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HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE AGE OF CHAUCER (1340-1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in the reign of Edward III, lived through that of Richard II, and died the year after Henry IV ascended the throne. His life thus covers a period of glaring social contrasts and political change.

Edward's reign marks the highest development of Medieval civilization. The spirit of the court was that of romantic idealism. England went forth on foreign conquest. But there was another side to this picture. The King and his nobility led a gay life. Trade expanded. Wealth increased among the commercial classes. But the masses of people sunk in misery. Pestilence ravaged the land. Black Death swept away one third of the population. Famine followed plague. Thieves multiplied. The enormous cost of French wars had to be met by heavy taxation. There was widespread social unrest.

Political troubles grew under Richard's unwise and despotic rule. The constitutional conflicts between the King and his subjects resulted in endless discord and confusion.

Another evil of Chaucer's age was the corruption of the Church there was very spiritual zeal and energy left in the country. The greater priests heaped up wealth. They lived in a Godless and worldly way. The ordinary clergy were ignorant and careless. The friars were notorious and greedy. It was at this point John Wycliff, the morning star of reformation started his work. He is an earnest man. He gave the best of his life for reviving spiritual Christianity. He wrote religious pamphlets. He sent his poor priests far and wide with the message of the gospel. He produced a complete version of 'The Bible'.

Social unrest and the beginnings of religious movement were two of the active forces in the England of the later fourteenth century. A third influence came from the new learning. The spirit of new learning had arisen in Italy chiefly from a renewed study of the Literature of classical antiquity. The leaders of the great revival were the two Italian writers Petrarch (1304-74) and Boccaccio (1313-75). It was through their work, influence of humanism passed into England. Its effect was shown in the quickened sense of beauty, delight in life and the free secular spirit. They began to appear in our literature.

Chaucer's Life:

Geoffrey Chaucer is the greatest figure in the English literature of the 14th century. He has thrown all his contemporaries completely into shade. He was born about 1340 in London. His father was a flourishing merchant vintner. We know nothing about his childhood. At the age of 17, he received a court appointment. Then he became a valet in the King's Chamber. He was closely connected

with the court. He toured the continent on diplomatic mission. He was thus brought into direct touch with the Italian culture. He may even have met Petrarch and Boccaccio. Then he fell on evil days. The grant of the royal pension placed him beyond want. He died in 1400 and was buried in that part of West Minster Abbey which came to be known as the Poet's corner.

Chaucer's Education:

Chaucer's education as a poet was two fold. Part of it came from literature and part of it came from life. He was a thorough student. He tells us how he would pore over his beloved volumes, till he was dazed. He was a man of world and affairs. He had travelled much. He had seen life. His relationship with people of all sorts brought him into intimate relation with people of all sorts. He had quick insight into character.

Chaucer's work in general:

Chaucer's literary career is divided into three periods; his French, his Italian and his English period.

His early work was done on French models. He translated 'Roman de la rose'. He wrote an allegory on the death of Blanche, John of Gaunt's wife called 'the Boke of Duchesse'.

As a result of his visits to Italy French influences disappeared. Italian influences took their place. He wrote "*The House of Fame*", and "*Troilus and Cryseyde*". He wrote an unfinished "*Legend of Good Women*".

Finally he became English. It means instead of being imitative, he becomes independent, relying upon himself. To this period, belong the minor poems and "*The Canterbury Tales*". It is Chaucer's most characteristic work.

The Canterbury Tales:

"*The Canterbury Tales*" is a collection of stories. Pilgrimages were very popular in the fourteenth century. The shrine of the murdered St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury is one of the favourite expeditions.

A number of pilgrims on the eve of their departure meet at the Tabard Inn in Southwark. Chaucer is also there on the same errand. The jolly host of the Tabard, Harry Bailey gives a hearty welcome to the pilgrims. He tells them that to beguile the tedium of the journey each member of the party shall tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. Those who tell best stories will be given free supper after their return to the Tabard Inn. The suggestion is applauded and '*The Canterbury Tales*' is the result.

In the '*Prologue*' Chaucer introduces his fellow pilgrims. The military profession is represented by a knight, a squire, and a yeoman; the ecclesiastical, by a prioress, a nun, a monk, a friar, a summoner, a pardoner, a poor parson, and a clerk of Oxford who is a student of

Divinity. Then we have a lawyer, a physician and number of miscellaneous characters. The Prologue is masterpiece of insight, sureness of touch, fine discrimination, and subtle humour. All the characters give unique value to Chaucer's picture of men and manners in the England of his time.

The Poet's plan was a large one. But he lived to complete a small portion only (i.e) merely a fragment of twenty four tales. The tales differ widely in character by whom they are told. The tales are not original in theme. Chaucer takes his raw material from many different sources. Chaucer has a quick eye for anything and everything.

The "**Knights Tale**" is also Chaucer's finest work.

General Characteristics of Chaucer's Poetry:

Chaucer was not a poet of the people. He was a court poet, who wrote for cultured readers and a refined society. The great vital issues of the day never inspired his verse. He made his appeal to a favoured few who wanted to be amused by comedy. They did not wish to be disturbed by the reminders of Plagues and famines.

Thus, though he holds a mirror up to the life of his time, the dark underside of it is nowhere reflected by him. He is called as '**the morning star of the Renaissance**'. Chaucer mastered the difficult fourteenth century English and made it easier. Chaucer is called father of the English poetry.

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE (1558-1625) NON-DRAMATIC VERSE

The Age of Shakespeare:

It means the whole period from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of James I in 1625. These 67 years were divided in three divisions-the first 21 years of the queen's reign called as the time of preparation or the Spenser's "**Shepherd's Calender**" and her death called as the time of full fruition, or summer and the 22 years of the reign of James I called as the time of decline of autumn. The first two may be called as the Elizabethan and the third is Jacobean.

This period ranks as one of the greatest in the annals of the World's literature because of its wonderful fertility and of the variety and splendour of production. England felt the full effect of the revival of learning. Innumerable translations carried the treasures of the classics far and wide. While Renaissance aroused the intellect and the aesthetic faculties, the Reformation awakened the spiritual nature. The invention of printing press put the English Bible into the hands of the people. It spreads the interest in religion and moral earnestness. The discovery of new worlds beyond the seas and thrilling tales of daring explorers quickened popular curiosity and the zest for adventure. It kindled fresh ideas about many things. The general prosperity of the country was increasing. The country enjoyed the blessing of internal peace, i.e.,

England had thrown off the foreign power, the Catholic, Protestant feuds were over, etc. An intense Patriotism became one of the outstanding feature of the Age.

In short, it was an age in which "**men lived intensely, thought intensely, and wrote intensely**".

Elizabethan Poetry before Spencer:

Spencer's "**Shepherd's Calender**" in 1579 marks the opening of the '**golden age**' of Elizabethan literature. In the first half of the queen's reign, there was much poetic activity and only little verse. The best poetry of the period is to be found in the contributions of Thomas Sackville, and Lord Buckhurst in "**A Myrrour for Magistrates**". This originated in a publisher's Scheme for a continuation of Lydgate's "**Falls of Princes**", and was designed to include a long series of 'tragical histories' of famous Englishmen. A number of writers took part in it. But Sackville's two poems—the "**Induction**" and the "**Complaint of Buckingham**" are superior to the rest of work. "**Induction**" is the finest single poem written in England between Chaucer and Spencer. The "**Steel Glas**" of George Gascoigne possesses some interest as the first regular verse satire in the English language.

EDMUND SPENCER:

Spencer and his Poetry:

Edmund Spencer the greatest non-dramatic poet was born in London in 1552. He was educated at the Merchant Taylor's School and Cambridge, where he studied classics and Italian literature. He also came under the influence of strong protestant spirit which then pervaded in the University. He found a place in the household of the Earl Leicester. There he formed an intimate friendship with Sir Philip Sidney, the nephew of Earl of Leicester. In 1580, he went to Ireland as secretary to the the new Lord Deputy, Lord Grey de Wilton. The remainder of his life was passed in Ireland, in miserable exile among a lawless people whom he loathed. He was disappointed again and again to secure a position at the court. His only relief was writing "**Faery Queene**". In October 1598, rebellion broke out in Tyrone, where he was then living. His castle was fired and plundered by an infuriated mob. He and his family barely escaped with their lives. In failing health and crushed in spirit, he reached London at the end of year. On 16th January, 1599, he died in an inn at Westminster.

Works of Spencer:

"**The Faery Queene**", "**The Shepherds Calender**" (1579), "**Astrophel**" (1586), an elegy on the death of Sidney, "**Four Hymes**" in honour of love and beauty, "**Amoretti**", a series of 88 sonnets, and "**Epithalamium**", a minor poem the noblest Wedding hymn in the language.

The Shepherd's Calender (1579):

It is a pastoral poem of the artificial kind. In the European Literatures the revival of learning spreads of the taste for everything classic. Spencer follows the models set by Theocritus, Vergil and by French and Italian

writers of the Renaissance. It is divided into twelve parts, one for each month of the year. In it under the guise of conventional pastoral imagery the poet writes of his unfortunate love for certain mysterious Rosalind. It deals with certain sundry moral questions. It discusses the religious issues of the day from the stand point of strong Protestantism. Spencer dedicated this book to Sir Philip Sidney. He uses all varieties of form, moral, religious, rustic, courtly, lyric and elegiac. He shows himself as a master of an old convention as well as herald of a new spirit in poetry.

The Faery Queene:

Spencer's "**Faery Queene**" is one of the longest as well as one of the greatest English poems. His underlying scheme is explained in a letter to his friend Sir Walter Raleigh. The Faery Queene keeps her annual feast for twelve successive days. On each of these days, a Knight at her command undertook a particular adventure. Each such adventure furnishes the subject of one book. Prince Arthur is chosen as the central figure of this. He was the hero of the greatest British legend cycle of chivalry. Having dreamed of the Faery Queene he went forth in quest of her, failing in with the various Knights who were engaged on their adventures, by the way. This appearance of Arthur at a critical juncture in each of the stories was specially devised as a link between one part and another.

The Faery Queene is compounded of the traditional materials of Chivalry, giants, dragons, dwarfs, wizards, knights of super human prowess and courage and distressed damsels of marvellous beauty, provide its chief characters; enchantment, tournaments, love passages and endless fightings are the staple of its plot. Spencer's genius was fed by the Reformation as well as the love of mediaeval romance and the culture of the Renaissance.

His own great work is inspired by a high moral and religious aim. In other words, the Faery Queene is not simply a Romance, it is a didactic romance. The poet used his stories as vehicles of the lessons he wished to convey.

It is also an allegory. The Twelve Knights are types of twelve cardinal virtues of Aristotle's philosophy. The adventures of each knight is arranged to body forth symbolically the experience, conflicts, and temptations of each such virtue and its ultimate triumph with a aid of Arthur, the incarnation of divine power, over all its foes.

Another kind of Allegory enters into Spencer's plan. It is concerned with the political and religious problems of the age. The figures of his narrative are not merely personifications of mental and moral qualities but of individuals of institutions.

The defects of the Faery Queene are very obvious. It is extremely artificial,. Spencer has little dramatic power. But his merits are very many and very striking. He has a wonderful sense of beauty. He has splendid pictorial power. His work is filled with a noble moral spirit.

The language, he used was the actual English of his day. The stanza he used is also his own invention, nine-

line stanza, rhyming ab abbc bcc, which is later called as Spencerian Stanza.

It is because of his greatness he was called as the "**Poet's Poet**", by Lamb. He was also called as the "**Prince of Poets' of his time**" and the "**second father of English Poetry**".

Other Poet's from 1579 to 1625:

The minor poets of the age of Shakespeare were very numerous. Some poems came under fanciful titles: "**The Paradyse of Daynty Devises**" (1576), "**A Handefull of Pleasant Delites**" (1584), "**An Arbor of Amorous Devises**" (1597) and "**England's Helicon**" (1600).

A special type of lyric called "**Sonnet**" entered in English poetry during this period. They are: Spencer's "**Amoretti**", Sidney's "**Astrophel and Stella**", Daniel's "**Delia**", Drayton's "**Idea**", and the "**Sonnets**" of Shakespeare. All these are love poems.

Another type of poetry inspired by national themes expresses the powerful patriotic feelings. They are Williams Warner's "**Albion's England**", Samuel Daniel's "**The Civil Wars between the Two Houses of Lancaster and York**", Michael Drayton's "**The Battle of Agincourt**", "**England's Heroical Epistles**", "**The Barons' Wars**" and "**Polyolbion**".

John Donne (1573-1631) was a celebrated divine and preacher. He wrote songs, sonnets, marriage poems, elegies and satires. His poems are characterized by genuine poetic feeling, harsh metres and '**conceits**'. He initiated the '**metaphysical**' school of poetry.

THE DRAMA

The Elizabethan Romantic Drama:

The Quarter century which followed the production of "**Gorboduc**" was a period of great confusion in the English drama. Certain scholars like Sir Philip Sidney believed that the only sure way to a really artistic drama lay through the imitation of ancient models i.e. the Senecan or "**Classic**". But certain other writers and actors who wanted exciting plots and vigorous action rejected the Senecan conventions altogether. So there was a conflict between the humanists, who stood for classical tradition and the strong taste of the English Public who demanded a different sort of thing. In the end the national taste triumphed and the '**romantic**' form of drama was established.

Principles of Classic Drama:

- 1) It adhered rigorously to unity of subject and tone. It kept tragedy and comedy entirely separate. A tragedy had to be a tragedy from first to last. No humorous episode was permitted in it. A comedy had to be a comedy from first to last and no tragic element was allowed to enter into its composition.
- 2) There was little or no dramatic action, the incidents composing the plot taking place off the stage and being reported to the audience in dialogue and set narrative.

- 3) At all events, the three unities of time, place and action controlled the construction. a) the entire story of a play had to be confined to a single day, b) to a single scene, and c) it was to be one single story without sub plots or minor episodes of any kind.

General characteristics of the humanists or romantic or Shakespearean drama:

- 1) It makes free use of variety in the theme and tone often blending tragic and comic characters in the same place.
- 2) It is a drama of action. Everything that happens is represented on the stage.
- 3) It repudiates the three unities i.e a) It allows the story to extend over months and even years, b) It changes the scene as often as necessary sometimes from one town or country to another; and c) it employs subplots and minor episodes in connection with its central subject.

Shakespeare's Predecessors:

The playwrights who have come just before Shakespeare prepared a way for him by introducing flexible form of drama. They constitute a group and are commonly known as '*the university wits*'.

They were all men of academic training. They give their talents to the public stage. They are: John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nash.

LYLY is most widely known as the author of a prose romance entitled "Eupheus". Some of his best comedies are "*Campaspe*", "*Endymion*" and "*Gallathea*". These were all written for the performance at the court. The interest in them depends on language i.e. on the wit, point, ingenuity, and grace of the dialogue. Lyly helped to give comedy an intellectual tone. In comedy he was undeniably Shakespeare's first master.

MARLOWE was a man of fiery imagination and immense powers. He lived a wild Bohemian life. He was killed in a drunken brawl even in his young age. He was for more of a lyric poet than a dramatist. Some of his writing are: "*Tamburlaine the great*", "*Dr. Faustus*", "*The Jew of Malta*", and "*Edward II*". Shakespeare was greatly influenced by Marlowe in the first. His narrative poem "*Venus and Adonis*" is inspired by Marlowe's "*Hero and Leander*". Richard III and Richard II are based on Edward II.

Shakespeare's Life:

William Shakespeare was born on or about the 23rd April, 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. He was a son of a prosperous tradesman. He went to the local Grammar School, where he was taught Latin and arithmetic. His few years at school gave him sound education. In his 19th year he married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior, the daughter of a well-

to-do yeoman of the neighbouring village of Shottery. This marriage was hasty and illadvised, and appears to have been unhappy. Three children were born to him: Susannah, and the twins, Judith and Hamlet. A few years after his marriage, about 1587, he left his native town to seek his fortunes in London. At the time, drama was gaining rapidly in popularity through the work of the University Wits.

Shakespeare soon turned to the stage, and became an actor first and then a playwright. He remained in London producing an average of a couple of plays a year, growing steadily in fame and wealth. He became a shareholder of the two leading theatres of the time, the Globe and the Blackfriars. But years which brought prosperity also brought domestic sorrows. Then between 1610 and 1612 he retired to Stratford, where he had bought a house known as New Place. He died on 23rd April, 1616.

Shakespeare was a practical man of affairs. He reached London poor and friendless but left it rich and respected. His fortunes were the work of his own hand. His writings revealed his great powers of creative imagination. Shakespeare was pre-eminently endowed with the happy faculty of turning everything that came to the best possible account.

Shakespeare's Works:

Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry consists of two narrative poems, "*Venus and Adonis*" and "*Lucrece*" and a sequence of 154 sonnets, the first 126 addressed to a man and remainder addressed or referring to a woman.

Shakespeare's dramatic work comprises of 37 plays. His activity as a writer for the stage extended over some 24 years. Critics have subdivided these 24 years into four periods.

i) 1588-93: Period of early and experimental work:

Shakespeare's apprenticeship begins with the revision of old plays, such as the three parts of Henry VI and Titus Andronicus. To this period belong his comedies – "*Love's Labour's Lost*", "*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*", "*The Comedy of Errors*", "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*". His first effort in chronicle drama is "*Richard III*", and a single very youthful tragedy "*Romeo and Juliet*". The work of this period is slight in texture. The treatment of life in it is superficial. There is little depth of thought or characterization and the art is immature.

ii) 1594-1600: Period of great comedies and chronicle plays:

"*Richard II*", "*King John*", "*The Merchant of Venice*", "*Henry IV*", "*The Taming of the Shrew*", "*The Merry Wives of Windsor*", "*Much Ado About Nothing*", "*As You Like It*" and "*Twelfth Night*". His works are independent. They reveal his immense development in power and technique. It is far more massive in quality. The characterization and humour are deep and penetrative. There is a great growth in the weight of thought.

iii) 1601-08: Period of the great tragedies and of the sombre or bitter comedies:

In this period all Shakespeare's powers in his dramatic power, his intellectual power and his power of expression are at their highest. This is the time of Supreme masterpieces. 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) 1608-12: Period of later comedies or Dramatic Romances:

During this period we can find a sudden and singular change in the temper of Shakespeare's work. In the last plays, the ground work is furnished by tragic passion. The evil is no longer permitted to have its way but it is controlled and conquered by the good. They fully show the decline of Shakespeare's dramatic powers. There are careless in construction and unsatisfactory in characterization. Three plays entirely Shakespeare's belong to this period- "**Cymbeline**", "**The Tempest**", "**The winter's Tale**". Two plays are partly his – "**Pericles**" and "**Henry III**". The latter was completed by his friend Fletcher.

Characteristics of Shakespeare's works:

The salient feature of his work is their astonishing variety. No one has ever rivalled him in the range and versatility of his powers. He was at home in tragedy and comedy. He was supreme not only as a dramatist but also as a poet. He is the most often quoted of all our writers. He is unparalleled in his characterization.

The greatness of Shakespeare's works is apt to blind critics to his limitations and defects. He wrote hurriedly, and signs of hasty, and ill considered production are often apparent. He designed his plays expressly for the stage and anxious to secure their success. So he is willing at times to sacrifice consistency of character. He reflects the low taste of the '**groundlings**'. At places his style is vivacious, his wit forced and poor and his tragic language bombastic. But they are small things after all in comparison with those paramount qualities which have given him the first place among the world's dramatists.

Ben Jonson:

Shakespeare's age is marked by tremendous dramatic activity. The list of his contemporaries is a long one. The most important of these is his friend Ben Johnson. He was the greatest of them in power and volume of his genius. The aims and principles of his work were different from Shakespeare's.

He was born in London in 1573 and was educated at the Westminster Grammar School, where he laid the foundation of his classical scholarship. He became an actor at about 1592. In 1598, he opened his career as a dramatist with the satiric comedy "**Every Man in his Humour**". For many years he wrote plays both for the court and for the public stage. Later his fortunes declined. He suffered from neglect, poverty and ill health. He died in 1637, having outlived Shakespeare by twenty-one years.

Besides drama, Johnson did a good deal of work outside drama, including many translations and miscellaneous poems. His plays fall into three groups. They are: his court masques, his historical tragedies Eg. "**Sejanus**" and "**Catiline**", and his numerous comedies Eg. "**The Alchemist**", "**Volpone or the Fox**" and "**Epicoene or the Silent woman**".

In studying these comedies we can realize the distinctive features of his genius and art. He was a realist i.e. the world of his comedy is not the world of romance but of contemporary London life, with its manners, foibles, weakness and affectations. His aim is not only to depict, and by depicting to amuse. He takes his art seriously. He wants to hold teach the moral seriously, i.e., to correct and teach. His realism is defined as didactic realism.

Jonson's characterization is based on the idea that each man is possessed or governed by some particular quality of master passion. It may be regarded as the backbone or central feature of his personality.

In Jonson's comedies intellect predominates. They are products of learning, skill and effort. Jonson was the real founder of the 'Comedy of Manners'. His influence on succeeding dramatists was very great.

Other Dramatists of Shakespeare's Age:

John Webster was a dramatist of great power. His morbid love of the violent and horrible led him to sheer sensationalism. His "**White Devil**" and "**Duchess of Malfi**" contains scenes of tragic passion unrivalled outside Shakespeare.

In John Ford, there is a tendency towards repulsive subjects and unnatural emotions is apparent. His pathos gives the distinction of his best work, "**The Broken Heart**".

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher did much work in collaboration. The moral tone is relaxing and their characterization is poor. But they have many redeeming features in plays such as "**Philaster**" and "**The Maid's Tragedy**".

Philip Massinger a ready writer in various styles, reached a high level in his comedy, "**A New way to Pay Old Debts**".

James Shirley is called as "**the last of a great race**" by Charles Lamb. In the end of this period we find that all the old creative power has gone and the stage has yielded completely to the fast-spreading immortality of the age.

The Playhouse of Shakespeare's Time:

In the early years of the regular drama plays had been performed in inn yards and other open spaces. In 1576, two permanent playhouses were built in the open fields of Shoreditch. They were the Theatre and Curtain. These were the only London Play houses when Shakespeare reached the city but by the end of Elizabeth's reign eleven were in existence. Shakespeare was very closely connected with the Playhouse, the Globe and the Blackfriars. The playhouse were very small. They were round or hexagonal and were mainly of wood. The stage and the boxes or '**rooms**' were round or hexagonal and were mainly of wood. The stage and the boxes or '**rooms**'

were roofed in with thatch but the rest of the building was open to sky. The boxes were frequented by the wealthy people and aristocrats. No seat was provided for the '**groundling**' in the '**yard**' or pit. Placards were shown. Performances generally began about three in the afternoon and last some years ago. There were no actresses on the Shakespearean stage. Women's parts are taken by boys and young men specially trained for the purpose. Only after Restoration, women began to appear on the English boards.

PROSE

Lyly and other writers of Prose Fiction :

While the Age of Shakespeare found its chief imaginative outlet in the drama, it was also active in the field of prose fiction.

The most important prose romance of the period is the work of John Lyly, whose comedies are "**Euphues**", the Anatomy of Wit" and its sequel "**Euphues and his England**". The first part tells of a young Athenian named Euphues, wealthy, handsome and clever, who sets out on his travels. He reaches Naples and becomes an intimate friend of Philautus. He holds many long conversations on Philosophical and ethical subjects with him. In the end, he returns to Athens leaving behind an ethical subject with him. Its purpose is to dissuade him from women's society and the tender passion. It is a sort of love-story but without action.

In the second part **Euphues** visits England and gives a long '**description of the country, the court, and the manners of the island**'. The popularity of Euphues was extraordinary, in the little more than half a century it went through ten editions a great record at that time. The ladies of the court used it as a moral handbook, a guide to polite behaviour, and a model of elegance in speech and writing. It owes its continued fame mainly to its style. Lyly's style is called as "**Euphuism**". The outstanding feature of Euphuism is the excessive use of balanced antithesis combined with alliteration. Lyly also indulges freely in similes, word play and punning. Another peculiar characteristic of Lyly is his fondness for myth and fable.

The second of Elizabethan romance may be assigned to Sir Philip Sidney's "**Arcadia**", completed about 1581. This work carries on the traditions of the older romances of chivalry. It is full of incidents. Its principal interest provided by the adventures of the two friends, Pyrocles and Musidorus, while seeking to win the two Arcadian princesses, Philoclea and Pamela. A large number of other characters are all introduced.

Two pre-shakespearean dramatists—Lodge and Greene—are also important writers of romance. "**Lodge's Rosalynde**", "**Euphues Golden Legacy**", furnished the raw materials of "**As you like it**". Greene's "**pandosto**", "**The Triumph of time**", those of "**The winter's Tale**".

The third of '**university Wits**' is Thomas Nash. He gave a distinct lead in the direction of realism of a coarse

description. His "**Unfortunate Traveller**" or the life of Jack Wilton is an example of picaresque novel, or the novel of rascality—a type of fiction which was already popular in Spain and was later to be cultivated with great success by Defoe.

Bacon and his Essays:

Francis Bacon was the second son of a famous lawyer. He was born on 22nd January, 1561. His wit and precocity attracted the attention of the queen. So the queen used to call him "**Young lord keeper**" because at that time his father was the keeper of the great Seal and England. He was educated at Trinity college, Cambridge. His father died in 1579. He chose the law as his profession, was called to the bar in 1582 and Queen's Counsel in 1589.

After the accession of James I he rose rapidly in favour and fortune. He was knighted in 1603; became Attorney General in 1613; privy Councillor in 1616; lord keeper in 1617; Lord Chancellor and Baron Verulam in 1618; Viscount St. Albans in 1621. Then came a sudden crash. He was impeached before the house of lords on various charges official malpractice. He was sentenced to a fine of 40,000 and imprisonment. But he received a royal pardon.

Bacon believed that he was '**born for the service of mankind**'. He sincerely devoted his wonderful powers to the advancement of knowledge of the glory of the creator and the relief of man's estate. He wrote voluminously on many subjects. His greatest works are "**Advancement of Learning**", "**Novum Organum**" collection of "**Essays or counsels Civil and Moral**". The writing of his "**Essays**" are suggested by the '**Essais**' of the great French thinker Montaigne. But the matter and manner are Bacon's own. Extra-ordinary insight and sagacity are their salient qualities.

Bacon had an almost unrivalled power of packing his thoughts into the smallest possible space. Therefore we can describe these Essays (with a phrase from Marlowe's "**Jew of Malta**") "**infinite riches in a little room**".

Other Poets of the Period:

The varied interests of the time are well represented in its prose literature. History is cultivated by many writers: Raleigh's "**History of the world**" (1614), Bacon's "**History of the Reign of Henry VII**" (1622), Foxe's or **Book of Martyrs**" (1563) Raphael Holinshed's "**Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland**".

At a time the spirit of adventure was strong and the literature of travel flourished. One specially famous work: Richard Hakluyt's "**Principal Navigation, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation**". In the field of theology: Richard Hooker's "**Ecclesiastical polity**" (1594-97). There is also great significance in the development of literature of criticism. The best known of these early treatises is Sidney's "**Apologie for Poetrie**". Other similar works of some importance are, William Webbe's "**Discourse of English Poetry**" (1586) and George Puttenham's "**Arte of English Poesie**" (1589).

THE AGE OF MILTON (1625-1660)

The Age of Milton:

The spirit of Puritanism spread steadily among the English middle classes during the reign of James I. A combination of causes led to its practical success. The fast growing flippancy and profligacy of the upper classes greatly increased its moral and social influence. Then came the monstrous encroachments of Charles upon the rights of the commons and the constitutional privileges of the English people. Their keen sense of the supremacy of the God as the ruler of rulers and of the prerogatives of the individual conscience, made the puritans intolerant of earthly tyranny in any form. Thus Puritanism became a moral and religious force. After a storm period of Civil war, it triumphed with the triumph of Oliver Cromwell and during the few years of the commonwealth it was supreme.

The influence of Puritanism upon the tone and temper of English life and thoughts was profound. The spirit which it introduced was fine and noble but it was hard and stern. We admire at the Puritan's integrity and uprightness. He was an intense an God-fearing , but illiberal and unreasonable man. Puritanism destroyed human culture and sought to confine literature within the circumscribed field of its own particular interests. It was only here and there a writer arose who was able to absorb all its strength while transcending its limitations. This was emphatically the case with Milton, the greatest product of Puritanism in our literature, in whose genius and work, the moral and religious influences of Puritanism are combined with the generous culture of the Renaissance.

Milton's Life:

John Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London, on 9th December, 1608. He was educated at St. Paul's school and at Christ's college, Cambridge, where he remained for seven years and took his B.A in 1629 and M.A in 1632. He realised that he could not conscientiously enter the church, for which he had been intended, he decided to give himself to self culture and poetry.

While a boy at school, his books had kept him out of bed till midnight. At the university, he had shown the same untiring devotion to learning. After leaving Cambridge, he spent six years in the country house of the family at Horton and enriched his knowledge. Thus, he became a very great scholar.

At 30, he resolved to complete his studies by travel. He went to Italy by the way of Paris. But he returned soon, by the news of the critical stage of things at home. On his return he entered politics as an ardent supporter of the Puritan cause against the Royalists. He wrote many Pamphlets and the establishment of the commonwealth he was appointed as the Latin Secretary to the committee for foreign affairs.

In 1643, he married Mary Powell, but it proved to unhappy. Early in 1653, a terrible Calamity overtook

him, he became totally blind. Then after three years, he married Catherine Wood Cock. She died within 15 months. He was poor, lonely as well as blind. He married again, Elizabeth Minshull. She brought comfort to him. He died on 8th November 1674.

Milton's Work:

Milton's works falls naturally into four periods:

- I. Milton's Earlier Poetry
 - a) The college period
 - b) The Horton period
- II. Milton's prose writings
- III. The late period or the period of his greatest achievement.

I. Milton's Earlier Poetry:

a) The College Period:

Milton's College poems, in Latin and English are simply, a young man's experimental work. In this period, he wrote the "*Ode , On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*".

b) The Horton Period:

To the Horton period, belongs the four minor poems of beauty and power. They are: "*L'Allegro*", "*IL Penseroso*"(1633), "*Comus*" (1634) and "*Lycidas*" (1637).

In Milton's work the moral and religious influences of Puritanism were blended with the generous culture of Renaissance. It gave a distinctive quality to his greatest poetry. He began to write chiefly under the inspiration of learning and art of the Renaissance. The Puritan element was at first quite subordinate but gradually it gained in strength and depth and became a dominant element.

In "*L'Allegro*" and "*IL Penseroso*" the charming contrasted pictures of man, nature and art can be seen and a little puritan thought can also be seen

In "*Comus*" we can find a distinct stage in the development of Milton's mind. The Puritan spirit is felt in his moral teaching.

In "*Lycidas*" Puritanism is political, ecclesiastical, spiritual and ethical.

It is in the style of the classic pastoral elegy.

Thus through these poems we can find the steady growth of religious element in Milton's mind.

II) Milton's Prose Writings:

In his 31st year, he threw himself into the fierce controversies of the hour. For the next twenty years, he continued active as a writer of prose. His prose works are not very interesting today. His style is heavy and cumbrous. He wrote a number of treatises. One of these is the great and noble "*Areopagitica*"

III) Milton's Later Poetry:

After the Restoration of the monarchy, he was driven into private life and obscurity. Milton found leisure to accomplish the immense task, which he had kept in his mind for many years. He produced our greatest English poem "*Paradise Lost*". The inspiration and subject matter of his poem alike come from his Puritanism. It undertakes

"to assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to men". As a thinker and moralist, Milton belonged completely to Puritanism, as an artist, he belonged to Renaissance and in its form and style, models, the great epics of classical antiquity.

In **"Paradise Lost"**, Milton sets forth the revolt of Satan against God, the war in the heaven, the fall of the rebel angels, the creation of the world and man, the temptation of Eve and Adam and their expulsion from Eden. Yet, while its central purpose was to show how **'man's disobedience'** brought sin and death in its train, it is characteristic of him that he does not close on the note of evil triumphant, but prophetically introduces the divine work of redemption, he was afterwards led to add a sequel of four books entitled **"Paradise Regained"**. The substance of this book is provided by the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. It is a very slight thing beside its gigantic predecessor.

The 'dramatic poem', **"Samson Agonistes"** crowns the labours of these closing years. In this, Milton applies the forms of the classic art to the treatment of a biblical subject.

Characteristics of Milton's Poetry:

After Shakespeare, Milton is the greatest English poet. He is regarded as one of the three or four supreme poets of the world. In him we can see a wonderful union of intellectual power and creative power, both at their highest. He is the most sublime of English poets. In his majesty of thought and diction, he is unrivalled. His descriptive power is astonishing. In the use of blank verse i.e., **'English heroic verse without rhyme'**, he remains our greatest master.

The Caroline Poets:

The term Caroline Poets is derived from the Latin word **'carolus'** which means Charles. It includes a number of verse writers whose work is assigned to the reign of Charles I. Some of them are secular, and some are religious poets. The most important of them is Robert Herrick, (1591-1633). He wrote both secular and religious poetry. His religious poetry was published under the general title of **"Noble Numbers"**, his secular, in the same volume (1633) under that of **"Hesperides"**. It is in the later Herrick's powers are shown at their best. They are miscellaneous in character, comprising addresses to friends, fairy poems, occasional poems on all sorts of subjects and many love poems. But they are all delightful in their naturalness and spontaneity. Historically, their singular feature is their complete detachment from the political interests of the hour.

In the **'Cavalier'** group of Caroline poets belong the writers Thomas Carew (1595-1639), his friend Sir John Suckling (1609-42), and Richard Lovelace (1618-58). These are all poets in the lighter vein. They do not treat their art seriously but their works are extremely well. Certain examples are Carew's **"He that loves a Rosy cheek"**, Suckling's **"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?"**

and Lovelace's **"To Althea from prison"**. Another writer is Andrew Marvell (1621-78). He wrote fierce satire in rugged style on Charles II and his supporters.

The Caroline poets who found their interest in religion are George Herbert (1593-1633), his collection of lyric is **"The Temple"**, Richard Crashaw (1613-49), Henry Vaughan (1622-95) and Francis Quarles (1592-1644) whose work is **"The Religious Emblems"**.

Cowley and the 'metaphysical poets':

Abraham Cowley is regarded as a chief representative of the metaphysical school. The name **'metaphysical'** was first applied to this school by Johnson. Johnson's explanation of his term is excellent: **"The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour. They neither copied nature nor life. Their thoughts are often new but seldom natural. They are not obvious and just ..."**

Salient features of the metaphysical group:

Their work is packed with affectations and efforts. They indulge in strained metaphors, far fetched similes, and the most extravagant hyperbole they cultivate ingenuity at any cost, substitute philosophical subtleties and logical hair splitting for the natural expression of feeling. They employed the vast out of the way learning without the slightest regard to propriety. As a result, they are in general violent, harsh, cold and obscure.

A slightly younger writer – Thomas Traherne (1634-1704) is regarded as one of the greatest religious and metaphysical poets of 17th century. His volume of **"Poem"** was published in 1903 his prose work is **"centuries of meditations"** (1908).

The Caroline Prose writers:

Some of the important prose writers and their writings are: Jeremy Taylor's **"Holy Living and Holy Dying"**, Richard Baxter's **"The Saints everlasting Rest"**, Thomas Fuller's **"Worthies of England"**, Thomas Browne's **"Religio Medici"** and, Izaak Walton's **"The Compleat Angler or of the Contemplative Man's Recreations"**.

Some of the important historical prose writings are **"Edward Hyde's" "History of the Great Rebellion"** and Thomas Hobbes's **"Leviathan"**.

THE AGE OF DRYDEN

The age of Dryden:

The Stuart Restoration was followed by an immense change in general temper of the English people. A sweeping reaction against Puritanism and everything was set in. Infidelity and profligacy became fashionable. The moral ideals of Puritanism were turned into jest. The spirit of corruption spread far and wide. The general lowering of the moral tone was everywhere apparent. Literature is a social product, and it reflects the life of the era. The literature of the age of Dryden was openly and defiantly corrupt. Though it had admirable qualities, it was wanting in moral strength and spiritual fervor. Real earnestness of

purpose and great creative energy had passed away. The thoughts of men no longer scaled the heights.

Thus we enter upon a period in which literature is intellectual rather than imaginative or emotional. Though often brilliant it is a bit hard and unsympathetic. This true even of poetry which became prosaic. Also, the literature of this period was powerfully influenced by French taste and French ideas of art.

The Forerunners of Dryden:

The two writers, who were considered as the pioneers of the so-called 'Classic' school of poetry were Edmund Waller, and Sir John Denham. They were the reformers of English versification.

Dryden's life:

John Dryden was born at Aldwinkle All saints, Northamptonshire in 1631. He was educated at Westminster at Trinity College, Cambridge and settled in London about 1657. Soon after this he wrote his first poems, the "**Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell**" and "**Astraea Redux**" in celebration of the '**happy restoration of Charles II**'. In 1670 he was made the poet laureate.

The first of his great satires in verse is "**Absalom and Achitophel**". The other two theological poems are "**Religio Laici**", (1682) a defence of the church of England and "**The Hind and the Panther**" (1687) an elaborate argument in favor of Roman Catholicism. He produced five more plays, translations of Juvenal, Persius and Vergil and a volume of fables. They were published in November, 1699. Six months later in May 1700, he died.

Dryden's poetry:

As a poet he ripened very slowly. His first poem, an elegy on the death of young Lord Hastings, written at eighteen is incredibly bad. His "**Heroic Stanzas**", written at twenty are crude and bombastic. He was greatly influenced by Cowley, who was afterwards described as "**the darling of my youth**", and as a result, all the characteristic absurdities of the metaphysical school abound in these early works. They survive even in "**Annus mirabilis**" (1667), where the two events, the war with Holland and the fire of London, were mentioned. In the last twenty years of his life, he came out from the false taste of metaphysical writers. His style was no longer turbid but chocked with all sorts of rubbish flows clear and strong. This work, which marks the definite establishment of the classical school of poetry in England, may be dealt with under three heads.

The Political satires:

"**Absalom and Achitophel**" was written amid the excitement following the alleged popish plot, to defend the King's policy against the Earl of Shaftesbury. It was specially famous for its powerful character studies as of Shaftesbury himself under the name of Achitophel and of the Duke of Buckingham under that of Zimri. It is a master piece of brilliant characterization.

"**The Medal**", a further invective against Shaftesbury. It is a brilliant piece of satirical work. "**Mac Flecknoe**", a scathing personal attack on a former friend. Thomas Shadwell, who had replied to '**The Medal**' in a poem filled with scurrilous abuse.

2) The Doctrinal Poems:

The two great Doctrinal poems are '**Religio Laici**' and "**The Hind and the Panther**". They are not strictly religious. There is nothing devotional or spiritual about them. They are theological and controversial.

3) The Fables:

These fine tales are written amid the anxieties of Dryden's last years and under the increasing burden of age and ill-health. "**The Palamon and Arcite**" based upon the '**Kinghtes Tale**' of Chaucer provides an opportunity for a most instructive comparison between the method and art of the 14th century and those of the 17th century poet.

Dryden's poetry thoroughly representative of the age. It has little imaginative power, little depth of feeling, and little spiritual glow or fervor. The two remarkable odes of Dryden are "**To Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew**" and "**Alexander's Feast**". It rarely touches high lyrical note. On the other hand it is characterised by splendid intellectuality and a manly vigour of style.

It was Dryden's influence and example which lifted the classic couplet into the serious English poetry.

Butler:

Another important writer of this period is Samuel Butler (1612-80), the author of the famous "**Hudibras**". It is a satire on the puritans. It hits the taste of the time. The machinery of the poem is upon Don Quixote. It tells of the misadventures of a Kinght and his squire and the Kinght's illfortunes in love.

To modern taste, **Hudibras** is far too long. Some of its best passages suffer from prolixity. The subject matter is also a disadvantage to the eyes of the reader to-day. Yet it is full of wit and vivacity.

PROSE AND THE DRAMA

The Restoration marks the real moment of birth of our modern English prose. The establishment of this modern prose is the greatest single fact in the literary annals of the Age of the Dryden.

The older prose was too intricate involved and cumbrous for general use. The sentences were long: parentheses were numerous, construction adopted was often Latin. But in new prose all this is changed. The sentences are much shorter and simpler. The large straggling masses are broken up. The parentheses and classical inversions are cleared away. These changes made reading and writing easier, direct and lucid.

Many causes combined in the introduction and establishment of this new prose. One thing is the spread of the spirit of common sense and of the critical temper of mind which was so injurious to the higher interests of poetry. The second thing is the extending influence