yeats (1865 – 1939)

William Butler Yeats was one of the most important of modern poets, who exerted a great influence on his contemporaries as well as successors. He was an Irish, and could never reconcile himself to the English habits and way of thinking. By temperament he was a dreamer, a visionary, who fell under the spell of the folk-lore and the superstitions of the Irish peasantry. Like them he believed in fairies, gnomes, and demons, in the truth of dreams, and in personal immortality. Naturally with such a type of temperament, Yeats felt himself a stranger in the world dominated by science, technology and rationalism.

Being convinced that modern civilisation effaces our fundamental consciousness of ourselves, Yeats trusted in the faculty of imagination, and admired those ages when imagination reigned supreme. Thus he went deeper and farther in the range of folk-lore and mythology. He discovered the primitive and perennial throb of life in passions and beliefs of ancient times, and he wanted to revive it, because he felt that modern civilisation has tamed it by its insistence on dry logic and cold reason.

Yeats was anti-rationalist. He believed in magic, occult influences and hypnotism. He thus led the 'revolt of the soul against the intellect', in the hope to acquire 'a more conscious exercise of the human faculties'. He also believed in the magic of words, the phrases and terms which appeal to common humanity. Therefore, he tried to rediscover those symbols which had a popular appeal in ancient days, and which can even now touch man's hidden selves and awaken in him his deepest and oldest consciousness of love and death, or his impulse towards adventure and self-fulfillment. Being disillusioned by lack of harmony and strength in modern culture, he tried to revive the ancient spells and incantations to bring about unity and a spirit of integration in modern civilisation which was torn by conflicts and dissensions.

All these factors inclined Yeats towards symbolism. Believing in the existence of a universal 'great mind', and a 'great memory' which could be 'evoked by symbols', he came to regard that both imagery and rhythm can work as incantations to rouse universal emotions. He liked Shelley's poetry because of the symbolism inherent in the recurrent images of leaves, boats, stars, caves, the moon. He found that Blake invented his own symbols, but his own task was easier because he could draw freely on Irish mythology for the symbols he required. Coming under the influence of French Symbolists like Verlaine, Mactierlinck, he tried to substitute the wavering,

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

meditative and organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of imagination, for those energetic rhythms as of a running man which are not suited to serious poetry.

As a symbolist poet Yeats' aim was to evoke a complex of emotions not by a direct statement but by a multitude of indirect strokes. The result is that sometimes the symbols used by him are not clear as they have been derived from certain obscure sources. For example, the symbols used in the following lines from *The Poet Pleads with the Elemental powers* demand a commentary:

Do you not hear me calling white deer with no horns?  
I have been changed to a hound with one red ear!  
I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the west  
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky  
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.

In most of his poems, however, the symbols used by Yeats are obvious. One very common symbol in his poetry is 'the moon', which stands for life's mystery.

Yeats, therefore, tried to reform poetry not by breaking with the Past, but with the Present. According to him, the true poet is he who tells the most ancient story in a manner which applies to the people today. His early poems, like *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889), express Yeats' deepest idealism in the simple outlines of primitive tales. The same attempt, though more effective and mature, was made in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1900). But up to this time Yeats had not found himself; he was groping in the dreamland for wisdom and illumination.

The First World War (1914-18) and the Irish disturbances during those eventful years gave to Yeats a more realistic direction. These conflicts, of course, did not completely efface his dreams, but they turned his eyes from mythology to his own soul which was divided between earthly passions and unearthly visions. Yeats realised that the highest type of poetry is produced by the fusion of both—"the synthesis of the *Self and Anti-self*" as he called it. *The Anti-self* is our soaring spirit which tries to rise above the bondage of our mental habits and associations. Yeats' lyrics which give the most effective expression to these views are *The Wild Swan at Coole* (1917), *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair* (1929). Here he gave a very satisfying presentation of the wholeness of man—his *Self and Anti-self*.

In his later poetry Yeats reached a maturity of vision and style which may be described as hard, athletic and having a metallic glint. Instead of serving as symbols and having certain indefinite associations, his last poems expressed 'Cold passion' in images which are chastened and well-defined. That is why, it is no exaggeration to say that Yeats was influenced by the Imagists, and influenced them in return. *A Thought from Propertius* is in every respect an Imagist poem.

In his last years Yeats retired to the solitude of his own mind, and he wrote poems dealing with his early interests—love of dreams (*Presences*), admiration of simple joy of youth and old civilisations, but the disintegration of modern civilisation under the impact of war pained Yeats, and he believed that a revolutionary change is in the offing. In *Second Coming* he describes what lies at the root of the malady;

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold...*  
*The best lack all conviction, while the worst*  
*Are full of passionate intensity*

For about half a century Yeats exerted a tremendous influence on modern poetry on account of his utter sincerity and extraordinary personality and genius. He recognised no external law, but like a true and great artist, he was a law unto himself.

### 8. T. S. Eliot (1888)

Thomas Stearns Eliot is the greatest among the modern English poets, and he has influenced modern poetry more than any other poet of the twentieth century. He combines in himself strange and opposing characteristics. He is a great poet as well a great critic; he is a traditionalist rooted in classicism as well as an innovator of a new style of poetry; he is a stern realist acutely conscious of modern civilisation with its manifold problems as well as a visionary who looks at life beyond the limits of time and space.

T. S. Eliot was born in 1888 in the U.S.A. He was educated at Harvard University. After that he received education at Paris and Oxford, and settled in England which he has made his literary home. He came into prominence as a poet in the decade following the First World War i.e., between 1920 and 1930, during which period he wrote the poems for which he is best known. There was at that time in England a tendency in favour of classicism which directly influenced Eliot. Being himself a great classical scholar, and finding around him petty poets of the Georgian group, he set himself to establish principles of a sound classicism. To him classicism stands for order. It is a tradition not established by the authority of Aristotle or any other ancient critic, but by the whole body of great writers who have contributed to it in the course of centuries. He conceives of literature as a continuous process in which the present contains the past. The modern poet, according to Eliot, should carry on that process, follow the permanent spirit of that tradition, and thus create fresh literature by expressing the present on a new and modified manner. Thus Eliot is different from the neo-classicists of the eighteenth century who insisted on implicitly following the narrowly defined rules of writing. To him classicism means a sort of training for order, poise and right reason. In order to achieve that the modern writer should not defy the permanent spirit of tradition, and must have “a framework of accepted and traditional ideas.”

But the surprising thing about Eliot is that in spite of his being a professed classicist and an uncompromising upholder of tradition, he was the man who led the attack on the writing of “traditional” poetry, and came out as the foremost innovator of modern times. He thought that the literary language which had served its purpose in the past was not suited for modern use. So he rejected it outright. According to him, the modern writer while carrying on the literary tradition of ‘poise, order and right reason’ need not follow the old and obsolete idiom of his predecessors, but should invent entirely a new medium which is capable of digesting and expressing new objects and new feelings, new ideas, and new aspects of modern life. The language used by the modern poet must be different from the language of the past because modern life dominated by science and technology is radically different from the life of the past ages characterised by slow and steady development.

In his attempt to find a new medium for poetry Eliot became interested in the experiments of Ezra Pound, the leader of the Imagists. Like Pound, Eliot also sought to extend the range of poetic language by introducing words used in common speech but commonly regarded as

## History of English Literature ENG-21101

---

inappropriate in literature. But Eliot is different from Pound in this respect that having a profound knowledge of classical literature he can, whenever he likes, borrow phrases from well-known poets and thus create an astonishing effect. Thus in his poem one find colloquial words expressing precisely and exactly the meaning which he wants to convey, along with archaic and foreign words used by ancient poets, philosophers and prophets, which sound like voice far away beyond a mountain.

Eliot is acutely aware of the present and the baffling problems which face mankind in the modern times. The poems of his early period as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) express the disillusion, irony and disgust at the contemplation of the modern world which is trivial, sordid and empty. In his greatest poem, *The Waste Land*, the poet surveys the desolate scene of the world with a searching gaze. He relentlessly uncovers its baffling contrasts and looks in vain for a meaning where there is only

*A heap of broken images, where the sun heats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.*

The same attitude is expressed in the *Hollow Men* (1925):

*We are the hollow men,  
We are stuffed men,  
Leaning together,  
He Headpiece filled with straw.*

But it is not merely the present with which Eliot is preoccupied. He is a mystic who has a profound sense of the past and he looks into the future. His aim is to look beyond the instant, pressing moment, and think of himself as belonging to what was best in the past and may be prolonged into the future. For him the spirit exists in one eternal Now, in which Past, Present and Future are blended. In order to experience it one should surrender one's ego and relax in a mood of humble receptivity. Only then one can absorb the fleeting moment in such a way that the scheme of existence purged of all one's personal prejudices, narrowness and resentment is felt all around one's self. It is in this mood that his later poems published together in *Four Quartets*, consisting of *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), and *Little Gidding* (1942) are written. In the last mentioned poem the poet lets his thoughts go free amid the ruined chapel at Little Gidding from which all recollection of conflict and effort has vanished, but where the intensity of spiritual prayer can still be left.

*Burnt Norton* begins with the significant lines

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.*

Thus T. S. Eliot who is a force in modern English literature, is a many-sided personality. He is a classicist, innovator, critic, poet, social philosopher and mystic—all combined into one. He makes the reader aware not merely of the problems of modern life but also of mankind as a whole. The soul of man finds itself in horror and loneliness in the *Waste Land* unless it is redeemed by courage and faith. Though a great and acute thinker, he has a spiritual approach to life, which is rare in the twentieth century dominated by science and materialism. And he has expressed his ideas and feelings in a language which is devoid of all superfluous ornamentation

What		I		expected		was
Thunder,						fighting.
Long		struggle			with	men
And						climbing,
After			continual			straining
I		should		grow		strong;
Then	the		rocks		would	shake
And	I		should		rest	long.
What	I		had		not	foreseen
Was		the		gradual		day
Weakening			the			will
Leaking		the		brightness		away,
The	lack		of	good		touch
The	fading		of	body		soul

Like smoke before wind  
Corrupt, unsubstantial.

Cecil Day Lewis also wrote his early poetry under the influence of Auden. But his later poetry has become more and more reflective and reminiscent. Moreover, he has adopted the Victorian diction. On account of his profound knowledge of technique he may be called the academic poet of the present age. In his poems the imagery is primarily rural and his tone is elegiac. These characteristics associate him with the Georgians.

Other important English poets of the present age are Louis Mac Niece, Edith Sitwell, Robert Graves, Roy Campbell, Geoffrey Grigson, George Barker and Dylan Thomas. Though they do not form any definite group, yet there is a tendency among them to Romanticism in English poetry which had become metaphysical and classical under the influence of Hopkins, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and the Auden group of poets. They do not give so much importance to 'dry, hard' images, and being visionary rather than speculative, their presiding genius is Blake rather than Donne. Dylan Thomas who is the most popular of the young poets finds unity of man with nature, of the generations with each other, of the divine with the human, of life with death. Death does not mean destruction, but a guarantee of immortality, of perpetual life in cosmic eternity:

*And death shall have no dominion  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,  
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;  
Though they go mad they shall be sane,  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;  
Though lovers be lost love shall not,  
And death shall have no dominion.*

But in spite of this tendency towards Romanticism in the poetry of the present age in England, Eliot, and his school of poetry which is akin to classicism, still hold the field. All modern poetry possesses intellectual toughness and there is no attempt to return to the melodious diction of Tennyson and Swinburne or to the imaginative flights of Shelley. Of course, the tension that we find in Eliot's poetry has ceased and the trend is towards Wordsworthian quietness.

### Lecture 26

#### Modern Drama/Modern Dramatists

#### The Rise of Modern Drama: Historical Survey

"From the dramatic point of view, the first half of the nineteenth century was almost completely barren. Many of the major poets had tried drama, but none of them had achieved any success. The greater part of their work never saw the stage"—(Albert). The professional theatre of the period was in a low state. Among the respectable middle classes it was despised as a place of vice. Audiences did nothing to raise the standard

which remained deplorably low. The popular forms of drama of the day were melodrama, farces, and sentimental comedies, which had no literary qualities whatever, were poor in dialogue and negligible in characterization, and relied for their success upon sensation, rapid action, and spectacle.

Toward the middle of the century, there can be traced a significant development from romantic and historical themes to more realistic themes, and this movement toward realism received considerable impetus from the work of T.W. Robertson (1829-71), a writer of comedies, who introduced in his plays the idea of a serious theme underlying the humour, and characters and dialogue of a more natural kind. He is inseparably connected with the modern revival of English drama. Robertson, however, did little more than point the way, and he never entirely freed himself from the melodrama and sentimentalism prevalent at the time. His chief plays were *Society*, *Caste* and *School*. The same limitations affected the more serious work of Henry Arthur Jones and, to a less extent, the plays of Sir A.W. Pinero. These dramatists did much to introduce naturalism into the English drama. Their names are also associated with the rise of the new Comedy of Manners, a genre which had languished since the days of Sheridan.

It was not until the nineties, when the influence of Ibsen was making itself strongly felt, and Shaw produced his first plays, that the necessary impetus was there to use the serious drama for a consideration of social, domestic, or personal problems. A period so keenly aware of social problems was an admirable time for the rise of the drama of ideas “and the themes of drama became the problems of religion, of youth and age, of labour and capital, and above all, now that Ibsen had torn down the veil which had kept the subject in safe obscurity, of sex”—(E. Albert). In the history of the naturalistic drama, Ibsen and then Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville Barker were of paramount importance, and they did much to create a tradition of natural dialogue. New psychological investigations increased the interest in character as distinct from plot, and the realistic drama of our period aimed at the impartial presentation of real life, contemporary rather than historical. To begin with, its concern was primarily with the upper classes, and its problems, except in Shaw were handled discreetly, but gradually it turned to other social levels and became more daring in its theme. The weakness of the new realistic, “drama of ideas” was its lack of anything to fire the imagination. It lacked poetry in the true sense, and its greatest danger was that it might degenerate into mere social photography. The greatest dramatists like Shaw and Galsworthy, could rise above these limitations. The dramatists of the new school of drama were, however, a small minority, and while they struggled for recognition, melodrama and musical comedy continued to hold the day. It was Ibsen’s influence which established the drama of ideas as the popular drama of the early twentieth century. It was clear that the future lay with this type of drama.

Theatrical activity was not confined to London alone. The most important of the theatrical developments outside London was the creation of *the Irish National Theatre* in Dublin. The idea of a national drama was born in the minds of W.B. Yeats and some of his contemporaries. In 1904, the generosity of Miss Horniman constructed for them the Abbey Theatre, in Dublin, of which Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory were directors. Of the dramatists who wrote for this theatre, Yeats and Synge looked on the drama as a thing of the emotions, and reacting against realism, sought their themes among the

legends, folklore and peasantry of Ireland. In their drama we have poetry in the truest sense, though Yeats' dramatic gifts were limited. In the hands of Synge and Lady Gregory there developed a new comedy. Lady Gregory cultivated a peculiarly Irish drama. Her plays were published as *Seven Short Plays*, *Irish Folk History Plays*, *New Comedies*, *Three Wonder Plays*, and *Three Last Plays*. A third stream in the Irish drama is represented by the work of Lennox Robinson who following the more realistic trends of the day, wrote realistic plays like *The Crossroads*, *The Lost Leader*, etc.

### **The Rise of Poetic Drama**

Despite the efforts of the major Victorian poets there was no tradition of poetic drama at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1920, there were signs of a rebirth but the atmosphere in which realistic, naturalistic drama thrived was uncongenial to poetic drama. At the *Abbey Theatre*, Dublin, Yeats attempted to revive poetry on the stage but he lacked the essential qualities of the dramatist. Stephen Phillips (1864-1915) is a more important figure in the history of poetic drama. He wrote a number of blank-verse plays, including *Herod*, *Ulysses*, *The Son of David*, and *Nero*, but he had little popular appeal. Masfield, too, experimented in poetic drama but had only a limited success, while Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) wrote a number of quite powerful poetical plays, saw hope for this form only in the amateur theatre. It was also during his period that John Drinkwater (1882-1937) began his career with poetic dramas, and achieved popularity with such plays as *The Storm*, *The God of Quiet*, and *X = O; A Night of the Trojan War*. But the true poetic drama was that of J.M. Synge, which though not in verse, had all the qualities which the others lacked. At this point, we may mention the work of Lord Dunsany, whose career as a dramatist began in 1909 with the staging of *The Glittering Gate*. One of the best exponents of the One-Act play, he merits inclusion in our consideration of poetic drama (although he writes in prose) by virtue of the romance on which his plays are built and his ability to create a most powerful atmosphere, often of the East. *T.S. Eliot, both through his theory and practice, has provided a powerful stimulus to English Poetic Drama, and Christopher Fry has contributed to it the "theatre of words" and the "comedy of moods."*

A number of foreign influences did much to bring about a revival of drama in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most important of these influences, was that of the Norwegian dramatist, *Henrik Ibsen*, whose work became known in England about 1890 and gave an enormous impetus to the realist movement, to the deeper study of character, and to a subtler conception of plot and character presentation. More than any other, Ibsen may claim credit for extending the scope of the modern dramatist. No doubt, Ibsen's influence was rather late in coming to England, but with the passing of time his treatment of themes and his technical methods came to be fully accepted, and a new spirit and a new enthusiasm overtook the English drama in the early years of the present century.

### **Main Trends**

It was under Ibsen's influence that serious drama from 1890 onward ceased to deal with themes remote in time or place. Ibsen had taught men that drama, if it was to live a true life of its own, must deal with human emotions, with things near and dear to ordinary men and women. Hence melodramatic romanticism and the treatment of remote historic themes alike disappeared in favour of a treatment of actual English life, first of aristocratic life, then of middleclass lives, and finally of labouring conditions. So

far as choice of subject-matter is concerned the break between the drama of the romantic period and the naturalistic drama of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is complete.

But difference in subject-matter is not all. With the treatment of actual life, the drama became more and more a drama of ideas, which are sometimes veiled in the main action, and are sometimes didactically set forth. These ideas were for the most part revolutionary, so that the drama came to form an advanced battleground for a rising school of young thinkers. Revolt took the form of reaction to past literary models, to current social convention, and to the prevailing morality of Victorian England. We thus find that sex occupies by far the greatest place in the new drama: it stands next in importance only to the problems of labour and the problems of youth. 'For the new dramatists, parental authority represented the sentimentalism which they were fighting against; capitalism represented the social state which they were bent on altering'—(A. Nicholl). The spirit of youth, liberated, eager to strike out on new paths, inspires many of these plays. Young men struggle to throw off the trammels of Victorian prejudice; young women join eagerly the Feminist movement and glory in a new-found liberty. "Constantly questing, constantly restless and dissatisfied, seem the character of these plays especially when they are placed by the side of their predecessors, the placid heroes and clinging heroines of romantic drama"—(Nicholl).

Romantic love, too, came in for its particular onslaughts. New investigations into the meaning of sex, which gave to the nineteenth century the philosophy of Schopenhauer and to the twentieth that of Freud brought men to believe no more in love as it was expressed by their forefathers, but in what Mr. Bernard Shaw has styled the Life Force. With the tearing off of those veils of prudery with which the Victorians had covered the facts of sex, the new dramatists came to take a definitely scientific view of life. Social convention, common standards of existence, seemed as nothing compared with this tremendous fact; Ann tracks down the father of her children in *Man and Superman*; and her sister, Ann Leete, in Mr. Granville Barker's play, throws over Lord John Carp for the plebeian John Abud.

Increasingly, the dramatists loved to make Life and Nature play their great parts on the stage. The desire for liberty in domestic and in moral circles was paralleled by the desire for liberty in social life. Suddenly, the play-wrights became aware of the depressing circumstances in which the poor are fated to dwell; they viewed the squalor and the misery of the cities; they looked around and saw the terror of modern civilization. 'The class-war, which has found its expression in actual life, was freely dealt with by the newer school, cynically, yet profoundly, by men such as Mr. Bernard Shaw, seriously by men such as 'Mr. Galsworthy'—(A. Nicholl).

"Being a drama of ideas, the modern theatre tended to become more static." The necessity of expressing in the three hours' traffic of the stage a multitude of diverse theories and points of view seriously interfered with the action of many plays. Inner conflict was substituted for outer conflict, and drama became quieter than had been the melodramatic, romantic theatre of previous years. This development, as has been hinted above, was a normal one. It only betokens the gradual progress by which the drama kept abreast of changing conditions. This inner quality of the modern theatre was intensified greatly by the recent investigations of psychologists. The new study of the 'soul' interested many, and none more than the dramatists. In their plays, therefore, they

sought ever more subtly and delicately to depict the most intricate aspects of the human spirit.

In many ways, this inwardness is connected with another marked development in twentieth-century dramatic art. To express these almost inexpressible ideas, emotions, instincts, which the psychologists have defined for us, the new writers found that ordinary direct words were insufficient. This accounts for the extensive use of symbolism in modern drama. The dramatists found precisely the same difficulty which faced the mystics of countless centuries before, and they came to employ the same methods for the explaining of their purposes. "Where direct enunciation was impossible or unsatisfactory they had recourse to symbolism. This symbolism in itself aided in raising the dark and even sordid themes chosen by the dramatists to artistic levels they otherwise could not have reached." The white horses in *Rosmersholm*, the roaring waters in Mr. Masefield's *Nan*, the waves dashing in ceaseless fury through Synge's *Riders on the Sea*, all give unity and universality to the various tragedies in which they appear. "Perhaps the dramatists are not fully conscious of the end at which they would aim in introducing these things; but consciously or unconsciously they are employing one of the surest means of raising apparently sordid subject-matter on to a higher and truly tragic plane" (Nicholl).

With the increased inwardness must be accounted, too, a tendency on the part of some of our living dramatists to make their protagonists not men, but unseen forces. Social forces are used as dramatic personages for the purpose of making wide and larger the sphere of drama. This tendency is most pronounced in the plays of Mr. Galsworthy. It is one of the chief tendencies which separates the earlier romantic theatre from the later naturalistic play.

Turning from the drama and tragedy proper to the world of comedy, we find many marked developments in these years. "Perhaps that which deserves most attention is the *Revival of the Comedy of Manners*. In many ways, we seem now to be approaching a new Augustan period, when reason rather than imagination, commonsense rather than romantic nonsense, will dominate life and literature" (Nicholl). It cannot be denied that a definite return is being made to the witty, satirical comedy which rose to full flourish with Congreve in 1700. *Oscar Wilde*, *Henry Arthur Jones*, and a number of others aided in the revival of this form of comedy; the successful revivals of *The Beggar's Opera* and *They Way of the World* seem to mark a certain correspondence in the tastes of the public. At times, this new comedy of manners is almost purely fanciful and dependent upon wit for its being, but more frequently it assumes a cynical and bitter tone which corresponds, in its own way, to the social purpose of more serious playwrights.

It is perfectly natural that the age should be satiric. Satire will always flourish in a society which has become over-civilized, where the artificial life rendered necessary by city existence has driven men, emotionally and morally, to be cut off from elemental conditions and primitive impulses. All signs indicate that this satire will continue to be a marked feature of modern drama.

### Modern Novel/Modern Novelists

#### TRENDS IN THE MODERN NOVEL

The one thing which stands out prominently in the history of the English novel, is *its immense popularity at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*. It has eclipsed the poetry and the drama, it is the only literary form which has competed successfully with the radio and the cinema, and it is in this genre that work of the greatest merit is being produced. Myriads of novels pour out of the press practically every day and are received by the public with enthusiasm. This immense popularity may be accounted for by the fact that while compression is the characteristic feature both of the poetry and the drama, the modern man, under the influence of science, requires discussion, clarification and analysis. This is possible only in the novel, and hence the preference for it.

*Another prominent feature of the modern English novel is its immense variety and complexity.* Novels are being written practically on all possible themes and subjects. A number of different trends are to be noticed. There are the traditionalists, like H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and Galsworthy, who, while they propound new ideas and open out new vistas to the human mind, still follow the Victorian tradition as far as the technique of the novel is concerned. On the other hand, there are innovators, like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, who have revolutionised the technique of the novel with their probings into the sub-conscious. While H.G. Wells fully exploits modern science in his scientific romances, novelists of social reform, like Galsworthy, make the novel-form a vehicle for the discussion of the baffling socio-economic problems of the day. Biographical novels, regional novels, satirical novels, sea novels, detective novels, war-novels and novels of humour, like those of P.G. Woodhouse, continue to flood the market and the list is by no means exhaustive.

*The modern novel is realistic.* It deals with all the facts of contemporary life, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant, the beautiful as well as the ugly, and does not present merely a one-sided view of life. Life is presented with detached accuracy, regardless of morals or ideological considerations. The woes and sufferings of the poor, their misery and wretchedness, as well as the good in them, their sense of social solidarity, their fellow feeling and sympathy, are realistically presented. Joseph Conrad makes realism the basis even of his romantic tales. The modern age is an era of disintegration and interrogation. Old values have been discarded and they have not been replaced by new ones. Man is to-day caught between "two worlds, the one dying, the other seeking to be born." The choice between capitalism and communism, science and religion, God and the Atom Bomb, is a difficult one, and the result is that man is baffled and confused. The modern novel presents realistically the doubts, the conflicts and the frustrations of the modern world. It is, therefore, pessimistic in tone. There is large scale criticism, even condemnation, of contemporary values and civilisation. E.M. Forster is undisguised in his attack on the business mind and the worship of bigness in industrialised England of the post-war generation. Aldous Huxley analyses the disease of modern civilisation and searches for a cure, and Conrad's novels are all pessimistic and tragic.

The realism of the modern novel is nowhere seen to better advantage than in *the treatment of sex*. The novel has entirely broken free from the Victorian inhibition of sex. There is a frank and free treatment of the problems of love, sex and marriage. Sex both

within marriage and outside marriage is a common theme of the novelist today. The theories of psychologists, like Freud and Havelock Ellis, new biological theories and methods of birth control, and the boredom, frustration and brutality caused by the war, go far to explain the pre-occupation of the contemporary novel with sex-themes.

The modern novel is not merely an entertainment, not merely a light story meant for after-dinner reading. *It has evolved as a serious art form.* It is compact in body and integrated in form and everything superfluous is carefully avoided. It is like a well-cut garden rather than a tropical jungle, which the Victorian novel was. The modern novel is very well constructed having nothing loose or rambling about it. As Albert points out, "Henry James and Conrad evolved techniques which revolutionised the form of the novel. Basically they amount to an abandonment of the direct and rather loose biographical method in favour of considerations of pattern and composition, and a new conception of characterisation, built upon the study of the inner consciousness." Disproportionate attention is being given to theories of fiction; the novel is now judged by severely aesthetic considerations. Narration, description and style must satisfy high and exacting technical standards. Moreover, it also embodies the writer's philosophy of life, his message, his view of the human scene.

### **The Stream of Consciousness Novel**

*Decay of Plot:* Edwin Mure is right in pointing out that plot seems to have died out of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "*Stream of consciousness novel.*" For the Victorian novelist, life easily fell into the mould of a story; but for the novelist of today it refuses to do so. "The great modern novels, like *Ulysses*, are still stories, but they are stories without an ending." The modern novel is like an incomplete sentence, and, "its incompleteness is a reflection of the incompleteness of a whole region of thought and belief." Under the influence of new psychological theories, life is not regarded as a continuous flow, but as a series of separate and successive moments. Hence a novelist, like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, concentrates on a particular psychological moment or experience; instead of telling a story with an eye on the clock and the calendar, he probes deeper and deeper into the human consciousness and moves freely backward and forward in time. The unities of time and place have no meaning or significance for him.

*Just as the story, so also the character, has decayed in the modern novel.* Previously, two different methods were adopted for the delineation of character: the method of direct narration and dramatic method. More often than not, there was a combination of both these methods. The externals of personality—the habits, manners, Physical appearance, etc.—were vividly and graphically described and further light was thrown on the nature of a character by his own words and actions and by what others said of him. But the modern novelist rejects such characterisation as superficial. He has realised that it is impossible to give a psychologically true account of character by such means. He probes deep into the sub-conscious, even the unconscious, and loses himself in the complexities and subtleties of inner life; instead of depicting a conflict between different personalities, he depicts the individual at war with himself. He is not concerned with any overt strife, but with the conflict that goes on in the sub-conscious regions of the human mind. A character is sketched not by extension but by probing the depths. Character is thus presented outside time and space. Not only are we given the 'past' of a character, but also the possibilities of his nature for the future are revealed.

This psychological probing into the depths of human nature has been the death of both the hero and the villain in the traditional sense. Just as no man is a hero to his own personal attendant so also no man can be a hero to a "Psychoanalyst." The heroism of a man dissolves when we come too close to him. And this is equally true of the villainy of the villain. However, we may here add that in novelists like Conrad much that is largely traditional, both in plot and characterisation, persists side by side with much that is new and unconventional.

*As the foregoing discussion has already indicated, the modern novel is predominantly psychological.* It was in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Freud and Jung shook the foundations of human thought by their revolutionary discoveries in the field of Psychology. They revealed that human consciousness has very deep layers and, buried under the conscious, are the subconscious and the unconscious. Thoughts buried deep in the unconscious and the subconscious constantly keep coming to the surface and an account of human personality cannot be complete and satisfactory, unless these hidden elements are given their due weight. Novelists, like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Elizabeth Bowen, have made the English novel extremely psychological in nature.

The impact of the new psychology on plot and character has already been noticed above. *Its impact has been equally far-reaching on the theme of the novel.* The traditional novel was largely social, its aim being to uphold and recognise social values. But in the modern age there are no such universally acknowledged values of social conduct which the individual must uphold and cherish. Hence it is that there is a shift in the theme of the modern novelist. The individual is more important for him than society. The psychological probings into the sub-conscious reveal that every individual has a separate personality peculiar to him, and that one particular personality can never merge or become one with another. Each individual is a lonely soul, and as David Daiches puts it, the theme of the modern novelist is not the relationship between gentility and morality but, "the relation between loneliness and love". The novelist today is not concerned with "the great society" *i.e.* society at large – but with the achievement of a "little society which can be achieved, if at all, only through great patience and care. Both Lawrence and Forster consider "the great society" as the enemy of the individual and want it to be reformed. Conrad's chief personages are all lonely souls and betrayal of one's own self or of others is the major theme of his novels.

Such are the current and cross-currents in the Modern English novel. It is an extremely vital and living form of art, and we can safely predict a bright and glorious future for it. New influences, specially the Russian and the American, are daily widening its horizons and renewing its vigour and vitality. New experiments are being conducted, some temporary and fleeting, others of a more permanent significance. The caravan of the English novel goes on, ever-changing, becoming and growing.

### Lecture 28

#### Post-Modern Literature

### Understanding Post-modernism

Until the 1920's, the term "modern" used to mean new or contemporary, but thereafter it came to be used for a particular period, the one between the two World Wars (1914-1945). Then came up after about half a century the, magic term, "post-modern," meaning the period after the modern. Now, this sort of naming is certainly problematic. For how many "post" will have to be used for the further periods of literary history to follow? Since our purpose here is limited to writing the "history" of literature, we shall not go on with the issue, leaving the matter for the more qualified critics to give it a thought. Even as it is, there is a problem about the naming of the period between 1945 to 1965, during which period there was no consciousness of what is now called "post-modern". The period of the "post-modern" is said to date from the mid-sixties - some critics push it even further to the nineteen eighties. Dealing with the contemporary is always, of course, a little ticklish, because closer we stand to an object, more details we see of the picture. Once removed by some distance, the outline comes out clearly. As of today, critics have seen historical changes in literary styles from decade to decade, from even author to author. Perhaps we shall have to wait another half a century or so to be able to make greater generalizations about the later half of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, let us accept what has become almost conventional in the historical writing of English literature.

In his essay "The Post-Modern Condition," Krishan Kumar has clarified some confusion about the meaning of post-modernism:

Most theories claim that contemporary societies show a new or heightened degree of fragmentation, pluralism, and individualism.... It can also be linked to the decline of the nation-state and dominant national cultures. Political, economic, and cultural life is now strongly influenced by developments at the global level. This has as one of its effects, unexpectedly, the renewed importance of the local, and a tendency to stimulate sub-national and regional cultures.... Post-modernism proclaims multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies. It promotes the politics of difference! Identity is not unitary or essential, it is fluid and shifting, fed by multiple sources and taking multiple forms (there is no such thing as 'woman' or 'black').

The debate about contemporary society being "post-industrial," "post-modern," "post-structuralist," "post-colonial," "pluralistic," "multi-cultural," "fragmented," etc., goes on, with select pieces of literature used for illustration. The fact of the matter is that the theoretical discussion of the subject has been self-generative, proliferating all over the space, pushing literature to the periphery, leaving not much space for actual human narratives in the privileged domain. As such, it has not proved of much help to the historian of literature who would much rather record the literary happenings than discuss literary theories (unless, of course, the latter has been an integral part of the former). Until the time of the Modernists like Pound and Eliot, literary theory came from the leading literary writers. During the Post-modern period, however, it has come from the non-literary thinkers. Hence the problem of its meaningful application to literary works.

One quickly turns to Frederic Jameson, who seems to have aptly articulated the reader's dilemma about "post-modernism":

I occasionally get just as tired of the slogan 'post-modern' as anyone else, but when I am tempted to regret my complicity with it, to deplore its misuses and its notoriety, and to conclude with some reluctance that it raises more problems than it solves, I find myself pausing to wonder whether any other concept can dramatize the issues in quite so effective and economical a fashion.

In the absence of a more useful concept, therefore, as also because now the concept of post-modernism has come to stay, we have no choice but to go on with it, leaving the problems it has raised to time for whatever solution will become possible tomorrow. But we must know at the same time how and why the term 'postmodernism' has come about and what it has accumulated around itself as a description of certain distinctive characteristics of the post-War period, which is still going on.

The growth of post-modernism, in the words of Charles Jencks, a major theorist of architecture and the originator of the term, has been "a sinuous, even tortuous, path. Twisting to the left and then to the right, branching down the middle, it resembles the natural form of a spreading root, or a meandering river that divides, changes course, doubles back on itself and takes off in a new direction." (*What is Post-Modernism?* London: Academy Editions, 1986, p.2). We may cite and examine any number of definitions (out of the innumerable available to us), post-modernism proves slippery like a snake whose twists and twirls are impossible to pin down. From the very inception of the term in Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1947), the term has accumulated a lot of meanings many of which are mutually contradictory. How then do we go about understanding the term, making sense of all that it has accumulated? As Tim Woods has rightly observed:

The prefix 'post' suggests that any post-modernism is inextricably bound up with modernism, either as a replacement of modernism or as chronologically after modernism. Indeed with *post-modernism*, *post-feminism*, *post-colonialism* and *post-industrialism*, that 'post' can be seen to suggest a critical engagement with modernism, rather than claiming the end of modernism to survive, or it can be seen that modernism has been overturned, superseded or replaced. The relationship is something more akin to a continuous engagement, which implies that post-modernism needs modernism to survive, so that they exist in something more like a host-parasite relationship. Therefore, it is quite crucial to realize that any definition of *post-modernism* will depend upon one's prior definition of *modernism*. (*Beginning post-modernism*. Manchester University Press, 1999, p.6)

Seen from the viewpoint suggested above, one can see how post-modernism is a sort of *knowing* modernism, or a *self-reflective* modernism. In one sense, post-modernism is a modernism which does not agonise itself; it, in fact, does all that modernism does, but only in a mood of celebration, not in a mood of repentance. Rather than lament the loss of the past, the fragmentation of life, and the collapse of civilization as well as selfhood, postmodernism embraces these phenomena as a new form of social existence and behaviour. Thus, the difference

between the two is best understood as difference in *mood* or *attitude*, rather than a chronological difference or as different institutions of aesthetic practices.

One core issue of this debate between postmodernism and modernism is the extent to which the Enlightenment values are still valuable. The Romantic philosophers, such as Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, had placed great faith in man's ability to reason as a means of securing our freedom. The modernist philosophers later raised doubts about man's ability to do so. This questioning of the Romantic philosopher's faith is mainly associated with the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard, for whom postmodernism is best understood as an attack on reason. As Sabina Lovibond has observed:

The Enlightenment pictured the human race as engaged in an effort towards universal moral and intellectual self-realization, and so as the subject of a universal historical experience; it also postulated a universal human *reason* in terms of which social and political tendencies could be assessed as 'progressive' or otherwise.... Postmodernism rejects this picture: that is to say, it rejects the doctrine of the unity of reason. It refuses to conceive of humanity as a unitary subject striving towards the goal of perfect coherence (in its common stock of beliefs) or of perfect cohesion and stability (in its political practice). ("Feminism and Postmodernism", *New Left Review*, 178 (1989):6)

As against the universality of modernism and the long-standing conception of the human self as a subject with a single, unified reason. Postmodernism has pitted *reasons* in the plural, that is fragmented and incommensurable. Post-modern theory is suspicious of the notion that man possesses an undivided and coherent self which acts as the standard of rationality. It no longer believes that reasoning subjects can act as vehicles for historically progressive change. Here, we must also understand the difference between *post-modernism* and *post-modernity*. Post-modernity is used to describe the socio-economic, political and cultural condition of the present-day West; where people are living in post-industrial, 'service-oriented' economies; where human dealings like shopping are mediated through the computer interface, where communication is done through e-mail, voice-mail, fax, teleconference on video-link; where the wider world is accessed via the net; where the choice of entertainment falls on high-speed image bombardment of the pop video, etc. Such conditions of living are often described as "post-modernity".

*Postmodernism* on the other hand describes only the aesthetic and intellectual beliefs and attitudes often presented in the form of theory.

The term postmodernism, in use roughly since the 1960's, designates cultural forms that display certain characteristics, which include (i) the denial of an all-encompassing rationality; (ii) the distrust of meta-narratives; (iii) challenge to totalizing discourses; in other words, suspicion of discursive attempts to offer a universal account of existence; (iv) a rejection of modernism. Thus, rejecting belief in the infinite progress of knowledge; in infinite moral and social advancement; in rigorous definition of the standards of intelligibility, coherence and legitimacy; postmodernism seeks local or provisional, rather than universal and absolute, forms of legitimation.

## INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

### Jean-Francois Lyotard (1724-98)

Extensive and varied debates about *postmodernism* in philosophy and cultural theory notwithstanding, we can concentrate upon the key theorists whose ideas have shaped these debates about the philosophical effects and theoretical impact of the movement after modernism. The philosopher who is said to have put the first post-modern cat among the modernist pigeons was Jean-Francois Lyotard, whose *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) occupies a special place among a set of books which launched an attack on modernity. His argument is for a rejection of the search for logically consistent, self-evidently “true” grounds for philosophical discourse. Instead, he would wish to substitute *ad hoc* tactical manoeuvres as justification for what are generally considered eccentricities. Ultimately, he is suspicious of all claims to proof or truth. As he puts it, “Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power,” (*Postmodern Condition*, p.46). In his considered view, beneath the facade of objectivity there always is a hidden and dominant discourse of *realpolitik*: “The exercise of terror” (p.64). Thus, any kind of legitimation is nothing but an issue of power. He believes that there is a connection, an intimate one, between power and the rhetoric of truth or value.

Lyotard identifies “an equation between wealth, efficiency, and truth,” and contends that it continually remains a question of: “No money, no proof—and that means no verification of statements and no truth. The games of scientific language become the games of the rich, in which whoever is wealthiest has the best chance of being right” (*Postmodern Condition*, p.45). He also demonstrates how utilitarianism is predominant in institutions:

The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer ‘Is it true?’ but ‘What use is it?’ In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to: ‘Is it saleable?’ And in the context of power-growth: ‘Is it efficient?’... What no longer makes the grade is competence as defined by other criteria true/false, just/unjust, etc. (*Postmodern Condition*, p.51). From these ideas Lyotard develops a narrative of the difference between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics which does not conform to an historical period. In his argument, Modernism is:

an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace or pleasure....

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which denies itself the solace of good forms...that which searches for new

presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.

Thus, to sum up Lyotard's view of Postmodernism, it is, first of all, a distrust of all metanarratives; it is also anti-foundational. Secondly, when it presents the unrepresentable, it does not do so with a sense of nostalgia, nor does it offer any solace in so doing. Thirdly, it does not seek to present reality but to invent illusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented.

Fourthly, it actively seeks heterogeneity, pluralism, and constant innovation. Lastly, it challenges the legitimization of positivist science.

### **Jean Baudrillard (1929—)**

Next to Lyotard, the founder of Postmodernism, comes Jean Baudrillard, another French intellectual who can be called the high priest of Postmodernism. According to Baudrillard, postmodernity is also characterized by “simulations” and new forms of technology of communication. His argument is that whereas earlier cultures depended on either face-to-face communication or, later, print, contemporary culture is dominated by images from the electronic mass media. Our lives today are increasingly being shaped by simulated events and opportunities on television, computer shopping at “virtual stores,” etc. Simulation is in which the images or ‘manufactured’ reality become more real than the real. In his view, the demarcation between simulation and reality implodes; and along with this collapse of distinction between image and reality, the very experience of the real world is lost. Hyper-reality, according to Baudrillard, is the state where distinctions between objects and their representations are dissolved. In that case, we are left with only simulacra. Media messages are prime examples that illustrate this phenomenon. In these messages, self-referential signs lose contact with the things they signify, leaving us witness to an unprecedented destruction of meaning. Advertisements present manipulated images to float a dream world only to trap the viewer for the sale of consumer goods. The manipulated simulation, manufacturing motivated reality, ignores or overlooks the harsh or unpleasant aspects associated with an image—say New York or New Delhi. Consequently, the images of sparkle and light casually erase the urgent socio-economic problems. His conclusion is that TV is the principal embodiment of these aesthetic transformations, where the implosion of meaning and the media result in “the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV” (*Simulations*, New York, 1983, p.55). Baudrillard was the one who contributed to the *Guardian* of 11 January, 1991, the well-known article “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.”

### **Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)**

Perhaps the most influential person among the Postmodernist intellectuals has been Jacques Derrida, who remains the principal theorist of Deconstruction. The publication of the three of his books in 1967, namely *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Of Speech and Phenomena*, laid the foundation of the theory of Deconstruction. Derrida has his precursors in Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1939), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who questioned the fundamental philosophical concepts such as “knowledge”, “truth”, and “identity” as well as the traditional concepts of a coherent individual consciousness and a unitary self. Although notoriously difficult and elusive, Derrida’s views can be summarised as under:

He insists that all Western philosophies and theories of knowledge, of language and its uses, of culture, are LOGOCENTRIC. What he means is that they are centred or grounded on a “logo” (which in Greek signified both “word” and “rationality.”). Using a phrase from Heidegger, he says that they rely on “the metaphysics of presence.” According to him, these philosophies and theories are logocentric in part because they are PHONOCENTRIC; that they, in other words, grant, implicitly or explicitly, logical “priority”, or “privilege”, to speech over writing as the model for analysing all discourse.

Derrida’s explanation for “logo” or “presence” is that it is an “ultimate referent”, a self-certifying and self-sufficient ground, or foundation, which is available to us totally outside the play of language itself. In other words, it is directly present to our awareness and serves to “centre” (that is to anchor, organise and guarantee) the structure of the linguistic system. As a result, it suffices to fix the bounds, coherence, and determinate meanings of any spoken or written utterance within the foundation in God as the guarantor of its validity. Another is Platonic form of the true reference of a general term. Still another is Hegelian “telos” or goal toward which all process strives. Intention, too, is an instance, which signifies something determinate that is directly present to the awareness of the person who initiates an utterance. Derrida questions these philosophies and shows how untenable these premises are. His alternative conception is that the play of linguistic meanings is “undecidable” in terms derived from Saussure’s view that in a sign-system (which is language), both the “signifiers” and the “signifieds” owe their seeming identities, not to their own inherent or “positive” features, but to their differences from other speech sounds, written marks, or conceptual significations.

Derrida’s most influential concept has been that of DIFFERENCE. His explanation for substituting ‘a’ for ‘e’ is that he has done it to indicate a fusion of two senses of the French verb “différer,” which are (I) to be different, and to defer. Thus, meanings of words are relational (in relation to other words). They are also contextual. In any case, there are no absolute meanings, nor are the meanings of words stable, as words always defer their meanings. Any utterance, therefore, oral or written, can be subjected to any number of interpretations, depending upon the reader’s ability to “play” with the various possible meanings each word is capable of yielding. This view of language and meaning has had great impact on both literary criticism as well as literary writing. Postmodernist texts as well as interpretations decentre and subvert the

conventional or settled meanings and values of any given story or situation, concept or construction, system or structure.

Some of Derrida's sceptical procedures have been quite influential in deconstructive literary criticism as well as in feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist creative compositions. One of these is to subvert the innumerable binary oppositions—such as man/woman, soul/body, right/wrong, white/black, culture/nature, etc.—which are essential structural elements in logocentric language. In Derrida's view, as he shows, there is a tacit hierarchy implied in these binaries, in which the term that comes first is privileged and superior, while the one that comes second is derivative and inferior. What Derrida does is to invert the hierarchy, by showing that the secondary term can be made out to be derivative from, or a special case of the primary term. He does not, however, stop at that; rather, he goes on to destabilise both hierarchies, leaving them in a state of undecidability.

Derrida had not thought of Deconstruction as a mode of literary criticism. He had only suggested a way of reading all kinds of utterances so as to reveal and subvert the presuppositions of Western Metaphysics. But more than any other discipline of knowledge it is literary criticism which has adopted his theory of Deconstruction as a critical tool of literary analysis. His most ardent followers have, however, been in America, not in England. The most influential of these has been Paul de Man whose *Allegories of Reading* (1979) was the earliest application of Derrida's concepts and procedures. Then came Barbara Johnson, a student of de Man, whose work, *The Critical Difference* (1980), carried the task of appropriating Derrida to literary criticism still further. Later, J. Hillis Miller, once a leading American critic of the Geneva School, converted to Deconstruction and contributed to the theory's practical application his *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (1982), *The Linguistic Movement: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (1985), and *Theory Then and Now* (1991).

### **Michael Foucault (1926-84)**

As he himself described, Foucault was a “specialist in history of systems of thought”, although we often call him a French philosopher and historian. Even though he wrote on a variety of subjects ranging from science to literature, his works that have influenced the course of Postmodern literature and literary criticism include *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), *History of Sexuality* (1976), *Power/Knowledge* (1980), “What is an Author?” (1977), and *Madness and Civilization* (1961). In the book listed last, Foucault explores how madness is socially constructed by a wide variety of DISCOURSES that give rise to collective attitudes or mentalities defining insanity. Its basic thesis is that, like the lepers of the Middle Ages, the mad are excluded in a gesture that helps to construct modern society and its image of reason. Foucault's major works examine the question why, in any given period, it is necessary to think in

certain terms about madness, illness, sexuality or prisons. By clear implication he seems to ask if it is possible to think about those topics in different ways. The effect of Foucault has been to view with distrust all that has been passing in the name of essentials, universals, or natural, and take all these as social constructs reflecting the values of different cultures and societies. In the history of philosophy, Foucault's work falls within the tradition established by Nietzsche, from whom he adopts the technique of "Genealogy" and the insight that the search for knowledge is also an expression of a will to power over others. For Foucault knowledge is always a form of power. He takes even psychiatry and mental health as new technologies that categorize certain forms of social and sexual behaviour as deviant in order to control them. The modern psychiatrist assumes the role of medieval priest, seeking confessions, imposing the values of the empowered. His thesis is that power is not something that one seizes, holds, or loses, but a network of forces in which power always meets with resistance. These views have led to the challenging of all sorts of political, social, and gender constructs, taken as networks of power to repress the weak, the individual, the disadvantaged, the female, etc. Although Foucault's name was associated with structuralism and the controversial theme of Barthe's catchy title, *DEATH OF THE AUTHOR* (1968) and *DEATH OF MAN* (1966), his true concern remained with the formation and limitations of systems of thought. Although made an icon of QUEER THEORY, Foucault's contribution has been valuable to all the Postmodern critical approaches including the Feminist, Postcolonial, Poststructuralist, etc.

### **Roland Barthes (1915-80)**

A French literary critic and theorist Barthes has been quite influential among the Postmodernist writers and critics. His principal concern, despite his varied writings, remains with the relationship between language and society, and with the literary forms that mediate between the two. The idea is that no literary composition can be studied in isolation, being one of the practices of a culture, an expression of society's ruling discourse. Hence, study of a text will be useful if it is done in relation to other contemporary practices of the same culture—even fashions of dress, cigarette smoking, or styles of wrestling. Cultural Studies, one of the aspects of Postmodernist critical theory, although founded by Richard Hoggart (*The Uses of Literary*, 1957) and Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society 1780-1950*, 1958), owes a good deal to the writings of Barthes as well.

Barthes's famous work *Mythologies* (1957), as well as his very first essay on writing in 1953, demonstrates that no form or style of writing is a free expression of an author's subjectivity, that writing is always marked by social and ideological values, that language is never innocent. A sense of the need for a critique of forms of writing that mask the historical-political features of the social world by making it appear 'natural', or inevitable, provides the impulse behind the analysis of *Mythologies*. Barthes's other books include *Elements of Semiology* (1964), *Writing*

*Degree Zero* (1953), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), and “The Death of the Author” (1968), later included in *Image-Music-Text* (1977) ed. By Stephen Heath. In his essay mentioned last, Barthes pleads for abandoning the conventional author-and-works approach in favour of an anthropological and psycho-analytical reading of canonical texts. His insistence is that literature as well as literary criticism, as well as language itself, is never neutral, and that the specificity of literature can be examined only within the context of a semiology or a general theory of signs. His ideas about language and author and their relation with social world promoted cultural studies as well as reader-response theory.

### **Jacques Lacan (1901-81)**

A French psychoanalyst, also most controversial since Freud, Lacan has had an immense influence on the literary theory of our time, as well as on philosophy, feminism and psychoanalysis. Most of his important writings are included in his *Ecrits* (1966). His writings, full of allusion to Surrealism, contend that the unconscious is structured like a language. His notion of the Fragmented Body clearly shows his debt to surrealism. He elaborates an immensely broad synthetic vision in which psychoanalysis appropriates the findings of philosophy, the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, and the linguistics of Saussure. He also heavily relies on Jakobson's work of Phoneme analysis and Metaphor/Metonymy. He defines language as a synchronic system of signs which generates meaning through their interaction. In other words, meaning insists in and through a chain of signifiers, and does not reside in any one element. For him there is never any direct correspondence between signifier and signified, and meaning is therefore always in danger of sliding or slipping out of control.

### **Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)**

A Russian literary theorist, Bakhtin has been a great influence on the contemporary theory of Discourse analysis. He is best known by his works named *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986), *Rabelais and his World* (1968), and *Problems of Dostoevski's Poetics* (1984). In these studies, there is a critique of Russian Formalism and an outline of his characteristic theme of “dialogism.” He criticizes Formalism for its abstraction, for its failure to analyse the content of literary works, and for the difficulty it finds in analysing linguistic and ideological changes. This critique is then extended to linguistics, especially the Saussurean. In his view, the purely linguistic approach to both language and literature is highly limited in scope. It tends to isolate linguistic units or literary texts from their social context, having no analysis to offer of the relations that exist between both individual speakers and texts.

Bakhtin's proposal is for a historical poetics or a "translinguistics" which can show how all social intercourse is generated from verbal communication and interaction, and that linguistic signs are conditioned by the social organization of the participants. In his later work, Bakhtin develops his historical poetics into a theory of "speech genres" or "typical forms of utterances." He claims that the weakness of Saussure's linguistics is that it focuses solely on individual utterances and is unable to analyse how they are combined into relatively stable types of utterance. Although his speech theory remains incomplete, Bakhtin was ambitious to apply it to everything from proverbs to long novels by analysing their common verbal nature.

With these major intellectual influences in the background, the Postmodern literature in the second half of the twentieth century grew to show greater impact of the new ideas on the continent and in America, with comparatively much less impact on the literature of the British islands. Mostly used as a periodising concept to mark literature in the later half of the twentieth century, Postmodernism is also used, as we have earlier discussed, as a description of literary and formal characteristics such as linguistic play, new modes of narrational self-reflexivity, and referential frames within frames. Going chronologically and genrewise, we shall try to explore the nature and extent of Postmodernism the literature in Britain absorbed and reflected during the period beginning with the 1950's.

### Post-War Novel

After Hitler's devastation of Britain, the country was literally in ruins, torn apart by years of bombardment. "The landscape of ruins must also be recognized as forming an integral part of much of the literature of the late 1940's and the early 1950's. It was a landscape which provided a metaphor for broken lives and spirits." One of the best expressions in fiction of this ruin and its implications is a novel, *The World My Wilderness* (1950), by a female novelist of the post-War period, named Rose Macaulay (1881-1958). The novel's London is not only post-War but also post-Eliotic: "Here you belong; you cannot get away, you do not wish to get away, for this the maquis that lies about the margins of the wrecked world, and here your feet are set... 'Where are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, you cannot say, or guess....' But you can say, you can guess, that it is you yourself, your own roots, that clutch the stony rubbish, the branches of your own being that grow from it and nowhere else."

Macaulay was, of course, not the only one to view the post-War period as one requiring the reassemblage of fragments of life and meaning. Another female novelist of the period, Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973), also gave powerful expression to the post-War experience in her *The Death of the Heart* (1938), *Look at all those Roses* (1941), *The Demon Lover* (1945), *The Heat of the Day* (1949), and *The Little Girls* (1964). Equally important among the post-War novelists was another female writer, Rebecca West (the pen name of Cecily Isabel Fairfield, 1892-1983), whose *The Fountain Overflows* (1956) and *The Birds Fall Down* (1966) depict the same

devastated world. With her pen-name derived from an Ibsen play, and actively involved in the feminist cause, West wrote on political climate of the cold-war era.

### **Graham Greene**

A major novelist of the postmodern or contemporary period was Graham Greene (1904-1991), who frequently gave direct expression to his pessimism, such as “For a writer, success is always temporary,” or “Success is only a delayed failure,” which he made in his autobiographical memoir *A Sort of Life* (1977). He emerged a popular writer with his very first novel, *The Comedians* (1965). He was a staunch anti-imperialist who resented the rising imperialism of America and despised the crumbling empire of Britain. He remained a Roman Catholic since 1926 when he was admitted to the Roman Church. Almost all of his work is haunted by the themes of a wounded world of the European colonies in Africa or the American imperialism in Latin America, a gloomy sense of sin and moral failure, and a commitment to “others” and rebels. Although Greene produced as many as twenty six novels, those necessary to know are *The Power and the Glory* (1940), focused on the character of a Whisky-priest in anti-clerical Mexico; *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) and *The End of the Affair* (1951) both of which are located in the twilit, blitzed London; *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), focused on the flyblown, rat-infested, and war-blitzed West-African colony; *The Quiet American* (1955), set in Vietnam, and *Our Man in Havana* (1955), set in Cuba, both expose the American imperialism. All of these novels present a grim picture of the world that emerged in the post-War period.

### **Anthony Powell**

Another notable novelist of the period was Anthony Powell, whose sequence of 12 novels collectively named *A Dance to the Music of Time* “is neither a fictionalized war memoir, nor a prose elegy for the decline and fall of a ruling class. However, as a chronicle of British upper-middle-class life, set between the 1920’s and 1950’s, it necessarily takes the disasters, disillusion, inconveniences, and changes of a society and its war in its leisurely and measured stride.”

### **Lecture 29**

#### **Postmodern Drama (The New Theatre)**

Drama of the post-war period shares, in some ways, the dominant spirit of the age we have witnessed in novel and poetry from the 1950’s onward. One thing that seems common to all the three is their concern with life at the elemental level—with life bare and bony, wholly demystified and demythologized, and with questions raised at the existential plane, and without

any attempt to seek soothing escape or magic solution to the problems of existence.

The central stance in all the literary forms seems to be to face the stark realities of life, to take suffering as it comes, and to learn to accept the unheroic status man seems to have been assigned in the absurd universe in which he is condemned to live. Drama of the post-modern period brings a still sharper focus on all these aspects than do its counterpart forms of poetry and novel. And to do that, drama of this period has been more daring than the other two; it has been more innovative in technique, more shocking in defying social and moral conventions.

### John Osborne

When John Osborne's (1929-94) *Look Back in Anger* was opened at the Royal Court Theatre on May 8, 1956, it at once made an impression that a dramatic revolution was afoot in England. The play was published in 1957. The early audiences did, however, feel shocked, as well as its more sensitive critics, into deeper response. The play shook the middle-class values of the "well-made play" founded by Ibsen and practiced in England by Shaw and Galsworthy. The audiences saw in Osborne's play a new kind of drama which addressed "the issues of the day." What was new about this drama was neither its politics, nor its technique so much as its alarm in rancour, language, and setting. The New Theatre ended the reign of country drawing-room setting with its moral cant and its sherry. It introduced instead the provincial bed-sitter with its abusive noises and its ironing-board. The conventional theatrical illusion of neat and stratified society was replaced by dramatic scenes of untidy and antagonistic social groups, grating upon one another's nerves. There may not have been any change in the social class of these characters, but there had, decidedly, come about a change in their assumptions and conversations. Other plays by Osborne include *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1957; pub. 1958), *The Entertainer* (1957), *Luther* (1961), *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964), *A Party for Me* (1965), *West of Suez* (1971), *A Sense of Detachment* (1972) and *Watch It Come Down* (1976). His autobiographies *A Better Class of Person* (1981) and *Almost a Gentleman* (1991), and a miscellany of reviews and letters, *Damn You, England* (1994), too, make interesting reading.

### Samuel Beckett

Although considered a foreign influence (because *Waiting for Godot* reached England via France), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was, in fact, the real pioneer of the New Theatre in Europe, including England. His much more radical drama than Osborne's had been launched quite a few years earlier than Osborne's. His *Waiting for Godot* was staged in Paris in 1953, and then in London (at the small Arts Theatre) in 1955, and had created sensations all over Europe, which must have influenced the composition of Osborne's play as well. Beckett was an Irish by birth, but from 1937 onward permanently resided in Paris, wrote his drama as well as fiction in French, only later to be translated in English. Earlier, he had worked with his fellow Irish writer James Joyce and his Parisian circle, becoming a part of the polyglot and polyphonic world of literary innovation. Beckett's plays include, besides *Waiting for Godot* (1955), *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1960), and *Happy days* (1962). His *Come and Go* (1967) is a stark 'dramaticale' with three female characters and a text of 121 words. Then there is the even more minimal *Breath* (1969), a 30 second play consisting only of a pile of rubbish, a breath, and a cry. There is also a play called *Not I* (1973), a brief, fragmented, disembodied monologue by an actor of indeterminate sex of whom only the 'Mouth' is illuminated. All these plays are revolutionary in

different ways.

Beckett's interest in the functioning and malfunctioning of the human mind, reflected by gaps, jumps, and lurches, remains at the centre of his fiction as well as drama. We see in his plays an overlapping of minds, ideas, images and phrases. We see voices both interrupting and inheriting trains of thought begun elsewhere or nowhere. We also see separated consciousnesses both impeding and impressing themselves on one another. Beckett's dialogue, for which his *Waiting for Godot* is especially remarkable, remains the most energetic. It is densely woven but equally supple. His settings are bare, just as his language is bald. In *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, there is only a country road and a tree, both, in fact, incomplete even as road and tree. The tree gets only four leaves in the second act. In the first, it remains without leaves. As for characters, there are only two pairs who occupy the stage by turns all through the play. The dialogue also runs into repetitive phrases and sentences and subjects leading to no conclusions or results. Beckett uses blindness and other disadvantages, as he does in both *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, suggesting that one kind of deprivation may sharpen the other organs of perception in a character.

Beckett's concept of time in his plays is the most radical of his innovations. He presents the time present as broken, inconsistent and inconsequential. He also allows within that time present the intrusion of time past. It is, of course, never a flashback. Rather, it is oppressively enriching in the private histories of characters as well as in the general perception of life. He also shares with his mentor, Proust, an antipathy to literature that describes. Hence there are no descriptions in his plays. As Beckett affirms, again echoing the mentor, "there is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us." As Sanders remarks, Beckett's "dramatic repetitions and iterations, his persistent echoes and footfalls, emerge not from a negative view of human existence, but from an acceptance of 'dull inviolability' as a positive, if minimally progressive, force. As his inviolable and unsentimental Krapp also seems to have discovered, a path forward lay in exploring the resonances of the circumambient darkness." Thus, Beckett remains the most radical among the Postmodernist playwrights in England, in fact, in the entire Europe.

While Beckett remained in popular perception a 'foreign' influence, Osborne emerged as a rebel within Britain's own established tradition. Also, while Beckett remained a representative of French symbolic and philosophically-based drama. Osborne responded to the native social and moral issues of his time, and without the burden of philosophy and symbolism. His *Look Back in Anger* came to be considered an epoch-making play. It became the launcher of the movement called "Angry Young Men." The play, of course, presented the noisiest of the lot of "angries." Jimmy Porter, the play's hero, is a young man of 25, presented as "a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike." Porter is not an idealist. He is said to be "born out of his time." He is described as a revolutionary without a revolution, or a rebel without a cause. He loudly and bitterly protests against the establishment values, against his wife's middle-class ex-Indian army parents; against his Member of Parliament brother-in-law; against bishops and church bells; against Sunday newspapers, English music, and English literature including Shakespeare, Eliot, and "Auntie Wordsworth." He is a new type of protagonist, classless, aimless, restless, although placed in a conventional social context. Osborne's *Luther* (1961), which too has for its title character an "angry young man," who makes a strong assertion of his identity when he says, "Here I stand; God help me; I can do no more. Amen"; *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964), in which Osborne provides for a location "where a dream

takes place, a site of helplessness, of oppression and polemic.” Osborne also wrote his autobiography, *A Better Class of Person* (1981), which is both pungently observant and spiteful. His characters and their anger and rebellion seem to have been an extension of his perception of himself. Thus, in a way, Beckett and Osborne complemented each other: while the former innovated new technique, the latter exploded conventional social norms.

### Lecture 30

#### **POST-MODERN CRITICISM**

Until the time of the modernist period of English literature, literary criticism was a “literary” activity, with leading (call them policy) documents written by the leaders of the literary movements. We know how from Dryden and Pope and Johnson to Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keats to Arnold and Rossetti and Swinburne to Eliot and Auden and Spender, English poetics was theorised by the leading English poets.

But in the post-modern period there is no such thing as literary theory, nor any of the dominant theoretic documents of today’s activity of criticism has come from any man-of-letters. It is mostly the philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, linguists, etc., who have propounded all kinds of dismantling orders, which are being applied, by their followers, in the field of literature. Today, the activity called “theory,” is related to, not any particular subject, but to all subjects. No wonder the literary criticism today has become cultural studies, feminism, postcolonialism, etc., which use literary texts for making political, sociological, or psychological case studies. As Jonathan Culler has attempted to explain the nature of THEORY:

Theory in literary studies is not an account of the nature of literature or methods for its study.... It is a body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define....a new kind of writing has developed which is neither the evaluation of the relative merits of literary productions, nor intellectual history, nor moral philosophy, nor social prophesy, but all of these mingled together in a new genre. The most convenient designation of this miscellaneous genre is simply the nickname *theory*, which has come to designate works that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in fields other than those to which they apparently belong. This is the simplest explanation of what makes something count as theory. Works regarded as theory *have effects* beyond their original field.

Thus, the main effect of theory is disputing all that we have been considering “common sense.” It questions all the concepts and beliefs we have held about literature, author, reader, text, meaning, etc. It questions as well the non-literary concepts of philosophy, sociology, linguistics, etc. Theory challenges the conception of the author’s intention, that the meaning of work or speaker is what he “had in mind.” It also challenges that literature is a representation of “life”, whose truth is outside of itself, in history, or biography, etc. It further challenges the very notion of reality as something present at a given moment. In this all-round critique of common sense, theory insists that all that passes in the name of natural or essential or universal is nothing but a

construction of social practices, a production of a certain discourse. Broadly, Culler makes the following four points to sum up the activity called theory:

- a. It is interdisciplinary, always deriving ideas or leaving effects outside an original discipline.
- b. It is analytical and speculative, always working out what is involved or implied in a text, or language, or meaning, or subject, etc.
- c. It is a critique of common sense, always questioning whatever is considered a given or natural or essential or universal.
- d. It is thinking about thought, always enquiring into categories and concepts we use in making sense of things, such as what is woman or man or meaning or text, etc. (Culler, p. 15)

Critics like Terry Eagleton (a well known British Marxist critic) may find in theory an expression of democratic impulse, and a liberation “from the stranglehold of a civilized sensibility,” the fact of the matter is that it has seriously subverted the value of literature in various ways, such as the following:

1. It has made criticism a jargon-ridden writing, inaccessible to the common reader. As such, it is anti-democratic.
2. It has reduced literature to the status of a speech, any speech, political, pornographic, stray writing, etc. As such, it deprives art and literature of their humane and ennobling effect.
3. It has reduced literary criticism to dividing people into regions, races, tribes, cultures, colonizers, colonized, etc. As such, it is divisive, not unifying.
4. It has also made criticism a negative activity, which is meant to trace faultlines, lapses, absences, what the text does not say or has failed to say.

Thus, theory has given birth to a set of approaches in criticism, which transforms the activity of understanding, appreciating, and evaluating a literary work into (largely) an activity of self-reflection. It tends to marginalize artists and their art-works.

### **Lecture 31**

#### **Criticism and English Literature**

##### **Criticism: Its Nature and Function**

The word criticism is derived from the Greek word meaning ‘Judgment’, and hence criticism is the exercise of judgment, and literary criticism is the exercise of judgment on works of literature.

Literary criticism is the play of the mind on a work of literature and it consists in asking and answering rational question about literature. Such an inquiry may be directed either towards literature in general leading to a better understanding of the nature and value of literature, and a better appreciation of the pleasure proper to literature. Such an inquiry by helping us to think rightly about literature enables us to gain the fullest enjoyment from it. In this way is built up a theory of literature, and the process of literary creation is examined and made intelligible.

Or, secondly, the inquiry may be directed towards particular works of literature, and its individual and distinctive qualities may be examined. The matter, the manner, the technique and

language of a piece of literature may be put to searching examination and in this way its literary worth may be assessed. In this way may also be formulated certain rules which, when duly tested and examined with reference to similar works of literature, may help the reader to form a better idea of literary merit, and also facilitate the task of the writer. Thus the function of criticism is not fault-finding as it is supposed to be by the layman. Its function is not to pick holes in a given work of literature nor is it its function to eulogise or laud some favourite author. Indiscriminate praise is as bad as indiscriminate fault finding. Rather, criticism is the science of forming and expressing correct judgment upon the value and merit of works of literature. It is only through criticism that intelligent appreciation and clear understanding becomes possible.

### **The Changing Role of Critics and Criticism**

Views regarding the functions of criticism and the role of critics have kept on changing through the ages. Every age has tended to assign a different function or functions to criticism. The earliest systematic critic, Plato, for example, was concerned with the problem of defining the utility of poetry in the educational system of his ideal state, found poetry wanting, and so banished poets from his ideal commonwealth. His approach was fundamentally utilitarian, and he condemned poetry as immoral and untruthful. Following Plato's condemnation, critics for long centuries to come were pre-occupied with justifying imaginative literature, more specially poetry. Aristotle took up the challenge of Plato and asserted the superiority of Poetry over Philosophy, and Sir Philip Sydney wrote his famous treatise in defence of poetry. All through the Renaissance the chief motif of critical writing was to set up a defence of poetry, and to emphasise its moral value. All through the neo-classical age, criticism was concerned with demonstrating that poetry both instructs and delights.

Critics from the earliest times have also thought that the chief business of criticism was to teach the writer how to write effectively. The general statements of Aristotle and Horace were narrowed down to dogmatic 'rules' and writers were advised to follow them strictly. The Augustans were of the view that the chief end of criticism was to devise rules and regulations for the guidance of writers, and then to judge a work on the basis of these rules. Pope admirably sums up the classical view of criticism when he advises the writers to make the study of the ancients their chief delight, and learn from them the rules of good writing. Writers must adhere to these rules when they create, and critics must judge strictly on the basis of these 'rules.'

However, such a view of the function of criticism soon became outmoded. With the rise of romantic individualism, the conception of the function of criticism underwent a radical change. It was now realised that the chief function of criticism is aesthetic, i.e. to promote appreciation and enjoyment of literature. The critic is a man of taste, he himself enjoys what he reads, and he tries to convey his own aesthetic pleasure to his readers. Highest criticism is the expression of the personal impression of an exceptionally gifted and sensitive individual; it is a record of his own aesthetic pleasure and response to a work of art and it stimulates and encourages the readers, and helps them to understand literature.

It was also during the romantic era that a number of critics wrote to promote a better understanding of the process of creation. The best of such critics have been the poets themselves, and they have written in order to convey their literary theories – their views of poetic creation – to their readers. Thus the purpose of Wordsworth's criticism is to explain to his readers his own poetic theory, and in this way to create the taste by which his poems could be enjoyed. Coleridge, another poet-critic, made minute and subtle studies of the process of poetic creation and tried to

formulate principles of poetic composition. In our own day, T.S. Eliot has given considerable thought to poetic creation and tried to formulate principles of poetic composition. In our own day, T.S. Eliot has given considerable thought to poetic theory, and through his criticism has done much to stimulate re-thinking. Criticism of such poet-critics is of much value and significance. It has been a great irritant to thought.

Romantic criticism often tends to be wayward and unbalanced. Therefore, the need was soon felt to discipline the personal likes and dislikes, prejudices and predilections, of the critic, and bring literary criticism in touch with the main currents of literary and social thought. Thus during the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold wrote that criticism is, "the endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." In this way, the scope of critical inquiry was much widened, and criticism became a handmaid to culture and education by propagating the best that is known and thought. Such criticism establishes a current of noble ideas, and thus creates the proper atmosphere in which great literature becomes possible. In this way, criticism promotes creation; critical activity of a high order is considered necessary for successful creation. Indeed, critics like T.S. Eliot are of the view that much critical labour must precede and accompany the labour of creation.

In the modern age, there has been a considerable widening of the scope of criticism. There is a bewildering multiplicity of views and theories regarding the scope and function of literary criticism. Broadly speaking modern criticism is of two kinds: (a) *Extrinsic criticism*, and (b) *Ontological criticism*. Extrinsic criticism is criticism which takes into consideration the current psychological, sociological and cultural concepts and relates a work closely to the life and age of its writer. It studies the impact of social conditions on literature, as also how far literature tends to mould the age in which it is written. It enables us to judge a particular work in its social and biographical context. Ontological criticism, on the other hand, focuses its attention entirely and exclusively on the work under study. For an ontological critic or 'New Critic', the poem is the thing in itself and the text is minutely examined and studied, word for word, and line by line, without any reference to any other extrinsic considerations. Obscure allusions, references, quotations, etc., are thus explained away and a better and clearer understanding of the meaning of the text is promoted. Such Textual or Formalistic criticism is of great service to the reader; it serves to bring the reader closer to the mind of the author. It is explanatory and interpretative and so conducive to a healthier and more intelligent appreciation. Evaluation, interpretation and explanation are now considered as the chief function of literary criticism.

### Lecture32

#### Criticism in English Literature

#### BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY

##### 1. Earliest or Hellenic Phase

We have defined literary criticism (see above) as the exercise of judgment on works of literature, and this implies that criticism would follow creative activity. This is true in general, but in ancient Greece criticism began almost simultaneously with literary creation. In the fifth

and fourth centuries B.C., Athens was the centre of literary and critical activity and Plato and Aristotle were the most important critics. This is the earliest or Hellenic (Greek) phase of criticism, and it forms the background to all subsequent literary inquiry. Aristotle is the first scientific critic, he is the first theorist of literature; he is a great irritant to thought, and his *Poetics* has influenced and coloured critical inquiry through the ages. A study of *the Poetics* is, therefore, considered indispensable for all students of literature.

### **2. Hellenistic Phase**

By the close of the third century B.C., Athenian culture suffered a decline and a period of decadence now set in. In the centuries that followed, we find that Athens is no longer the centre of literary activity in the ancient world. New centres of art and culture have sprung up, the most prominent of which is Alexandria in Egypt. The second phase of criticism is antiquity known as the Hellenistic phase. It is a period of decadence in which very little original work is done. However, the scholars of this period did valuable service in preserving old texts, classifying them, and conducting patient research in the life and writings of the great writers of Greece. We are indebted to these painstaking scholars for much that we know of the art and culture of antiquity. However, much of their literary production is merely imitative, and their contribution to literary criticism is small.

### **3. Greco-Roman Phase**

The decadent Hellenistic phase was soon followed by the brilliant Greco-Roman phase, Now Rome, the capital of the ancient Roman empire, was the centre of cultural and literary activity of a very high order. It was a brilliant age when Rome was not only the political and economic centre of the known world, but also its literary and cultural centre. The Roman scholars of this period were inspired by the ancient Greek masters whom they wanted to equal and excel. Instead of blind imitation, they aimed at originality. However, in practice, they could neither be original nor comprehensive. Their criticism largely consists of elaboration, interpretation and application of the rules and precepts laid down by the ancient Greeks, more specially, Aristotle. Their influence on subsequent criticism was far reaching for their interpretation and commentation was accepted as identical with that of their Greek originals. They often misunderstood and interpreted wrongly, and in this way much that Aristotle had never written was hoisted on to him. The purity of Aristotle's criticism was thus clouded for centuries to come. Horace, Quintilian and Longinus are the most penetrating critics of the Greco-Roman phase.

### **4. The Medieval Phase**

The break up of the Roman empire around the fifth century A.D., under the onslaughts of barbarian hordes, put an end to the brilliant Greco-Roman phase and ushered in the dark and obscure Medieval Phase. There was much confusion and dislocation and literary activity suffered. The rich literary treasures of antiquity, though not entirely forgotten, lay unused and neglected. Literary activity was confined mainly to Schoolmen, medieval scholars whose interests were theological and who indulged in meaningless, hairsplitting discussions. Literature was frowned upon as sensuous and pagan and Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic were given the pride of place. With the spread of Christianity, the medieval torpor was a little shaken but the theological bias of the schoolmen continued to come in the way of healthy literary appreciation. Ancient masterpieces were studied, but they were interpreted allegorically and their aesthetic beauty and

high literary merits were lost. 'The dark ages' are particularly 'dark' as far as literary criticism is concerned. Dante is the only ray of light that illumines for a while the all-enveloping darkness.

### 5. Renaissance Criticism

With the Renaissance, which was ushered in by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, and the consequent western movement of literary masterpieces of antiquity, one witnesses an unprecedented spurt of literary and critical activity. There is a widening of mental horizons, the shackles of medievalism are broken, and there is a renewal of zest for life and the enjoyment of beauty. The Great works of ancient Greece and Rome are translated into vernaculars all over Europe, and scholars throng to the great centres of classical learning. There is a desire to emulate and excel the literary exploits of haughty Greece and insolent Rome, and this results in the growth of national literatures, and the flowering of genius, and critical activity goes on hand in hand with creation. *In Renaissance England, critical inquiry evolves rapidly through four successive and overlapping stages. First*, there is a study of style and language in the manner of ancient rhetoricians, *and then* there is an attempt to introduce classical metres into English poetry. *In the third* and most important phase, there is an attempt to justify imaginative literature against the attacks of Puritans and moralists. The result is the publication of numerous apologies and defences, the best of which is Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*. *In the next phase*, English criticism grows self-conscious and attempts are made to devise rules and principles to guide would-be poets, and to curb the excesses of the romantic Elizabethan literature. Ben Jonson is the most important critic of this phase; he is the first champion of neo-classicism in the country.

### 6. Neo-Classical Phase

While Ben Jonson's classicism was, 'liberal classicism, aiming at curbing the excesses and absurdities of his age, this classicism becomes more rigid and stringent with the passing of time. Aristotle now becomes the literary dictator and his 'rules', as interpreted by the French critics of the day, became a 'must'. They are applied with increasing rigidity. For over a hundred years – from Dryden to Dr. Johnson – Neo-classicism reins supreme in England. *Dryden, Pope, Addison, Dr. Johnson*, are some of the greatest critics during this period.

### 7. The Romantic Phase

Just as Neo-classicism was the result of a reaction against the excesses of the Elizabethans, so the very rigidity and stringency of Pseudo-classicism soon breeds a reaction against it. French Revolution and German Idealistic philosophy also contribute to the rise of romanticism. 'Individuality', 'subjectivity', individual freedom of expression, 'inspiration' etc. are increasingly emphasised. The hollowness of 'rules' and their evils are exposed, and attention is turned to the creative process, and the part played by imagination and emotion in the process of creation. Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is a landmark in the history of English criticism, and so is Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth and Coleridge are two of the greatest of the romantic critics. Valuable work was done during the romantic phase, and a better understanding of the creative process was achieved. New light was shed on the old English masters, and new beauties were discovered.

### 8. Victorian Criticism

However, Romantic criticism had its own faults. It was too individualistic and mood dictated. Its emphasis on aesthetic appreciation, to the entire disregard of rules and principles, resulted in many excesses and absurdities. The result is that in the Victorian age, there is a re-action against

it, and efforts are made to introduce, once again, order and discipline in literary criticism. There is tremendous critical activity in France and Germany, and it cannot but influence criticism in England. An exalted view of the function of criticism is taken, and it is brought closer to life. Thus *Matthew Arnold*, the leading critic of the Victorian phase, defines criticism as, “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.” Towards the close of the Victorian age, we witness in England the rise of the aesthetic movement, largely as a consequence of the influence of French symbolists, Baudelaire and others. “Art for art’s sake”, is the cult of the aesthetes, and in England, Walter Pater gives to this movement a noble and restrained expression. The criticism of the aesthetes is impressionistic, expressive entirely of their own enjoyment of a work of art.

### 9. Critical Scene To-day

The critical scene in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is complex and varied. During the early years of the century, both the Arnold-tradition and the Pater-tradition continue to be followed. There are also academic critics, who are professors and profound scholars, rather than original thinkers and innovators. *The Reviews* do much to diffuse critical knowledge. There are also the neo-classics – the most illustrious of them being T.S. Eliot – who seek to counter the faults of impressionistic criticism by appealing to tradition and authority. The approach of I.A. Richards, on the other hand, is psychological. In more recent times, we see, the rise of the ‘New Critics’, who emphasise the study of the text to the entire exclusion of other concerns, biographical, historical, sociological, etc. This emphasis on the study of the text – word and line by line – has resulted in new and valuable interpretations of existing masterpieces. In England, F.R. Leavis is one of the most competent critics of this Textual school. There are also various other approaches to criticism, such as *Moral*, *Sociological Archetypal*, *Symbolistic*, *Expressionistic*. Such immense variety is bewildering and chaotic, and it is too early to predict which particular approach has a permanent validity and significance, and which is merely ephemeral.

### **References and Bibliography**

A Critical History of English Literature by David Daiches.

A Critical History of English Literature by Dr. B. R. Mullick

A Dictionary of Literary Terms by Martin Gray

[www.wcs.k12.va.us/users/honaker/Literary\\_Terms](http://www.wcs.k12.va.us/users/honaker/Literary_Terms)

---