A Survey of the History of English Literature (1)

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PART I:

THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

Chapter 1
Historical and Linguistic Background of the Old English Period

Historical Background

In the middle of the fifth century some Germanic (Teutonic) tribes invaded Britain and established permanent settlements there. They brought with them a language, a religion, and a poetic tradition. Their culture was transformed by natural processes from within and by invasions as well as other influences from without of which the most important is their conversion to Christianity early in the seventh century.

Of the pre-historic inhabitants of Britain we know very little. **Celts** are the first known inhabitants who migrated to Britain from west or north-western Europe in the sixth century B.C. These were warlike and fierce people who disliked cities and loved pastoral life. They called the island **Britain**. The origin of **Albion**, the older name of the island, is not known. They believed in gods, magic, and Druidism. "**Druid**" in Celtic means "magician". Druids were priests, some were poets, and respected the holy island of Mona. They sacrificed human beings to gods in their religious temples such as Stonehenge. Druids had an important role in such religious ceremonies, and they sang songs of which nothing is extant to give us some hints on their poetic tradition.

When **Julius Caesar** invaded Britain in 55 and 54 B.C., he had to withdraw in the face of heroic resistance from the Celts. In A.D. 42 **Emperor Claudius** invaded the country and conquered Britain. A serious uprising of the natives occurred in AD. 61 under Boadicea, the widow of one of the native chiefs, and about 70,000 Romans and Romanized Britons are said to have been massacred. The Romans never penetrated far into Wales and Scotland. They protected the northern boundary by a stone wall stretching across England Four great highways

soon spread from London to the north, the northwest, the west, and the southwest. Numerous lesser roads connected important military or civil centers. Towns with Roman houses, baths, temples and occasional theaters show the introduction of Roman habits of life. By the third century Christianity had made some progress in Britain and bishops from London and York attended a church council in Gaul. Latin did not replace the Celtic language; it was confined to the upper class, and common people did not dislike the language of their conquerors.

About the year 449 certain **Teutonic tribes**, the founders of the English nation, invaded Britain which was never regarded by the Romans as a very strong and important stronghold. Consequently, when barbarians began to make attacks upon the heart of the Roman Empire, attacks that were to culminate in the collapse of the Empire, the occupation forces were recalled to Rome. Early in the fifth century, the evacuation had been completed. When the Roman withdrawal was completed in 410, the Celts found themselves at a disadvantage.

The Celts, who had come to depend on Romans for their own protection, were no longer able to keep out the warlike Picts and Scots or the Germanic (Teutonic) tribes. Several times they called upon Rome for aid, but Romans, having problems at home, were forced to refuse assistance. Being cut off from all military protection, Britain was an alluring prey to the restless Germanic tribes of the continent. Our most reliable source for the details of the new invasion is the **Venerable Bede** (673-735) whose *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (Church History of English People,* 731) begins with the invasion of Julius Caesar. According to Bede the Teutonic tribes that invaded England were Jutes, Saxons, and Angles who came originally at the invitation of Vortigern, a fifth century king of the Britons, who was fighting a war with the Picts and Scots. With their aids, Vortigern defeated the Picts, but he made the alarming discovery that his invited guests had no intention of leaving their pleasant new home. Bede says that Germanic tribes plundered and burned the native temples, and they murdered many native priests. Most Celts were massacred and very few of them settled down in Cornwall, Wales and the remote parts of Britain. That was the end of the Celtic as well as Roman civilization.

In time various Germanic tribes combined either for greater strength or under the influence of a powerful leader to produce small kingdoms. Seven of these are eventually recognized: Northumbria, Mercia. East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Wessex, and they are spoken of as

the **Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy**. In the early part of the seventh century Northumbria gained political supremacy. In the eighth century this leadership passed to Mercia. Finally, in the ninth century Wessex began to extend its influence and under King Alfred (871-901) Wessex attained a high degree of prosperity and enlightenment

The Celts called their Teutonic conquerors Saxons. Early Latin writers, following Celtic usage, call the Teutons in England **Saxons** and the land **Saxonia**, but soon the terms **Angli** and **Anglia** are used for the Teutons generally. Pope Gregory, in 601, calls the king of Kent "Rex Anglorum." The language is called **Englisc** by the vernacular writers. From about the year 1000 **Englaland** is used for the country and finally England replaces Englaland. Possibly a desire to avoid confusion with the Saxons who remained on the continent and the early supremacy of the Anglian Kingdoms were the factors in determining usage.

Conversion to Christianity

Many Celts have been Christianized during the Roman occupation, and **St. Patrick** converted Ireland in the middle of the fifth century. The conversion of the English people began in 567 when **Pope Gregory** sent a mission to England. Bede's account concerning Gregory's desire to convert the English people is an attractive story: One day, in the market-place in Rome, Gregory happened to meet some handsome slaves. When he found that those Angles were pagans, he decided to go personally to England and convert the English. But he became Pope and could not undertake the conversion personally. He sent a mission of 40 monks to England led by his friend **St. Augustine** (who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury). Gregory advised them to proceed slowly with the conversion. Pagan customs were not to be immediately stamped out but were to be gradually remolded. This policy of moderation may explain the awkward mixture of pagan and Christian elements such as we find in *Beowulf:*

Augustine converted Kent and made Canterbury the seat of the Roman church in England. Students of old English literature should always keep in mind that so many European nations as well as the English accepted Christianity because their rulers wanted them to do so. This fact explains the mixture of pagan and Christian elements in so many European and English heroic poems.

The Development of the Old English Language

The English language has gone through extensive development since its introduction into Britain about the middle of the fifth century. We know very little about the languages spoken in Britain before the Anglo-Saxon invasion of the island. We have no knowledge of the language(s) spoken by the Paleolithic (Old Stone) Man who lived in Britain when it formed a part of the continent, when there was no English Channel and when the North Sea was only an enlarged river basin. We have also lost hope of learning anything about the language(s) of the Neolithic (New Stone) Man.

Celts are the first people in Britain about whose language we have definite knowledge. It is reasonable to expect that the Teutonic conquest of Celtic Britain should have resulted in a mixture of their languages, but the influence of Celtic upon the Old English language is negligible because not more than twenty words and some place-names in Old English can be traced to a Celtic source.

Latin was spoken in Britain for a period of about 400 years before the Teutonic invasion of the island. It was introduced when Britain was a province of the Roman Empire. If the influence of Celtic upon Old English is negligible, it is because Celts were not civilized enough to make any notable contribution to Anglo-Saxon civilization, but Latin was the language of highly civilized conquerors from whom Teutons could learn a lot. They were in touch with Latin when they were still occupying their continental homes, they benefitted from the Roman rule in Britain, and they adopted extensive Latin elements *into* their language after the conversion to Christianity.

A page of Old English looks like a foreign language and one cannot read it without special study. English, like other languages, has continually changed and continues to change in response to fresh influences. New habits slowly develop among those who use the language, and drastic modifications take place as a result of contacts with foreign cultures through trade,

migration, and war. The present-day English language is the product of centuries of such evolution.

The differences one notices between Old English and Modern English are those of spelling. , pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The spelling looks strange because of employment of certain characters that are no longer a part of Modern English alphabet. The pronunciation of Old English words differs from that of their modern equivalents. The long vowels in particular have undergone considerable modification. For example, the Old English "stan" is the same word as the modern English "stone, but the vowel is different.

Perhaps the most formidable difference between Old English and Modern English is in vocabulary, Old English was essentially unilingual: instead of borrowing from other languages, it formed new words out of its own native resources. It also uses self-expressing compounds. The vocabulary of Old English is almost purely Teutonic. The reader of Old English feels the absence of those words derived from Latin and French words that make up more than half of the words now in common use, words that seem quite familiar and natural to us and are essential to the expression of our ideas.

Old English, like Latin and Modern German, is inflectional: Verbs have person, number, and tense; nouns, pronouns, and adjectives have case, number and gender-all indicated by endings added to a root or by internal change. An example of internal change appears in the formation of the plural *men* from singular *man* -a practice retained in this instance down to the present lime. Unlike the almost inflectionless Modern English, in which clarity requires an inflexible word order, Old English permitted the writer considerable freedom in arranging his words.

Inflectional languages are either synthetic or analytic. Old English, like Latin, is a synthetic language, one that indicates the relation of words in a sentence largely by means of inflections. An analytic language depends on strict word order and extensive use of prepositions and auxiliary verbs. Old English is a synthetic language; Modern English is an analytic one. In Modern English, the subject and the object have neither distinctive forms nor inflectional endings to indicate the other relations marked by case endings in Old English. The Old English grammar resembles that of modern German. The noun and adjective are inflected for four cases in the singular and four in the plural. An adjective has separate forms for each of the three

genders. The inflection of the verb is less elaborate than the Latin verb, but there are distinctive endings for the different persons, numbers, tenses, and moods.

Old English survives in manuscripts and relics in four major dialects: Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish and West Saxon (Wessex) manuscripts of about the year 1000. Northumbrian culture was virtually obliterated by the Danes and the Wessex of King Alfred for a long time set the pattern for literary English. But the Norman Conquest shifted the social and political center of England from Wessex to London, a predominantly Mercian area. Modern English proceeded to evolve largely from London English.

Old English differs from Modern English in the following chief respects:

1. Its complex gender system bore no necessary relationship to sex. **Wif** (woman), for example, was neuter.

2. There were inflections of nouns, pronouns and adjectives with the four cases, containing a dual form, singular as well as plural. Modern English pronouns and a few irregular noun plurals represent the only significant survival of this complicated system.

3. Verbs were divided into seven classes of strong verbs and three classes of weak verbs. Strong verbs changed the interior vowel of the stem in conjugation. Weak verbs simply added inflectional endings to the stem.

4. The word order was more fluid in Old English because inflections showed the full relationship of words. It did not necessarily have, as Modern English does, a rigid subject-verb-object pattern or a modifier-modified pattern. 5. Pronunciation included harsh guttural sounds stopped by Modern English but still evidenced by spellings: knight, brought, thought.

6. Its vocabulary had about 30,000 words. The edition of *Oxford English Dictionary* in 20 volumes cites about 500,000 words.

Chapter 2
The Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture

The Roman historian **Tacitus** (AD. 55-120) gives us a picturesque account of the early Germanic tribes. But we should remember that his *Germania* was written in AD. 98, three and a half centuries before the Anglo-Saxon invasion when they had lost or adjusted some of their continental customs and beliefs. However, Tacitus sheds a good deal of light upon the social organization of the Germanic tribes and their customs as reflected in Beowulf and other Old English poems.

The Celts had been within the orbit of the Mediterranean civilization, but the invading Anglo-Saxons belonged to an early Norse or Teutonic culture which they maintained at least until their conversion to Christianity. The overwhelming quality of their old religion was its northern coldness and pessimism. Their Scandinavian religion emphasized the great power of fate (ward) that was stronger than all the gods. It emphasized the military virtues of courage, endurance, and obedience to leaders. The fundamental social organization of the invading Anglo-Saxons was the typical warrior band of a heroic age as we witness in *Odyssey*. These Germanic tribes boasted of being sackers of cities. The Germanic warrior band was termed Comitatus. The best warrior and leader of the band was called king or **hero-king** who would demonstrate himself as the greatest warrior. He distributed booty to his followers (**thanes**) who were expected to follow him loyally to death. From this simple organization developed the small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in pagan England. To the defected Celts the Anglo-Saxons were no more than pagan savages, but the Roman estimate of them was favorable. Roman historians, like Tacitus, praised them for being straightforward, warlike, and unswerving in purpose and sober. The ancient Germanic people admired strength and courage. The self-portrait of the Anglo-Saxons in their literature confirms the Roman evaluation, especially as regards their love of battle.

The custom of composing in Latin came to England with the missionaries of the Christian church, and the English converts, especially those trained for holy orders, learned to read and write Latin as part of their professional education. After the conversion of the English, a rich Christian literature in Latin came into being and the church made this literature accessible to the converts. The new religion brought Mediterranean civilization to the Island. **Theodore of Tarsus**, Archbishop of Canterbury (668-690), came with parchment and books, together with reverence for learning. Monasteries at Canterbury, York, and Jarrow (Bede's monastery in Northumbria) emerged as internationally esteemed citadels of Latin and Greek scholarship. Literature had been transmitted orally before the middle of the seventh century, but now the clerics in monasteries committed works to writing in order to preserve an accurate and unbroken literary tradition. Besides copying Latin manuscripts, clerics began to create original compositions both in Latin and in the English vernacular.

Behind the literary products of the Anglo-Saxons lies a long **oral tradition** developed during the time when the Germanic tribes still inhabited the continent. Early Germanic poetry was composed and recited by the **scop**, meaning "shaper", a professional bard who may have often wandered from one court to another, hoping to acquire the patronage of some generous lords. At court feast the scop would celebrate in songs the deeds of real or legendary heroes of the remote past. Warriors were delighted to hear these glorious exploits recited over and over because many warriors, immortalized by the scop, achieved the status of ancestral heroes. These illustrious figures were part of the legacy which the Anglo-Saxon invaders brought with them to Britain.

With the conversion of England to Christianity, the subject matter of poetry underwent a great change. Both poetry and prose were committed to writing, and (with the church virtually monopolizing the art of copying old works and creating new ones) the clerics generally preserved only such materials as were considered serviceable to Christianity. The distinction that literary scholars make between "pagan" and "Christian" literature docs not help much in classifying Old English literature, for mere survival of it in writing almost guarantees that a work is more or less Christian. The Old English poets either used Christian material from the Scriptures or the liturgy, or they tried to fit subjects of pagan derivation into the framework of the Christian universe. In the Anglo-Saxon mind Christ and his disciples could be visualized in

what Tacitus calls the Comitatus relationship (the relationship between the hero-king and his retainers); God absorbed the functions of **Wyrd** (fate), and Beowulf could be comprehended as an ideal Christian king who had not been entirely divested of the thirst for worldly glory that motivated the Germanic warriors.

The verse patterns as well as the heroic qualities utilized by the Old English poets are indebted to centuries of oral tradition. The Old English poetic line consists of two half lines separated by a distinct pause called Caesura. Each line contains four accented syllables and a varying number of unaccented syllables.

Old English alliterative poetry uses a regular system of alliteration but no end rhyme. 'The alliteration involves the initial sounds, whether vowels or consonants of the four stressed syllables. Three of the stressed syllables are alliterated, and it is the initial sound of the third accented syllable that determines the alliteration. The following extract describing the monster Grendel's approach to the Danish hall is a good example of Old English alliterative poetry. It is quoted from *Beowulf's* verse translation by Charles W.Kennedy (Oxford University Press, 1940) who has attempted to recreate some of the alliterative effect in Modern English:

Grendel came creeping, accursed of God,
A murderous ravager minded to snare
Spoil of heroes in high-built Hall
Under clouded heavens he held his way
Wine-hall of warriors gleaming with gold.

(II. 711-15)

The pounding rhythm, in conjunction with the alliteration, conveys an impression of unrelenting strength. Although alliteration is no longer the chief basis of English prosody, it remains an indispensable tool of English rhetoric and is commonly used by writers of both poetry and prose. The alliterative tradition declined after the Norman Conquest, but its revival in the latter part of the fourteenth century produced four of the greatest poems of the Middle Ages: *Sir Gawain, Pearl, Morte Arthur,* and *Piers Plowman.*

Rhythm and alliteration were not the only poetic devices by Old English poets. In order to achieve variety, they would frequently introduce a kind of condensed metaphor called **kenning**,

a compound of two terms used instead of a common word. The sun is referred to as "world-candle", and the ocean as "sea-monster's home". Kenning is very often degenerated into a cliche: a prince is almost automatically called "ring-giver". Still, kenning in the hands of talented poets could provide a fresh appeal to the imagination of the audience.

Variation and **litotes**, two other rhetorical techniques of Old English poetry, deserve mention here. Variation is the use of equivalents for poetic purposes. *Widsith,* for example, begins (in Modern English) with the following line: "Widsith spoke, his word-hoard unlocked." The second half of the line furnishes no additional information; its intention is purely decorative. Variation can be regarded as repetition which is one of the main features of heroic poetry intended for recitation.

Litotes is the negation of the contrary. For example, "not a bad show at all" instead of "a good show". It is a kind of understatement. The *Exodus* poet, talking about the Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea, says: "Less blithe was their boasting."

Much of Old English literature has perished, and what has survived is in fragmentary form creating problems of authorship and dates of composition. Most of the extant Old English poems are in four manuscripts, all somewhat damaged, compiled around the year 1000 in the West Saxon dialect.

With prose we are on much surer ground because the significant Old English prose may be linked with specific writers of the tenth and eleventh centuries. King Alfred (849-901) is certainly the pioneer who is responsible for the development of literary prose during the Old English period. As part of his systematic educational efforts to make Wessex the center of English culture, Alfred translated or caused to be translated into English certain Latin texts.

The earliest works written by the English clergy were in Latin which was the official language of the church. Anglo-Latin literature in the Old English period is often dialectic, intending to provide religious instruction or inspiration.

The **Venerable Bede** (673-735) is the outstanding representative of Anglo-Latin culture in the Old English period. His monastery at Jarrow in Northumbria was one of the best intellectual institutions for Christian scholarship. Bede was a monk who encompassed many areas of

intellectual accomplishment. He wrote Latin treatises on medicine, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy, but his immortal achievement was in the field of history.

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (Church History of the English People)* traces the history of England from Julius Caesar's invasion in 55 RC. to A.D. 731, the year in which the book was completed. Bede is the first writer to conceive of the English as one nation with a single destiny. He desires his readers to become familiar "with the actions and sayings of former men of renown." He makes his narrative attractive through anecdotes, dramatic speeches, and miracles designed to show the Christian ideal. He distinguishes facts from hearsay; he mentions his sources and assesses their reliability. But modern readers have difficulty in reconciling Bede's integrity as a historian with his acceptance of miracles: a river dries up in order that a holy man may travel more quickly to the place of his martyrdom. But Bede and the preachers of his day often employed imaginary stories to illustrate a point of doctrine.

Judged merely as literature, the Latin writings of the Anglo-Saxons, with the single exception of the works of Bede, may not rank very high; but as a measure of the level of culture achieved and sustained in Anglo-Saxon England, those Latin writings are extremely valuable.

Chapter3

Old English Heroic Poetry

The Heroic Tradition

Epic or heroic poetry in general is one of the earliest literary forms and the subject of critical discussion from Aristotle to the present day. The verse patterns as well as heroic qualities utilized by the Old English heroic poets are indebted to centuries of oral tradition. Old English heroic poetry, often called courtly poetry, consists of one epic, *Beowulf,* and several poems of epic nature, all belonging to the oral tradition, oral poetry of the heroic age or oral courtly poetry.

Epic is a long narrative poem in elevated style presenting characters of high position in a series of adventures which form an organic whole through the central figure and through the development of episodes important to the history of a nation or a race. Epics, both primary, folk, oral or Homeric, and art, secondary, written, literary or Virgilian epics, share a group of common characteristics:

(1) The hero is a figure of heroic stature, of national or international importance, and of great historical or legendary significance; (2) the setting is vast in scope, covering great nations; (3) the action consists of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage; (4) supernatural forces (gods, angels, demons) intervene from time to time; (5) it's style is elevated; (6) the epic poet recounts the deeds of his heroes with objectivity; and (7) conventions such as invocation, opening the narrative *in medias res* (in the middle of the things), extended formal speeches by the main characters, epic simile, etc. are employed. The *Iliad,* the *Odyssey,* and *Beowulf* are primary or Homeric epics; *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost* are Virgilian or secondary epics.

Primary epic was sung or recited in a hall and was one of the possible entertainments of the heroic age. It is the loftiest and the gravest among the kinds of courtly poetry in the oral period. It has spontaneity, tragic quality, and supposed historical truth. It is about nobles, made for

nobles, and performed on occasions by nobles. It is solemn; it has epic solemnity.

By **oral poetry** we mean poetry that reaches its audience through the medium of recitation. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are too long to be recited in one session. But Homer and the *Beowulf* poet are familiar with the practice of serial or selective recitation from a poem too long to be recited in its entirety. Homer's epics and Beowulf employ the oral techniques: the repetitions and the stylized diction of oral poetry, and festal, aristocratic, ceremonial tone. The most obvious characteristic of oral techniques is the continued use of stock words, phrases, or even whole lines. In 103 lines of the *Iliad* (VI, 390-493), concerning the parting between Hector and Andromache, a quarter of the whole passage is "stock": 28 phrases and lines are repeated. The same is true of *Beowulf.* These repetitions are of great help to the singer. But what about the readers? It is a prime necessity of oral poetry that the hearers should not be surprised too often or too much. The unexpected tires us. The language, therefore, must not be familiar, But in epic, which is the highest species of oral poetry, the language must not he **familiar** in the sense of being colloquial or commonplace. It necessitates a poetic diction; that is, a language which is familiar because it is used in every part of every poem but unfamiliar because it is not used outside poetry, Epic diction is different from daily usage, but wholly familiar within its own sphere. Homer's diction is not the same as that of *Beowulf,* the Greek epic was recited more quickly and thus it needs more repetition.

A great **subject** is not the mark of primary epic. The fact that these adventures happened to Odysseus while he was returning home from the Trojan War doesn't make that war the subject of the epic. Our interest is in the fortunes of an individual. If he is a king, he is the king of a very small country, and there is no attempt to make Ithaca seem important. The world or Greece would make no difference if Odysseus had never got home at all. The epic is an adventure story similar to that of Beowulf who seeks fame through adventures. The Germanic world would make no difference if Beowulf had never chosen to fight Grendel, Grendel's mother. and the dragon.

The Trojan War is not the subject of the *Iliad;* it is only a background to a purely personal story, that of Achilles' wrath, suffering, repentance, and killing Hector. Homer has nothing to say about the fall of Troy, except incidentally. It has been argued that he does not need to

because the fall of Troy was inevitable after Hector's death, but it is hardly believable that the climax of the story should be left to be inferred.

Primary epic simply wants a heroic story and cares nothing about a great national subject. The primary epic neither has nor could have a great subject which is a profound and permanent change in the history of the world as the founding of Rome or the fall of man. The mere endless ups and downs, the constant changes of glory and misery, which make the Heroic Age, are not important events in history. Primary epic is great, but its greatness lies in the human and personal tragedy built up against this background of meaningless flux. It is all the more tragic because there hangs over the world a certain futility. Achilles says to Priam: "And here I sit in Troy afflicting you and your children, not protecting Greece, nor even winning glory but just doing it because that is the way things come about." In Virgil and Milton suffering has a meaning; in Homer and *Beowulf* there is meaningless suffering. Goethe says, "The lesson of the *Iliad* is that on earth we must enact Hell." Only the style of Homer makes it endurable. *Beowulf* is somewhat different. In Homer despair is a background; in *Beowulf* darkness is embodied in monsters and the hero fights against them. In Homer no one fights against darkness. Primary epic leaves matters much as it found them: the heroic age is still going on at the end.

The subject matter of the **secondary epic** (art epic) is different from that of folk epic. It is national or international. The Greek's desire was for the timeless, the unchangeable. Romans were different. Virgil's decision was to take one single national legend of the remote past. The aim of this epic is a higher solemnity. The Virginian or Miltonic style is there to compensate for the privacy and informality of silent reading. The effect is achieved by grandeur or elevation of the style. This grandeur is produced by three things: (1) the use of slightly unfamiliar words and constructions including archaisms; (2) the use of proper names; and (3) continued allusion to all sources of heightened interest in our sense experience (light, darkness, storm, flowers, jewels, love. and the like). Continuity is an essential part of the secondary epic style, The poet avoids discontinuity by avoiding simple sentences. The literary epic pays more attention to the meaning, it is more philosophical, more didactic, highly allusive and more learned. The characters are more symbolic; the style is more polished, consistent, and accurate. The primary epic is not philosophical and teaches no lesson: the characters are less symbolic; the style is less

polished, but more fluent, spontaneous and alive; it pays more attention to a major incident, but there may be contradictions because the scop may forget what he has already said; its hero does not develop. The literary epic hero develops and learns to sublimate his own ideas, desires and wishes to those of the gods, to dedicate his power to an idea outside of himself. Beowulf's personal pride is replaced by Aeneis's loyalty to family, to lads, to Rome to fighting for an idea. Beowulf fights to gain personal glory and fame.

Some Characteristics of Old English Heroic Poetry

Germanic kings used to keep professional poets, nowadays called poet laureate or official poets. In England such a poet was called scop (gleeman/minstrel). The scop's function was to compose noble songs and sing them before a great lord. He is a composer and performer. He is or seems to be one of the warriors for he is or pretends to be present in all the fields of battle in which his lord participates. It seems that he has witnessed the great deeds of warriors and recorded them in his songs which are ideal historical records. The scop immortalizes his patron by praising him. Another function of the scop is to entertain noble warriors, but the emphasis is on the Immortality gained through poetry. Widsith, a scop, claims that he has chanted songs before so many kings who honored him with gifts, realizing that he is the chronicler of their deeds. Thus heroic poetry becomes a means of preserving fame, worldly fame. Religious poetry promises fame in the next world, but heroic poetry bestows worldly fame on those capable of performing heroic deeds. It has nothing to do with salvation or other-worldly values.

Old English heroic poetry celebrates Germanic values of heroic values, Ideal values. It is true that the heroic king bestows gifts upon the scop and his retainer-warriors, but wealth is not significant in itself; it does imply that the receiver is worthy enough to deserve such an honor; it shows the warrior's worthiness. Epic poetry celebrates abstract values such as fame, ambition, honor, and the like. Achilles sacrifices half of the Greeks to his honor; he stops fighting because he believes that his honor is offended by Agamemnon.

The heroic actions of the legendary heroes were examples of noble behavior to the Anglo Saxons. Widsith boasts of rich rewards he has received for his services to noble kings and singing of the ends of heroic life; i.e., by holding the mirror of the past to the audience and by expressing the fame of the dead and the praise of the living. Thus the scop immortalizes the

heroes, entertains them, and encourages them to do heroic deeds. His song is for nobles and is ennobling. Such poets keep the heroic ideals alive and inspire warriors to do heroic actions.

To the Greek and Germanic peoples the idea of kingship saw very important because the ideal of kingly behavior was the spiritual force behind their civilization. This ideal, usually called the heroic ideal, was the creative power that shaped their history and literature. The **hero-king** would do heroic actions such as taming a horse, sailing a ship through a storm, swimming a river, and fighting bravely. He had to have skill and courage to be the leader. He was the leader of the warriors and the bravest of them all. He was the active leader of his faithful fellow warriors who witnessed what he did and often lost their lives in defending him. Loyalty in fighting for the hero-king or losing their lives in supporting him is called the **theme of sacrifice**. The warriors would swear to be loyal to the hero-king and he would undertake to support them and would give them gifts. This relationship is called "**King and dright,"** what Tacitus calls **comitatus**. Royal generosity was one of the aspects of heroic behavior because warriors received what they deserved because of their loyalty, and by giving gifts the king would prove himself worthy of that loyalty. He is referred to as "protector of warriors," "ring-giver," and "dispenser of treasure." The relationship is more spiritual than material.

Christianity offers the promise of rewards (immortality) in an afterlife. but those Germanic kings won immortality through fame, and the scop who could sing of the king's ideal was the agent of securing that fame, and, therefore, a valued member of the court. Visiting the tomb of Achilles, Alexander envied those ancient hero-kings who had a Homer to celebrate their deeds. Heroic poetry immortalized these heroes. and warriors found such heroic tales an inspiration for their own lives. Even after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. The *Beowulf* poet tried to reflect the heroic ideal and spirit inherited from the earlier times long before the conversion. The scop sings of the heroic deeds of Germanic heroes and calls people to heroic life. Since death is the end of life, fight is worth fighting. Widsith wok the Anglo-Saxons back to their Germanic past and its values, hut Christianity brought them the world of the Bible. Yet poem as *Beowulf* composed perhaps by a Christian poet during the first half or the 8th century reflects an attitude toward life mat the poet inherited from his Germanic past. The Christian values appear in the Old English heroic poems only when the scop is rejected or is suffering.

The world of Old English poetry is dark and narrow. Men seem seldom to relax; they always think of the struggle in war, triumph, and testing their courage against fate. It is a fatal world; fate gives them the ordained life if their courage is good. Man means warrior and we hear nothing but preparation for the battle, rushing to the field of battle, fighting, and festal celebration before and after each battle. We hear of their heroic values, not of their social life and actual living. Whenever there is no war, it seems that life is static, but it becomes dynamic at the time of battle. The *Beowulf* poet begins the second part of his epic by stating that "fifty winters" have passed. It is winter because there is no heroic action, while the only thing that makes life worth living is action in the battle-field.

Beowulf

Beowulf is the most famous and the longest surviving poem in Old English. It was composed by an unknown poet in early eighth century. The extant version is in the West Saxon dialect copied about the year 1000. The setting is southern Scandinavia in the Age of Migration of the fifth and sixth centuries and the poem makes no reference to Britain

Beowulf is a primary epic recording the three great deeds of the heroic warrior Beowulf in his youth and maturity. The basic narrative appears in two sections related to Beowulf's youth and his old age As a prelude to the two adventures of Beowulf s youth, the slaying of the monster Grendel and Grendel's mother, the epic gives an account of the mythical founder of the Danish royal line, Scyld Sceafing (Shield, son of Sheaf). Starting his life as a wretched castaway, Scyld grew in power and goodness until he was feared and loved throughout the whole empire. Then the epic gives an account of Scyld's death and funeral. The dead Scyld is honored with gifts from a grateful people. He is laid amid splendid treasures in a lordly ship and is launched on the lonely sea.

The grandeur of the Scyldings is manifested in Hrothgar's palace, Heorot, a mighty mead-hall for the king and his retainers. The scenes at Heorot throw vivid light on the lord-thane relationship. Here Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, distributes gold bracelets and rings among his faithful retainers who spend their peaceful hours feasting and drinking mead.

The revelry at Heorot angers **Grendel**, a monster, a demon descended from Cain, the first murderer. Roused from his subterranean sea cave, Grendel invades Heorot, finds the Danish

warriors asleep, and snatches and devours thirty men. Grendel continues the invasion of the hall for twelve years.

When the news of Grendel's ravages spreads to the Geats, Beowulf, nephew of the Geatish King Hygelac, decides to sail to the rescue of Hrothgar. Here the voyage of Beowulf and his fourteen companions is brilliantly depicted.

When Beowulf arrives, he and his men are challenged by the Danish coast guard, but upon announcing his identity and his errand of mercy, he is conducted to Hrothgar, who receives him warmly and invites him to the nightly feast at Heorot. Beowulf boasts that he will do battle with Grendel and save the Danes. The Queen passes the goblet of mead among the warriors with dignity and grace, and Hrothgar promises Beowulf ample rewards if he destroys Grendel.

After the feast, the Danes retire for the night, leaving Beowulf and his men to keep vigil for Grendel. Beowulf knows that Grendel cannot be harmed by a sword.

The monster storms into the hall, tears one of the warriors to pieces, gulps down his blood, and devours his flesh. Grendel is seized by Beowulf who has the power of thirty men in his grip. He grasps Grendel's arm which is ripped out of its socket when the monster struggles to get away. Grendel, mortally wounded, escapes to his cave under the lake.

The next day Hrothgar and the Danes are overjoyed at their deliverance. A scop sings a song in honor of Beowulf. Grendel's huge arm and claw are hung in Heorot, and a feast is prepared Hrothgar rewards Beowulf and the scop recites the "lay of Finn". The Queen gives gifts to Beowulf and begs him to safeguard the interests of her two sons.

At night **Grendel's mother** invades the hall to avenge the death of her son. She seizes Hrothgar's advisor and runs away to her cave, carrying the arm of Grendel along with her captive.

Again Heorot is enveloped in gloom. Beowulf prepares to set out after the female monster who is shielded in her underwater lair. Beowulf plunges into the pool and swims to the waterless sea-cave. The sword fails Beowulf in the terrible fight. He sees a giant sword in the cave. He takes it and strikes the female demon a fatal blow. The sea grows so bloody that the Danes and the Geats assume that Beowulf is dead, but Beowulf returns to the surface carrying the head of Grendel. There is a feast and the next morning Beowulf and the Geats return to Geatland.

The second part of Beowulf is set in Geatland fifty years later when Beowulf is the King of Geats and he has ruled wisely. A firedragon now lays waste the land. The **dragon** that for 300 years has been guarding a treasure in a burial mound is now enraged because he has been robbed of a cup by one of Beowulf's subjects. The dragon belches forth his flames throughout the countryside. The devastation is overwhelming. Beowulf's own hall is consumed.

The aged Beowulf must once again defend a nation against evil. Beowulf sets out with his retainers to confront the dragon. In the violent battle Beowulf's sword fails him and all the thames, except **Wiglaf**, flee to the forest. With the help of Wiglaf, Beowulf slays the dragon, but he is mortally wounded.

Before he dies, Beowulf bestows his armor and his rings upon Wiglaf and orders the dragon's treasure to be given to the Geats. He requests that his body be placed on a mound near the sea and burned. The funeral pyre is built as Beowulf had asked. His ashes are buried in a magnificent mound and the treasure is buried with him. Twelve warriors circle the mound and lament the death of their lord.

Beowulf deals with two Germanic tribes, the Danes and the Geats, before their invasion of England, and thus nothing of the poem, except its language, is English. Beowulf himself is the flower of the pagan Germanic culture and the scop glorifies that culture by glorifying the hero. He celebrates not the contemporary deeds of heroism, but events of a past already remote, already glorified by an old tradition, the oral and courtly tradition. We have a spiritualized picture of the Germanic heroic age, a warrior society of mutual trust and respect, of the hero-king and his retainers. Grendel and the dragon are threats to the society of the Germanic peoples, and it is the duty of the hero and his companions to put down the evil. In fighting them he tests his relationship with fate; i.e., he has chosen a heroic way of life. Doom ultimately claims him, but not until he had fulfilled the pagan ideal of a heroic life. The epic ends with Beowulf gaining the heroic reward of pagan immortality achieved through heroic deeds. The epic ends when people lamenting the death of their lord, saying that "of all kings Beowulf was the mildest and gentlest, kindest to his people and most eager for fame." Thus he has accomplished what he was after, and receives a heathen burial, not a Christian one, glorifying the Germanic ideals.

There are critics who still believe that *Beowulf* was originally a complete pagan poem and all the Christian passages were interpolated much later by monks or clerics. Some believe that the original poem was revised by a Christian poet. It is now generally accepted that the Anglo-Saxon Christianity permeates the poem and transfigures the pagan elements. It was written by a Christian scop who valued the oral Germanic tradition. However, Pope Gregory's policy of moderation is somehow responsible for the, confusion and mixture of pagan and Christian values.

The blend of Christian and Germanic elements is not the only problem offered by the poem; there are other problems as well. There are **two kinds of heroic manhood**:

1. The **absolute hero** who looks for opportunities to display his prowess and win honor, glory, and fame. Of this type of self-centered hero Achilles is a splendid example. He remains a hero tied to his ideal of prowess and. glory and he is ready to suffer and die for it.

2. Against Achilles stands Hector, a **responsible hero**, whose significance is that he embodies not only the spirit of Troy but its actual existence. When he plays with his small boy or comforts his wife, he has his human side. He is deeply considerate to his old mother and courteous to Helen. With his death it seems that as if Troy itself were falling. If Achilles stands for the pure ideal of personal heroism, Hector stands for the kind of heroism closely tied to a man's duty to his city and his family. Beowulf combines the two kinds of manhood in his own person in the same way that he emerges in the two worlds of pagan and Christian values. These two worlds as well as the two levels of manhood operate together and at times conflict with each other.

Here is a wise and reflective hero-king who labors to merit the Christian reward of bliss; yet he is a fierce warrior who never thinks of renouncing the prizes of this world. He fights for his honor and personal fame, but he is also wholeheartedly committed. to the ideal of service to his own people and to humanity at large. The double personality or whatever we call it, of Beowulf is because of the dubious conditions of the age of Beowulf, an age marked by the interplay of old and new, of Germanic sternness and Christian charity. Out of these two conflicting cultures emerged the epic *Beowulf.*

Unlike religious poetry, epic is not other-worldly; it is related to here and now. Epic in the

oral tradition is concerned with human actions. Whenever Homer mentions gods, he is interested in their influence on human actions and their own worldly actions. When gods appear on earth they act like human beings. But Grendel, Grendel's dam, and the dragon are neither human beings nor appear as such. Beowulf is fighting against monsters, not real human beings, or, as the scop calls them, the enemies of mankind. In these fights nobody else gets involved. Thus the epic becomes the celebration of one man's heroic actions against the powers of darkness which broods over' the whole epic. Beowulf becomes a Christ figure, of whose twelve retainers in the dragon battle only one remains faithful, while of Christ's twelve disciples only one is disloyal. Both the heroic and religious worlds seem degenerating, the theme of sacrifice is violated and the final lamentation suggests the disintegration of the heroic circle.

Lesser Heroic Poems

'Widsith is an early courtly poem showing an ideal scop or gleeman. It explains the hero's professional experience and success in composing songs and reciting them before great lords. Parts of the poem may be the earliest extant poetry in the English language. Widsith, meaning "far traveler" is an idealized stop who boasts of the faraway places he has seen and the mighty princes he has served, It does not matter that some of the masters Widsith claims to have entertained were separated historically by nearly two centuries because he stands for all scops, not a particular one. Nor does it even matter that *Widsith* is negligible as poetry because much of it consists of a catalogue of famous names. What is important is that through allusions the scop has left a splendid *"Who's Who"* of kings and kingdoms of the heroic age. *Widsith* is also important because of the immense pride the scop displays in his craft. Whenever he lifted up his harp and sung, his patrons, who gave him gifts because he was a means of preserving their fame, avowed that they had never heard better music and song. But patronage is never certain, and the future is vague in its prospects. The minstrel wanders wearily wherever fate takes his steps, always searching for a generous lord who will protect him "until light and life fall in ruin together."

Finn or the Fight at Finn's Borough*:* Only 46 lines and 2 half lines have survived, but the whole episode appears in *Beowulf.* King Hnaef of the Danes with 60 followers is in Frisia, visiting his sister, the wife of King Finn of the Frisians. Trouble arises; they fight. The Danes

lose heavily and King Hnaef falls in the struggle. The Frisians also lose heavily. And Finn's son is killed. Hengest, the spokesman of the Danes, comes to terms with Finn, the slayer of his lord. The dead are buried and life continues the winter through. With spring, travel by sea becomes possible, but Hengest thinks more of vengeance. Two Danes get away by sea to whet the Danes against Finn. A Danish fleet-army attacks and slays Finn. The Queen goes back to her native land with victors. We are not told what becomes of Hengest. His action is wise, but not heroic. By entering the service of their lord's slayer, the Danes do not carry out their obligation of avenging their lord's death, and thus the theme of sacrifice is violated, although they have no other choice and cannot honorably turn against Finn.

The helpless Queen makes a pathetic figure: husband and brother wage war against each other, the son and brother fall, but she can do nothing to keep her nearest and dearest from killing each other. The poet emphasizes her sorrow and her innocence. She does not deserve the fate that befalls her.

***Brunanburg**:* At Bruna borough King Athelstan of England and his brother Edmund fight and win a battle against an invading force of Scots and Vikings. The poem celebrates the occasion. The scop, after praising the two brothers and emphasizing the enemy's loss, praises the English army. A long part of the poem explains the triumphant homecoming of the two brothers. The significance is nationalism which goes beyond loyalty to the king. Here victory serves as an occasion for praise and the poem tends to become panegyric rather than heroic.

***Battle of Maldon**:* Old English scops could explain defeat better than victory. The scop of *Maldon* tells a tragic tale with high simplicity. The battle was fought and lost in 991 near Maldon. The hero is Byrhtnoth, the Earl of Essex, fighting the Viking invaders. We know from history that Byrhtnoth was a man of deep Christian piety.

The poet of Maldon is versed in heroic poetry, seems to have read Horner and Beowulf and is familiar with the traditional epic mannerisms, although the battle itself is of no particular importance. The Earl advises his men to be firm and heroic. The fight, like battles in the *Iliad,* takes the form of single combats. Over one fourth of the poem is made of speeches as those of the single combats in Homer.

The action of the poem can be divided into two parts: the course of the battle before (II. 1-184) and after (II. 185-325) the fall of Byrhtnoth. The English have the upper hand first (II. 1-94), but the Earl makes a tragic mistake by allowing the Vikings cross the river. Still the issue of the battle hangs in the balance (II. 96-184). The Earl is killed with a poisonous spear. His fatal mistake or tragic flaw grows out of his heroic spirit to which the enemy cunningly appeals. Godric, a coward, mounts on the hero's horse and flees. This misleads many. The scop sings of the loyal and the brave who stand by the hero. He glorifies the relationship of the hero and his retainers which gives rise to heroism.

Chapter 4
Old English Religions Poetry

For several decades in the seventh century it was uncertain whether the English would follow the Roman or the Celtic division of Christianity. The Celtic Church disclaimed the authority of Pope and permitted its clergy to marry.

The Synod of Whitby in 664 favored the Roman Catholic Church as the official religion of the English people. Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury from 669 to 690, gave the first united form of worship to England. Thus the decision at Whitby tied England to Europe. The earlier Scandinavian culture was largely abandoned in favor of the new Mediterranean culture. The wealth of knowledge brought by the new faith produced an Anglo-Saxon Renaissance. The Christian monasteries at Canterbury, York, Jarrow, etc. became the centers of knowledge and trained scholars like Bede and Boniface.

Christianity tempered the battle-hard Anglo-Saxons and weakened the warrior code. But religious poetry flourished. Since Latin was the official language of the church and the translation of the Bible was forbidden, religious poetry functioned as a bridge between the new faith and those people who did not know Latin.

Old English poets looked for Teutonic or Germanic values by which they lived. They did not forget the old values when Christianity introduced new ones. They supplemented Anglo-Saxon values with those of the new belief which they treated in the same epic terms. In employing the Old English alliterative poetry for Christian subjects, poets had to accept its formula and its heroic attitudes. Thus in the Old English religious poetry, Moses, Christ, and God are presented as Beowulf, performing heroic deeds.

Caedmon and His School

Caedmon and his poetic school flourished in Northumbria during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. A passage in Bede's *Church History of English People* tells of Caedmon who "did not learn the art of poetry from men, but from God." Caedmon, the first known poet in the

English language, was an untutored man in charge of the horses of the monastery at Whitby. One night he fled in embarrassment from a banquet hall where he was called upon to sing a song. He retired to the stable to sleep while his emotions were disturbed. A person appeared to him in his sleep and asked him to "Sing of the beginning of created beings." Thus he was given the divine gift of composing religious poetry. Bede's account seems questionable because such a happening is a recurrent theme in various cultures. Whether we believe Bede or not, Caedmon is the first known English poet. Since none of the poems attributed to Caedmon can be positively assigned to him (except the nine-line "hymn of Caedmon" quoted by Bede), it is preferable to call such poems Caedmonian.

Caedmon and his school wrote religious narrative poems drawn from the Bible. They took God for their theme and praised Him just as scops praise hero-kings. The main characteristics of Caedmon's school are paraphrasing and versifying Biblical stories and writing poems on Scriptural subjects. *Genesis, Exodus, Daniel; Christ and Satan,* and *Judith* are Caedmonian poems.

Genesis

Genesis is the longest Caedmonian poem, coming to 2936 lines. It seems to be a combination of two poems, *Genesis A* and *Genesis B,* by two poets. *Genesis B* (II. 235-851), which is interpolated into the manuscript, is a translation of a ninth-century Old Saxon poem, inserted perhaps to make the narrative continuous and complete. The author of *Genesis A* was perhaps a clerk. He followed St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate, and closely paraphrases his Biblical source. The author of *Genesis B* shows real narrative power and has received more attention from scholars. The Satan of *Genesis B* emerges with much of the insolence of Milton's Satan. Enraged at the prospect of humbling himself before a God whose supremacy he refuses to acknowledge, Satan boasts of his own strength and rouses his followers to rebellion much in the manner of a Teutonic hero-king rallying his thames. After being hurled with the rest of fallen angels into the fiery abyss of hell, Satan plots the overthrow of man and, like Milton's Satan, tempts Eve by playing upon her aspirations to divinity as well as by promising her dominion over her husband.

Genesis A opens with the praise of God followed by the description of the happy lot of

angels in heaven. With line 103 the story of the creation of the world and man begins. *Genesis B* deals with the fall of Satan and his followers. *Genesis A* follows the subsequent Biblical events through Abraham's offering of Isaac. The poet follows the tradition of the scops, not for matter but for stylistic devices and phraseology. Therefore, the battles of Genesis are described after the manner of the scops.

Exodus

The Caedmonian poem *Exodus* comes to 591 lines. It depicts, with more originality and strength than found in *Genesis,* the career of Moses as lawgiver and military leader. It begins with the Mosaic Law, gives an epitome of the career of Moses, and describes the events that led up to the departure of Hebrews from Egypt. Then the poet depicts the march of the Hebrews to the Red Sea, the Egyptian pursuit, the passage of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the Egyptian army.

The main action begins with Hebrews preparing to leave Egypt. After tracing their journey through various lands, the poem comes to the narrative climax of the tale, the crossing of the Red Sea by the Hebrews and the drowning of the Egyptian army. Moses speaks to his people about the joys of the future life, and the Hebrews raise their voices in thanksgiving to God who has delivered them.

The *Exodus* poet has boldly fused the Germanic and Christian elements. Moses possesses some of the characteristics of the Teutonic hero-kings. While no actual battle takes place, the poet skillfully creates tension by shifting from Hebrews to the advancing Egyptians and back to Hebrews. Moses prepares his men for combat and advises them to be courageous. Suddenly the poem jumps to climax by describing the dreadful battle, not between the opposing armies, but between the Almighty God and the forces of darkness. However, there are signs in *Exodus* that a fresh mind, more creative than Caedmon's, is at work.

The text of the 764-line poem called *Daniel* is divided into six fits. It covers the Hebrew history down to the war with Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, the story of the golden image which the king sets up and which the three Hebrew youths refuse to worship and are cast into a fiery furnace, but they are saved by an angel. The rescue story is repeated after the prayer of Azariah, one of those three youths. Then comes the song of the three children

in praise of God.

Daniel consists of two separate poems: *Daniel A* (c. 7(0) and *Daniel B* composed in the ninth century. Still the poem is left incomplete. The final episode in the poem describes Belshazzar's feast, but the manuscript breaks off as Daniel prepares to explain the mysterious handwriting on the wall.

The 733-line poem known as *Christ and Satan* is in three parts: a lament of the fallen angels, Christ's Harrowing of Hell, and Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Satan here has none of the heroic qualities of the Satan of *Genesis B.* He is portrayed as on abject self-pitying creature. When this enfeebled Satan tempts Christ in the wilderness, he receives a resounding curse that banishes him to an eternal hell.

The poet's interest lies, not in poetic devices, but in the rewards and punishments of the life to come, and he pictures these repeatedly to hammer home the moral: We should follow Christ, not Satan. The folly of choosing Satan's leadership is made quite explicit by the laments put in Satan's own mouth.

Cynewulf and His School

Cynewulf embedded his signature, in runic letters, in the texts of four poems: *The Fates of the Apostles, The Ascension, Juliana,* and *Elene.* The unsigned *poems-Guthlac, Phoenix, Andreas,* and *Dream of the Rood-were* certainly written by his followers.

Cynewulf's works reveal a degree of learning and literary sophistication not found among the Caedmonian poets. He drew his subjects not so much from the Bible as from the liturgy and from the saints' lives in which he incorporates marvelous incidents in which the hero undergoes fantastic tortures but miraculously escapes unharmed. The most distinctive feature of Cynewulfian poetry is its highly intricate use of images, symbols and allegories. Cynewulfians do not emphasize battle pictures so much as Caedmonians do. Female saints are prominent in Cynewulf while women do not appear elsewhere in Old English poetry. Cynewulf delights in natural scenery and he is concerned with ideas and emotions which give a subjective tone to his poetry, but he is not lyrical because the emotions are universal.

The Fates of Apostles is a short poem of 122 lines and perhaps the least effective of Cynewulf's four poems. He records briefly the life, works, and the death of each of the twelve

apostles. He names the places where the apostles taught and died. The poem has an epic opening, but art and craftsmanship yield to the soul's need. His runic signature is preceded and followed by a request that whoever reads the poem should pray for the safe passage of the poet's soul on its long journey to the unknown. He signs his poems, not out of vanity, but from a fervent hope that his readers might help him to attain salvation.

The Ascension (Christ II)*:* of the three-part Cynewulfian poem collectively known as *Christ,* scholars generally assign only the second part to Cynewulf. *Christ II* or *Christ B* is an artistic reworking of a homily on the Ascension composed by Pope Gregory. It covers the contrast between nativity and ascension, Christ's farewell to his followers, the ascension, the song of the angels, the appearance of the two angels to the disciples, the parting words of the two angels, the song of angels celebrating Christ's harrowing of hell and return to heaven with the redeemed souls, the plan of salvation, man's duty to thank God, the second coming, the destruction of the world, and the terrors of Doomsday.

In attempting to convey the rapture of the Ascension of Christ, Cynewulf employs some of his most dazzling images. Christ allegorically becomes a radiant bird who flies heavenward to the realm of angels and then swoops downward to inspire mankind on earth. Christ's redemption is symbolized as a series of six leaps: Incarnation, Nativity, Baptism, Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection. Cynewulf says that man also must leap to God. After incorporating his runic signature into a vivid account of the Last Judgement, Cynewulf concludes the poem with a beautiful metaphor envisioning life as a .ea journey in which the harbor is salvation and God's grace helps people to find safe anchor.

Juliana, a poem of 731 lines, is based on a Latin prose life of St. Juliana who lived during the reign of the Roman Emperor Maximian (305-11). Cynewulf depicts the torments and eventual martyrdom suffered by a beautiful Christian virgin who will not compromise her faith. Juliana wishes to keep her virginity, but her pagan father betrothes her to Heliseus, a pagan official who is in love with her. She refuses to marry him because he will not become a Christian. Her father turns her over to Heliseus for judgement.

Heliseus has her stripped, scourged, hanged on a tree by the hair and beaten for six hours. He throws her into prison where Satan visits her in angel form. She makes the Devil reveal the

secrets of deviltry. She is thrown into fire, but an angel saves her. She is immersed in a cauldron of boiling lead, but she is not hurt while 75 pagans are killed by the lead as it splashes. When all these afflictions have failed to break her spirit, she is beheaded. Meanwhile her fortitude has won many converts from the ranks of pagans who have witnessed her ordeals; and shortly after her burial, the cruel Heliseus is drowned in a furious storm at sea.

It is strange that beheading which was the normal form of execution kills Juliana whereas the various uncommon tortures leave her unharmed. One significance of the poem lies in the use of beautiful images. In the beautiful scene in which Satan is disguised as an angel, Satan pictures the soul of man as a besieged city. When he faces a person of strong faith, the Devil must flee to seek one who is "less bold" and can be ensnared easily. The great intrinsic power of the metaphor has appealed to many poets.

Elene, a poem of 1321 lines, is related to the legend of St. Helen (mother of Constantine) and the true cross. Constantine wins a battle by the sign of the true cross revealed to him in a dream and thus he becomes a Christian. He sends his mother Elene (Helen) to seek the burial-place of the true cross. Elene makes her way to Jerusalem by sea and land. She makes Judas, a Jew, agree to help her. They go to Calvary where God makes a sign and they find three crosses. The true cross is identified when it brings a dead man back to life. Judas is baptized and becomes the bishop of Jerusalem. He succeeds to find the nails by which Christ was fastened to the cross. The nails will be made into a bit for Constantine's horse. The poem ends with a passage on Doomsday.

The poem contains several moments of rare power. Cynewulf has breathed fresh life into the traditional battle scene. He also evokes a striking picture of Elene's sea crossing. The cross sparkles in the sky to give hope to Constantine, and the nails of the cross suddenly shine from the dark depths of the earth "like heavenly stars."

Elene is different from *Juliana* or the usual saint's life in that the interest is attached to a deed not linked with the saint's death. The saint takes usually a measure of passivity. Juliana is only subjected to suffering; she does not resist and prefers to suffer. It is not important whether she does anything or not; what is important is what happens to her. But Elene is heroic and belongs to the tradition of scops. However, by drawing on themes more pointedly poetic and

didactic, Cynewulf widens the scope of vernacular verse.

Cynewulfian poets wrote on kindred themes. Poems like *Guthlac, Christ I* and *II* and *The Dream of the Rood* do not include Cynewulf's signature and they are attributed to his school of religious poetry.

Guthlac treats the life and death of Guthlac, a native English saint who in 699 became a hermit in a desolate part of Lincolnshire. Assisted by a guardian angel, Guthlac resists the physical and spiritual assaults made upon him by demons who fail to destroy his faith.

Guthlac A praises the hermit's way of life and treats the saint's trials and triumphs. When physical affliction fails, the fiends try to destroy his confidence in the purity and integrity of the clergy. But Guthlac defends his brethren and shows a deep understanding of human weakness.

Guthlac B touches upon his triumph over the fiends, but the chief concern of the poem is with Guthlac's final sickness and death. The death scene is miraculously serene: a miraculous light floods the hermitage and shines upon his face.

Christ appears in three parts: *Christ II* or Ascension bears Cynewulf's signature. *Christ I* or *The Advent Lyrics* consists of eleven liturgical anthems celebrating the coming of Christ. There are lyrics portraying Christ as the cornerstone, God as the keeper of the keys of life, Jerusalem as the city of Christ where the souls of the righteous will find rest, and the Virgin Mary as the door through which Christ shall enter. In the middle of the lyrics there is a dialogue between Joseph and Mary considered as the first dramatic scene in English literature.

In *Christ III* the poet depicts Doomsday, the hot flames raging in a world deprived of light. Then the Cross is raised as the sign of God, bringing promise to these who believe and terror to sinful men.

The Dream of the Rood or the vision of the cross is the most exalted of the Cynewulfian poems, one of the best dream-visions. The dreamer beholds the towering Cross which addresses the poet and unfolds its history. When it was only a tree, it was cut down, carried to the hilltop and fastened firmly in the ground. Christ honored and inspired it when as a young soldier mounted to redeem mankind. Thus Christ is portrayed not as an agonized sufferer but as a fearless savior whose majesty shone bright against the darkness which eclipsed the whole universe in sorrow suggesting both tragedy and triumph.

The Cross recalls the dirges sung by the mourners and how Christ, still embracing the Cross, was flung into a pit. The Cross reveals how it was recovered and graced with treasures. It foretells the Second Coming.

The poet tells us that since the vision of the Cross, he has prayed earnestly to it which sustains him throughout the loneliness of the transitory life on earth, hoping that the Cross will transport him to heavenly kingdom of everlasting joy.

Chapter 5
Old English Prose

In the history of any nation's literature, prose as a form of conscious art has flourished much later than verse. The development of prose has nearly always been slower and more uncertain than that of poetry. In the history of English literature, we have to wait almost three centuries after the composition of *Beowulf* to get the first English prose work, and even a longer time before we find it fully articulate, and perhaps longer before we meet with prose that is a pleasure to read.

In the primitive age of a nation's literature, the prestige and magic of poetry act as a discouragement to prose. It is the poet who celebrates the great deeds of heroes and laments their misfortunes, who praise God or gods, who sing of love, honor, victory, and death.

The oral tradition in any nation's literature reveals one of the causes of the slow development of prose and the rapid development of poetry. Literature in primitive societies depended on human memories for its continuing existence. For most people it is much easier to recall and memorize an extended passage of verse than a corresponding piece of prose. In an age when the transmission of literature depended on the memory of scops and minstrels, it is not surprising that the great bulk of it should have been in verse. Wordsworth tells us that he composed his poems in open air and then went home to make a copy; and Boswell says that Samuel Johnson composed seventy lines of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* in one day "without putting one of them upon paper till they were finished." But prose has never been composed in this way because it is written by a writer hovering upon a blank page with a pen in his hand writing slowly, crossing and revising as he continues while Shakespeare never blotted a line, as somebody told Ben Jonson

In reading the Old English and even the Middle English prose writers, we find them constantly stumbling over obstacles, laboring along under every sort of difficulty, and frequently out of breath. Very often we come across slow, labored prose with loose and haphazard structure. After reading the rhythmical poetry of Chaucer, one cannot believe that Chaucer did

not know how to write a story in prose. It seems, however, that the prose writers were unaware of a fact that the organizing techniques of poetry actually belong to good prose. The division into paragraphs and parts, like the stanza form, influences the writer's thinking and makes him arrange his ideas in a lucid sequence. Techniques like lucidity, steady progress, and the mind continually looking forward and organizing the argument are characteristics of both poetry and good prose.

It is true that English was the language of daily communication in the Old English period, and Latin remained for a long time the language of serious composition in the fields of theology, biography, philosophy, and history. But many learned works were inevitably translated or paraphrased into English. Such translations encouraged the production of original prose in English. King Alfred should certainly be credited for the emergence of English literary prose.

Alfred the Great (840-901) was a hero both in peace and in war. He was not only a great warrior but a great administrator and scholar who devoted much of his time to the education of his people. His political and intellectual reform was designed to make Wessex the center of English culture and restore the past glory. He invited scholars to his court to help him plan an educational program for his people, a program that included the translation of important Latin works into English.

Alfred first translated or caused to translate Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* or *Pastoral Care* which, as its name suggests, emphasizes the teaching function and the duties of the clergy. Alfred's Preface to the *Pastoral Care* is the first significant prose in English. In the Preface, he recalls the former intellectual prestige of his country and deplores the decay of learning in his own time. He would, therefore, "translate some books which are most needful for all men to know into the language which we can all understand." He recommends further studies in Latin for those desiring a more advanced education.

Pastoral Care is a close translation of Gregory's book. Alfred benefitted from the help of four scholars whom he names in his preface. It is a literal translation with some Latinisms. But his later translations show great boldness in the treatment of the text, feeling free to omit and even insert whenever necessary.

In the fifth century many people considered Christianity responsible for the fall of Rome. Directed by Pope, Paulus Orosius, a Spanish priest of the fifth century, wrote *Historia Universalis* or *Universal History,* treating the fall of the seven great empires and refuting the contention that Christianity was responsible for the fall of Rome. Alfred condensed seven books of 236 chapters into six books of 84 chapters and inserted two fascinating pieces of geographical study: one by the Norwegian explorer Ohthere, who sailed the Arctic Ocean and the White Sea; the other by the traveler Wulfstan, who visited the regions of the Baltic. The translation is so free that it is almost a rewriting of Orosius whom Alfred did not feel necessary to follow closely.

The translation of Bede's *Church History* is significant only for being the first history of England in English. It is a slavish translation of Bede without Alfred's boldness in treating Latin texts. Either Alfred's respect for Bede made him follow Bede too closely or he had an insignificant role in the translation. Most of Bede's scholarly materials are left out, condensed or summarized while other parts are translated literally. Perhaps Alfred tried to make it fit his educational program.

Alfred translated *De Consolation Philosophiae* or the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, the sixth-century Roman philosopher. The book was the most influential work of philosophy in the Middle Ages displaying the Neoplatonism and Stoicism that Boethius was exposed to in Rome. Philosophy appears in the form of a woman to comfort Boethius in his prison cell explaining the knowledge of self (Book I), the fickleness of fortune (Book II), true happiness found only in God (Book III), how evil is punished and good rewarded (Book IV), and the harmony existing between free will and God's foreknowledge (Book V). Alfred divided the original five books into 42 chapters and after he had finished his prose rendering of Boethius, he made a verse rendering of most of the metrical parts of the work Therefore, we have two versions of the metrical parts of Boethius, one in prose and one in verse. The verse rendering depends on the prose, not on the original Latin text.

Alfred was not a conscious stylist and he was not trained in literary composition. Some of his passages are worthy of a skilled craftsman but, in general, neither his verse nor his prose is of great merit. He had no tradition of literary prose behind him to lean on, but his prose is

expressive of his great personality. His independence of his originals is remarkable and he gave prestige to prose composition that was neglected for centuries.

Soliloquia or *Soliloquy* of St. Augustine is the last Latin text rendered into English by Alfred and called *Blostman (Blossoms).* Alfred's version appears in three books. Book I, which is a close translation of Book I of *Soliloquia,* is a search for the presence of God through Faith, Charity, Hope, and Truth. Book II covers the immortality of the soul and consists of selections from Book II of Soliloquia. Book III, which is the maturest prose of Alfred, is a free translation of *De Vivendo Dei or Seeing God* and is related to Wisdom accompanying the soul in its afterlife.

Alfred's Preface to *Blostman* can be called an artistic piece of prose by a man who no longer sees any difference between prose and poetry. Alfred compares himself to a wood-cutter who has cut down and brought home what is needed for his people.

The *Old English Annals* or *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was probably initiated at Alfred's direction. It seems that he has made the best use of Bede's *Church History* which is followed for the early history of Britain. Entries start from (the invasion of Julius Caesar and extends to 1154, but the early ones are. historically of minor value until the reign of Alfred. The literary style of entries before the ninth century is not distinguished. Only in the entries related to the ninth, late tenth and eleventh centuries does the prose reach the level of narrative excitement.

Alfred as a pioneer and father of English prose prepared the ground for its development. **Aelfric**, the first abbot of Eynsham Abbey, distinguished himself as the first authentic prose writer in English. His purpose was literary distinction; he wanted to provide people with moral education founded upon the teaching of Christianity.

Aelfric translated the first seven books of the Bible into English and 120 *Homilies-in* three groups of forty each-translated "for those men who do not know Latin." The first two series are called *Homiliac Catholicae (Catholic Homilies*) and the third series is called *Passions Sanctorum, (Saints' Lives*), but these titles cannot be taken seriously because some saints' lives are included in his Catholic Homilies, and some homilies are included in his Saints' Lives. Although Aelfric is a great master of prose, the series differ in style. In the first series, alliteration is used to convey emotions and heighten the effect. In the second series, alliteration

is used more freely. In the third series, many passages are written in rhythmic alliterative prose which look" like verse. The rhythm plays on the emotions of the reader and any kind of audience making them believe what he says; it helps to gain not only artistic but emotional effect, what the Ciceronians have always been after.

Wulfstan, who became the Archbishop of York, is even more persuasive than Aelfric. Wulfstan's chief interests were practical rather than literary, but his fame rests upon his powers as a homilist who treats doctrinal matters in a spirit of ethical and religious reflection. But the main significance of his prose lies in his skillful use of thunderous rhetorical effects such as rhyme, repetition and alliteration. His *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos (Sermon Against English People)* is typical of his style. It is a passionate outpouring, a crushing attack upon the numerous sins of people. He pleads with his listeners to repent that they may not be consumed in the flames of hell.

The tenth and eleventh centuries are the classical period of English prose. Homiletic prose flourished and reached heights of achievement. Historical prose also flourished. Prose claimed and gained its proper position and role in literature but the Normans paralyzed English prose and poetry. They wasted the garden laid out by Alfred and brought to high cultivation by Aelfric a~ Wulfstan.

PART II:

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

Chapter 6
The Norman Conquest

The Norman Conquest of Britain which occurred in 1066 had a greater effect on the English language and literature than any other event in the course of the English history. If **William the Conqueror** had not succeeded in his claim to the English throne, the language would probably have pursued much the same course as the other Teutonic languages; i.e., retaining more of its inflections and preserving a Teutonic vocabulary, adding to its word-stock by word-formation and incorporating much less freely words from other languages. The Norman Conquest changed the whole course of the English language.

On the northern coast of France directly from England is a district extending some 75 miles back from the Channel and known as **Normandy**. It derives its name from the bands of Northmen who settled there in the ninth and tenth centuries. At the same time similar bands were settling in the north and east of England. A generation after Alfred, England reached an agreement with the Northmen. A somewhat similar understanding was reached between Rollo, the leader of the Danes in Normandy, and Charles the Simple, the king of France. In 912 the right of the Northmen to occupy this part of France was recognized; Rollo acknowledged the French king as his overlord and became the first Duke of Normans. In the following 150 years a succession of masterful dukes raised the dukedom to a position of great influence, overshadowing at times the power of the French king. Readily adopting the ideas and customs of the French, the Normans soon absorbed the most important elements of the French civilization. They profited by their contact with the French military forces and, adding French tactics to their own courage, soon had one of the best armies in Europe. They took important features of Frankish law, including the idea of the jury, and made it one of the outstanding legal systems of the world. They accepted Christianity and began the construction of those great Norman cathedrals that are still marvels to the modem architect; they soon gave up their own language

and learned French. So rapidly did the old Scandinavian tongue disappear in Normandy that the second duke was forced to send his son to Bayeux that he might learn something of the speech of his forefathers. In the eleventh century, at the time of the Norman Conquest, the civilization of Normandy was essentially French, and the Normans were among the most advanced and progressive of the nations of Europe.

For some years before the Norman Conquest the relations between England and Normandy had been fairly close. In 1002 **Aethelred** had married a Norman wife, and when driven into exile by the Danes, took refuge with his brother-in-law, the Duke of Normandy. His son **Edward**, who had thus been brought up in France, was almost more French than English. When in 1042 the Danish line died out and Edward, known as the Confessor, was restored to the throne from which his father had been driven, he brought with him a number of his Norman friends, enriched them, and gave them important positions in the government. A strong French atmosphere pervaded the English court during the 24 years of his reign.

When in January 1066, after a reign of 24 years Edward the Confessor died childless, England was again faced with the choice of a successor. At his succession Edward had found England divided into a few large districts, each under the control of a powerful earl. The most influential of these nobles was Godwin, the earl of West Saxon. He was a shrewd, capable man who became Edward's principal advisor, and he was the actual ruler of England until his death. His son Harold succeeded to his title and influence, and during the last 12 years of Edward's reign he exercised a firm and capable influence over national affairs. The day after Edward's death Harold was elected king.

William, the Duke of Normandy at this time, was a second cousin to the late king. While his relationship did not give him any right of inheritance to the English throne, he had nevertheless been living in expectation of becoming Edward's successor. Edward seems to have encouraged him in this hope. Even Harold had been led to acknowledge his claim. Having on ~ occasion fallen into William's hands, he had been forced to swear, at the price of his freedom, not to become a candidate or oppose William's election. But the English had had enough of French favorites, and when the time came Harold did not consider himself bound by his former pledge.

Only by force could William hope to obtain the crown. An armed invasion of England was difficult, but William was an exceptionally able man, from infancy he had surmounted difficulties. He was not a man to give up a kingdom without a struggle. He secured the cooperation of his troops by the promise of liberal rewards, came to terms with his rivals and enemies on the continent, and appealed to the Pope for the sanction of his enterprise and received the blessing of the church. Consequently, the ambitious, the adventurous, and the greedy came to his help from all over France and even other parts of Europe. In September 1066 he landed on the south coast of England with a formidable force.

His landing was unopposed. Harold was occupied in the north of England meeting an invasion by the king of Norway, another claimant to the throne, who had been joined by a brother of Harold's (Tostig) returning from exile. Hardly had Harold triumphed in battle over the invaders when he was informed of William's landing. The news was not unexpected, but the English were not fully prepared for it. William's invasion had been delayed, and with the coming of the harvest season many of those whom Harold had assembled a few months before in anticipation of an attack, had been sent home. Harold was forced to meet the invader with such forces as he had. Hurrying south with his army, Harold reached a point between the Norman host and London. He drew up his forces on a broad hill not far from Hastings, and awaited William's attack. The battle began about nine o'clock in the morning. Harold's position was advantageous and the English defended themselves very well. Since William could not drive them off, he determined to try to lure them off and ordered a feigned retreat. The English fell into the trap, thinking the Normans were really fleeing, a part of the English army started in pursuit, but the Normans made a stand and the battle was renewed. Harold was suddenly pierced in the eye by a Norman arrow. His death was instantaneous. Two of his brothers had already fallen. Confusion spread and the English were soon in full retreat. When night fell they were fleeing in all directions, seeking safety under the cover of darkness, and William was left in possession of the field.

While William had won the **Battle of Hastings**, he had not yet attained the English crown. It was only after he had burnt and pillaged the southeast of England that the citizens of London decided that further resistance would be useless. On Christmas day, 1066, William was crowned

king of England. His possession of the throne was a matter of conquest attended by all its consequences of which one was the introduction of a new nobility. Many of the English higher class had been killed on the field at Hastings. Those who escaped were treated as traitors, and the places of both alike were filled by William's Norman followers.

Thus the old English nobility was practically wiped out. In 1072 one of the 12 earls in England was an English man, and he was executed four years later. Norman prelates were gradually introduced into all important positions in the church. Norman monks and priests occupied the monasteries. Numerous castles were built, all garrisoned by Norman troops. Norman barons surrounded by Norman retainers and Norman merchants and craftsmen settled in England.

For 200 years after the Norman Conquest, French remained the language of ordinary intercourse among the upper classes. Before long the distinction between those who spoke French and those who spoke English was no longer racial but social. The language of masses, however, remained English. As long as the Anglo-Normans held continental territory and were united to the continent by ties of property and kindred, a real reason existed for the continued use of the French language and literature among the governing class in England. The first link in the chain binding England to the continent was broken in 1204 when **King John** lost Normandy. John fell in love with and married Isabel who was formally betrothed to Hugh, the head of a powerful and ambitious family. To make matters worse John attacked them. They appealed for redress to their common overlord, the king of France. Philip summoned John (1202) to appear before his court in Paris and answer the charges against him. John said that as king of England he was not subject to the jurisdiction of the French court. Philip replied that as Duke of Normandy he was. On the day of trial John did not appear, and the court declared his territory confiscated according to feudal law. Philip proceeded at once to carry out the decision of the court and invaded Normandy. In 1204 Normandy was lost to the English crown.

The loss of Normandy was advantageous. The king and nobles were now forced to look upon England as their first concern. Those who had estates on both sides of the Channel were compelled to give up one or the other for according to Philip nobody could serve two lords (1244). The growing feeling of antagonism culminated in a long period of open hostility with

France (1337-1453) called The Hundred Years' War. Thus the important factor, the king of England being the Duke of Normandy, was removed.

The Appearance of Middle English Language

After the Norman Conquest, the new ruling class continued using their own language and made no effort to learn English. For almost two centuries French remained the official language and since it was a mark of social distinction, some English natives found it to their advantage to learn French. English remained the language of masses, the socially inferior class.

In the period up to 1200 the attitude of the king and the upper classes toward the English language and literature may be characterized as one of simple indifference. William was more closely attached to his dukedom than to the country he governed by the right of conquest. Not only was he buried in Normandy, but at his death he gave Normandy to his eldest son and England to his second son. He and his sons were in France for about half of their reigns. Except Henry I, all married Norman wives. This constant going and coming made the continued use of French not only natural but inevitable. French enjoyed popularity in England until the English came to realize that they were speaking the language of the enemy. The improvement in the condition of the masses; the Plague (1348-49) 911ed the Black Death which killed 30 percent of the lower class people and resulted in a serious shortage of labor and rise in wages; farmers leaving the land in search of high wages; and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 all contributed to the rise of the middle class and their language. English once more became the official language and its literature flourished in the middle of the 14th century.

The most significant effect of the Norman Conquest consisted in the impact it had upon the structure and future of the English language, and it led to an expansion of the literary potentialities. Spelling, pronunciation, and grammar changed between Old and Middle English. Some of the changes have been in the direction of simplicity, e.g., the loss of inflections. But the most prominent feature of Middle English was its new and enlarged vocabulary. Besides additional prefixes and suffixes, more than 10,000 French words found their way into the English language.

Chapter 7
Medieval Thought

The Middle Ages that is often considered to be static is, like many other periods, full of contradictions. Brutality and sentimentalism, luxury and self-denial, coarseness and refinement flourished simultaneously. Some poets like to picture Fortune at her turning wheel exerting influence in the manner of the Anglo-Saxon Ward. Yet it was possible for the medieval men to believe that the universe was governed by God's just laws. Beneath the very real chaos of his worldly existence he could perceive order and beauty.

The Christian view of the universe permeates the best Medieval works. In medieval Christianity God (Himself absolute perfection) placed Adam and Eve in a world where they enjoyed abundant satisfaction, including closeness to God. But Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator and, as a consequence of their sin, were expelled from Eden. Their descendants, sharing the guilt and tile punishment, were denied Paradise; man was required to work until he died.

In this world man is wearied by the incessant pursuit of an ever fugitive satisfaction. His earthly attainments (wealth, power, pleasure) pale into insignificance when compared to the higher delight that comes from closeness to God. What man thinks of as pain in this life has no significance when he considers the endless bliss of heaven. But even if man in his mortal life gains the wisdom to renounce the empty values of the world, his vision of God is partial. Here he acquires a knowledge of God through His works and His glorious gifts, but he does not see God face to face and cannot understand the operations of His providence.

The sin of disobedience whereby Adam and all humanity fell from the state of grace was so great an offence that Christ (God's infinite love) offered himself as a sacrifice. If an individual reciprocates Christ's love through obedience of God's commandments and if he accepts the teachings of the Church, he will attain salvation. It will be his privilege in the next world to achieve the full felicity missing on earth. Thus this life becomes a school which prepares man for the everlasting life.

Just as God expressed the unity of the cosmic order, so the king was widely regarded as the natural expression of the unity of the social order. Although the right of the people to seek redress from tyrannical oppression was often questioned, the king was expected to fulfill his obligation to God and to his subjects.

The commanding position of the medieval king is illustrated in the system of feudalism that William the Conqueror introduced into England. He rewarded his followers with the land of displaced English nobles, but these lands remained in his jurisdiction. The lord held the estates in perpetuity so long as they furnished the king with knights, young men trained to fight on horseback. The lords could meet their military commitments by similarly subinfeudating part of their estates to lesser nobles in return for military service. This vassalage continued down the social scale. The serfs were obliged to provide physical labor on the manor of their immediate lord in exchange for food, protection from external enemies, and justice within the estate on which they lived. Each member of this hierarchy from king to serf, had definite responsibilities which, as a Christian, he could not renounce, and medieval literature is frequently concerned with clarifying these duties.

The profound respect for kingship, which characterized the Middle English period had its roots in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of comitatus. The feudal king (like the Germanic hero-king) expected devotion from his subjects. The only difference is that the Anglo-Norman kings rewarded their Norman retainers and expected devotion from all people. However, sanctity of the crown remained the ideal political and social order well into the Renaissance and became an integral part of the philosophy of kingship underlying the plays of Shakespeare.

Another focus of medieval loyalty was chivalry and courtly love. Knighthood, initially a practical means of supplying cavalrymen for the king's war, was eventually glamorized into an elegant ideal called, after the French chevalier, "chivalry." It was not enough for the true knight to be merely a capable horseman. He was expected, like the knight in Chaucer, to exemplify courage, generosity, piety, and above all, courtesy. In theory Chivalry was identified with virtue; and later, with increasing emphasis placed upon the protection of the weak, the Chivalric ideal became as compelling in peace as in war. By 1300 Chivalry had receded into a golden memory. Nevertheless, some of its values influenced writers throughout the Middle Ages and (in

modified form) contributed to the Renaissance concept of the courtier and the gentleman. The religious implications of Chivalry are constantly stressed in the Middle English literature. Sir Gawain, the hero of one of the greatest medieval romances, is a Christian knight, courageous, courteous, and deeply pious.

One development associated with Chivalry and medieval romances is the doctrine known as "**courtly love**" based on late 11th and 12th century love lyrics of the Troubadours in Provence (southern France), lyrics that have eastern sources. In courtly love conventions a lover must obey his mistress and be must love her eternally. Love comes with the first sight and is ennobling. The true lover is required to worship at the shrine of a beautiful lady. She, in return, inspires him to perform acts of courtesy on behalf of all womanhood. Courtly love conventions, which have a bearing upon medieval literature, especially the romances, will be discussed later. It is a controversial matter and some writers, e.g., Malory, have emphasized the destructive force of courtly love.

Chapter 8
Some Characteristics of Middle English Literature

Literature produced in different phases of Middle English period (1066-1485) is so various and inconsistent that any kind of generalization is dangerous. Chaucer, the greatest English poet before Shakespeare, lived and wrote in the Middle English period which also produced poems that lack literary significance. It is convenient to distinguish four different periods with different characteristics or use the term medieval literature for the years 1066 to 1350 and 1400 to 1485. The four different phases can be listed as:

1.1066-1250: The period of religious records or Anglo-Norman literature

2.1250-1350: The period of religious and secular literature

3.1350-1400: The period of great individual writers or alliterative revival

4.1400-1485: Imitative period, transition period, Pre-Renaissance, or the period of the followers of Chaucer

Some of the medieval writings produced in the latter part of the 14th century, especially the works of Chaucer, are of great literary significance. The epithet "infra-literary" often attached to Middle English literature may be true only of the works produced in other medieval periods, especially 1066 to 1350. Any kind of generalization concerning the characteristics of the Middle English literature must exclude the period of the great individual writers.

Middle English literature in the first 300 years is **imitative**, **repetitive**, **infra-literary**, and **anonymous**. It lacks originality which was not required. The lack of originality was because so many writers tried to reflect the principles of the medieval Christian doctrine. Until the beginning of the 15th century Christian teaching was concerned with personal salvation, laying no emphasis on ethical and social responsibilities. The emphasis was on the world-hating doctrine. To the medieval people the reformation of this world was neither possible nor desirable and they looked to the next world as an answer to man's miseries and troubles. Many

writers advised Christians to endure this world, not try to reform it. Time seems to stand still because of the growth of feudalism, and other social changes were too slow in the lower orders of the society to produce intellectual awareness. Besides, plague, war, famine, and death made people think of the world to come. It does not mean that they didn't enjoy it more than we do. The medieval society was more primitive than ours, even childlike. They were subject to emotional extremes: weeping and laughing more quickly than we do, quick to sin and repent very soon and then sin and repent again. Thus the church had an important place in medieval life which was considered as a means to the next, full of the fear of hell and the desire for the salvation of the soul. Religious writings are, therefore, the most common part of the early medieval literature. Even when religion is not concerned, there is explicit moral purpose. Even in lyric poetry there is the will to teach. Therefore, medieval literature is didactic. In such an age we cannot expect heroic poems like *Beowulf.* The heroic age was ended; there were no English hero-kings, but Norman kings indifferent to books which they could not read. Thus writing in English was paralyzed for three centuries but not dead. Continuity with the past went on through copying, modernizing, and translating the manuscripts of the Old English poems. In this period much that is important in medieval French literature was produced in England, while the English writings were for their souls' need.

To the medieval people God's greatness was manifest throughout his created universe. Consequently some authors, for figurative purposes, spoke of the world as a symbol. By the visible forms and motions of everyday life could spiritual mysteries be expressed. The red rose, for example, was a convenient figure for the blood of the martyrs; the 12 months could be used to represent the apostles and the pelican, which was believed to feed its young with its own blood, could serve as a poetic analogy with Christ's love for man. As in *Pearl, Piers Plowman, Everyman,* and Chaucer, symbolism and its partner 'allegory' could be vastly enriching. In Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1307-21) the poet's journey stands symbolically for the gradual ascent of mankind to the divine presence and the seat of grace.

The bulk of the extant Middle English literature is concerned, explicitly or implicitly, with the problem of sin and redemption. One insistent theme recurs: the vanity and treachery of this transitory world as opposed to the perfect bliss of the world to come. Death is seen not as an

affliction, but rather as the culmination of a long journey-the release from all the shortcoming attendant upon man in his mortal state and the deliverance into eternal joy.

English literature in the period following the Norman Conquest is in three languages: Latin, French, and English. Latin, as in the Old English period, was not only the language of learning but the vernacular of the learned. A large body of poetry written in England was in French and constituted for over 200 years the literary entertainment of the English court. With regard to what was written in English we can distinguish between what was written for the aristocratic class and what was intended for common people by the language in which it was written. Middle English literature is quite class conscious with numerous works intended for the ignorant. A great part of Middle English literature, for whatever class intended, is derivative and imitative. English poets adopted the themes and fashions of French literature. All through the 13th and much of the 14th centuries English literature was constantly indebted to French originals and followed French models. Even a British legend like that of King Arthur reached English romance not directly from the Celts but through the French romances. The general character of the Middle English literature can be understood if we recognize its tri-lingual form, its class distinctions, and its general indebtedness to French sources and models. Thus, judged by modem standards, much of the early medieval English literature is infra-literary.

Chapter 9
Middle English Literature 1066-1350

For Their Souls' Need

Works like *Poema Morale* and *Ormulum* are typical examples of English poetry in the period of Religious Records when the French rhyming fashion began to come into Middle English religious and didactic verse. *Poema Morale* or *Moral Ode* (c. 400 lines) is a late twelfth-century versified sermon written in the same rhyme as the Ormulum but it has certain vigor and some signs of personal feeling that are lacking in the *Ormulum.* This versified homily is of importance to literary history because it employs for the first time in English the "fourteeners", a fourteen-syllable or seven-foot iambic line that was frequently used during the Renaissance. The poet preaches a sermon on the theme of repenting before it is too late.

It surveys the poet's life; he regrets his spiritual deficiencies, recommends holy living, paints Doomsday and the terrors and torments of Hell, and he concludes with a joyful picture of Heaven. There is some note of Cynicism in the opening lines: Whoever trusts too much in wife or child instead of thinking of his own spirituality is in danger of missing salvation and he will soon enough be forgotten by his friends and relatives. The rich think to find safety in wall and ditch, but he who sends his treasure to Heaven need have no fear of fire or thief. Repent now because when Death is at the door, it is too late to cry for mercy. There is no virtue in hating evil when you cannot do evil any more.

All the terrors of Hell which the Middle Ages knew are described in contrast with the joy which the blessed experience in Heaven. The wicked are enumerated in detail: those who made vows to God and did not keep them, who led their lives in war and strife, who lied, cheated, persecuted poor men, etc. The poet ends with an exhortation to choose the narrow and difficult road which few follow. The poem is addressed to "simple men and poor" and is one of the numerous 12th-centwy poems addressed to the poor, and similarly deals with the usual medieval religious commonplaces. There is nothing new in the poem and the poet acknowledges his debt

to other religious works, but he has presented his material in a new way and the poem offers learned advice.

If the *Ormulum* (c. 1200) had been preserved in its entirety, it would have reached the amazing length of 150,000 lines. We have only about an eighth of it, some 20,000 lines. The poet was called Orm of Ormin which is a Scandinavian name. In the dedication addressed to Walter, his brother, Orm says that they were both members of the same religious order. He asks Walter to examine every verse and see that it contains nothing contrary to true belief. It tells us he has attempted to explain to ignorant people most of the gospels that are read in the Mass throughout the year, but he has gone beyond the gospels and included parts from Acts of the Apostles. His method is to begin with a paraphrase of a Biblical passage and then to explain it in details. He has arranged the texts in a chronological order, giving us the life of Christ in a series of episodes with homiletic interpolations.

As a poem the *Ormulum* has no literary value. It is very tedious and Orm explains the obvious at painful length without making the thought advance. He repeats himself without changing even the phrase. Its significance lies in the fact that it is a document valuable in the cultural history showing the literary taste of the humble classes. The poem is also a revelation of human personality, the personality of a man of serious nature who follows his laborious task with devotion and complete conviction. Orm is never in doubt about the importance of his mission and he is determined to be clear even to the dullest mind, because souls are at stake. He devises a new system of spelling, and thus becomes the first spelling reformer. We are touched by his piety and unselfishness, but we are irritated by his insistence upon little things of no importance. We admire his piety and remember him but we have neither time nor patience to read his boring poem which teaches us nothing.

The Harrowing of Hell: Christ's descent into Hell to release the souls of the worthy who had died before his coming was a popular religious theme throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. The framework of the *Harrowing of Hell* (c. 1250) is narrative, but after a forty-line introduction, the account proceeds entirely by means of dialogue in which Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, John the Baptist, and Moses call upon Christ and their claims are acknowledged. There is no heroic action and no battle between Christ and Satan.

Debate Poems

The Body and the Soul marks the beginning of medieval poetry based on vision or dream. The poet, lying in bed, sees a marvelous vision: the Body of a proud knight is lying on a bier. As the Soul of the dead man is about to depart, it pauses and looks at the Body and calls it foul. Now both Body and Soul shall suffer the pains of Hell. The Body answers that it was the Soul's business to keep it from evil. The Soul says, "Body, be still! Who taught you all this wit? Both of us shall answer for misspent life at Doomsday. You have paid no heed to God. Now you are loathsome to see; nobody would kiss you; your friends would flee if they saw you coming down the street." The Body's rejoinder is that it did nothing without the Soul; it would have been better off without a soul, like a dumb beast conscious of no hereafter. The Soul denies that it had any influence upon the Body after its childhood, and the Body argues that more strict discipline in youth would have saved it. The Soul weeps and repents. It denies charges of the Body's wilful ways. Finally the Body laments its past life, but, as the Soul says, it is too late. Repentance is futile after death. The fiends of hell come to take it away. There is a terrifying description of the tortures inflicted by the devils on the unhappy soul. The dreamer awakes in a cold sweat because of the scene which he had witnessed. The poem has some considerable merits, but the motive is still the same: to write something "for their souls' need." The poet urges the sinners to repent while there is still time.

The Owl and the Nightingale

The poet wanders into a secluded valley and overhears a violent quarrel between two birds. Each claims to be the better singer and the more useful servant of man. The solemn owl Objects to the daylight twittering of the nightingale:

Better than thou I sing at least;

Thou chatter like an Irish priest.

The pleasure loving nightingale cannot stand the melancholy hooting of the owl

You sing like a hen in snow

Where all she sings is the song of woe.

The owl accuses the nightingale of encouraging love and fostering lust through her sensual music which teaches "shame, adultery, and evil fame." Both are angered and hurt. The

nightingale says that she is proud of singing of love, a delightful experience which is beyond the comprehension of the owl, but it is chaste love between husband and wife that she would extol. It is not her fault if others pervert her beautiful song to evil purposes. Moreover, she is skeptical of the claim of wisdom of which the owl is bragging. The owl gets so puffed up with rage that she looks as if she had swallowed a frog. There is the threat of actual battle, but a tiny wren intervenes as peace-maker and the birds agree to seek judgement from Master Nicholas de Guildford (The poet? His friend?) but the debate is not resolved.

Most of the poem is a dramatic dialogue between the two birds. The debate begins dramatically as an exchange of abuse. Instead of fighting they agree to argue. The argument is satiric and meaningful. Both birds are judicially balanced against each other. The language is conversational and the poem is in octasyllabic couplets adapted from French or Latin. The wisdom of the poem is not a clerkly one but that of a broad human experience. The birds in this beautiful poem are not merely ill-tempered birds; they are embodiments or symbols of self-denial and pleasure, of philosophy and art, of religious poetry and love poetry, of contemplative life and active life, of Christian values and sensuality, of the two ways of life: the monastic and secular, of didactic poetry and amorous poetry, etc. Whatever the allegorical intention, it is clear that the author delighted in the dramatic quality of the poem and his main interest lies in giving life and spirit to a conventional form. The poet displays a lively mind, an expert command of metrics and a superb sense of comedy. The poem suggests that there was a significant native English literary tradition that may have been enriched by contact with Normans.

Proverbs of Alfred (35 sayings, 600 lines) belongs to didactic literature. Although Alfred the Great was a man of many and varied accomplishments, there is no evidence that he had anything to do with the popular collection of early Middle English sayings that enjoyed the prestige of his name. The *Proverbs of Alfred* contains advice on a variety of matters practical and philosophical, including how to choose and manage a wife, bring up children, live a good Christian life, and the like; the king or ruler should be learned; etc. They are more secular than religious. Metrically they are of some interest because both alliteration and rhyme are used and thus the poem represents a transitional stage between Old English and Middle English verse.

Chapter 10
The Period of Great Individual Writers (Alliterative Revival)

Alliteration which had been an indispensable device of the Old English poets was largely supplanted by rhyme after the Norman Conquest, but it never entirely disappeared from English prosody. Alliterative revival was no less extraordinary in quality than in quantity, for it included four poems *(Morte Arthur, Sir Gawain, Pearl, and Piers Plowman)* that must be numbered among the greatest achievements of the Middle English period. Chaucer who did not write alliterative verse and preferred rhyme lived and wrote in the same period.

The Alliterative Morte Arthur (c. 1360)

After enjoying an artistically fruitful period in Germany and France, Arthurian romances flourished in England in the 14th century. Of such romances only two are of great importance: one of these is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight;* the other is the alliterative *Morte Arthur,* so called to distinguish it from a less important stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. The alliterative *Morte Arthur* served as one of the sources for Malory's work.

The anonymous poet of the alliterative *Morte Arthur* generally dispenses with the romance world and magic, the inevitable ingredients of earlier Arthurian chronicles and romances. He creates instead an epic world of flesh-and-blood heroes who act and feel like real human beings. When Sir Gawain is going to fight against the forces of the treacherous Mordred, one seems to be in the world of *Beowulf.* When this noblest of Arthur's warriors is slain, the evil Sir Mordred knows an instant of remorse. Praising Sir Gawain as " the most gracious man that under God lived," Mordred weeps bitterly that it was his fate to have killed him. And Arthur, too, feels the epic grief of a Hector or an Achilles as he clasps the dead Gawain in his arms and senses that his own doom is forthcoming:

"Alas!" said Sir Arthur, "now my sorrow increases!
I am utterly undone within my own lands;

O'doubtful dread death, thou dwellest too long!
Why drawest thou on so slowly? Thou drownest my heart!"
Then faints the sweet king, and swoon falls down,
Staggers up swiftly, and lovingly kissed him,
Until his burly beard was berun with blood...
His bold heart had burst for sorrow at that moment. (11. 3%5-74) Arthur is not a supernatural being, but a mortal hero of exceptional magnitude. The "Avalon" in which he is buried is no land of fairies; it is in English Glastonbury, and he is buried according to Christian law. The poem ends with a tribute to Arthur as a Kinsman of Hector of Troy.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The story is very ancient and there are analogues in both early Celtic and French documents. But all that we can say for certain is that the story was widely dispersed and may have been of remote Celtic origin.

At the start of the poem, Arthur is beginning his Christmas revels at Camelot on New Year's Day when a huge figure, dressed all in green and on a green horse, intrudes into this ambit of joy. He lays down a challenge, and as a result Gawain strikes off his green head with an axe. The severed head tells Gawain that he must repair to the Green Chapel a year hence for a return blow.

The cycle of the year passes. Gawain gears himself and sets off for the Green Chapel. He travels over rough country in wintry weather until Christmas Eve, when he comes to a castle and breaks his journey for rest. He is welcomed by the lord of the castle, who has a fair young wife accompanied by an old and hideous lady of high status. After Christmas rejoicing, the lord goes hunting with his retainers while Gawain spends this period in his chamber, recuperating his energies for the promised meeting with the Green knight. The lord and his guest have agreed to exchange each other's daily earnings. On each of these three days, while her husband is out hunting, the lady goes to Gawain's chamber and tempts his constancy, courtesy, and chastity. Gawain survives the test well and receives no more than a kiss on the first day, which he gives to the lord in return for the buck he has killed. The next evening Gawain receives a slain bear and faithfully returns two kisses. In the third evening he receives an old fox for the three kisses

he had received, but he breaks the bargain since he fails to give the green girdle which the lady had given him under a pledge of secrecy, and which she says will protect him in his encounter with the Green knight.

Gawain resumes his journey. He has the help of a guide for part of the way. The Green Chapel turns out to be nothing but a mound with a bubbling spring nearby. The Green knight appears with his axe, and his third blow inflicts a slight graze which draws blood. The Green knight then discloses himself as identical with the lord who had entertained Gawain. The old woman at the castle was Morgan de Fey who has urged the original apparition in Camelot a year ago to spite Guinevere, Arthur's wife. Gawain refuses further invitation from the Green knight and returns to Arthur's court. He gives a, faithful account of his adventures to Arthur, and gets some delight~ laughter for his pains. From that day, all Arthur's knights wear green girdles as a commemoration of Gawain's adventure with the Green knight.

This outstanding Arthurian romance in English is built upon the physical and moral ordeal undergone by Sir Gawain, knight of rare courage and purity. The hero emerges from his chivalrous test with one blemish upon an otherwise spotless character.

When the hero enters the castle the temptation motif enters the story. While Bercilak is away at the hunt, his beautiful wife exercises all of her abundant charms in an effort to seduce Sir Gawain. On the third day as the hour of his departure for the Green Chapel draws nearer, Sir Gawain suffers a lapse-a lapse not of manners, but of courage. He accepts from the lady a silk girdle which he believes will protect him in his encounter with the Green knight and conceals the gift from Bercilak. When Gawain reaches the Green Chapel, the Green knight's first two blows do nothing to Gawain because he resisted the first two temptations but the third blow nicks him slightly as a visible mark of the tiny break in his moral armor. Morgan de Fay had wanted to test the true mettle of the Knights of the Round Table.

The hunting exploits of the Green Knight are structurally related to the temptations of Sir Gawain. On the first day Bercilak hunts the deer, an animal described in medieval hunting treatises as a noble game-wise, quick to foreknow hazards and avoiding embarrassing situations. These are precisely the qualities that Sir Gawain displays in the face of temptation on the first day. The bear, the second day's game, is also a noble game, renowned for boldness and ferocity

in conflict. Gawain is also bold in facing the second temptation. The fox, the third day's game enjoys a reputation for duplicity; it makes a false turn and, fearing for his life, makes an instinctive moment of avoidance. All these have close affinities with Gawain's sly, fear-inspired behavior of the third day.

The *Gawain* poet is not only an accomplished storyteller but also a great scene painter. He uses scenery to suggest Gawain's mental state. While Gawain waits for his year to elapse before his going to Green Chapel, the four seasons come and go with amazing rapidity-an apt reflection of the speed with which time would pass for one anticipating almost certain death. The dreariness of Gawain's situation (he does now know whether the Virgin protects him or not) is further reinforced by the freezing weather that afflicts him on the long road.

The principal distinction of *Sir Gawain* is the vitality of its two leading characters. The poet succeeds in making the Green Knight a figure both terrifying and comic. At his appearance in Camelot, Arthur's knights "sat stone-still ... in swooning silence.· The poet adds that the formidable stranger happened to be green; his skin, hair, beard, armor, horse, and axe are green. The one startling exception was his bright red eyes. Asked whether he has come to do battle, the Green knight answers contemptuously that he cannot condescend to fight such beardless babes. as are in Arthur's retinue. But he lays down his challenge. Upon receiving Gawain's mighty blow he calmly gets his bloody head from the floor, where it has been kicked around for a while, holds it aloft by the hair, restates the terms of the contract, and rides off into the night.

Sir Gawain himself is almost unique in medieval romance: he is an ideal knight who is not fearless and a champion of purity who is never dehumanized into an abstraction. With touching simplicity the poet indicates the deep spirituality of the young knight during the lonely progress to mysterious rendezvous. Painted upon his shield is a five-pointed star, a symbol of his whole-hearted commitment to Christian piety. The star stands for his five faultless wits, his five strong fingers, his being conscious of the five wounds of Christ, his absorption in the five joys of Mary, his five supreme virtues, etc. When he prays for protection, it is not a prayer for victory, but a request for some lodging where he might worship and hear mass. In the temptation scenes Gawain holds firm to the moral values of Christianity. He manages to preserve his chastity without ever being discourteous to his alluring hostess. He is thus a perfect knight who realizes

that it is more important, if he is faced with a choice, to be a good Christian. Yet Gawain is not perfect. In accepting the magic girdle, he fails to display sufficient faith in his own physical and spiritual resources and in the bounty of his God. His second error is to conceal the gift from Bercilak. These are human weaknesses, but weaknesses nevertheless. Gawain's courage fails him when he dodges like the fox beneath the raised axe of his opponent. He is spared for his head is not replaceable. Yet he insists on retaining the girdle as a constant reminder of his frailty.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a perfect work of art, a romance in which plot, setting, characterization, and theme are controlled and integrated. It meets the requirements of the medieval romance for idealization while it remains firmly rooted in the realities of human feeling and conduct. It fulfills a serious moral purpose (the glorification of Christianity, courage, and truth) without ceasing to be an entertainment. It is the best Arthurian romance whose main contrast is between the social joys of the court and the savagery of nature's winter, careless of human needs.

Pearl

Pearl (101 rhymed and alliterative stanzas; 1200 lines) is quite different from *Sir Gawain.* It is more personal and private, less social. The poet explains how a lovely pearl slips from his hands into .the grass and is lost in the ground. In his grief he often visits the place which covers his pearl. One August day he fall asleep and in a dream-vision he finds himself wandering in an earthly paradise in which his pearl is transfigured to a heavenly pearl.

For a long time the poem was considered as a mere peB0nal elegy, with the pearl representing the bereaved poet's two-year-old daughter'. Most modem readers interpret the poem as a religious allegory: the pearl symbolizing purity, and the experience of the dreamer being parallel to the mystic's emergence from spiritual dryness into a renewed oneness with God. According to a different interpretation the dreamer in the garden is the fallen man; the Pearl is-equated with his lost innocence "hat will eventually be restored.

'Pearl certainly succeeds artistically on both the personal and allegorical levels. As the poem begins, the poet returns to a lovely garden where he once lost a very dear Pearl, "precious, without spot," His Pearl appears in a dream, radiantly adorned with the faultless white gems.

Deeply moved, the dreamer cries out in grief: "Are you my pearl for which, I mourn, /Lamenting all alone at night”? The Pearl rebukes him and introduces a theological discussion. He has no right, she, says, to mourn when he has really gained and not lost; there is no cause for grief; the Pearl had been enthroned as one of the heaven's peerless queens, But how, the dreamer asks, could a creature so young and inexperienced have won salvation? Again she chides him. Both the child and the adult; she says, can be saved; the former by virtue of innocence and the latter through suffering and repentance. He has only one request: to let him see the celestial city. The dreamer is permitted to look with his flawed eyes upon the new Jerusalem for "one short hour." Having described brightly burning city, all gold "like gleaming glass: gradually to the heavenly throne itself. After beholding the lamb smiting gloriously as, the blood gushes, down his white side, the dreamer plunges into the stream that cuts him off from his Pearl, but such an action is' unpleasing to God and he finds himself once more awake and alone in his garden. The poet accepts his exile and takes comfort in his new-gaine4 submission 'to the will of God.

Pearl gives freshness to the religious view of the vanity of this world and the transcendent beauty of the next. The Pearl may be a symbol suggesting, the fundamental contrast between the values of the earth and those of the heavenly kingdom. The poet must transfer his love from the material to the spiritual reality, from the worldly pearls to the Pearl .of heaven. Thus the poem appears to be a religious exercise.

The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman

Piers Plowman, written perhaps by William Langland is a religious allegory, a social history, and the first great satire in English. It is a diagnosis of a corrupt and decadent society. There are three different texts: The A-text, the shortest of the three, consists of 2579 lines. The B-text reworks and expands the materials of the A-text and continues with fresh materials; it comprises 7241lines in all. The C-text slightly longer than the B-text (7335 lines), ··is a further revision, in some parts a complete rewriting of the B-text. Although the B-text is Langland's supreme achievements, each text has its distinctive qualities. The A-text is less straightforward; the B-text has literary embellishments; the C-text is more concerned with theological and moral matters and the language is more abstract and prosaic.

Piers Plowman in its totality is a series of extraordinary visions concerning the way in which man can attain salvation. It shows the poet's personal reaction and views of the English medieval society. He reveals the true nature of the vices of his time. By living in accordance with the simple set of values, Piers can pass judgement on the world around him and indicate the way leading to spiritual health. Piers is a 14th-century ideal farmer concerned with the evils of contemporary society.

In the opening vision the poet clothes himself as a hermit and falls asleep by the bank of a brook. He dreams of; a "fair field full folk" which symbolizes the world as it is: a place full of vitality but at the same time rife with hypocrisy and corruption, Far away in the distant east stands a tower on a high hill, the tower of Truth, the dwelling place of God. In the valley below is a dungeon the home of the Devil, the Father of Falsehood In the busy scene swarm countless figures, some realistic and some allegorical.

The huge mob starts on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Holy Truth. No one knows where Truth lives. Piers knows where truth is and will gladly serve the pilgrims as a guide as soon as he: finishes plowing his half-acre. Truth gives Piers a pardon containing two lines:" Those who do good will go to heaven and those who do evil will go to eternal fire." The dreamer is convinced that to do well is the key to salvation.

The rest of the poem consists of an extensive search for Do-well, Do-bet (DO-better), and Do-best. These three may symbolize three stages of man’s spiritual journey; i.e., the active life, the contemplative life, and the mixed life. Do-well labors actively in the world; Do-bet stands for monastic life and study; Do-best-the personification of the mixed life that is active and contemplative-returns to the world with a deepened responsibility to lead and inspire. Piers himself embodies in turn each of the three ideals. Of course, these three symbols change their significance during the course of the poem.

The allegory in *Piers plowman* is complex. Piers himself stands, among other things, for the honest worker, the spiritual guide, the perfect priest, the instrument of grace, the church, and even Christ himself. But the *Piers* poet is more poet than theologian. He loves the whole of the created universe. He is moral in a personal way, concerned with the religious, Social, and economic problems of his time. His vision of “a fair field full of folks" develops into an

allegorical interpretation of life. Underlying all the visions is the nation of the quest the search for good life, for truth, and for God.

Though *Piers plowman* lacks artistic unity and the poet shows only sporadic control over his material. It is a remarkable work alternating bitter satire and tendencies of a vivid description of contemporary life, bringing together social realism and religious vision. It is the work *of* a religious idealist who is genuinely distressed by the social and moral condition of England, an idealist who is endeavoring to create a vision of what is wrong and where we must look for improvement. Even in the most visionary moments. It is never private; the poet is always thinking of people, and in Piers himself the poet creates a symbol. Who unites the Ideal of the common man with the ideal of God made man. Like Chaucer, the Piers poet makes use of traditional material. Both of them draw on the facts of contemporary society, but they present different pictures. The *Piers* poet, Unlike Chaucer, rarely, displays an affection for this satirical targets; his monk is a corrupt person who will one day be punished for this corrupt living.

In the vivid delineation of scenes and the realistic painting of characters, *Piers Plowman* bears with the best of medieval allegories, with the *Roman de la Rose* or the *Divine Comedy*. Its distinguishing characteristic is its natural satire as well as its deep moral earnestness. Such a popular poem was naturally not without its imitators. *Piers plowman's Creed* is an attack on the friars. The poet goes to each of the four orders looking for someone to teach him the creed, but finds that nobody knows it. A poor plowman abuses them and explains the creed himself.

Chapter 11
The Middle English Romance

Medieval romance was an aristocratic literary type appealing to the tastes of the upper class that preferred the idealized characters of the romance to the epic heroes who, in spite of being supermen, are real human beings who may will or lose the battle while the romance heroes are nearly always successful both in love and battle.

Up to the latter part of the thirteenth century when English began to displace French as the official language, the romances written in England were in French. Most English romances belong to the fourteenth century when the age of the romance had almost ended in France and other European countries. Moreover, the English romances are disappointing because they are adaptations and even translations from French originals.

Adventure is the main ingredient of the romance. Love is either subordinate to adventure or it is only an excuse or a motive for adventure. Medieval romances are actually stories of adventure. The characters are knights, kings, and distressed ladies. The heroes act very often under the impulse of love, religious faith, or the desire for adventure. The romance reflects a chivalric age, lacks the weight and solidity of epic, stresses rank or social distinctions, and avoids the tragic seriousness of classical epics in which the heroes aim at high achievement while the, romance heroes are usually satisfied with more or less aimless adventures.

Classical epics observe unity, whereas the structure of the romance is loose and it is episodic. Love is either absent or of minor interest in classical epics, but it is supreme in romances. Fighting in the romance is often aimless whereas epic fighting is serious and well motivated. The epic emphasizes dialogue, the dramatic method of having the characters speak for themselves while the reader of a romance is listening to an omniscient narrator.

The anonymous authors of romances gave expression to some of the most cherished religious, political and courtly ideals of the Middle English period, but almost all romances are lacking in form, characterization, and literary significance. They lack the life-like variety witnessed in epics. The characters are stock or type rather than individualized portraits. Virgil's

Aeneas is by far different from Homer's Achilles, but knights in romances have similar qualities, and lovely damsels are always captured by foul villains. The quest theme is dominant: an unacknowledged heir is seeking his throne or a knight is searching for the Holy Grail.

Magic, fantastic settings, and imaginative encounters with imaginative opponents are the usual ingredients of Medieval romances. We come across mythical animals, monsters, giants, and enchanted castles and forests.

Medieval romances make extensive use of Christian references. The knights emphasize piety, courtesy, courage, and humanity. They do not have, as the epic heroes do, any tragic flaw. They are idealized knights portrayed as strong, courageous, moral, virtuous, modest, and piously Christian.

It has long been customary for scholars to Classify the vast number of medieval romances according to national themes or "matters". "The matter of France" includes romances about Charlemagne and his Frankish knights; "the matter of Greece and Rome" deals with the exploits of Alexander and with the Trojan War and its aftermath; "the matter of England" treats the careers of English and Germanic heroes of legend and history; "the matter of Britain" focuses on king Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. There are countless other romances that do not fit into any of the major cycles. However, the mysterious figure of King Arthur has been the most important focus of medieval romances. Therefore, it is preferable to begin with the "matter of Britain" or Arthurian romances.

Arthurian Romance Through Malory

Fabulous tales have surrounded the myth of King Arthur who apparently lived in the sixth century and became famous for his valiant leadership of the Welsh in their hopeless defense of Britain against the invading Anglo-Saxons. He eventually became a legend which spread far beyond the borders of Wales. He was in time raised to the rank of king and credited with the fabulous achievements in peace and war. He was made the central figure in the twelfth century Latin history of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Then he appeared in French romances. It was in the 13th century that Arthur as a literary hero appeared for the first time in an English version, Layamon's *Brut,* and soon established himself as the common literary property of much Western world.

Arthur received his fullest treatment in the prose work of Sir Thomas Malory, published in 1485 under the title *Mone d'Arthur*. The Alliterative *Morte Arthur* and *Sir Gawain* and *The Green Knight* are the greatest achievements of the period of alliterative revival. Arthur's fame continued well beyond the Middle Ages. Spenser, Dryden, Tennyson, William Morris, Edwin A Robinson, John Masefield, and Mark Twain have made use of Arthurian subjects suggesting Arthur's enduring literary appeal. Thus the tremendous myth about Arthur has been accumulated through literary works and oral transmission. Geoffrey of Monmouth's bold imagination and graceful literary style helped him to organize the scattered materials of the myth systematically into a single book. It was Geoffrey of Monmouth who really gave impetus and direction to the "matter of Britain".

Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (1137) is an imaginative chronicle in Latin prose and one of the most valuable works in the early history of Arthurian legend. It is actually a superb and deliberate compound of fact and fantasy claiming to be a true record of British events from the time of alleged foundation of the nation by Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas. Monmouth claims that his work is based upon "a secret book in the British tongue" given to him by his friend Walter, the Arch-deacon of Oxford, but Walter's book has never been discovered and Monmouth invents his source to make us consider his book as a true chronicle, not a fictional legend. He links Britain with Troy to enhance the prestige of his country.

Geoffrey of Monmouth is the real founder of Arthurian legend which is largely an exercise of the author's imagination on native Celtic tradition. His legend is the first extended account of Arthur. More than half of the book deals with Arthurian legend, and all subsequent versions are essentially variations or expansions of it. The Lancelot scene is a later addition to the legend or the substitution of Lancelot for Mordred.

Shadowy kings like Gorboduc, Cymbeline, and Lear who appear later in English literature are first met on Monmouth who introduces Merlin, the Magician, who is one of the central characters in many Arthurian romances. Merlin engineers the adulterous union of King Uther Pendragon and the beautiful Igraine which leads to Arthur's birth.

Monmouth devotes much of his book to Arthur's adventures such as Arthur's conquest of Britain, his invasion of Gaul, his war with ancient Rome, the treachery of Mordred, the infidelity

of Queen Guinevere-here with Mordred, not Lancelot who is not yet a character in Arthurian legend. Arthur's departure for Avalon after his death and the hope for his second coming are Monmouth's invention. He tied together the scattered threads of Arthurian legend and added fiction to facts.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthurian legend was limited in circulation to the learned who could read Latin. Several free translations and adaptations soon appeared in French of which the most notable was *Roman de Brut* (1155) by **Wace**, a Norman poet of elegance and taste. The name of this verse chronicle is derived from Brutus, the supposed founder of Britain.

Roman de Brut is not a bare translation of Monmouth. Wace's poetic imagination and love of picturesque detail helped him to add to the literary significance of the Arthurian legend. He adds a lot to the narrative, introduces the Round Table, and strengthens the idea that after his final battle Arthur departs for Avalon where his wounds healed and he is prepared to return as "the hope of Britain." Wace, like Monmouth, cites authorities for his statements saying that many Arthurian wonders have been told so many times that they seem valid.

Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace treat the Arthurian legend in a comprehensive biographical fashion. Chretien de Troyes, the gifted French poet at the court of the Countess Marie refined the loosely knit Arthurian chronicles into unified, clearly constructed and continuous tales. He wrote five great Arthurian. romances on specific heroes and injected the French courtly ideal into the rugged world of the Arthurian knights. His characters stand for virtues required of courtly lovers.

No English version of Arthurian legend was available in the twelfth century until Layamon, an English priest who was enchanted by Wace, wrote his *Brut* in English. He adds a lot to Wace and combines alliteration and rhyme. He provides a vigorous -narrative of the circumstances that made the construction of the Round Table necessary and he fully describes the details of its construction. The Round Table becomes the preserver of harmony and a symbol of equality among Arthur's Knights.

Layamon is an intensely patriotic poet who loves the English folk traditions. He draws on Celtic lore for the passing of Arthur.' He is convinced of the prophecy concerning Arthur's return "to help the Britons."

Arthurian romance flourished in England in the latter part of the 14th century. *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and the alliterative *Morte Arthur,* which were discussed in the previous chapter, are among the best Arthurian romances. They avoid the episodic quality of other romances and create flesh-and-blood heroes who feel passions broadly. They served as sources for Malory's full-scale prose work.

Sir Thomas Malory (1410-71)

Malory's rendering of "the matter of Britain- was completed (1469) in prison and printed (1485) by William Caxton (the first English 'printer) as *Morte d'Arthur.* Caxton believes that Arthur was one of the Nine Worthies and he printed MaIory's book not because it is true but because it is moral. But Malory himself was not much concerned with the: didactic possibilities of "the matter of Britain," Malory did not write one continuous prose" epic with a unified structure and theme; he wrote eight individual romances which were assembled by Caxton into a single epic. MaIory's literary art is more impressive if we consider his Arthurian tales as eight separate romances instead of a single narrative.

Malory was interested in telling a good story and derived his plots from numerous English and French sources. Malory traces the early career of Arthur, including an account of his birth, his coronation, and his acquisition of the sword Excalibur from the mysterious outstretched hand in the lake. We traveled with Arthur as he wages a triumphant war against the ancient Romans and the Saracens. The Chivalrous Sir Lancelot wins tournaments, delivers prisoners from unjust captivity, and rescues: distressed ladies from wicked knights and evil enchanters. Sir Tristram achieves fame in literature through his love affair with Iseult. Sir Galahad(Lancelot's son),"a clean virgin above all knights," is among a few who are granted' the Bight of the' Holy Grail ,the vessel which Christ used at the last Supper. Malory's concluding pages recount the most poetic phase of the Arthurian legend: the fatal love of Lancelot and Guinevere, the revolt of Mordred, the final battle, the passing of Arthur, and the final disintegration of the order of the Round Table.

As it is to be expected of a chivalric romance, courtly love is exhibited in Malory's stories, but Malory is not really at home in the French world of courtly love. The Anglo-Saxons had glorified the Comitatus, and the Renaissance writers would extol the fraternal bond between

man and man as being far superior to the love between man and woman. Accordingly, Malory's Arthur recognizes that romantic love must yield to the higher ideal of knightly fellowship. Knighthood and courtly love turn out to be incompatible; and the chivalric order is destroyed, ironically, through the unworthiness of the very lady who should have inspired it and held it together. Guinevere herself acknowledges the destruction which her faithlessness has caused. The lovers become aware of the vanity of human life and spend their remaining days on earth in fasting, penance, and prayer.

Malory's characters are for the most part free agent entangled in the web of conflicting loyalties and passions: Lancelot loves Guinevere and owes allegiance and loyalty to Arthur, his friend and king, but he strongly desire Guinevere; Arthur strives to-preserve the knightly order, but he also cherishes his waning domestic happiness; Guinevere enjoys a sinful relationship with Lancelot, but she cannot escape the agonizing conviction that she is wronging her husband; undermining knighthood, and separating her soul from God. All of these are in a sense caught in the traps of an inescapable destiny, yet we feel that they are responsible for their own acts.

In Malory, as in later tragedy, destiny and individual freedom serve to reinforce each other. By probing into the inner conflicts of essentially believable human beings, Malory lifts his narrative far above the usual standard of medieval romance. His eight romances become a diagnosis of a corrupt and decadent civilization that is doomed to become disintegrated. Malory's passing of Arthur leaves some hope that Arthur may some day return, but Malory himself seems skeptical of a glorious future, for the heroic days are ended and may never return. Rationalism and Mammonism have blinded even the best knights to the heroic values of the golden age.· Heroism seems already far away and the modem man neither desires nor can attain and keep the heroic values.

The Matter of England

Some Middle English romances are built upon the careers of English and Germanic heroes. A few of them are appealing because they shed light upon English life. A few are remembered simply because they introduce into English literature motifs or characters later explored by more gifted writers. *King Horn* and *Havelock* are the most interesting romances making up "the matter of England." Both of them treat the popular romance theme of the exiled prince who returns to

his land, regains his rightful place, and marries the beautiful princess who had been unaware of his royal lineage.

King Horn tells the story of a young prince who is uprooted from his native Suddene (Isle of Man) in the Irish Sea by Saracens, invaders from Scandinavia. Horn and twelve companions are cast adrift in a rudderless boat. They are carried by wind and tide to the land of Westerness where Horn meets the princess Rimenhild who tries to win his love, but he prefers duty and knightly adventure to marriage. One of his companions, Fikenhild, reveals the love affair to the princess's father, the King, who banishes Horn. Banishment gives Horn an opportunity for adventure, and he fights bravely on behalf of the King of Ireland. He returns from his second exile to rescue the princess from a hateful suitor. Her father pardons him. Horn returns to Suddene and defeats the Saracens. He becomes king, but he hears that Rimenhild is abducted by Fikenhild. He rescues the princess and marries her.

Havelock (c. 1250) deals with the adventures of a dispossessed prince of Denmark. Earl Godard, the scheming regent, deposes the child king, Havelock, kills Havelock's Sisters, and arranges to have the boy drowned by a fisherman named Grim. Grim takes pity on Havelock and rears him in his humble fisherman's cottage. He perceives a mysterious light about the young man's head, becomes aware of his royal birth, and sails with him to England.

Godrich, the wicked English regent, has imprisoned Goldborough, the English princess, in Dover Castle. He holds on to her wealth by delaying her marriage until he can find the strongest man in England to be her husband.

Havelock displays incredible physical prowess in England. Godrich is delighted to marry Goldborough off to Havelock. She resents the low birth of Havelock until she observes the light emanating from the face of the sleeping Havelock. She becomes sure that he is a prince and she is not disgraced by marrying him. In time Havelock conquers both Denmark and England, and the couple can live happily ever after.

Unlike most other romances, *Havelock* is concerned with refreshing scenes of ordinary life and characters. But the themes of exile, wicked oppressors, the honest oppressed, and the restoration of the exiled king is common to most romances.

Other romances related to English and Germanic heroes cover a variety of subjects and moods. *Richard Coeur de Lion* (c. 1300) covers the adventures of the English crusader-king Richard I who gets his name by thrusting his arm down the throat of a lion, tearing out the lion's heart, dipping it in salt, and swallowing it. This long and ambitious romance exhibits patriotism: England is glorified while the French are buried with contempt.

Guy of Warwick and *Bevis of Hampton,* dating around 1350, deal with heroes who, besides experiencing knightly adventures, defend the Christian faith against infidels.

The Matter of Greece and Rome

In medieval England, several romances based on heroes and events of classical antiquity were produced. Alexander, the Trojan war, Thebes, and Aeneas furnished the principal stories.

Alexander's popularity as a hero of romance was based on his magical birth and his adventures as the conqueror of Persia and India. Alexander romances in England and Europe were derived from a Greek prose biography of Alexander written in the second century. The biography was translated into Latin, French, other Continental languages, and finally into English (c. 1300). The English version was called *King Alisaunder,* a long poem in octasyllabic couplets. The legend of Alexander, unlike the Arthurian legend, was circulated by means of a written scholarly tradition rather than an oral tradition. Of Alexander romances only *Alexander A* and *Alexander B* have survived. They appear in West Midland alliterative verse from around the middle of the fourteenth century.

The Troy legend was derived from two Latin prose documents translated from two Greek works in which the writers pretend to have participated in the Trojan war. Benoit's *Roman de Troie,* a long Norman-French poem, was the first treatment of the Troy legend. *The Siege of Troy* (c. 1300) was the first English version of the Troy legend of which the longest account is John Lydgate's *Troy Book (1412-20).*

The legend of Thebes, immortalized in the three great tragedies of Sophocles, received scant attention in England. It is reflected in Chaucer's *Knight Tale.* Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* (1420-22) is the only English romance related to the Thebes legend.

The legend of Aeneas is almost absent from Middle English romance except for Chaucer's inclusion of the story of Dido in the *Legend of Good Women.*

The Matter of France

"The matter of France" which was very popular on the Continent was almost ignored in England perhaps because of the growing hostility between the two nations. "The matter of France" falls into three main divisions, the *geste du roi* or the exploits of King Charlemagne, the *geste de Doon de Mayence* or the romances dealing with some of Charlemagne's vassals and the *geste de Garin de monglane* dealing with the adventures of William of Orange. The first group is the most important one, and its chief glory is the French epic *Chanson de Roland (Song of Roland)* which deals with the heroism of Roland, the King's nephew.

Near the beginning of the fourteenth century an English version of the *Song of Roland* appeared in four-stress rhymed couplets. *Sir Ferumbras,* written in late fourteenth century, is the most distinguished English romance on Charlemagne. It deals with the conversion of the Sargcens to Christianity. Ferumbras himself accepts the Christian faith after being defeated by Oliver, the bravest knight of Charlemagne. The interesting significance of *Sir Ferumbras* is that its preserved manuscript is in the anonymous author's own handwriting.

The so-called Otuel Group consists of five English romances related to Charlemagne's expeditions to Jerusalem and Spain. The group takes its name from Otuel, a Saracen who accepts Christianity and fights bravely in Charlemagne's Christian army.

There are some romances of slight literary value that belong to no "matter", romances like *Floris and Blancheflor* (c. 1250), which narrates the separation of two childhood lovers and their reunion; *Amis and Amiloun* (c. 1290), which celebrates a perfect friendship between two men; and John Barbour's *Bruce* (1376), a patriotic romance that honors the exploits of the Scot Robert Bruce against the English.

With rare exceptions, medieval romances are disappointing. They are usually made up of loosely connected episodes, some of which recur again and again in romance literature. They offer little in the way of sustained plot or characterization. Supernatural elements play decisive roles in shaping the outcome. The knights are little more than puppets. They do not look real; they mechanically slay dragons and rescue their damsels in obedience to the rules of chivalry and courtly love. The women are even less real; they are unmotivated, beautiful creatures for whom their chosen lovers would willingly lay down their lives.

In spite of the infra-literary quality of most medieval romances, there are romances that are indeed rarities: *Havelock* and *Sir Orfeo* do not deal with courtly love and are the best that one can expect. The writers of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* the alliterative *Morte Arthur,* Chaucer, and Malory have breathed genuine artistic life into the genre. Malory's awareness of human tragedy; the *Gawain* poet's dazzling control of plot, setting, and character; and Morte Arthur's epic world are significant. Chaucer's *Troilus* and *Criseyde* and *The Knight's Tale* rise to the level of philosophic poems probing the depth of human nature.

Chapter 12
Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400), the son of a wealthy London wine merchant, was born around 1340. He became a page in the household of the Earl of Ulster and gradually advanced to more responsible positions. He served in the French Wars and was taken prisoner in 1359. King Edward III paid his ransom.

Around 1366, Chaucer married Philippa Roet, a lady-in-waiting to the queen and later a sister-in-law to John of Gaunt, Henry IV's father. Thus Chaucer rose in royal favor, and he was sent abroad on a diplomatic mission. He visited Italy and France several times on official business. In 1374 he was appointed controller of customs for the part of London and in 1385 he was named a justice of the peace for the county of Kent. In 1386 he represented Kent in the parliament.

In 1386, Chaucer went into temporary retirement and did not return to public life until 1389 when he was appointed Clerk of the King's Works in and around London. In 1391, he became deputy forester in the royal park in Somerset. Henry IV, who usurped the throne in 1399, granted a generous pension to Chaucer who had been his father's loyal servant and friend. Chaucer died on October 25, 1400. His burial place in Westminster Abbey is now known as the Poets' Corner.

Chaucer's occupations at court provided him with a sophisticated audience who maintained social and literary intercourse with the Continent, especially with France and Italy, but his audience was by no means confined to the nobility. In fact, the large number of the extant manuscripts of his poems and the poems themselves suggest that he was in touch with all the segments of the society and all the three classes enjoyed reading him.

Chaucer was familiar with the great Latin works of the classical period mainly through French translations, although he had read Virgil, Ovid, and Boethius in the original. His translation of *The Consolation of Philosophy* indicates Chaucer's indebtedness to Boethius, the Roman philosopher who wrote his *Consolation* in prison. The Stoic doctrine of Boethius offered

Chaucer inspiration and comfort and taught him to live wholeheartedly in the world and at the same time remain spiritually detached from it.

Chaucer scholars have found it convenient to assign his output to three different periods: the French (1359-72), the Italian (1372-86), and the English (1386-1400). This is not an accurate assignment, but it is certain that one of the main features of Chaucer's poetry is its indebtedness to Continental models. Early in his life he carne under the spell of the French dream allegory. *Le Roman de la Rose* exerted a lasting influence upon his verse. He has acknowledged his indebtedness to Dante and Petrarch. He drew heavily upon Boccaccio for the plots of *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight's Tale.* His indebtedness to Boccaccio and other Italian poets is not acknowledged. The fact is that Medieval and Renaissance poets were never accused of plagiarism while they freely borrowed from other writers.

In the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women,* Chaucer talks about his own translation of *Le Roman de la Rose,* a French poem written by Guillaume de Lorris and finished by Jean de Meun, two men of contrasting temperaments. Guillaume de Lorris was interested in creating an encyclopedia of courtly love while Jean de Meun took a cynical tone towards women and love. Chaucer was sympathetic to both, That is why the two opposing strains run throughout his works; comedy is achieved by presenting the romantic and the cynical attitudes side by side; and even satiric effect is produced through romantic material.

Chaucer's early works belong to the genre of the dream-vision. *The Book of Duchess* (c. 1370), a dream-vision in octosyllabic couplets, is an elegy upon the death of Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, Chaucer's friend and patron and father of King Henry IV. In his dream the poet comes across a: Knight in Black who recites a poem lamenting the tragic death of Blanche, his dearest love. The Duchess is portrayed as the embodiment of gracious womanhood. The poem has real structural unity. It ill an allegory in which Blanche symbolizes the virtues and ideals of love which have left the world. Thus the Knight's grief seems genuine.

In *The House of Fame* (c. 1379), written in octosyllabic couplets, the dreamer is snatched away from earth by a learned eagle, a medieval symbol of contemplation. The dreamer is supposed to receive enlightenment concerning love from some "man of great authority". The dialogue with the eagle is fascinating. The eagle tells Chaucer that the latter has experienced

love only through reading and writing. The eagle demonstrates his intellectual powers to Chaucer. The manuscript abruptly ends. Either Chaucer left the poem unfinished or the rest of the poem has been lost.

In *The Parliament of Fowls,* another dream-vision, Chaucer takes the reader to a society of birds involved in a furious argument regarding courtly love. All the birds have gathered in an assembly presided by the goddess Nature to choose their mates. The first bird to be mated is a female eagle of great nobility. Three noble male eagles make debarred pleas for her hand begging pity and grace. A heated parliamentary debate follows, but Nature restores order by urging the lady-eagle to choose the most gently born suitor. Then Nature bestows upon each bird a mate suitable to its rank in the social hierarchy.

In the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (c. 1386) Chaucer reports that Queen Anne took offense at Chaucer's portrait of the faithless Criseyde and ordered him to write about good women. The Legend is a series of narratives about faithful women deceived by men. Such women include Dido, Lucretia, Cleopatra, and Medea. The significance of the poem lies in its high-spirited prologue which anticipates the "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales.*

Troilus and Criseyde (c. 1385) and *The Canterbury Tales* rank with the masterpieces of world literature. Troilus and Criseyde, written in rhyme royal, is Chaucer's greatest sustained narrative and his only complete long poem. **Boccaccio's** *Il Filostrato* is probably Chaucer's source for *Troilus and Criseyde* which is a love story set against the background of the Trojan War. Troilus, Priam's son and Hector's brother, openly scoffs at love, but suddenly falls in love with Criseyde, a lovely widow whose father, Calchas, has deserted the Trojans and joined the Greek camp.

Pandarus, Troilus' friend and Criseyde's uncle, acts as a go-between, and the lovers are finally united. All goes well until Calchas claims his daughter, and in an exchange of prisoners, she is returned to the Greek camp. She promises to come back, but she actually becomes the mistress of Diomede. Troilus blames his own destiny, dies in battle and ascends to the eighth sphere. He looks down upon the world and laughs.

By medieval standards *Troilus and Criseyde* is a tragedy which results when fortune plays a trick and suddenly reduces the prosperous man to wretchedness. Since fortune works without

motive, no one can ever rest secure. She favors the young lovers for a While, but suddenly cuts out Troilus from his lady's grace and sets up Diomede. It is in the eighth sphere that he understands that his affections for Criseyde have been misplaced. If a man loves God who is the only stable lover, he has no need for the imperfect shadows of love that the world offers.

The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's most famous work, is an unfinished collection of tales told by pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Becket at Canterbury. It opens with *The General Prologue* which describes the 30 pilgrims and introduces the framework: each pilgrim is to tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two more tales on the way back. There follows 24 tales. It is possible that the idea for this framework came from Boccaccio's *Decameron,* a collection of 100 tales told in ten days by ten people who leave the plague-stricken Florence for the neighboring villas. *Decameron* has no unity, but different prologues in Chaucer's work as well as the conversations between the Host and the pilgrims serve as a unifying link. Therefore there is no reason to suppose that Chaucer had a specific model for the use of a single framework to link a series of stories. Chaucer's work is remarkable for its integrations of framework and tales. The characters established in *The General Prologue* come from all sections of society. They are developed through linking passages and through the tales they tell, making the collection a human comedy, a picture of the 14th-century England, and a sustained piece of social drama.

The General Prologue sets the scene and introduces the characters, although between many of the tales, Chaucer provides links that enlarge upon the previously defined personalities of the pilgrims. However, the pilgrims meet at the 'Tabard Inn in Southward to begin their journey under the guidance of the Host, Harry Bailly who will function as the judge of the best tale. The plan calls for 120 tales of which only 24 tales were written. Each tale suits the personality of the teller. Dryden in the preface to *Fables Old and New* praises Chaucer's

> Comprehensive nature, because ... he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humors ... of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his characters are severally distinguished from each other ... The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humors, and callings that each of them would be improper in any other mouth.

In *The General Prologue* Chaucer collects his characters, familiarizes us with their appearances and manners and sets the stage for their tales. The host draws lots, and the privilege of telling the first tale falls to the Knight.

The Knight's Tale is a long chivalric romance adapted from Boccaccio's *Teseide,* an epic celebrating the career of Theseus, Duke of Athens. Two Theban knights, Arcite and Palamon, who are the prisoners of war, see Emelye from their prison window in Athens and fall in love with her simultaneously. Their lifelong friendship is disrupted by their rivalry for the love of Emelye. Arcite is released from prison and forbidden to return to Athens, but his love of Emelye makes him hide his real identity and return to Athens. Palamon manages to escape. The two young knights meet by chance in a grove near Athens where they are discovered fighting by Theseus who arranges a tournament to decide their quarrel. Arcite prays to Mars for victory, while Palamon prays to Venus for Emelye. Both requests are granted, but Arcite falls from his horse and dies after his victory and Palamon is later married to Emelye.

Chaucer constantly shifts the narrative center from one knight to the other to make sure that neither should receive a larger share of attention. The activities of the two knights are neatly balanced. Both make speeches declaring their love, both curse their destiny, and both pray to their respective gods. It is odd that .the two knights get involved in a fiery debate over which one saw Emelye first and loved her most. When Theseus finds them at each other's throat, he observes with sober melancholy that men in love make utter fools of themselves. This is true because Emelye is a completely depersonalized heroine who has no interest in either Palamon or Arcite, and offers her prayers to Diana, goddess of chastity, hoping to remain unmarried. Thus the emotions of love and heroism are reduced to triviality.

The key to the interpretation of *The Knight's Tale* is provided by the Duke in a speech out of Boethius. He justifies the turn of events by appealing to the principle of order, a chain of love that underlies the universe. Since all things of this earth are transitory, it is inevitable that people should be plagued with misfortunes. By accepting the omnipotence and justice of the Creator, we can triumph over the vicissitudes of fortune and prove that earthly love and hatred are not only insignificant but amusing.

After the Knight has completed his philosophic romance, the Host invites the Monk to tell the next tale, but the Miller, who is so drunk that he totters upon his horse, rudely interrupts and starts telling his bawdy tale. *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale,* which follows immediately as an answer to the Miller, are obscene tales called fableaux.

The Host admonishes the pilgrims not to waste their valuable time. Then he asks the Man of Law for a tale. The Man of Law complains that Chaucer has spoiled all the good stories. There follows a brief summary of Chaucer's stories versified up to that time. He tells the tale of the unfortunate Constance, the daughter of a Christian emperor and the wife of a Sultan whose vicious mother kills all the Christians including the Sultan and sets the widowed Constance adrift in a boat. Constance remains patient through all afflictions, believing that whatever happens in this world happens according to the will of God who governs the universe justly and according to a plan. Thus the story is placed in an explicitly Christian context.

The Wife of Bath's Tale is preceded by a long prologue in which the Wife reveals her own domineering, licentious and pleasure-seeking character. She gives an account of her own eventful life with her five successive husbands. Her tale continues the theme of women's mastery over men. A young knight ~f king Arthur's court is sentenced to death as a punishment for rape. The Queen will forgive him on one condition: he has to discover within a year what women most desire. Eventually he promises to grant a wish to an old hag in return for the right answer, sovereignty. After giving the right answer in court, the foul old witch wants him to marry her. He reluctantly complies. She asks him if he would prefer her ugly and faithful or beautiful and faithless. He allows her the choice and is rewarded by having her young, beautiful and faithful.

The Wife of Bath's prologue and tale introduce the question of the relationship between husband and wife and thus begin the so-called "marriage group ft. The wife loves mastery over husband, but *The Clerk of Oxford* introduces the most obedient and patient wife. The Clerk is a student of Aristotle and knows the significance of the golden mean. His tale is only an answer to the Wife of Bath's unreasonable demands. He himself knows that too much patience or obedience is immoral. The patient Griselda is subjected to her husband's various cruelties, including the feigned murder of her children and his intended divorce and remarriage, in order to

test her love and patience. Griselda bears his cruelty to the end, when her children are finally restored to her and her husband again accepts her as his wife. Chaucer suggests that neither the mastery of the wife over the husband nor the mastery of the husband over the wife can be desirable.

The Merchant's Tale tells the tale of an old husband and a young wife. The old man becomes blind; the wife and her lover take advantage of the old man's blindness and make love in a pear-tree. Pluto suddenly restores the husband's sight, but Proserpine enables the wife to outwit him, saying that she was told that the only way to restore the husband's sight was to make love with a lover.

The Franklin's Tale tells the story of Dorigen who is wooed by a lover in the absence of her husband. She promises him her love if he can remove all the rocks from the coast of Brittany. She is secure in her belief that the condition can never be met. The lover makes the rocks disappear through the help of a magician, and Dorigen is horrified to see the condition met. Her husband tells her that she must keep her promise. The lover is touched by Dorigen's love and fidelity to her husband. He releases her from her obligation.

The Franklin's Tale depicts a happy marriage based on mutual love and respect without seeking sovereignty over the husband or wife. In a marriage based on love and understanding, neither party claims to be the master. Thus the tale strikes a balance between the one-sided views of marriage expressed by the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, and the Merchant. The essence of this kind of marriage is compromise, give-and-take, and generosity suggested by the moral wisdom of the Franklin.

The Physician's Tale is the story of Apius, a corrupt judge, who perverts his own high office in order to satisfy his lust for the chaste and virtuous Virginia. He invents a charge of abduction to force the father to offer his daughter to the judge's servant. The father kills Virginia to protect her honor and sends the head to Apius. However, the corruption is uncovered. Apius is imprisoned and he commits suicide and the servant is exiled.

The Host requires a merry tale to cheer him up. He asks the Pardoner to tell such a tale, but other pilgrims demand a moral tale. The Pardoner shamelessly reveals his own depravity. He describes the techniques he employs to extort money from his audience. He cares only for the

satisfaction of his own cupidity, while in all his sermons he tells his audience that avarice is the root of all evils. He has expensive taste and his sermons are profitable. He admits that he is "a full vicious man" who has marvelous abilities as a storyteller.

The Pardoner's Tale, set in Flanders, tells how three drunken men set out to find out and kill Death who has killed one of their friends at the time of plague. They rudely question an old man who directs them to an oak tree where they find a heap of gold. The youngest of the three is sent into town for bread and wine. In his greed he poisons the wine to kill his friends and possess the whole gold. The other two, greedy for a bigger share of the treasure, kill the youngest friend and then toast their still greater fortune with the poisoned wine and thus destroy themselves. The Pardoner ends his sermon by displaying his false relics and appealing to the other pilgrims to part with their money.

The Shipman's Tale is a fabliau telling how a merchant was cheated and cuckolded by a monk. *The Prioress's Tale* is told in response to the polite request of the Host and it is related to a miracle of the Virgin. It begins with an invocation to the Virgin and continues with the story of a Christian child murdered by Jews. The dead child is given the power of speech by the Virgin and thus reveals his whereabouts by singing and explaining how he came to his death. In spite of the Prioress's devotion to love, her story seems surprisingly vindicative. The Jews are not converted to Christianity; they arc relentlessly killed. In the *General Prologue,* the Prioress is all "conscience and tender heart"; she is "so charitable and so pious that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap", but her tale makes it clear that her attitude toward non-Christians is by no means humane. It seems that she is unable to comprehend the true sense of love as distinguished from sentimentality.

Chaucer depicts himself a silly pilgrim who does not know how to walk, let alone telling a good story. He assigns the ludicrous *Tale of Sir Thopas* to himself, a tale which actually burlesques the medieval metrical romances. The tale is interrupted after 246 lines by the Host on account of its exceptionally poor quality. The hero, Sir Thopas, rides in search of the elf-queen and he is challenged by a giant. He retreats, promising to return. The giant throws stones at him as he flees. However, he never finds the elf-queen he loves and dreams about. He would still be riding on and on and getting nowhere if the impatient Host had not asked Chaucer to stop and

tell a tale in prose. This time he tells *The Tale of Melibee* which is a dull moral debate. Dame Prudence persuades her husband, Melibee to forego seeking revenge upon three "Old foes" who invade his home and beat his wife and daughter. Here advice is delivered largely in proverbs. She also speaks to the three adversaries and prevails upon them to repent. They place themselves at the disposal of Prudence and Melibee.

The subject matter of *The Tale of Melibee* was quite interesting to Chaucer's contemporaries. It focuses on the question of private revenge as opposed to organized justice, and glorifies the principle of forgiveness of one's enemies.

Harry Bailey, the Host, calls upon the lusty Monk to tell a tale in keeping with his character, perhaps about hunting, but *The Monk's Tale* is a series of tragedies with Biblical, classical, and contemporary figures found in Boccaccio, Boethius, Dante and the Bible. The Monk is interrupted by the knight after 775 lines because he cannot bear the dismal stories.

The Host boldly asks the Nun's Priest to tell a tale that may cheer their hearts. *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is a mock-heroic fable about a proud cock, Chaunticleer, the fox and the hen. The cock dreams of impending danger. He is persuaded by Pertelote, his favorite wife, to ignore the dream. Thus the hero falls an easy prey to the flattery of Daun Russell, the wily fox, who appeals to the cock's vanity to close his eyes and crow. The fox seizes the cock, but the latter tricks the former into speaking and thus escapes from his mouth. This mock-heroic tale is set against a background of world history and philosophy, and it is enlivened with vivid characterization and humor. The tale is the best example of Chaucer's comic genius. He has created perfect characters, and managed to convey the marvelous illusion that they are human, and succeeded to produce a poem that can be taken seriously both as a satire on man's romantic pretensions and as a mockery of his ridiculous efforts to adorn his petty triumphs and misfortunes in high-flown poetry and philosophy.

The Second Nun's Tale is a skillfully told saint's life of St. Cecilia, who ends in martyrdom. The prologue has an invocation to the Virgin based in part on lines from *Dante's Paradiso.* The tale itself tells how Cecilia converted her husband and his brother to Christianity, and was eventually martyred for refusing to honor the pagan gods. After this tale the Canon and his Yeoman join the party, though the Canon soon leaves them. *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* begins.

The Yeoman discloses his experience as an assistant to the Canon, an alchemist. His tale, which deals with practicing alchemy, is in two parts. The first part deals with the sincere, though unsuccessful, effort by the Canon to transmit baser metals into gold. The Yeoman suspects that alchemy brings more frustration to the alchemist than to the victims of his fraud. However, the tale relates how the Canon cheated a priest, tricking him into believing he could transmute mercury into silver and selling him the method for 40 pounds. The Yeoman concludes with a moral: Whoever works against the will of God, "never shall he thrive." Then the Host orders the Manciple to tell his tale.

The Manciple's Tale is the story of a husband, Phebus, who teaches a white crow to talk. The bird that is given the power of speech informs Phebus that his wife has committed adultery. He kills his wife, but, overcome by anger and remorse, he tears out the crow's white feather, makes him black and takes away its power of song and speech. He curses the bird so that all its descendants are black with a coarse voice. When the Manciple ends his tale, the sun is receding into the horizon. There is a mysterious air of finality about the journey and storytelling regardless of Chaucer's original plan. The Host turns to the Parson for the one tale still lacking to fulfill the agreement. The Parson has decided to tell "a merry tale in prose" that will "knit up all this feast and make an end."

The Parson's Tale is a long, systematic sermon on the Seven Deadly Sins and Penitence. The pilgrims, who represent diverse social backgrounds and literary tastes, are in the first place a cross section of the fourteenth-century English society with all its vices and virtues. The parson reminds them that the pilgrimage does not end in Canterbury. He transforms the pilgrimage into a symbol of man's spiritual journey.

Chaucer has appended a Retraction in which he renounces all his secular works except *The Legend of Good Women* and asks divine forgiveness on account of the many moral works he has written. He is thankful to God for his translation of Boethius and "other books of legends of saints, and homilies, and morality, and devotion."

Dryden's comment in Chaucer, part of which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is the best summary of Chaucer's literary achievements. Dryden calls Chaucer "a perpetual fountain of good sense" and infinite variety, "a man of a most wonderful and comprehensive nature."

Chapter 13
Medieval Drama

Drama reappeared in the Middle Ages after centuries of almost total neglect. Long before the fall of Rome in the fifth century, performances of serious Greek and Roman plays had ceased. Whatever "dramatic" entertainment the Romans enjoyed seems to have been provided by lewd farces and pantomimes or by brutal gladiatorial spectacles in the arena. These debasements of the theater, however, did not last very long. The Church, naturally enough, condemned them as immoral. Thus significant acted drama had been dead for hundreds of years prior to its rebirth in the Middle Ages.

As early as the ninth century, a more formal kind of drama began to take shape under the auspices of the Church, the very institution that had done most to suppress any sort of dramatic representation. From certain tropes, simple Latin embellishments upon the liturgy, there evolved practically all of the ingredients necessary for fully developed plays. As a result of the innovations, audiences at church ceremonies grew so large and staging became so bulky that the dramatizations, which had increased considerably in scope, overflowed from the choir stalls to the nave of the Church. Later, when the assembly was particularly large and noisy, they moved out into the churchyard.

Meanwhile an important trend toward secularization started to operate in the religious drama. In order to edify the laity, who could not understand Latin, clerics tried incorporating translations of the liturgical embellishments and went on to add bits of dialogue in the vernacular. This concession proved immensely entertaining, and eventually Latin disappeared from the religious drama entirely. At the same time, comedy and mimicry had crept into the liturgical plays and lessened the serious objectives which the plays were supposed to fulfill. If the Church by and large approved of the use of drama, there were some who vigorously protested and opposed the abuses which accompanied the presentation of the religious plays.

The protest certainly indicates some degree of dissatisfaction on the part of the clergy with the unexpected direction in which the drama was moving. No wonder, then, that the drama-with or without the blessing of the churchmen-passed out of the physical control of the Church into the hands of lay authors and producers. Plays literally moved into the streets and, later, into innyards and regular theaters. Plays moved into the streets and, later, onto innyards and regular theaters.

Tropes and Liturgical Plays

English drama, much like the drama of ancient Greece, seems to have originated-almost by accident-in religious ritual. During the Easter service certain monastic communities began to protract the last syllable of the Alleluia. For a time this trope remained a wordless musical ornamentation, but before long words were added to the embellishment. A rudimentary dialogue then developed in the form of an antiphonal chorus between the "**angels**" presiding over Christ whose parts were sung by a choir of monks on one side of the altar, and the "**Three Marys**" who discover the empty sepulchre, and their parts were sung by singers on the other side. In the earliest extant trope, dating from the ninth century, the angels ask the Marys,

Angels: Whom do you seek in the sepulchre, 0 Christian Women?

Marys: Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, 0 celestial ones.

Angels: He is not here; he is risen, just as he foretold. Go, announce that he is risen from the sepulchre.

This simple but revolutionary trope played a central role in religious drama for hundreds of years. Complete plays dating from as late as the twelfth century still retain the Quem quaeritis (whom do you seek) trope as their core.

By degrees this trope was elaborated into full-length dialogue, and those impersonating the Marys actually go through the motions of visiting the tomb. The following instructions for Easter matins, composed (c. 963-75) by St. Ethelwold of Winchester, prescribe costumes and accompanying gestures that resemble modern stage directions. After the angel shows them the place where Christ was laid, the Marys lift up the cloth in which a cross is wrapped, and, "as if making known that the lord had risen and was not now therein wrapped," they sing an anthem and place the cloth upon the altar. In later versions of the Quem quaeritis trope the Marys speak Latin and then paraphrase their lines in English.

Dramatizations were not restricted, however, to events surrounding the Resurrection of Christ. A similar trope developed during the Christmas service, centering upon the Nativity. The Nativity plays offered a new attraction-a favorite stage character in the person of the colorful King Herod was added. In a twelfth-century play from France, Herod finds a book prophesying the coming of Christ, hurls it to the floor in a fit of rage, and brandishes his sword menacingly. This ranting Herod, a familiar figure in medieval Nativity plays, is an ancestor of the blood-and-thunder characters who roar their way across the Elizabethan stage. Hamlet warns the players who visit Elsinore against tearing a passion to tatters: "It out-herods Herod; pray you, avoid it." *(Hamlet,* III, ii.)

Mystery Plays

The word *mystery* was first applied to these plays by an 18th-century editor (Robert Dodsley, 1774) on the analogy of the French *mystere,* a Scriptural play. Medieval writers were more likely to refer to the plays as Corpus Christi, "Whitsuntide plays", Pageants, and possibly as Miracle Plays, the term preferred by modem authorities.

Mystery plays are medieval religious plays based upon Biblical history; they are Scriptural plays. They originated in the liturgy of the church and developed from liturgical dramas into the great cyclic plays, performed outdoors and ultimately upon movable pageants. They seem to have developed from three sources: (1) Old Testament plays treating such events as the creation, the fall of man, the death of Abel, the sacrifice of Isaac, etc. ; (2) . the New Testament plays dealing with the birth of Christ; and (3) the Death and Resurrection plays; entry to Jerusalem, the betrayal by Judas, trial, crucifixion lamentation of Mary, sepulchre scenes, the Day of Judgement, etc.

Mystery cycles were produced frequently on Corpus Christi Day, in late Mayor early June, when the weather was suitable for open-air performances. Most of the extant English mystery plays are found in four major cycles, named after the localities where they were acted: **The Chester Cycle** of 25 plays; **the York Cycle** of 48 plays; **the Wakefield Cycle** of 32 plays (sometimes called **Towneley Plays**, after the family that owned the manuscript); and **the Lincoln Cycle** of 42 plays.

The cycles were sponsored by the trade guilds, each of which dramatized a story that may have been in line with its particular talent or equipment. The carpenters portrayed the building of Noah bakers produced the Last Supper, etc.

Plays were generally performed in a procession of horse-drawn floats, called pageants. At appointed stations along the way, the individual wagon with its carefully prepared scene stopped for the guildsmen to act out their play. Spectators could thus stand in one spot and enjoy an unbroken sequence of scriptural history lasting sometimes a full day or even longer. But not all of the cycles were presented in the manner just described. Some were enacted on fixed stages in a large field. The English mystery plays were usually composed by the communities rather than by individual author. Once the nucleus of a play was established, details could be added or modified according to the tastes of each locale. Most of the mystery plays are variants upon a few familiar themes: The Creation, Noah's flood, Abraham and Isaac, the Shepherds visit to the scene of the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, Doomsday, and others. The plays derive their essential strength from their very artlessness. The tradesmen must have taken authentic pride in creating a beautiful pageant that could express the depth of their religious faith as well as reflect honor upon their crafts, but these amateurs tell their Scriptural stories simply and with little conscious striving for dramatic effects. One notable exception, however, is the sophisticated playwright known as "The Wakefield Master", an artist of unique literary gifts who (perhaps in the second quarter of the fifteenth century) made several contributions to the Wakefield Cycle-including the superior Shepherds' play.

Wakefield Cycle consists of 32 plays of which 5 to 12 were written by the **Wakefield Master**: *The Murder of Abel; The Doomsday; The Course of Noah; The First Shepherds' Play; The Second Shepherds' Play (Secunda Pastorum).*

The Second Shepherds' Play, the greatest English Mystery play, consists of two episodes: A comic episode about sheep-stealing followed by a serious one about the Nativity. In the longer first part the wicked shepherd Mak pretends to be an enchanter, steals a sheep from his three sleeping comrades and, with the help of his wife Jill, dresses it as an infant and conceals it in a cradle in his cottage. The trick works for a while, and the victimized shepherds, after a useless search of the cottage, suddenly remember that they have neglected to bring presents for the

supposed baby. When they return to the cottage, they discover their own sheep. They wrap Mak in a blanket and return to the field to sheep. In the very brief second part the shepherds are awakened by an angel and directed to Bethlehem to see the infant Christ.

The play depicts the development of English drama up to the time of its composition and anticipates what is to come later. The Wakefield Master has freely introduced native English figures into a traditional play with Biblical plot just as Elizabethan dramatists transplant almost everything they write about to essentially English soil. The play also suggests the ease with which Elizabethan dramatists move from farce to high seriousness within the same work. Moreover, the play anticipates later English plays in which a subplot is employed to parallel and illuminate the main plot.

Miracle plays are often considered as related to mystery plays, but these plays do not originate from Biblical sources. They rely on Saints' lives and their miracles. The best ones are: *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament; The Conversion of St. Paul,* and *Mary Magdalene.* Passion plays are usually discussed as a separate group.

Morality Plays

Morality play (15th-century) is a kind of dramatized allegory. Its characteristic theme is man's struggles to win salvation as the personified man vices and virtues grapple for dominion over his soul. Although the morality plays declined in popularity around the middle of the 16th century, it left a permanent imprint upon English drama. The allegorical figures of the good and bad angels appear in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* and fight for the possession of his soul. The prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry W, Part II* is spoken by Rumor. There are two kinds of morality: 1) Full-scope morality in which personified abstractions (good and evil) fight to possess the soul of man. The best example is *Everyman.* 2) limited-scope morality has a greater unity and is more realistic because it deals with only one vice or moral problem. **Skelton's** *Magnificence* is a good example for it depicts the danger of excess.

The Castle of Perseverance (c. 1425)

It is a good example of full-scope morality to begin the study of the English morality, for it contains nearly all the themes found in individual plays throughout the genre. This long play of more than 3600 lines traces the entire life of its hero, *Humannun Genus* (Mankind), as he wages

a fluctuating battle with evil forces. Appended to the manuscript is a diagram showing how the elaborate action was staged. The plan calls for five scaffolds (belonging to the world, the Flesh, the Devil, Covetousness, and God) to be erected in a circle around an area known as "the place". At the center stands the castle of Perseverance. The protagonist remains in bed. From time to time Mankind mounts the various scaffolds to indicate his commitment to one or another of the five forces. As the play begins, Mankind ignores the council of his Good Angel and allows the Bad Angel to entice him into the service of the World. Mankind, arrayed in splendid garments and attended by Lust and Folly, is led by the World to the scaffold of Covetousness where he accepts the Seven Deadly Sins. He is brought back to the Castle by Penance and he is protected from sin by the seven Moral Virtues. His enemies (the World, the Flesh, and the Devil) attack the Castle but are repulsed by the Virtues. Covetousness, who is blamed for letting Mankind slip away, tempts the now aged hero out of the Castle with promises of wealth. The Virtues plead with Mankind but they are interrupted by the impatient Bad Angel Mankind's greed is cut short by Death who appears without warning and strikes him with a dart. In vain he calls upon the World for help. There is nothing that he can do except pray that God may deliver his soul from hell Mercy and Peace appeal to God to save Mankind. God pardons Mankind and admits the Soul to heavenly bliss. Then the actor impersonating God turns to the spectators and points out the moral: "... Thynke on youre last endynge!"

Everyman (c. 1500)

After a brief prologue, the theme of the story is announced: God dispatches his servant Death to get Everyman (who is untroubled by any thought of death) ready for a pilgrimage "which he in no wise may escape." Everyman is by no means prepared for the pilgrimage and thinks of bribing Death to give him 12 years to build up his moral account. He is only permitted to take any of his life-long associates with him if they are willing to make the journey.

Much to his disappointment, Everyman makes the painful discovery that none of his former companions (Friendship, Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods) will accompany him. Friendship is ready to die for him, but when he hears that Death awaits Everyman, he backs down. Fellowship would be happy to join him in murder but cannot accompany him on his pilgrimage. Kindred offers Everyman her maid to help him in the journey, but she herself must

stay behind. Cousin, after pledging eternal loyalty withdraws on account of a cramp in the toe. All of Everyman's friends, of course, wish him well. When he perceives the emptiness of men's promises of love, Everyman turns to Goods, whom he has adored more than all else in life. It takes a while for Goods to arrive, for he must work his way out of the comers, chests, and bags into which he has been packed. He may help Everyman to remedy any worldly sorrow, but he follows no men into the grave. Their conversation is interesting. Once Everyman is dead, Goods promises to deceive someone else in precisely the same way.

From this point on, the play deals with the way in which Everyman can achieve salvation. The only character who can go with him is Good Deeds who is too weak to stand or even to speak. Good Deeds sends Everyman to Knowledge who leads him to the cleansing river of Confession and later guides him to Priesthood. At last Good Deeds is strong enough to rise and join Everyman. Gradually Everyman is deserted by the last of his worldly possessions (Beauty, Strength, and the Five Wits) and, on the very threshold of the grave, even by Knowledge. As the redeemed Everyman enters Paradise, Knowledge announces that he has been saved, and an angel receives his soul.

Despite a tendency to obvious moralization, *Everyman* occupies a distinguished place in English drama. The reader is almost always aware of the figures in the play as flesh-and-blood people rather than empty personifications. Within 900 lines the play presents a stirring summary of the most deeply felt tenets of the medieval faith.

Interlude

Interlude was a comic performance acted between courses of a great feast. The purpose is primarily entertainment rather than edification. It is more realistic and humorous than other medieval plays.

Interludes are a bridge between morality and Elizabethan drama. Henry **Medwall's** *Fulgens and Lueres* emphasizes romantic love. **John Heywood** (1497-1580) wrote *The Witty and Witless, The Play of Love, The Play of the Weather, The Play Called the Four P's.*

PART III:

THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Chapter 14
Renaissance in England

The word renaissance, which means rebirth, is commonly applied to the movement or period which marks the transition from the medieval to the modern world in Western Europe. It designates the great revival of arts and letters which, under the influence of classical models, began in Italy in the fifteenth century, culminating in the High Renaissance and spreading to northern Europe to the end of the century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. The revival of classical learning affected all European literatures in which the same general causes were at work, causes such as the liberation of thought, belief in the potentiality of man, humanism, the revolt against papal authority incited by the Reformers, the discovery of classical writers, wonder at the new world as revealed by navigators and men of science, the perception of beauty and great art in the Greek and Latin classics, the secularization of literature, this-worldly approach to life, etc.

Renaissance, in its broadest sense, can include the earlier renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and Chaucer and Matthew Arnold can be called renaissance men for Chaucer was influenced by Italian writers and Arnold by Greek classics. But in the usual sense of the word Renaissance suggests the period beginning with the end of the Middle Ages and continues up to middle of the seventeenth century. The dates differ for different countries. The English Renaissance, for example, was a full century behind the Italian Renaissance in its flowering.

The break from medievalism was gradual Some Renaissance attitudes go back into the heart of the medieval period and some medieval traits persisted well into and even through the Renaissance period. Marlowe introduces the good and bad angels as well as the seven deadly sins in *Dr. Faustus,* and morality plays were performed up to the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

But when the break from medievalism was completed, the change was so radical that the term Renaissance was sharply contrasted with medievalism.

The Renaissance writers turned to the treasures of classical culture and the authority of classical writers for inspiration. They condemned the world-hating doctrine and the preparation of one soul for the future life. The classical culture had taught them that man was a glorious creature capable of infinite development in the direction of perfection and set in a world which should be explored and enjoyed.

Individualism exerted a strong influence upon English Renaissance literature as did many other forces such as the Protestant Reformation, the introduction of printing which led to a commercial market for literature, the spirit of nationalism, the revitalized university life, courtly patronage, and the new science which led to the scientific approach to life and nature.

The period in English literature called the Renaissance is usually considered to have begun with the accession of the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII, in 1485 and lasted until the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660. This long period is divided by some anthologies into two periods: the sixteenth century extending to the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 and the seventeenth century ending with the restoration of kingship. But, properly speaking, the Renaissance consists of the **Early Tudor Age** (1485-1557), the **Elizabethan Age** (1558-1603), the **Jacobean Age** or the Age of King James (1603-1625), the **Caroline Age** or the Age of King Charles I (1625-1642), and the **Commonwealth Interregnum** (1642-1660). Of course, no division can be satisfactory because the English Renaissance affected literature very slowly and Milton, the greatest Renaissance poet, wrote his greatest works in the Restoration period.

In the Early Tudor Age, the ideals of the Renaissance continued replacing those of the Middle Ages. Humanism and Reformation continued making major modifications in English life and thought. In literature it was a time of extensive borrowing from Italian and French sources. Wyatt and Surrey borrowed the sonnet form and matter from Petrarch, and Surrey, in his translation of the *Aeneid,* invented blank verse which was called a "strange meter" by the editor. But Skelton and Barclay continued the old tradition, and the medieval mystery plays, moralities, and interludes were still dominant, although School Plays introduced new elements into the English drama. *Tottel's Miscellany* (1575), a collection of songs and mainly by **Wyatt**

and **Surrey**, was the most significant literary book because it influenced the Elizabethan sonneteers who expanded and modified the sonnet's form and matter.

The Elizabethan Age was the age of great economic and political changes, nationalistic expansion, commercial growth, and religious controversy. It witnessed the development of English drama to its highest level, the outburst of lyric poetry, and great interest in literary criticism. It is called the "Golden Age of English Literature" for it was an age when Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare flourished.

English drama came into being and developed so miraculously that the Elizabethan Age is now called the golden age of English drama from which arose the modem theater. The elements contributing to its development were various: besides the medieval heritage, the classical tradition of drama attracted the attention of the Elizabethan dramatists. The tradition of tragedy was drawn from Seneca, the Roman writer of the revenge tragedy, and the tradition of comedy was drawn from the great Roman writers of comedy, Plautus and Terence. The Greek tradition of drama was drawn from humanistic criticism based on Aristotle and transmitted through Italian Renaissance scholarship. This classical influence appeared first in the School Plays, and then affected the drama written under the auspices of the royal court and of the Inns of Court, and finally influenced the plays of the University Wits who adapted the classical dramatic materials to the demands of the popular stage, and advanced dramatic technique to a point where it was ready for the perfecting touch of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

The period of the reign of James I is called the **Jacobean Age**, that is the age of *Jacobus,* the Latin form of James. The early Jacobean literature is actually a rich flowering of Elizabethan literature, while the late Jacobean literature shows the attitudes that are characteristic of the Caroline Age. In this period the Puritan-Cavalier conflict grew in intensity and the breach between them widened.. The period is marked for the growth of realism in art and cynicism in thought.

The Jacobean Age is the great age of drama, prose, and poetry. Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Chapman, Webster, Middleton, Messinger and Ben Jonson were at their peaks. The sonnet cycles of Shakespeare and Drayton, and Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* were published. Good prose also appeared. The authorized Version of the Bible, Bacon's major work, Donne's

sermons, and Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* appeared in print. Caro6ne literature means all the literature of the age of Charles I, both Cavalier and Puritan, although very often it suggests the literature of the royalist group and the spirit of the court of Charles I. In spite of the nation's involvement in violent religious controversies, classicism was advancing, scientific spirit was growing, and the Puritan migration to America was heavily growing. Caroline literature is often considered as decadent. The theaters were closed in 1642. By the time Charles lost his head, the Puritanism almost ended the literary greatness of the Renaissance.

During the **Commonwealth Interregnum**, the period between the execution of **Charles I** in 1649 and the restoration of monarchy in 1660, England was ruled by parliament under the control of **Oliver Cromwell**, the Puritan leader, who died in 1658. It was an age of great prose works such as Milton's pamphlets, Hobbes' Leviathan (1651), etc. In poetry Vaughan, Waller, Cowley, Davenant and Marvell nourished. John Dryden started his poetic career. He and Marvell shared with Milton the honor of being the greatest poets of a troubled age, although Dryden wrote little during it and he became a typical neoclassical poet.

Classicism

Since the word renaissance means the revival of classical arts and letters, classicism has been an important force, often an issue, in English literature since the beginning of the Renaissance period. Renaissance poets and humanists were conscious advocates of classical doctrine and they fell strongly under its influence, drawing freely upon classical materials and imitating such classical masters as Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Horace, Seneca, Terence, Plautus, etc. In spite of writing *Arcadia,* a pastoral romance, Sir Philip Sidney speaks as a classicist in his *Defence of Poesy.* Ben Jonson is the greatest advocate of classicism, both in his drama and dramatic criticism and in his influence upon English poetry.

By classicism we mean a body of doctrine which reflects the qualities of the ancient Greek and Roman culture, particularly literature, philosophy, art, and literary criticism. But it is dangerous to classify writers or literary types as perfect examples of classicism. Ben Jonson, a self-proclaimed classicist, uses comic relief and violates the unities in his classical tragedies, and some of the romantic poets have cultivated romantic qualities.

Classicism stands for certain ideas and attitudes drawn from the critical remarks of Greeks and Romans and developed through an imitation of ancient arts and letters. These ideas and attitudes can be suggested by the following words and phrases: objectivity, order, balance, restraint of passions, restricted scope of the subject matter, sense of form, unity of aim and design, clarity, simplicity, attention to structure and logical organization, chasteness in diction and style, severity of outline, moderation, self-control, mimesis, intellectualism, propriety or decorum, respect for tradition, conservatism, good sense, communication rather than self-expression, clarity of thought, observing the law of probability, dignified subject reflecting human nature and life, and emphasis on the common attributes of men and states.

Humanism

Humanism is an integral part of English Renaissance because it was the English humanists of the early sixteenth century who were the leading figures in reviving the classical learning and devoting themselves to the study of classical languages and literatures. Thus, humanism designates the revival of classical culture which accompanied the Renaissance.

Humanism accelerated the break with the Middle Ages. It was a revolt against the medieval world-hating doctrine and Scholastic philosophy. The humanists believed that the only way to make people realize their human capacities as individuals was to make them turn to the ancient classics for inspiration and enlightenment. They considered this world as a dynamic and significant one in which man's role was action, not contemplation about the next world.

The Renaissance humanists repeated the ancients' view of the dignity of man and the importance of the present life. They objected to the medieval view of the world as a bridge, a place of preparation for the next world. In the classical underworld, the ghosts of the dead appear as shadows. Thus, the real dignity is given to this world and to man alive, not to Hades.

Humanism encourages devotion to the studies dealing with the life, thought, language, and literature of the ancients, those studies that promote human culture. The humanists found in the classics a justification for their tendency to exalt human nature as opposed to the medieval attitude that exalted the supernatural and the divine and reduced man to a worm.

Humanism in England started with the introduction of the study of Greek at Oxford. The English humanists began with mastering the Greek and the Latin languages and then applied

their new methods to education, theology, and literature. Unlike most Continental humanists, the English humanists retained their faith in Christianity, although they reacted against medieval other-worldly approach to life and attacked the current abuses in the church. They came to believe that classical culture could be fused with Christianity. This view is responsible for the blend of Christianity and paganism in Renaissance literature, especially in the poetry of Spenser and Milton. However, humanists secularized literature and devoted it to human life in this world.

The Renaissance humanists had their own religious, political, and educational doctrines. Of course, the efforts of such humanists as **Erasmus** and **Dean John Colet** to reform the church and theology through humanistic education and appeal to reason failed because of Luther's Reformation. According to humanists, political institutions are of human, not divine, origin and exist for human good. The monarch's duties are of greater concern than his rights. The monarch has no right to start a war for selfish reasons because war is inhumane and should be restored to only when approved by the" people themselves.

Humanism suggests that happiness is achieved through virtuous life that can be achieved through the control of reason checked by education. Since humanistic education can secure human happiness, both men and women should be educated. Physical education is very important, and nature should be employed as an educational tool. Humanities that are most deeply rooted in ancient wisdom are concerned with man as man, as a rational and ethical being, and the aim of education is to attain the knowledge of virtue that makes a good man.

The humanists were the enemies of hypocrisy and late medieval pretense, of a money-grubbing society that did not care for the ideal society of peace, unity, and piety. They wanted to rebuild a new society based upon the highest ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. Their ideal man was a widely informed man-of-the-world, somebody like Leonardo da Vinci who was a scholar, writer, artist, scientist, and inventor.

Humanistic education began with **William Grocyn** (1446-1519) who studied in Florence and was the first teacher at Oxford and the first introducer of the "New Learning", **Thomas Linacre** (1460-1525), a doctor of medicine, founded the Royal College of Physicians in London and taught Greek at Oxford to Erasmus and Sir Thomas More. **John Colet**, the dean of St. Paul's

School, founded the first secondary school devoted to the "New Learning", **William Lily**, the first master of St. Paul's School, wrote a Latin grammar handbook that continued to be the standard text for centuries.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), the greatest humanist of the age, who was Dutch by birth, wrote his *Praise of Folly* (1510) at the London home of Sir Thomas More, exalting the humanistic ideals and satirizing the corruption of religion and learning. He and other Oxford reformers interpreted the original classical and Christian texts as living documents divorced from medieval commentary and allegorical interpretations. Erasmus attacked Pope, although all Oxford reformers opposed Protestantism and remained Roman Catholics.

Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), an intimate friend of all humanists of his age, was successful until he disapproved of Henry VIII's proposed divorce from Catherine, and refused to subscribe to the Act of Supremacy which denied Pope's spiritual authority. Consequently he lost his life and 400 years after his execution he was canonized as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.

More's *Utopia* (a Greek term meaning no place or nowhere) is an imitation of Plato's *Republic.* It portrays an ideal state, a communist rather than a Christian one. It consists of two books. Book I portrays an ideal world as opposed to the European world of corruption, discord, war, poverty, crime, cruelty, and immoral conduct. Book II goes into details of More's ideal state in which the government is truly representative, idleness is forbidden, both men and women are educated, there is complete religious toleration, and the economy is communistic. Utopia is a rational world governed by humanistic, not Christian, principles.

Other humanists discovered and translated into English the classical works previously accessible only to classical scholars. Some of them attempted original works and helped the spread of the "New Learning". Of course, most original works are free translations, imitation or patchworks of continental writings.

Sir John Check (1514-1557), the professor of Greek at Cambridge, popularized Greek studies in England. His *Heart of Seduction, How Grievous It Is to a Commonwealth* portrays the Tudor ideal of political order under a strong monarch and the Tudor fear of anarchy and rebellion.

Sir Thomas Elyot (1490-1546) prepared the first Latin-English dictionary. In the book named *The Governor* Elyot expresses his humanistic concept of education for princes and those in high places. To him a real ruler is an enlightened and liberal humanist and his education should be both practical and intellectual. A prince should learn both Greek and Latin and cultivate a healthy body by exercise. Elyot's *Governor,* which was strongly influenced by Xenophon and Plato, is the first full treatise in English on the theory of humanistic education and moral philosophy.

Roger Ascham (1515-1568), an accomplished Greek scholar and tutor to Queen Elizabeth and her Latin secretary, was credited and honored for Queen Elizabeth's great interest in classics and humanistic learning. He strongly encouraged the use of English as a language of scholarship, and he was a purist who opposed the use of foreign words.

Ascham's *Toxophilus* praises archery as a backbone of national defense and an excellent physical training and character building. The book is a Platonic dialogue in which Philologus (lover of knowledge) and Toxophilus (lover of archery) discuss the use of bow and arrow. Aschams' *Schoolmaster* is the first significant treatise on the theory of humanistic education in which patience, love, sympathetic encouragement and gentleness can accomplish more than whippings. He recommends Arthur edifying literature and condemns *Morte d' Arthur* and. *The Canterbury Tales* for immorality. He also recommends some classical models who can help students in writing English prose in a plain ……..

Thomas Wilson (1525-1581) wrote *The Art of Rhetoric,* the first handbook of English composition. He leans on Cicero and Quintilian. He favors a simple and fluent prose style, free of affectation, inkhorn terms, and excessive Latinisms. *The Art of Rhetoric* is not a mere composition handbook; it is actually a humanistic treatise on the full education of a man for the full life.

Translations of Classical Works

Numerous Renaissance books, treatises, and even poems considered as original works are actually unacknowledged free translations. It was an age of the revival of learning when few people cared for originality, sources, influences, or assimilation. However, translations made the wealth of classical culture and learning accessible to Renaissance writers.

Renaissance translators were more attentive to history books and late Greek romances than philosophy. **Sir Thomas Elyot** translated *The Doctrinal of Princes by the Noble Isocrates* and Plutarch's *The Education or Bringing up of Children.* **Sir Thomas North** translated Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* which served Shakespeare and some other authors as a source. **Philemon Holland** translated Plutarch's *Moralia.* **John Wilkinson** translated *The Ethics* of Aristotle whose *Politics* was translated by J. D. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was translated by **W. Barker** and again by Holland and *The Famous History of Herodotus* by B. R. Arthur Hall translated *Ten Books of Homer's Iliad* and then **George Chapman** translated all of Homer.

Latin historians were favored. Julius Caesar's *Commentaries* and *Gallic Wars* were translated, the latter by Arthur Golding. Holland translated **Livy** and some other Roman historians including **Pliny**. **Holland's** excellent and numerous translations won him the title of "the Translator General of his age." **Seneca's** philosophical works were translated by **William Adlington** whose version was one of the most popular Renaissance translations and it contributed to the Elizabethan imagined view of antiquity.

Numerous Latin poems were translated in the Renaissance period. **Lucretius** was the only major Latin poet that was not translated in that period. **Surrey's** translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* in blank verse inaugurated the verse translation. Arthur Golding translated **Ovid's** *Metamorphoses* in rhyming heptameters. Marlowe's excellent translation of Ovid's *Amores* appeared in 1590, and **George Pettie's** *Petite Palace of Pettie His Pleasure* offered twelve prose translations largely from Ovid.

The complete works of **Terence** were translated by R. Bernard in 1598, and **Plautus** was translated by W. Warner. The translation of the complete works of Seneca by various hands appeared in 1581. **William Painter** translated many Italian short stories in his *The Palace of Pleasure. The Courtier* was Sir **Thomas Hoby's** translation of **Gastingelion**. It was called the greatest courtesy book, and it was one of the favorite volumes at Queen Elizabeth's court. It portrays an ideal courtier, an ideal lady of court and different steps of love.

Machiavelli's *Art of War* was translated by **P. Whiteforne** in 1560, but his *Prince* was translated anonymously and it made his name a synonym for treachery and deceit. The

translation of **Ariosto's** *Orlando Furioso* by **Sir John Harrington** influenced Spenser, and **Ariosto's** *Gli Suppositi* and *I Suppositi* introduced the romantic domestic comedy into England.

Sir S. Lee Barners's *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* and **Sir Thomas North's** *The Dial of Princes* are translations from the philosophical romance concerning the Roman Emperor written by the Spanish bishop Antonio de Guevara. But the most popular Spanish work translated into English was **Cervantes'** *Don Quixote* by Thomas Shelton.

Almost every significant work in Renaissance French was translated into English, and **Montaigne's** *Essays* translated by **John Florio** was the most popular. Florio also wrote *The World of Words,* the first Italian-English dictionary.

Renaissance Views of Man and State

The Renaissance view of man, derived from ancient sources and Christianity, was not fundamentally different from the one held by the Middle Ages or the Neoclassical period. The difference depends only on a shift of emphasis. The Middle Ages and the neoclassical period emphasize man's limitation, while the Renaissance emphasized man's individuality and the way microcosm can affect macrocosm. Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Man* draws on Christian theology as well as the concept of the Chain of Being and asks man to "submit" to the will of God because "this due degree / Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee," But to Hamlet man is a miracle, a wonder.

In the Christian view, man is half angel half animal; his position is unfortunate, standing halfway between angels and beasts. While the Middle Ages laments man's animal nature, Renaissance finds. him capable of advancement through his angelic nature.

The idea of **the Great Chain of Being** began with Plato's principle of **plenitude**, fullness of the world, expressed in *Timaeus.* The fusion of Plato's plenitude and Aristotle's **continuity** and **gradation** gave rise to the philosophy of the Chain of Being that was one of the commonplaces for centuries until it was rejected by the Romantic poets. The great chain started from the foot of the throne of God or Zeus to the meanest creatures and inanimate objects. Every speck of creation was a link in the chain. Each link was bigger than the lower one and smaller than the upper one. Only one link is given to man.

Gradation governs all links: fire is the noblest of the four elements, lion is the king of beasts, eagle is the chief of birds, whale is the king of sea creatures, oak is the forest's king, diamond is the noblest stone, gold the highest metal, the sun is the king among stars, justice is the highest virtue, and the head is the highest limb.

The connection of man with the upper or lower link may be weakened or strengthened, but no one can move to the upper link. Shakespeare's *Tempest* is an excellent example: Caliban hovers between man and beast, and Prospero learns that he cannot transcend the terms of his humanity. He realizes that man for all his striving towards angels cannot get rid of the bestial, the Caliban within him. But man's double nature, which is the source of internal conflict, has the unique function of binding together all creation and becoming a microcosm influencing and being influenced by the macrocosm, summing up all the universe in himself.

It was a commonplace of the Renaissance period that the state duplicates the order of the macrocosm. There are comparisons between the sun, the ruler of the heavens, and the king, the ruler of the state. It is common to see the correspondence between disorder in the heaven and civil disorder in the state. The descriptions of heavenly confusion during the night before Caesar’s or King Duncan’s death are excellent examples. Confusion is everywhere when Macbeth is going to kill Duncan, and wild beasts haunted the streets of Rome the night before Caesar's assassination.

Chapter 15
The Reformation in England

The Reformation, which is very often called **Martin Luther's Reformation**, is usually described as the great religious movement of the sixteenth century which aimed at the reformation of doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church of Rome; it was a movement which ended in the establishment of the various Reformed or Protestant churches in Europe and England. Its principal leaders were Martin Luther in Germany, **John Calvin** in Geneva, and John Knox in Scotland. But the contribution of each if them the movement is exaggerated. It would be wrong to attribute the break u of the medieval world or the Catholic Church to Martin Luther because Luther himself was the product of the forces that brought the religious movement and the new world into being.

Renaissance awakened the spirit of awareness and demanded secularization in different walks of life. Some claims of the Church were challenged by a variety of factors. The Church's claim as the only means through which man can attain grace and salvation was challenged by mysticism with its emphasis on the direct encounter with the divine. Humanists preferred the culture of the ancient Greece and Rome to that of the scholastic theologians. It is true that some English humanists like Erasmus and More were hostile to Reformation, but they were also hostile to the corrupt and ignorant clergy, to such abuses as the sale of papal pardons, and to any kind of idolatry in the Church. New learning brought about new awareness and added to the significance of this world. The sense of nationalism, patriotism, the rise of a middle class interested in trade and commerce and hostile to the feudal system, the tendency of peasants to revolt, the discovery of the new world, the new ideas of Copernicus, and the spread of information through the printing press had prepared the ground for any religious movement. Without these forces and those who supported the rightness of Luther's cause and convictions, Luther could only become another martyr.

While Luther helped to give form and direction to Reformation, its subsequent direction and its impact upon history, arts and letters were out of his hands. The significance of Luther must be seen in his religious and Scriptural insights which necessitated a break with the medieval Catholic Church, but such a break was made possible by the non-religious developments partly mentioned.

The so-called English Reformation was not predominantly a religious movement. The German Reformation was inspired by Luther and that of France by Calvin, but the English Reformation, excluding that of Wycliffe, was a social, political, and somehow religious movement moulded by the political and social conditions of England and dominated by the passions and policy of Henry VIII. It had little that was intellectually original. It borrowed ideas from abroad and what was interesting was the social-political-ecclesiastical form which it worked out. Its religious elements were the Protestant tendencies traceable to the tenets of Wycliffe and the Lollerds who favored the translation of the Bible into the language spoken by people and demanded a return to pure Christianity. The English Reformation ended with the secularization of the society and the fulfillment of Henry VIII's claim of being the Supreme Head of the English Church.

The English Reformation had no ideological basis. **Henry VIII** needed a legitimate son to succeed him, and he could not get one without the approval of Rome to divorce Catherine. He actually wrote a book attacking Luther's Reformation and defending Pope Leo X who gave Henry the title "**Defender of the Faith**." But Henry failed to get the approval of Pope for the intended divorce. Thus, Henry's effort s in defending the Catholic Church and condemning the translation of the Bible were labor lost. He suddenly broke with Rome, called himself the Supreme Head of the English Church, and achieved what Rome denied him. Thus English Reformation took place for political reasons.

During the reign of the child **King Edward VI** (1547-53) the English Reformation acquired a strong social and religious force. England became a safe place for Protestant theologians from the Continent, but when Mary succeeded Edward, most leading Protestant leaders fled to the Continent and those who remained in England or were captured were burned as heretics. **Mary** remained a Roman Catholic, but since she was challenged by a rebellion, and she had married

her Spanish cousin and, therefore, was not loved by her people, she could not undo what her father and her brother had done. After her death, the protestant exiles returned to England and shaped the English society during the long reign of **Queen Elizabeth** who identified herself with her own country and ruled as the favorite protestant ruler of her people.

Religious controversy was a natural outcome of the Reformation which was opposed even by some of the humanists. **Sir Thomas More** was a humanist and finally a saint, but neither of these two sides of his character found expression in his polemical writings. **Hooker** believes that More, though a very learned man, did not fully understand the position that his own church was defending against the Lutherans.

William Tyndale (1484-1536) denies the medieval distinction between religion and secular life. He is in full sympathy with Luther's view that the Bible should be translated into a language that can reach the heart and mind of everybody.

The English translations of the Bible before Tyndale were from the Latin Vulgate. *Tyndale's Bible* was the first English translation of the Greek New Testament. He also translated the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the Book of Jonah. His translation is very clear and accurate suggesting sound scholarship and poetic power.

Opposition to the translation of the Bible, especially from Sir Thomas More, forced Tyndale to flee to Germany in 1524 where he did most of his translation and printing. In 1527 Henry VIII ordered the burning of Tyndale's New Testament, Tyndale was finally tried for heresy and executed near Brussels by the Spanish.

Coverdale's Bible (1535) was the first complete Bible in English and its second edition (1537) was the first Bible printed in England, and it carried a royal license. Miles Coverdale included Tyndale's Old Testament translation and he himself translated the rest of it.

Matthew's Bible was a translation by John Rogers, one of the Protestant leaders martyred in the regime of Mary. Rogers was once Tyndale's assistant and he had access to Tyndale's translation. *Taverner's Bible* is the revised edition of *Matthew's Bible* by Richard Taverner.

The Great Bible (1539) was a reworking of the Bibles of Coverdale, Tyndale and Rogers by Coverdale. A preface was added by Thomas Cranmer, and it came to be called *Cranmer's Bible.*

The Geneva Bible (1560), a militantly Protestant one, mainly by William Whittengham, was printed in Switzerland by the Protestant exiles. It was the most scholarly and accurate translation up to its time. It was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth and, at least, 140 editions of it were printed. It was the first Bible which employed division into verses.

Hoping to counteract *The Geneva Bible,* most of the Anglican bishops contributed to the translation of *The Bishops' Bible* (1568) headed by Oatthew Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury. That is why it is very often called *Parker's Bible.* It became the standard church Bible of the Elizabethan period. It was well-known to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and it was the strongest basis for the *Authorized Version.*

English Roman Catholics in exile prepared a completely non-Protestant translation of the Scriptures, published by the English Jesuit College at Douai in 1609. That is Why it is called *The Douai Bible* which is based on the Latin Vulgate and influenced by Tyndale and Coverdale. It is still the best translation of the Bible for English-speaking Roman Catholics.

In 1604 king James appointed a group of bishops and learned men to prepare the best possible translation of the Bible call *The Authorized Version* or *The King James' Bible* which was published in 1611. *The Bishop's Bible* was the key translation and all other translations were consulted.

The Authorized Version is the best known, the most influential, and the greatest translation in the English language. Its poetic quality and its wording suggest the influence of Coverdale and Tyndale respectively. It has influenced almost all English-speaking writers, and it has enjoyed vaster circulation than any other book in English.

The English Reformation gave rise not only to the translation of the Bible but also to some of those other religious works such as the *Book of Common Prayer* which was given shape by **Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) who helped Henry VIII to divorce Catherine, became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533, and was burned by Mary. **Hugh Latimer** (1485-1555), the Bishop of Worcester, was also martyred at the stake. His 45 extant sermons are the first significant Protestant sermons in English, and it was his eloquence that moved the majority of people to the Protestant position.

John Fox (1526-1587), who was once one of the Protestant exiles in Frankfort, concentrated on the Protestant martyrs in his *Fox's Martyrs* which perpetuated the English hostility toward Roman Catholicism.

Richard Hooker (1554-1600) wrote *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* which portrays the main position of the Anglican Church, refutes both the Roman Catholic and the Puritan Protestant viewpoints, and recommends moderation, charity, and goodwill,

There were Protestants within the established Anglican Church who regarded the reformation of the Church as incomplete and demanded a purer church. These Protestants were called the Puritans only because they called for purification. It was in later times that the term "Puritan" came to mean any person who affects extreme strictness in morals.

Puritans objected to what they called the Catholic structure of the Anglican Church; that is, the administration of the church by bishops and papal semblances in the ritual. They also objected to the Anglican version of Protestant theology.

The sixteenth-century Puritans were not so powerful as the seventeenth-century ones who closed the theaters and took over the government. **John Knox** (1505-1572) was the greatest of the early Puritans. He was the first significant Protestant leader in Scotland. He met Calvin in Geneva and become the most eloquent spokesman of Calvinism in England. He founded the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and stamped his image upon his nation. He wrote his *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) against Queen Mary of England and Mary Queen of Scot. His most important work is the *History of Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1585) which is the first original prose work of Scotland.

The Puritan attack against the English Established Church reached its climax in the *Martin Marpelate* tracts, demanding the elimination of the bishops and other hierarchy of the church and placing the true ministers of the gospel on equal footing. The tracts declare that ritual pageantry should give its place to simple rites that move the spirit rather than the senses.

John Whitgift (1530-1604) was responsible for maintaining the position of the Established Church which was under the attack of Puritans, but when the State Chamber Decree required the publication of any book or pamphlet be authorized by the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of London, Puritans were silenced and their leader, Thomas Cartwright, fled to the

Continent. But Cartwright thundered the English Established Church from the Protestant presses of northern Europe for two decades. However, the threat was not serious until the age of Charles I when Puritans closed theaters in 1642 and took over the Church and the government.

Chapter 16
Renaissance Sonneteers

Sonnet as a poetic form developed in Italy in the thirteenth century. Petrarch, the fourteenth-century Italian poet, raised the sonnet to its greatest Italian perfection and gave it, for the English readers, his own name. The form was introduced into England by **Sir Thomas Wyatt**, who translated 26 Petrarchan sonnets and left over 30 examples of his own in English. Henry Howard the Earl of Surrey shares with Wyatt the credit for introducing the form and he is important as an early modifier of the Italian form. Since Shakespeare attained fame for sonnets of this modified type, his name has often been given to the English form. Certain poets following the example of Petrarch have written a series of sonnets dealing with unified subject. Such series are called sonnet sequences or sonnet cycles.

Sonnet is a lyric poem of fourteen iambic pentameter lines. The two characteristic sonnet types are the Italian, Petrarchan, or classical and the English or Shakespearean. The Italian form is distinguished by its bipartite division into the octave and the sestet. The octave bears the burden: a doubt, a problem, a reflection, a query, a historical statement, a cry of indignation or desire, a vision of the ideal, etc. The sestet eases the load, resolves the problem or doubt, answers the query, solaces the yearning, and realizes the vision. The octave may present the narrative, state the proposition, or raise a question. In this case the sestet drives home the narrative by making an abstract comment, applies the proposition, or solves the problem. English poets have varied these items greatly: the octave and sestet division is not always kept; volta or the change of thought after the octave is sometimes ignored; and the rhyme-scheme is often varied.

The English or Shakespearean sonnet embodies four divisions: three quatrains and a couplet. The couplet at the end is usually a commentary on the foregoing or an epigrammatic close.

Sonnet's definite restrictions as to form make it a challenge to the artistry of the poet and call for all the technical skill at the poet's command. Emphasis is placed on exactness and perfection.

The brevity of the form favors concentrated expression of idea or passion. For all the great Renaissance sonneteers, the sonnet is less concerned with the expression of love than with the process by which a moment of passion is transformed into a polished artefact. The Petrarchan sonnet is the most conventional of forms, and a large part of its appeal to the Renaissance writer lay in the challenge it offered to emulate what others had done before.

The fulfillment and frustration of passion have been the two great subjects of love poetry since time began. The love sonnet is the most committed form of that poetry of frustration which, taking its origin from **Ovid** came down the centuries picking up refinements and elaborations on its way, gaining romantic coloring and something approaching religious fervor on the one hand, and formal structure and a set of conventions on the other. From **Petrarch** it absorbed a new personal and lyrical intensity. Petrarch is actually the bridge between the medieval and Renaissance love poetry, converting what had been narrative into lyric. Neo-Platonism, mysticism, the cult of the Virgin Mary, and the English frame of mind tempered what the Middle Ages called **courtly love** and produced a species of **romantic love** that cares more for the spiritual than the physical beauty. The story of the influence of Petrarch on English sonnet in the Renaissance period is a story of experiment and reaction. Renaissance sonneteers tried constantly to give to Petrarchan love poetry an intellectual and moral respectability, yet they preserved some of its traditional characteristics.

The exact origins of love poetry cannot now be completely traced. The status of women in the Middle Ages is confused and does not help us to account a poetic attitude which exalted the lady far above the lover whose hope of earthly happiness was based upon her beauty and wisdom. In Provence, **Troubadours** wrote a kind of love poetry about the year 1100 that seemed original.

Socrates elaborates the type of abstract longing which has perfection for its object, but it is obviously not with a woman that he expects the lover to begin the spiritual ascent. For **Plato** the love of a woman is a sickness of the soul. **Platonic love** is the love of beauty identified with virtue which leads the lover to perfection and finally to the absolute good.

Since goddesses in ancient Greece and Rome were troublesome, and the discord they brought about in heaven was accounted for troubles on earth, women were depicted as the chief

obstacle to the ordered affairs of men. This classical attitude was transmitted to the Christian Middle Ages.

Between the passions of the classical epic hero and those of the romantic lover there is much difference. **Heroic love** is conquest: the hero attacks and the lady defends. The romantic passion is of entirely different nature: it involves the fixation of the lover upon a single object of ideal character. **Constancy** on the part of the lover is the essence of romantic love. For the romantic lover, the beloved lady is unique, indispensable to his happiness and even to his health. He is no longer self-propelled in a line. He becomes a satellite and love compels him to revolve in the orbit of the beloved; therefore, he cannot sustain a heroic role and he takes on a measure of passivity. He is left more dead than alive, with the **dart of love** fixed and festering in his heart.

To **St. Augustine** the sexual act appeared innocent, but the desire for it evil. Therefore, in the Middle Ages to love a woman for her own sake was to be faithless to God. Any kind of love which stopped short of God would be in the Christian view no more than lust, but it was permissible to love the beauty of God in a woman, a basis upon which rested the story of Dante and Beatrice.

Following the Christian concept of love, Renaissance sonneteers excluded carnal love. Even in the love songs of Troubadours nothing is more common than the distinction between true and false love. The carnal, unspiritual desire is not the subject of love poetry. The basis of love poetry is the concept of **fin amor** or true love which is a complete reversal of the normal relation of man and woman. Love comes with the first sight and the lover's submission is complete and perpetual. It is not mutual love; only the lover loves while the lady is indifferent or even hostile and cruel. The lover looks absent-minded and even mad; his mind cannot function properly because the inner image of the beloved has absorbed his attention to the exclusion of anything else. Therefore, the lover cannot be expected to act rationally. In the debate between love and reason, the latter is powerless. The lover is fearful and humble, and he asks for pity, while she is called a goddess, an angel, a guide, the source of inspiration and nobility. In fact, romantic love is ennobling. It is the beauty of the beloved that makes the lover's poetry beautiful, and the cruelty of which the lover complains is the measure of her worth and her virtue. That is why love is considered as the source of all virtue and all goodness. Only by becoming virtuous and

gentle a lover can hope to deserve the love of a lady who is herself the source of all virtue and goodness. Thus, romantic love is a discipline, and the lover is led to virtue and nobility through love which has an **ennobling power**. That is why the lady is depicted as eternal beauty, youth, perfection, and godly qualities. She is a remote and unattainable vision of loveliness.

The joy of love and the pain of love sum up the experience which lovers have shared in all ages. The sadness of love poems is not that of regret; it is the sadness of unfulfillment. In love, joy is everywhere and overshadows the torments of love. The pains of love are undertaken joyfully in the hope of greater joy to come. It is out of deep and sincere feeling that the poet-lover sings. No one can sing well unless the song comes from the heart which is full of true love.

Falling in love is always accompanied by great emotional disturbances: the lover is bewildered, helpless, miserable, tortured by mental and physical pains; he sighs, weeps, trembles; he loses appetite and becomes sleepless. He agonizes over his condition and indulges in endless self-questioning and reflections on the nature of love and the lack of fulfillment. His condition improves when he thinks of fulfillment.

Petrarchan love poetry reached England effectively only by the 15408. The Elizabethan love sonnet is, in a sense, the continuation of an unbroken tradition of Petrarchan love sonnet. The Elizabethan sonneteer inherited not only the basic Petrarchan situation of the adoring lover and the unresponsive mistress but also a large number of traditional conventions inseparable from it. The English lover in his turn suffers the tempestuous and warring passions of love; he lies awake all night, or if he sleeps, he has erotic dreams of his mistress; he itemizes all her virtues and beauty, and he strongly believes that his verse has the power to keep that beauty alive in spite of the ravages of time. The poet-lover is imagined as a ship in the tempest; the hot ice and freezing fire afflict him. The lady's eyes are like the sun; her eyelashes like nets ready to catch him.

Conceit or far-fetched comparison is commonly associated with Petrarchan sonnet. It is the basic conception within the sonnet and the rhetorical figure upon which the framework of an individual sonnet depends. A good sonnet in Renaissance term is one in which the conceit is worked out perfectly in fourteen lines so that form and content fit each other. It takes innumerable forms. It may appear as/ a single metaphor that extends through the whole sonnet

and reaches its natural climax in the last line; it may be a classical myth applied as an allegory of the lover's state; and it may be a debate or a paradox.

The credit for the introduction of sonnet into England is given to **Sir Thomas Wyatt** (1503-42) who returned from Italy with a desire to fashion English verse on the Italian model. He hoped to introduce dignity and harmony into English verse. Unable to find these qualities in Chaucer, of whose correct pronunciation he was, like his contemporaries, ignorant, he borrowed from Italy forms unknown to England, chief of which was the sonnet. He also introduced a new lyric style, rich in images, metaphorical and subtle.

Wyatt was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge. He fulfilled royal missions for Henry VIII in France and Italy where he acquainted himself with the Renaissance spirit, especially with that of love poets. After being knighted in 1536, he was imprisoned either because of a quarrel with the Duke of Suffolk or suspected of being the lover of Anne Boleyn. Regaining favor, he served as a member of the Privy Council and as ambassador to Spain. In 1541 he was again imprisoned under the charge of treason, but he secured unconditional pardon through his eloquent defence. In 1542 he sat in parliament and was designated commander of the fleet. He died of fever in the same year. His poems were published in 1557 in *Songs an Sonnets,* known as *Tottle's Miscellany* which is one of the landmarks of English literature beginning lyrical love poetry in English.

His translations of Petrarch has always been criticized for not keeping the accent, but it is easy to see that poetry as a melodious and enriched expression of a poet's own feeling is in its infancy here. The new poets had to find their own language and enrich it with borrowings from other languages.

In his translations we have Petrarchan matter which, in spite of its great influence on English sonnet, does not fit the English temper. That is why Wyatt's finest poems are not translations. His original poems have an ease of movement and versification which is much less apparent in his translations. To read Wyatt's Petrarchan sonnets after reading Shakespeare's is to have one's ear teased by irregularities and puzzled by the position of accents. This kind of awkwardness was caused by the double difficulty of being faithful to the original and of writing the first English sonnets. His original songs came to him as naturally as the leaves to a tree. In his

translations he was writing within a certain tradition and its established conventions. A poet cannot express his own feelings in borrowed conventions because lyric poetry is a kind of confessional.

In spite of all these problems, Wyatt breathed new life into the conventions he imported. In spite of all conventions, he stands out as an individual voice, as a complex and passionate love poet, and as a great artist.

In his translations of Petrarch, Wyatt follows the Petrarchan love conventions closely, but in his original poems he departs from them. This gives us the idea that either Wyatt did not understand Petrarch or he departed from him intentionally. In "The Long Love" (Petrarch's *Sonnetto in Vita* 91) the love convention and the conceit of Petrarch are there. The whole sonnet is about the poet-lover's blush in the presence of the lady, expressed in the conceit of love as a warrior who is afraid of facing the beloved and expressing his love, In "My Galley" (Petrarch's Sonnet 137) the lover compares his state to a ship in perilous storm. This is an old and familiar conceit expressed in so many love poems in the world literature, an idea beautifully expressed in one line of poetry by Hafiz: "Darkling, I am terrified by horrible waves and whirlpools." But "Whoso List to Hunt" which is an adaptation of Petrarch's *Rime 190* is a greater sonnet, especially when applied to Wyatt's view of Anne Boleyn who married Henry VIII. "I Find No Peace" which is translated from Petrarch, *Sonnetto in Vita 90,* is one of his best poems because it expresses the natural and at the same time universal feeling and situation of a lover who entertains paradoxical thoughts: fear and hope, rejection and fulfillment.

The finest part of Wyatt's work is the part which shows little or no foreign influence. It consists of a series of lyrics, written perhaps for the lute, singularly native in melody and form, and singularly individual in their appeal. His poem on mutability, beginning "Is it possible", is one of the finest 16th-century poems. Lyrics like "They Flee from Me", "My Lute", "Madam Withouten Many Words", "Farewell, Love", and the like are among his best poems. The expression of such personal feelings in the simplest and briefest form is itself the highest poetry.

It has been observed that, unlike Petrarch, Wyatt does not describe the women with whom he is in love, but it could not be said of him, as has been said of Donne, that he was an egocentric

sensualist who ignored the feelings of women. In fact, one of his poems voices the complaint of a forsaken maid; and another one (No. 38) expresses his sweetheart's grief.

It is true that a large number of his lyrics are concerned with the unhappy state of the lover, but the reader must be careful not to misunderstand him because very often he is objecting to the conventions of Petrarchan love.

In his original poems Wyatt accuses his real or imaginary mistress of cruelty, of deceit and hypocrisy, of disdain, of guile and "newfangleness." It means that his beloved is not perfect or Petrarchan. Thus, he is not conventional, but he is natural, for what is conventional is artificial. Unlike Petrarch, Wyatt does not praise ladies. He is always full of resentment, saying how unjustly his mistress has treated him, how well he deserves to be treated, and how sorry she will be some day. He loves women who do not love him; that is, he expects mutual love that fits the English mind.

In "Farewell, Love" he says good-bye to his mistress and to romantic love conventions. No romantic lover ever says good-bye to love for constancy is the essence of Petrarchan love. But the lover is invited by Plato and Seneca to study philosophy. Since these two were known as moral philosophers, Wyatt is suggesting that Petrarchan love is immoral. There is a debate here between love and reason, and it is won by the latter. In "They Flee from Me" he forgets the lady of sonnets and comes to actua1life in which women are changeable. Here there are many ladies, not a unique one. "My Lute, Awake" suggests that romantic love is a waste of time, and a lover who suffers the pains of love and humiliates himself is unnatural. That is why in "Madam Withouten Many Words" he demands a decisive answer from the lady; it looks like proposing marriage. The lady is not a goddess but an actual human being.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-47) was notoriously adventurous. In youth he studied Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian. In his teens he lived in Windsor Palace as the guest of Henry VIII and a friend of the Duke of Richmond, Henry's illegitimate son who married Surrey's sister. But in 1546 he was charged with treason because of the dispute over Henry's successor, imprisoned in Windsor castle, and beheaded one week before Henry's death. Surrey followed in Wyatt's footstep, but he was a finer artist. His metrical innovations are important: he was the first to give to the sonnet its purely English form and he introduced blank verse in his translation

of two books of Virgil's *Aeneid.* He is greater than Wyatt, not so much for greater skill as for more boldness and experiment. He was a man of action, of courage, and of sensibility. In a sense, he, like Lord Byron, became a romantic figure, shaping the tastes of his reader. Wyatt is sententious and simple while Surrey is pictorial and discursive. Grace and tenderness of feeling beautify Surrey's poems. He is more fluent and musical but less vivid and vigorous than Wyatt. He was inspired by Wyatt, although he had his own independent access to the Italians, and his technical standards were higher than those that Wyatt could have taught him. Even his Petrarchan poems, which are not his best, are more accomplished than those of Wyatt, but his original lyrics and sonnets are the best when they are not about love. The two poems in which the reader is moved by the theme of love are put into the mouth of a wife who is in love with her husband.

Surrey is not a great love poet, but he can express real feeling on subjects other than love. His elegy on Wyatt conveys genuine feelings. Best of all is the poem on his imprisonment at Windsor. It catches the very spirit of that pleasure which flows over like-minded young men when they are all together and making their first friendships. It depicts the occupations and feelings of the boyhood days he had spent at Windsor with the king's son. Equally great is his poem on Wyatt's death and the five poems in which Surrey mentions Wyatt with reverence. Metrically, Surrey is one of the great road-makers. Judging by the utility of a poet's work to his successors, Surrey ranks not only above Wyatt but above Chaucer and Milton.

The sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey, whether translated or original, are independent ones. The first sonnet sequence was written by **Sir Philip Sidney** (1554-86), poet, literary critic, and soldier, patron of poets, courtier, and gentleman by birth and by nature, statesman, and scholar. He was educated at Christ Church, Oxford. In 1581 he became a member of parliament for Kent. He was a favorite of the queen and he was knighted in 1583. He was governor of Flushing in 1585. He was mortally wounded in Zutphen battle and died 26 days later when the whole England mourned his death. He was versed in theological matters, and few English man of his day were so much informed on international and social affairs. He actualized the Renaissance ideals.

Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella (star-lover and star),* the first English sonnet cycle, records a young courtier's frustrated love for a lady of refinement and dazzling beauty who happens to be married to another. These 108 sonnets and eleven songs describe a genuine passion which the lover is reluctant to give in to, ashamed to persist in, yet unable to overcome.

Sidney has written a new dramatic version of the old Petrarchan situation, with the central role filled by a modem lover whose particular character breathes new life into old conventions. One should be careful not to read too much autobiography into these poems. Petrarch, who depicts the most constant lover, once admitted that he hated women. Petrarch wrote of his love in the first person, but it is far from certain that the Laura of his poems corresponded to any Laura in real life. The fact that almost all sonnet sequences tell substantially the same story should put us on our guard against a naive biographical approach. Sidney bases his defence of poetry on the argument that it is by definition a form of fiction, not fact. He writes his sonnet cycle as a poetic fiction, a tragedy in three acts, making his fictional characters more lively by giving them real identities.

Sidney was dissatisfied with the love poetry of his age, saying "if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love". He is against blind imitation of Petrarch or Plato. Generations of poets following Petrarch have mechanically reproduced his “long deceased woes” and have imitated his time-worn conceits of ice and fire.

The opening sonnets of Sidney's cycle are so packed with reference to critical theory that they form a manifesto of Sidney's intention: the true source of knowledge about love is not to be found in books but in human heart. Unlike Petrarch, he did not fall in love at the first sight; he fell in love only gradually. Stella is only an image, a pattern of perfection existing only in the lover's mind. Thus, Sidney's sonnets challenge the centuries-old tradition of romantic love. It does not mean that Sidney was not influenced by Petrarch or Plato. In fact, he uses them very cleverly while he denies that he is imitating them. In sonnet 15 he ridicules the importers of foreign wit and decries their lack of poetic feeling. While most love poets pay attention to the beloved and her beauty, Sidney focuses on the situation of the lover whose internal tension can hardly be solved. Petrarch is filled with wonder at the celestial harmony he discovers in the image of his beloved whose perfect beauty and chastity are admired. Sidney is obsessed with

conflict between love and reason, between desire and virtue. He praises Platonic virtue, which suits exceptional people. Sidney's sonnet 71, for example, is based on Petrarch's sonnet 248, but where Petrarch visualizes a goddess in nature and urges the reader to hasten to witness this miracle, Sidney (in sonnet 71) pictures a Platonic divine harmony on earth only to shatter it in the last line. The first thirteen lines of Sidney's sonnet are a stately expression of how the Platonic lover should feel. The fourteenth line tells how he does feel: "But oh," Desire still cries, "Give me some food."

Astrophel revolts against Petrarchan conventions even when he has accepted them. In short, Sidney's lover objects to all romantic and Platonic love conventions, although he is a romantic lover who has reluctantly accepted all of them. Consider sonnet 31, an invocation to the moon, a splendid sonnet which is the most musical of all. The motion of the poem is deliberate and melancholy. Astrophel confides in and addresses the moon that has seen so many lovers and can surely sympathize with his case. The mood of the octave is one of exasperation with ladies who disdain the constancy of their lovers. In the sestet, the lover utters his impatience with the very emotion that possesses him. He questions and Objects to conventions he has reluctantly accepted. It is natural for the Petrarchan lady to be proud and call the lover mad. The image of the lady occupies the mind of the Petrarchan lover so much that he looks absent-minded and even mad, but Astrophel feels that this kind of love, in which only the lover loves and the beloved is indifferent or unresponsive, is unfair.

Sidney’s cycle is often compared to a tragedy in three acts because its structure suggests a simple, three-part pattern, The first part contains the largest number of purely intellectual and ornamental sonnets. The second part is less conventional and earthier. The third part contains some of the most personal sonnets leading up to the tortured conclusion (sonnets 107 & 108).

In the opening part the poet tells us why he is writing sonnets, how he fell in love, and what the nature of love and poetry is. He sees the matter in Platonic terms: love is the admiration of the good and the desire to possess it. Poetry is designed to please and instruct. The process of falling in love is intellectual, beginning with admiration and proceeding to liking before it turns into true love. The lover reasons about the Platonic theory that a lady's virtue is what attracts her lover.

It is in sonnet 30 that Astrophel overcomes his shyness and addresses Stella directly and identifies Stella with Lady Rich. From this point on the reality of Astrophel's passion becomes increasingly obvious: "Oh give my passions leave to run their race." He abandons moral pretensions in sonnets 75 to 79 in which Stella ceases to be remote and becomes tender and womanly. The rest of the cycle is suffused with the pain of separation.

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) carries into his pure and natural verse the qualities of his prose. His sonnet cycle, *Delia,* is merely a pretext for writing poetry. These fifty-five sonnets offer no original ideas, no psychology, and no story. The whole cycle is simply a masterpiece of phrasing and melody. He cares for content and truth, not for style: "I versify the truth not poetise". The Renaissance literary theorists did not actually share the modem assumption that the form and content of poetry are inseparable; they usually conceived of style and form as the clothes in which content is dressed up for a given occasion. In Daniel, this dichotomy is extreme: for him content is poetry; it is the intensity and truth of the vision which makes the poetry. Thus his belief in the pre-eminence of content in poetry makes him dependent on his subject-matter. Unlike Sidney, he cannot make poetry out of the sheer excitement and pleasure of rhetorical virtuosity. That is why his sonnet cycle is very uneven in its quality. The most successful sonnets are those like sonnets 13 and 31 which are organized around a central metaphor taken from a classical myth. Whenever he finds an important theme to deal with, he looks great. His sonnets (32-38 & 45) dealing with the decay of beauty are among the greatest in English.

The most common theme in Daniel's sonnets is the eternity of verse. The lady is a chaste goddess who reconciles chastity and beauty. We witness no conflict between desire and reason in Delia's lover, the conflict that creates excitement in Sidney. Daniel talks about spotless love and chaste desire. The lover's failure in his love justifies the elegiac tone of the sonnets.

Michael Drayton (1563-1631) never studied at any university, but he is a greater poet than Daniel. His sonnet sequence published first in 1594 was called *Idea's Mirror.* Since he was sensitive to comments from fellow poets, he made revisions to accommodate their criticism, added new sonnets that seem akin to the new metaphysical style in poetry, and called it *Idea.* His changes usually reject the extravagant conceits of earlier versions and increase the clarity of logic and poetic structure.

By "Idea" Drayton means Anne, the daughter of his early protector, Sir Henry Goodere. Although Idea means the Platonic concept of beauty, Drayton's sonnet cycle is not very much different from other cycles. Sonnet 61: "Since there's no help, Come let us kiss and part," which is his best, is by no means Platonic.

Drayton is lively and interesting, and although he lacks Sidney's depth, he has something of Sidney's directness. He reflects Sidney's phraseology and conceits, but he does not see the great contribution of Sidney to the Petrarchan tradition. Yet Drayton's debt to Sidney is quite deep: both poets have the same range of conversational tones, the same involvement in contemporary affairs and critical debates. Like the sonnets of Sidney, Drayton's sonnets do not exist in a world of which love is the only dimension and where the function of the sonnet is to look inward into the private and traditional sufferings of the heart, Drayton's sonnets look outward and acknowledge the existence of situations and activities going on outside. Although *Idea* has no overall dramatic structure and development such as we find in Sidney, it shows a passionate intensity similar to the one seen in Shakespeare's sonnets. However, Drayton's sequence comes nearest to the poetry of the MetaphysicaIs, and some of his sonnets, notably 8, 15 and 52 are very close to Donne's anti-Petrarchan poems.

Edmund Spenser (1552-99), the greatest nondramatic poet of the English Renaissance, went to Cambridge in 1569 as a "sizar" or poor scholar. He was influenced by the strong Puritanical environment of Cambridge. He wrote *Amoretti,* meaning little love poems, to a woman named Elizabeth-probably Elizabeth Boyle who became Spenser's second wife. His sonnet cycle shows the influence of Petrarch and Sidney, but he departs from them. Spenser observes the strictest decorum of the amorous mode and excludes everything which is not a part of love's poetic world. The language itself is consciously poetical while Sidney is very often colloquial. The vocabulary is as archaic, the syntax as uncolloquial as anything in heroic poetry. He is the poet’s poet.

Astrophel is preoccupied with his own state of mind, but Spenser puts the lady on her pedestal and the sonnets are devoted completely to her praises, describing all her beauty and all her cruelty. Yet the prevalent state of mind is neither one of frustration nor that of Platonic idealization.

Spenser has consistently Christianized the classical properties: for example, in the first sonnet Hilicon is peopled with angels, and in sonnet 9 the divinity of the lady is almost blasphemously equated with that of God. Thus, he Christianizes Petrarchan love sonnet as he Christianizes the heroic poem, while the Petrarchan motive is at odds with his un-Petrarchan theme.

In the first sonnet Spenser, like Sidney, states that the only reader he is concerned with is the lady herself. The second sonnet proceeds, in Sidney's manner, to give an account of the origin of love, but the style shows that Spenser does not belong to Sidney's school: Sidney is dramatic, Spenser is reflective and musical. Love to Spenser is not primarily a dramatic conflict. The most vivid thing in Sidney's sonnet cycle is the personality of Astrophel who is characterized very particularly to give a sense of reality to the poetry itself. But in Spenser it is the lady, not the lover, who is portrayed most fully without being addressed by a Petrarchan name.

Spenser emphasizes the spiritual qualities of the lady: her eyes calm down the storm that passion did bring, and her freedom from the bondage of love is the sign of her independence and her strong free will. Her greatest glory is her mind, "adorned with virtues manifold." However, she is the embodiment of spiritual qualities, but her physical attributes are not neglected. Sonnets 15 and 64 describe her beauty. Her divine nature is manifest in her physical qualities as well as in the qualities of her mind.

What is new in Spenser is his romantic view of marriage which is quite anti-Petrarchan. He actually encourages the lady to join the lover (sonnet 70), emphasizing mutability which does not go with love poetry in which the beloved is always young, always beautiful. In sonnet 75 he wants to eternalize her "virtues", not knowing that virtues are themselves eternal. It seems that something is lacking in his knowledge of Christian Neo-Platonism. However, these eighty-nine sonnets are a prelude to the wedding hymn, *Epithalamion.*

Of all the Renaissance sonnet sequences **Shakespeare's** is the least typical. It celebrates not the idealized love of an idealized mistress but the affection of the poet for a young man. In his *Sonnets* Shakespeare attributes angelic love to a young man and diabolic love to a dark lady whose actions have won her the epithet "dark". These 154 sonnets differ in character as well as in excellence from those of other sonneteers. They tell the story of a man who is torn between

passionate affection for a young man and reluctant passion for a woman whom he neither trusts nor respects. The sonnets to the youth (1-126) dwell on the great Renaissance themes of friendship, love, death, change and immortality as well as the relationship of the poet's art to all these and his faith in the permanence of affection.

A frequent topic of Renaissance debate is that of the significance of friendship, whether friendship should not rank higher than the love between man and woman. Very often Aristotle's highest kind of friendship, which is the love of a person for his own sake and not the Object of another's own good or advantage, is identified with true love. Very often Shakespeare uses the words "love" and "lover" to mean friendship and friend.

The *Sonnets* were published by Thomas Thorpe in 1609, but there is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare authorized or even approved of their publication. Thorpe's dedication of them to Mr. W. H. has led to many conjectures concerning the identity of the young man who may be Shakespeare's patron, Henry Wriothley, the Earl of Southampton, whose mother might have asked the poet to write sonnets and encourage her adventurous son to marry.

In sonnets 1-17 immortality is to be won through having children; the need to breed is a better way of making "war upon this bloody tyrant Time" (16) than the poet's "barren rhyme". In these 17 sonnets the theme of mutability and the consuming power of time creeps under the theme of immortality. He lays more emphasis on the decay of beauty than on immortality because the idea of the decay of beauty stirs the young man's awakening powers more deeply than the promise of immortality. From sonnet 18 onward it is the poet's poetry that is the best means of immortalizing the young man.

We must not forget that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are poetry and as such they had been written within a specific literary tradition and a specific literary genre. Love was for the Renaissance poets a kind of imaginative discipline which inspired and ennobled the lover. They considered love as a spiritual education which could lead the lover upward from the sensible to the eternal world. In Shakespeare, as in Petrarch and Sidney, love proves to be an ennobling discipline. The experience is full of suffering and frustration; love means suffering and anguish, but it redeems.

Shakespeare applies Petrarchan love conventions and imagery to a male rather than a female beloved. His theory of two loves, angelic and diabolic, comes from the tradition of fin amor and

false love. In fact, he demonstrates the height and climax of the Renaissance quest in the Petrarchan sonnet tradition. His demand of marriage and begetting children leads very soon to defying time and death. Sonnet 55 is a good example of his treatment of time in a tone of solemn dignity.

The lover's despair and his desire to be pitied are integral parts of romantic love poetry. The general mood in sonnet 73 is that of despair, and the lover asks the beloved to pity him. The lover's age is contrasted with the youth of the young man. The three quatrains proceed from the declining of the year to the declining of the day, and finally to the declining of the fire. The lover emphasizes the approach of death only to encourage the beloved to love him.

Nearly all love poets, from Troubadours to Shakespeare, have considered constancy and the guiding power as the main qualities of true love. Shakespeare depicts these qualities in sonnet 116 in which love is stable and permanent. The sonnet can be called Shakespeare's definition of love. In the battle between love and time, the victory is given to love. True love is compared to a landmark and the polar stars which are constant and guide the wandering ships. But since Shakespeare's love means friendship and thus it is mutual, his use of Petrarchan tempest is irrelevant.

Sonnets 127-154 devoted to the **dark lady** provide an opportunity for the treatment of a love situation far outside the area of the usual Petrarchan sonneteers. These sonnets are better not to be called love poems because the dark lady is the incarnation of sexual desire rather than love. There is no beloved like Shakespeare's dark lady in all the love poetry of the Renaissance where the ladies of the sonnet tradition are idealizations. Shakespeare emphasizes the darkness of her beauty and that of her deeds: she is "the bay where all men ride." The central poem of the series is sonnet 144 in which the young man is the love of comfort and the good angel while the dark lady is called the bad angel and the love of despair. Love in sonnet 147 is madness and the sickness of the soul. Sonnet 129 is a formal description of lust and its relation to madness. Lust is "Perjur'd murderous, bloody, full of blame"; it leads men to hell. Sonnet 130 is an anti-Petrarchan one. The poet actually ridicules the dark lady by denying her all the beautiful comparisons attributed by sonneteers to their ladies. He means to parody the excessive hyperbole of sonneteers. He ends the sonnet by saying that his mistress is as unique as any lady

misrepresented with false comparisons. Thus, Shakespeare contradicts himself by praising a lady whom he has already condemned.

Chapter 17
Renaissance Pastoral Poetry

Edmund Spenser and some other Elizabethan poets began, as Virgil had done, by writing pastoral poetry. They saw a meaning, a positive ideal in pastoral life, an ideal of the good life, of the state of content and mental self-sufficiency. By projecting this ideal, English Renaissance poets were able to criticize life as it is and portray it as it might be. They took over the conception of pastoral from different sources: the most obvious source was the Bible in which David, Moses, and Christ are portrayed as shepherds. The Renaissance mixed examples of the shepherd from the classical tradition with those from the Bible.

The Elizabethan attitude toward Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy, reveals the significance of pastoral in the poetry of the age. Paris prefered pastoral life to politics, was first in love with the nymph Oenone, became an umpire among the three goddesses, and gave the apple of discord to Venus who had a great role in abducting Helen. The shepherds and shepherdesses in English pastoral poetry often allude to the Paris story or compare themselves with figures in it. In spite of his faults, Paris remained the archetype of the shepherd.

Paris in George Peele's play, *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584), defends himself by claiming that it was only for beauty that he gave the apple to Venus.

Renaissance pastoral poetry is essentially a celebration of the ideal of contentment. The shepherd is never motivated by ambition or by greed. He rejects ambition, pride, aspiration, envy, and jealousy. He is in harmony with nature, and nature reflects his mood. That is why in old days the wisest men were content to be shepherds. Good life, in its pastoral sense, means being content with what you have, enjoying freedom from envy of others, and avoiding the dangers of pride and ambition. The shepherds live in an Arcadia that can be identified with the Golden Age. Shakespeare in *As You Like It* compares pastoral life to the Golden Age.

The general tendency of English pastoral poetry is to subdue the sexual element and make the love scenes romantic and innocent. Of course, pastoral literature emphasizes the irrationality

of love. Such a romantic and irrational love is the subject of the anthology of pastoral lyrics published in 1600 and called *England's Helicon* in which many poems are complaints. Very often the shepherd himself is the speaker. Sometimes the complaint is only overheard by the shepherd, and sometimes the shepherd's complaint takes the form of a narrative.

Less than half of Sidney's poems in *England's Helicon* are pastoral when taken out of context. It is on the basis of these poems that Sidney is thought of as a writer who has lent seriousness and dignity to pastoral mode. However, in Sidney's poems included in the anthology, the shepherd is rejected by his beloved. The other kind of pastoral complaint included in the anthology is that of the betrayed or abandoned shepherdess: No. 149 printed from Peele's play expresses the complaint of Oenone of the Paris story.

Several poems in *England's Helicon* are invitations. These are written in simple language and short lines. The strategy of the shepherds in these poems is to call attention to the beauty and innocence of the pastoral setting, and to reinforce simple desires:

Fair love rest thee here,
Never yet was mom so clear,
Sweet be not unkind,
Let me thy honor find,
Or else for love die. (No. 74 by Drayton)

Drayton knows the Elizabethan art of securing a beauty and simplicity that seems almost impersonal, but Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (137) is superior to all of its kind. The greatness of Marlowe's poem consists in the completeness of his pastoral picture and its total identification with the state of mind which the pastoral lyric of invitation is intended to induce. It includes the entertainments fit for the contented mind as well as rural and simple things such as shoes, gowns, cap, belt, and bed of roses.

The finest poem in all English pastoral poetry is of course Spenser's praise of Queen Elizabeth in the April eclogue of *The Shepherd's Calendar* which is printed in *England's Helicon* as No.6. The greatest pastoral lyrics in this anthology are dance songs, and Spenser is the most expert maker of this type of poem represented by the August eclogue printed in the anthology as No.11.

Since the pastoral lyric distils emotion from an ideal of content and good life, it concerns itself largely with love and good life. Therefore, it is less psychologically and rhetorically complex than Petrarchan sonnet, less troubled by the sexual paradox than the poetry of the Ovidian-mythological tradition.

Pastoral eclogue is more typical and more conventional than pastoral lyric because Spenser used it to usher the poetry of a new age. The models for pastoral eclogue available to Spenser were both classical and modern. His *Shepherd's Calendar* leans heavily on the background of pastoral poetry beginning with Theocritus (c. 280 B.C.). Petrarch's twelve Latin eclogues transform the pastoral into satire. Mantuan's lyrical eclogues sing of a tender simplicity and a golden lanscape. But Spenser's work was influenced more by the pastoral poems of Clement Marot, the French humanist, than any other.

Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) consists of twelve eclogues, one for each month. Its dominant theme is the unrequited love of Colin Clout for Rosalind. It also includes comments on political and religious problems of the time and contributes to friends and patrons. The eclogues can be classified as plaintive, moral and recreative. They begin and end with plaintive eclogues (January and December).

In the "January" eclogue Colin Clout regrets the hard heart of Rosalind who looks like Petrarchan beloveds. The wintry lanscape parallels his sadness. He is sometimes only a reflection of nature, and nature is often only a reflection of the moods and feelings of the shepherd. However, Colin breaks his shepherd's pipe and ends singing.

The "February" eclogue seems to be a political allegory, telling the fable of the humble oak and the upstart brier. In the "March" eclogue a shepherd boy explains how he tried to shoot down Cupid, the god of love, and how Cupid shot him. The "April" eclogue comes back to Colin who recites his complimentary ode to Eliza who is "of heavenly race" and "is my goddess plain". The shepherd promises to offer her a milk-white lamb when the lambing season comes. Then follows the musical glorification of Eliza, with the Muses trooping to her and playing their instruments, while the Graces dance and sing. The Ladies of the Lake then come to crown her with olive branches symbolizing peace. This leads to the lovely flower stanza in which the Queen is associated with the beauties of the earth. The remarkable quality of the poem depends

on the poet's power of blending and harmonizing many motifs: classical myth, abstract divine qualities, and the reality of earth, music and color are beautifully combined.

In the "May" eclogue two shepherds represent the Protestant and Catholic viewpoints. The "June" eclogue comes back to Colin's love of Rosalind who has chosen Menalcas as her lover. It is the crisis of love drama. It includes high praise of Chaucer in the most lyrical passage of the poem.

In the "July" eclogue two shepherds discuss the contemporary English church in a thinly disguised conversation. "August" is a singing match between two shepherds containing their beautiful love complaints. The "September" eclogue explains the disappointments of a shepherd who had taken his flocks abroad in hope of gain. The whole eclogue is an attack on high-church prelates.

The "October" eclogue is a dialogue between two shepherds, Piers and Cuddie. The latter expounds the concept of poetry and poets: a true poet is a moralist who combines virtue and truth; he is a lover who is inspired by the ultimate Platonic idea of beauty; and he is a vehicle for divine inspiration. The shepherd as pastor is responsible to care for his flock and protect them from wolves. The shepherd as a poet is responsible to influence people morally, but if people are not grateful for instruction, then the poet should turn to heroic poetry and become the spokesman for the national spirit. This is of course a pattern followed by Virgil. Spenser conceives of poetry as a means of swaying man's total nature, disciplining man's will and molding his character.

In the "November" eclogue, which is actually a pastoral elegy, Colin Clout is persuaded to recite his elegy on the death of Dido. Following the pattern of the classical elegy, it falls into three movements: grief over the death of the virtuous deceased, questioning the justice of fate, and consolation in contemplating the heavenly joy now being experienced by the dead shepherdess.

"December", the final eclogue, returns to monologue and sums up the career of Colin: in spring he experienced joy and freedom, and felt pride in his songs; in summer he learned his craft, but he fell in love; in harvest he reaped only a weedy crop of care; and now winter comes "And after winter comes timely death." Thus Colin reviews the year as a symbol of man's life.

The most elaborate single eclogue in English is probably Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (1591) in which Spenser abandons the archaic language which he used in *The Shepherd's Calendar* and moves toward direct and plain communication in a more modem eclogue. It is more fluent and more informal, although it is a continuation and completion of some pastoral tendencies inherent in *The Calendar.* Colin's contribution to it is the addition of a pastoral-mythologizing story of the love of two rivers and the extension of the area of normal pastoral subjects. The principal subject of *Colin Clouts,* the relationship between the poet and his society, is a continuation and extension of "October" in which the complaint is that the poet is not sufficiently appreciated by the public and that the classical generosity of patrons can no longer be depended upon. In *Colin Clouts* a much deeper analysis of the situation of the artist is attempted. His function is to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. The court is the symbol and representative of culture. Love is found at court, but it is very different from pastoral love because among the shepherds love is a religion. Spenser draws on the abuses of the courtiers and then comes to the assertion of the shepherds' religion of love and the praise of love as the creator, as the great moving force in the universe.

The eclogues included in **Sir Philip Sidney's** *Arcadia* are significant in the development of English pastoral poetry. *Arcadia,* a prose romance interspersed with poems, was considered not only as a pastoral romance but as a courtesy book, a moral treatise, and a discussion of love and philosophy. Sidney wrote it to amuse his sister, the Duchess of Pembroke, to whom it was dedicated.

Sidney's eclogues correspond closely to those of Spenser in general purpose and method, although Sidney believes that English verse should be 'written in a more academic way than Spenser does. Sidney's complaint eclogues also show a sharper psychological probing than Spenser's do because they depend upon the dramatic expression of the speaker's feelings which mount to a genuine climax. He also depicts the conflict between reason and passion which is a major motif in *Astrophel and Stella.*

Sidney's eclogues are all recreative in purpose; they me • shepherd's entertainments for a court while serious political and moral ideas are dealt with in the romance. However, many of Sidney's eclogues are metrical experiments.

Michael Drayton, the most ambitious of Spenser's followers, published in 1593 a group of eclogues modeled on *The Shepherd's Calendar* and called it *The Shepherd's Garland.* His eclogues have the same objectives as those of Spenser, although he moves away from Spenser's archaic language. However, Drayton provides a natural link between the pastoral tradition of the Elizabethans and the more domesticated and yet more classical school of Herrick and Milton.

Drayton's eclogues consist of two contrasting parts. The first part is a treatment of the theme of the Golden Age when the pastoral ideal governed mankind. The corruption of more recent times, treated in the second part, can be seen as the absence of the pastoral ideal in modem society. It is an age which puts undue and immoral value upon gold Drayton illustrates the survival of interest in pastoral poetry on into the seventeenth century.

Chapter 18
Elizabethan Theater

Elizabethan drama is the chief glory of the Renaissance literature. The form of Elizabethan theater affected the form of the plays that were written for it. Medieval drama was an amateur affair presented first by the clergy and later by the trade guilds. While Elizabethan drama retained its amateur standing in academic performances at schools and colleges and Inns of Court, it was almost wholly professional.

The miracle plays and morality plays continued to be acted throughout much of the 16th century. When Hamlet Objects to ranting because it "out-herods Herod", the reference to medieval plays is quite clear. Morality plays were so popular even in the sixteenth century that wandering groups of actors toured England in the warmer months, presenting their morality plays upon improvised Stages wherever they could coax pennies from viewers. A favorite play site was the courtyard of the medieval inn which was usually built in the shape of a huge U with stables closing the open end. Some men at the innyard entrance would collect the money from the play viewers. A temporary stage was erected against the inn structure, with inn doors providing stage entrance and exit.

The appearance and development of the Elizabethan theater depended to a great extent on the rise of professional actors. This development of acting exposed the early players to the danger of being listed as vagabonds who were subject to arrest and imprisonment.

The first permanent theater for public performance of the English drama was erected in 1576. Its name was simply The Theater where most English plays were performed until it was demolished in 1599 and was reconstructed on the south bank of the Thames as The Globe. A decree of the London Common Council in 1574 forbade public theaters within the city limits, largely because of the Puritan dominance of London. The fact that eight playhouses were erected within the next thirty years shows the rapid growth of the professional drama.

The city officials, unlike the Queen and her court, did not favor public play-acting, partly on moral grounds and partly for fear of fire, sedition, and plague. These were not idle fears. The

two largest theaters, the Globe and the Fortune, were burnt to the ground in 1613 and 1621. The disorderly groundlings sometimes stormed the stage. The Phoenix Theater was almost destroyed by rioting apprentices in 1617.

Besides the public theaters, there were the so-called private theaters, a somewhat misleading designation. They housed professional actors and were open to the public. The name was chosen to appease the London authorities, for some of these, unlike the public ones, were within the city limits. Moreover, the word private attracted the more select and higher paying viewers.

The popular Elizabethan drama was never intended for reading. Its actual form was realized only in live drama, perfoIllle4 by live actors, upon living stage. To understand Elizabethan drama the reader must always visualize how the lines project to the audience.

To evade laws against vagabonds, until the closing of theaters in 1642 all the acting companies were "servants" of noble protectors. The noble protector did not finance the company but permitted its members to wear his livery and bear his letters of recommendation. In return the actors provided entertainment for any festivity of their patron. The most famous company was the Lord Chamberlain's Men, organized in 1594. With the accession of James I in 1603 it came to be called the King's Men. Its star dramatists were Shakespeare and Jonson. The star dramatist of Lord Admiral's Men was Marlowe. Morality plays were often performed by wandering companies, each composed of half a dozen men.

Each theatrical company was self-operative and self-governing. It consisted nr certain number of full members who owned shares. Hired men were paid a fixed salary to play minor parts; and apprentices, notably the boys, played all the female roles-there were no professional actresses until Restoration times.

An acting company was patterned after the trade guild. Sharers, usually nine to twelve in number, were leading actors who would share all the profits. The hired men, who took the minor roles, included musicians, stagehands, gatherers, who collected admission fees, and bookholders (prompter and stage manager). The hired men floated in and out of the company.

The apprentices were boys learning the craft of acting. Boys started at the age of ten to twelve and took all the roles of young women; mature men would enact the roles of older

women. Promotions within the company were directly from apprentice to sharer when the able youths reached the age of 24.

Since the companies depended upon immature boys whose voices had not changed, female roles are generally in the minority throughout the Elizabethan drama. The problem of love scenes under such circumstances was brilliantly solved by Shakespeare in idealizing the encounters between Romeo and Juliet, avoiding passionate embrace.

Since the Elizabethan popular stage had few properties and no scenery, the actor dominated the play. On the stage, actors wore the habitual garments of the Elizabethan age, but . lavishly ornamented and enriched them.

The theater derived its shape from the medieval innyard. Although each theater differed somewhat from every other one, the usual overall form was round or polygonal. Only the Fortune was square and after its burning in 1621 it was rebuilt as a circle. Estimates place the capacity of each theater between 1300 to 3000 spectators. Over the tunnel-like entrance to the Globe was a sign showing Hercules bearing the globe and a Latin inscription meaning "All the world's a stage." Passing through the public entrance into the Globe, a spectator deposited with the "gatherer" his penny, which permitted him to observe the play while standing in the open pit. For an additional penny or so he could secure a seat in one of the three tiers of galleries circling the interior under a thatched roof.

Remaining in the pit, a Globe spectator would be confronted with the stage directly opposite the entrance. The platform about five feet high, projected about 45 feet from the rear wall into the open pit. Scenery was altogether absent from the stage proper, and playwrights had to provide the actors with word pictures of setting, time of day and the weather. Shakespeare in the first scene of *Hamlet* must have Horatio report the dawn. All entrances and exits were through the two doors at the rear of the stage proper. The inner stage and the curtain served as a hiding place, a place to perform the "play within a play", etc.

Since no places were normally reserved in the Renaissance Theater, playgoers would arrive early to secure the best vantage points. Before the drama commenced, the lounging spectators played cards, cracked nuts, smoked and chatted. Even during the performance, they continued to drink bottled ale, and those seated in the galleries would lob an occasional apple core into the

ranks of the groundlings. The groundlings loved low comedy. They shouted with enthusiasm, and announced their disapproval with hooting, spitting, and throwing objects. Some spectators wanted c1awns, music dancing, swordplay, and the like, while some of them preferred romance and imagination, or philosophical speculation. Some plays like *Romeo and Juliet* satisfied all of them.

The gentry seated in the tiers of galleries included many cultured men who demanded an intellectual quality in drama. Shakespeare spoke to them as well as to the groundlings. Some coarse country women and harlots were in the audience, but very few respectable women ventured into public theaters.

Some dramatists continued writing moralities and interludes, but the public taste called for drama from scholars. "University Wits", fresh out of college and fully aware of humanistic learning, were ready to write plays for the acting companies. By 15908, companies had eager college graduates, ready to embark upon playwriting careers. The young "University Wits" as well as the actor-turned-playwrights like Shakespeare, had to start as hacks, doing whatever the company demanded. They were asked to rewrite older plays or improve upon inferior ones. If the dramatist showed real achievement, he could look forward to original plays from his hand.

Chapter 19
Pre-Shakespearean Drama and Dramatists

The changing tastes of the Renaissance public theater fall roughly into three distinct periods: the pioneering period, the peak of Renaissance drama, and the decline of drama to the closing of theaters in 1642. The young dramatists were not content to follow the medieval or classical drama closely. They were born poets and inventors. They did not constitute anew school with some definite formula for the creation of a new drama. Most of them enjoyed a sound classical education and were familiar with classical models, but they were not slavish imitators of those models. They were pioneers from whom Shakespeare could learn a lot. They shared the tastes of the public, but their education and talent enabled them to guide, purify, and elevate these tastes; they trained an audience ready to receive and applaud Shakespeare who benefited from their innovations. They were the founders of new forms of drama.

In the pioneering period **revenge tragedy**, modeled upon Senecan drama, started with **Thomas Kyd's** *Spanish Tragedy* (1586). Replete with physical violence, its standard pattern is a treacherous slaying atoned by an indefatigable avenger.

The "**Fall of Princes**" **tragedy** follows the familiar Wheel of Fortune concept in material and theme: rising and then falling to misery and destruction. So many of them derived their plots from *The Mirror for Magistrates.*

The **chronicle play** or **history play**, which started with **Marlowe**'s *Edward II* (1591), is a rather free dramatizing of history with the primary purpose of exalting the nation's past. Its materials are usually adapted from the history books written by Holinshed and Hall (Shakespeare used Plutarch too).

Frequently the dramatist works his subject into the pattern of revenge tragedy or "Fall of Princes" tragedy.

Romantic comedy began with **Peele**'s *Old Wives' Tale,* and it is based on a love affair; it always ends happily. Every obstacle is treated in an optimistic spirit, so that virtue inevitably triumphs and the oppressed is made free.

In the period that can be called the peak of the Renaissance drama (1595-1610) revenge tragedy matures from its simple origin into a psychological and philosophical analysis of human situation. The avenger is no longer a mere feudist but a Renaissance humanist confronted with moral and spiritual questions.

The "Fall of Princes" tragedy transcends the medieval theme of Fortune's Wheel to portray human dilemma, that life is a series of decisions made in ignorance of their outcome, and that true wisdom can be gained only through suffering.

The chronicle play reaches its height of popularity, emphasizing the necessity of a stable reign and an enlightened monarch. Romantic comedy also reaches its heights, especially in the comedies of Shakespeare. **Realistic comedy**, in which marriage is based not on poetry but upon adequate material possession, became popular. Ben Jonson wrote **comedy of humors** which has its roots in the classical comedies of Plautus and Terence, and employs stock characters designed for the laughter of the spectators.

In the period between 1610 and the closing of theaters in 1642 drama declined. Tragedy tended toward sentimentalism, exploiting incest and shocking themes. **Tragicomedy** also appeared. In tragicomedy there is no killing which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet it approaches killing which is enough to make it no comedy. It has a plot that shapes toward a tragic conclusion only to be converted to a happy ending.

Realistic comedy gave way to the **comedy of manners** which is a witty reflection of the upper-class tendencies in which the genteel conduct is far more important than emotions or ideas. It cares a lot for the gay tricks of the game of courtship.

In the 15808 "the University Wits" started the public theater on the way to greatness with dramas of Lyly, Peele, Greene, Kyd, and Marlowe who were fresh from the humanistic training in the universities and altered the medieval forms of drama in the light of their classical education. They gained their subject matter from every source available to them, ranging far from their classical and medieval models.

In the summer of 1583, **John Lyly** (1554-1606) received from the Earl of Oxford the lease to Blackfriars Hall where the choirboys presented plays before nobles. Love is the dominant theme of almost all his plays because, as he himself says, courtiers call for comedies of which the

subject is love. Of course, it is a rather cool and unemotional love because his aim is to breed soft smiling, not loud laughing.

For the 1584 Christmas season Lyly prepared *Compaspe* for performance before the Queen. In this prose comedy Alexander the Great yields the beautiful Compaspe to her artist lover, Apelles. The action of the play is not exciting or significant; he concentrates upon courtly behavior and euphuistic dialogue, His love scenes are actually offstage. In *Galathea* (1585) the scene is an English country cursed by Neptune who demands the sacrifice of fair virgins. To save their daughters from being sacrificed, two fathers disguise their daughters as boys, and the disguised girls promptly fall in love with each other. To complicate matters, Cupid inflames Diana's nymphs with a passion for the disguised girls. Diana in anger seizes Cupid, clips his wings, and breaks his arrows. Venus promises to gratify the mutual love of the girls by changing one of them into a boy. In *Endimion* Lyly introduces fairies into English drama. Shakespeare employs all the devices contributed to English drama by Lyly.

George Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (1585) repeats the famous mythological tale of the argument over the Golden Apple of Discord which Paris offered to Venus. Rather absurdly, Peele wrenches the judgement of Paris by having Diana discard the three claimant goddesses, Hera, Venus (Aphrodite), and Pallas, and present the prize of beauty to the then fifty-year-old Queen Elizabeth. Thus Peele converts the play into a splendid flattery of Queen Elizabeth. Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1590), which is the first English romantic comedy, is his most influential work in which the aged Gammer starts a story of love and magic that comes to life on the stage.

Robert Greene (1560-1592) may claim greatest fame for the graceful lyrics scattered throughout his plays. His most interesting play is *The History of Orlando Furioso* which is a free dramatization of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso.*

Greene's best constructed play is *The Scottish History of James Iv.* His most popular play is *The Honorable History of Friar Bacon* and *Friar Bungay* which is a romantic comedy. It is a fictionalized account of the distinguished English scholar of the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon. Margaret, who is the first great romantic heroine of the English stage, is an ideal woman and the prototype of Shakespeare's many lovely women. Nashe called Greene "the Homer of

women". Greene portrays Margaret as a virtuous and charming woman who is mentally alert and equal to a man in will and spirit. In plot and characterization the play brings the pattern of romantic comedy to full form. Greene's love story is original but the part related to magic was inspired by Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus.*

When we turn from Lyly, Peele, and Greene to Kyd and Marlowe, we cross the borders where Elizabethan tragedy begins. Kyd and Marlowe were the creators of true Elizabethan tragedy. Their plays held the stage when Shakespeare came to London; it was from them that he learned the rudiments of his art as a tragic dramatist.

Thomas Kyd (1558-1594) perhaps never attended a university, but he had a sound classical training. His latest editor says that Kyd had Seneca at his fingers' ends and he had a fair knowledge of French and of Italian. During the rioting in 1593 Kyd's living quarters were searched and irreligious writings were discovered. Under torture Kyd asserted that the writings belonged to Marlowe, who was killed before he could be examined. Released under a cloud of suspicion Kyd died in poverty. His *Spanish Tragedy* (1586), which inaugurated the revenge tragedy, was the best-known play until the end of the century, It is a story of murder and revenge: Horatio, son of Hieronimo, the Marshal of Spain, and Lorenzo, the nephew of the king, capture Balthazar, the son of the Portuguese envoy, as a prisoner of war. Balthazar falls in love with Bel-imperia, Lorenzo's sister, and for political purposes Lorenzo encourages the alliance. Horatio and Bel-imperia are lovers. Lorenzo and Balthazar surprise the lovers and murder Horatio. Hieronimo feigns madness while plotting vengeance. In a play-within-the-play arranged by Hieronimo, Balthazar and Lorenzo are killed. Hieronimo and Bel-imperia commit suicide.

Although Seneca is Kyd's model of imitation, Kyd outdoes Seneca in bloody horrors. Senecan influence is manifested in the ghost, the chorus, the numerous accounts by messenger, and the alternate-line dialogue. No previous English play has such clear-sighted unity, here concentrated upon a father's revenge for his murdered son. The play establishes later practices such as feigned madness and the play within the play. Hieronimo is the pattern for the revenger; that is, a good man forced to take vengeance into his hands when the law will not help him. His

soliloquies humanize him and thus he gains our sympathy. Lorenzo is the model for the antagonist, a soulless Machiavel who is capable of every vicious scheme and duplicity.

The Spanish Tragedy was an extraordinary successful play. The reason for its success is that it is a blend of classical theory and popular practice; it contains something for all varied tastes of the time. From Seneca Kyd drew a sense of structure, a division of the play into acts and scenes, a plot carefully built up with a beginning, a middle, and an ending, motivation, suspense, counter-action, and catastrophe. From popular practice Kyd drew his sense of the need for action on the stage. The most important events of his play are staged before the eyes of the audience, not reported. Kyd presents the whole story in action. The murder of Horatio and the discovery of his body by his father suddenly aroused from sleep so impressed the public that it is referred to over and over in the popular literature and drama of the time.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), "the Muse's darling" as Peele called him, was the most brilliant and interesting of all the University Wits. He received M.A from Cambridge in 1587 when he was attached to the Lord Admiral's Men as a dramatist. He was accused of heretical views, but before the authorities could question him, he was mysteriously killed by Ingram Frizer in a tavern brawl at Deptford. He was perhaps a victim of conspiracy, possibly because of his alleged political activities as an agent of France.

Although Earl of Surrey introduced blank verse into English and *Gorboduc* had employed it, **blank verse** was a pale thing until Marlowe made it resound with eloquence and grandeur. Shakespeare and many other English poets who have since employed the form have derived blank verse's expressive force from "Marlowe's mighty line", as Ben Jonson termed it.

Marlowe trumpeted from the stage the Renaissance **lust for life**. No English poet since Chaucer had so sounded the **robustness of living**, its challenges and its glories, although Marlowe senses the tragic grandeur of life quite differently from Chaucer. **The central character** in each one of his plays is a **towering figure** who insatiably desires to wrestle with every experience. Not even Shakespeare pictures such supermen, driven by such consuming desire. No previous English dramatist has such a sense of theater. Kyd may have known more about dramatic construction, but Marlowe knows the brilliant stage maneuver that stirs the audience by its sheer **theatricality**.

Marlowe breaks from the ordered conventions of Elizabethan life and drama. His *Tamburlaine the Great* (Parts I &. II) has been called a dramatized epic. It follows the "Fall of Princes" tragedy. Tamburlaine, the ruthlessly ambitious Scythian Shepherd, conspires with the general Theridamas to overthrow the king of Persia. The king's treacherous brother, Cosroe, is used and slain in turn as Tamburlaine makes his bloody way to the throne. Bajazeth, the ruler of Turkey, and his wife Zabina, are defeated and publicly exhibited in a cage until they dash out their own brains. Tamburlaine's beloved, Zenocrate, plead for the sparing of her land and her father, the Soldan of Egypt, but the merciless conqueror destroys that country. He even slaughters the virgins of Damascus who are stationed before the city to intercede for it. In Part II Tamburlaine's bloody conquests continue. He enters Babylon in a chariot drawn by defeated kings. The confident victor, however, is shaken by the death of Zenocrate and the cowardice of one of his sons. Drunk with power, he orders an assault by his troops upon the powers of Heaven. Now his all-conquering armies are helpless and death claims the conqueror. He falls dead upon the tomb of Zenocrate.

In the course of the two plays the hero-villain is carried from humble origin through incredible triumphs to eventual fall, and thus fulfilling the medieval Wheel of Fortune theme. This monstrous figure does not seek mere wealth and power; he is seeking the pleasure of toppling the established order. He is single-minded while his adversaries are weak, petty, and scheming. Part II underlines the horrible futility of all this power-seeking.

Marlowe has invented the character of Zenocrate to show another side of the protagonist, to show the ruthless conqueror's homage to love. It is true that Tamburlaine is the only vital character in the play. Marlowe's special and peculiar technique is to center the whole action about the protagonist in whom Marlowe embodies the two-fold spirit of the Renaissance: its lust for power and its worship of beauty.

Tamburlaine stands for the thirst for power and Faustus, for the thirst for knowledge. *Dr. Faustus* (1589) illustrates Faustus' ambition for complete intellectual power. The tragic tale of Faustus falls naturally into three parts: the temptation and fall of the hero; his life as a wonder-working magician; and his death and damnation. He conjures up Mephistopheles who agrees to be his slave for 24 years in return for the pledge of Faustus' soul. Now equipped with

superhuman powers and renewed youth, Faustus roams the world in search of all knowledge and experience. At times he seeks repentance. Finally the years of compact expire and the devils bear his soul to hell.

The Good and Bad angels as well as the Seven Deadly Sins come straight out of medieval Morality plays, and the play is completely orthodox in its Protestant Christianity. William Bird and Samuel Rowley who were paid four pounds by Henslowe to revise the play are perhaps responsible for the prose passages and some of the defects. In fact, the superb opening and conclusion are not matched by the intervening scenes.

Dr. Faustus rises above *Tamburlaine* in that it is a soul's tragedy. The tension in Faustus is quite dramatic. The action, as usual, is centered about the protagonist who changes with the action. He is dominated by the lust for knowledge, is tempted, falls, wavers between repentance and despair, sinks deeper into sin, and dies at last in horror.

The play has no unity. There is an effective beginning, an effective ending, and an episodic middle. It is the beginning, not the middle that determines the ending. It is the middle that presents a conflict. The clash within Faustus is never solved. He has to resist both the inner and outer enemies: he has to resist not only the devils but his wishes for the pleasure they provide. He can be called an Aristotelian hero because he is neither innocent nor vicious. He wants power to slay his enemies and aid his friends, but he slays nobody and helps nobody. He wants pleasure but we see no sensuality. He never desires evil as such; rather he forgets the good. He is not so much vicious as misguided. His problem is not social but private and spiritual. His tragic flaw is that he wants unlimited knowledge and power with unlimited irresponsibility. His aspirations to rise above human limitations make him inconsistent, illogical, and even contradictory. "He denies and at the same time invokes the supernatural. He victimizes himself; he is erring rather than vicious. He wants to become a superman, but becomes Everyman and repeats the fall of man.

The Jew of Malta (1591) is less interesting than *Tamburleane or Faustus,* but it is more unified and it shows Marlowe moving towards the school of Kyd. The play is influenced by Kyd's revenge tragedy: Barabas, the Jew, avenges the loss of his money as Hieronimo avenged his son's death. Half of the wealth of Barabas is confiscated by the Governor of Malta to pay the

tribute demanded by the Grand Seignior of Turkey. Barabas plots revenge but succeeds in bringing about his daughter's death and that of his own. Again Marlowe's central figure is grasping for the world, this time the world of financial wealth. Material possessions are the goal of Barabas because they alone can confer power and respect on him in a hostile Christian community.

Edward II is the first great history or chronicle play. In Marlowe's hand the genre is transformed into tragedy of character. The fate of Edward is not due to external circumstances, but to his own weak and wavering personality. The protagonist of this play is not a superman like Tamburlaine, but a gentle monarch who is the victim of a fatal passion for an unworthy favorite, a monarch who is pathetically incapable of coping with his responsibilities as king. This weak English king is forced by nobles to banish Gaveston, his favorite. The estranged queen, Isabella, to regain her husband's favor, intervenes to have Gaveston recalled. Mortimer incites the queen against the king and the barons against Gaveston and the king. Finally Edward is deposed and assassinated. The young prince who comes to the throne as Edward III orders the execution of Mortimer and the imprisonment of Isabella.

Marlowe's problem is that of Shakespeare's *Richard II:* How can the audience sympathize with a weak, wrongheaded king? Marlowe's solution is to' show the treacherous, selfish people torturing the king, and thus he brings things to a pathetic climax in the slaying of Edward II. There is something in Edward's nature which attracts sincere affection from those who know him best. Against such a king Marlowe arrays a group of ruthless nobles who are ready to rebel.

The chronicle play reached maturity in *Edward II,* which offered to subsequent playwrights the clue to revision and compression of facts for theatrical purposes. Marlowe molds history into the plot form of the revenge tragedy and gives to the chronicle play the characterization and tragic heights of the "Fall of Princes" Tragedy; he also presents real people in real-life situations.

Chapter 20
William Shakespeare

Considering the vast amount of writings on and about Shakespeare's dramas and the multiplicity of their interpretations, it would be impossible to present here anything like a detailed analysis of each of his plays. In fact, no single book can do justice to Shakespeare, let alone a chapter in a literary survey. Therefore, this chapter attempts only to summarize some significant facts about each play.

Shakespeare (1564-1616) was a great dramatist who was very much a man of the Elizabethan theater, a man who was versed in the public taste of his day and the traditions of both English and classical drama. He has always been praised for his knowledge of human nature, human heart, and human passions. His ability as an actor helped him to write plays that are appealing to readers in all ages. He was Marlowe's successor, the heir to a tradition of play writing which we saw developing in the preceding chapter.

Until 1623 all printed plays of Shakespeare appeared in small, cheap quartos which are now divided by scholars into "good" and "bad" quartos. Since the theatrical company was the chief owner of the plays, the "good" quartos seem to have been printed from prompt-copies or from Shakespeare's manuscripts. But companies usually avoided publication during a play's active run for fear of losing customers. The "bad" quartos were perhaps sold to publishers by memorizers or by the hired men who received only meager wages from the company.

The first folio of Shakespeare's plays appeared in 1623 (in double-column format, totaled 908 pages, and sold for one pound). Of the 1000 copies printed only 14 are now in perfect condition. John Heminge and Henry Condell., beneficiaries of Shakespeare's will and the sole survivors from the poet's old acting friends, supervised the printing of the first folio. They used the original manuscripts or prompt-copies as texts and divided the 36 plays arbitrarily into Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies. The second folio (1632) is a reprint of the first folio, and the third folio (1663), which is a reprint of the second folio, includes *Pericles* which was omitted from the first two folios.

Shakespeare's early plays (written between 1590 to 1594) are his apprenticeship to a play writing career; they show him interested in a variety of Elizabethan dramatic traditions. His early plays are imitative, leaning in comedy upon the academic theater with its Plautine influence, the courtly drama of Lyly, and the romantic comedies of Greene and Peele; leaning in tragedy upon the Senecan tragedy of Kyd; leaning in chronicle play upon Marlowe. In spite of following the paths of these writers, he has emulated them by creating superior plays in which great emphasis is laid upon characterization and primary human affections.

The Comedy of Errors, which is a farce comedy about mistaken identities, is superior the comedies of Plautus in construction and theatrical effectiveness. His characters are not mere greedy people as in Plautus; they are actually selfish human beings who deserve a happy ending due to some trivial redeeming quality. Besides, Shakespeare molds a classic farce toward romantic comedy.

The plot of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is thin and its structure is loose, but it contains one of the most famous songs. The theme of a disguised girl in pursuit of her lover is interesting. Besides, the play is reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnets in emphasizing the theme of love vs. friendship by introducing two devoted friends who love the same girl. The purpose is to substantiate the Renaissance concept of male friendship transcending love between the sexes. The play owes its elements of romantic comedy to Greene and its love-friendship theme to Lyly.

Love's Labor's Lost is a romantic comedy approaching almost the musical comedy, written for the courtly audience. It is strongly influenced by Lyly's comedy. It contrasts the insincerity and vanity of the court with the wholesome purity and natural wisdom of country life. Shakespeare here, like Lyly, sacrifices characterization to witty dialogues.

The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus is a revenge tragedy which goes beyond Kyd in bloodshed. It is the work of a talented beginner who leans on Kyd and Marlowe, although its careful plotting and somber style make it a very good Senecan tragedy. In his early chronicle plays, Shakespeare leans heavily on Marlowe. *The First Part of King Henry VI* borrows actual quotations from other dramatists and poets. It seems that the French scenes were written by a lesser playwright. Characterization is subordinated to plot, and it violates historical facts more than any other Shakespearean chronicle play. It gives a picture of English national confusion,

suggesting that a weak monarch like Henry VI is responsible for a chaotic realm ruined by the selfish feuding nobles.

The analysis of history in *The Second Part of King Henry VI* is rather naive because Shakespeare considers the personal feuds of the greedy nobles responsible for the turmoil. The play is episodic with formal speeches, but it depicts sympathetic, tragic figures who anticipate Shakespeare's great heroes. *The Third Part of King Henry VI* is a continuation of the second part with the same characteristics in style and structure.

Richard III is a chronicle play written as a "Fall of Princes" tragedy. As an early play it lacks great poetry and tragic grandeur, but its dazzling speed provides the unity of action. This is an imitation of Marlowe's hero-villains, although Shakespeare surpasses his models and ends his period of apprenticeship. As Edward IV is dying, his brother Richard kills all the six people who come between him and the throne. Richard's deformity provides some motivation for his villainy. When a tyrant impiously rises to the throne by the slaughter of the legitimate heirs, the horror of disorder dominates the country.

By 1595, Shakespeare seems to have gained self-confidence and the ability to produce great poetry in superb drama. He is now his own master, creating rich and deep characters, high intellectual content, and profound analysis. *King John* is a humanization of history. Shakespeare's emphasis is upon patriotism, not upon anti-Catholicism. He examines the current political concepts. He comes to the rights and duties of kings and the relations of people to spiritual rulers. He supports the concept of order and the glory of England.

Richard II is the first fully developed tragedy of character in English drama. Richard is sincere, eloquent, poetic, and his own opponent. Bolingbroke, the usurper, is a man of action, not of words. He knows when to use guile and when to use force.

The Fim Part of Henry W unites history and comedy by the roguish knight, Sir John Falstaff and the gay young Prince Hall, the son of Henry IV, who explains in a soliloquy that he is amusing himself in youthful capers while he is spiritually preparing himself to be a great monarch. Thus tlte theme of the play is the proper education of a prince. Falstaff is the most original creation of the play; he is the most superb comic figure in Shakespeare, and a comic masterpiece unequaled in English. *The Second Part of King Henry W* looks like a realistic

comedy utilizing the plot of history dominated by comedy. With the death of Henry IV, Prince Hall ascends the throne as Henry V toward the end of the play. Falstaff rushes to the coronation of Henry V; he is rebuffed by the reformed young king, but he is provided for. Falstaff actually dominates the play. His dismissal at the end of the play is quite unexpected. But Shakespeare's meaning is clear: a king should put away frivolous things.

Henry V is Shakespeare's historic epic, the only Shakespearean drama in which the chorus furthers the action. It is the glorification of Henry's victory at Agincourt over the French army. It displays Shakespeare's concept of the ideal Renaissance ruler. By his actions Henry portrays the Platonic virtues of justice, fortitude, temperance, and wisdom. He is a perfect Renaissance monarch, a scholar who knows diplomacy, the art of war, theology, psychology, and the handling of civil affairs. He is an eloquent orator whose courage is tempered with prudence. He is a pious man who knows the responsibilities of a monarch who should know his own limitations as a man. Since this unqualified hero must dominate the play, the report of Falstaff's death is not an artistic mistake.

Shakespeare's acceptance of political, cosmic, and economic order as fixed principles is hereafter reflected not only in his comedies but also in his tragedies. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a masque fantasy. The play itself and the verse are full of music, and the construction is very well managed. It focuses on young, unworldly lovers, and the Athenian tradesmen form the comic plot. The lovers usually speak in rhymed couplet, royalty in blank verse, the fairies chant a lyrical trochaic tetrameter, and the clowns usually employ prose.

The Merchant of Venice (c. 1596) is a romantic comedy which deals with two favorite Renaissance themes: the nature of true love and the claims of friendship vs. love. Neither sensual love nor love directed by intellect can be called true love which depends on intuition and innate Spirit. *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) is a romantic tragedy in which the lovers fall in love at the first sight, but they-are star-crossed lovers, cursed in a world made by their elders. They are wilful and unthinking, but one cannot demand of them more wisdom than their years possess. 'The ultimate tragedy is that of the broken-hearted age that witnesses the destruction of the glory of youth. However, the final effect of the play is pathos rather than tragic grandeur.

Julius Caesar is a "Fall of Princes" tragedy in which the proud Caesar stands for order. Cassius rallies conspirators against Caesar, partly because of his personal jealousy, partly because of his fear of dictatorship. The noble Brutus, who loves Rome more than he loves his friend Caesar, joins the conspiracy. The conspirators stab Caesar to death in the Senate House. Brutus tries to justify the assassination to people while Mark Antony's eloquence stirs the emotions of people who drive the conspirators from Rome. Brutus and Cassius finally commit suicide.

If we consider Caesar as the pillar of order, Brutus wars against order and brings chaos into the political and social fabric. Shakespeare shows no sympathy for the republicanism of Brutus who is portrayed as a misguided intellectual and idealist.

The Taming of the Shrew, a romantic farce comedy, is significant for the absence of the early imitative style. There are no echoes of Lyly, Marlowe, and others. It shows an ever-increasing ease in Shakespeare's technical handling of blank verse. Falstaff is back in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* which is a realistic farce comedy. It was written at the command of Queen Elizabeth who desired to-see Falstaff in love. She commanded it to be finished in fourteen days. The play actually shows many signs of hasty writing. Falstaff is not the inimitable figure that we witnessed in the two Henry IV plays. He writes identical letters to the wives of two burgesses of Windsor, and the merry wives conspire with their husbands for the final humiliation of Falstaff. The play's themes of the tricker tricked and the boy bride stem from Plautus.

Much Ado about Nothing, As You Like It, and *Twelfth Night* are called Shakespeare's great comedies. They are also called joyous comedies because they epitomize the magic world of youth and the youthful love. *Much Ado about Nothing* is a romantic comedy and, like *The Merchant of Venice*, it combines two plots of which one has tragic overtones. In the Claudio-Hero story, the bridegroom is deluded by the wicked Don John into believing in his innocent bride's criminal wantonness and thus he denounces her at the altar. Wit combat provides the other plot. The two plots interlock neatly and reinforce each other emotionally. In the comic plot, Beatrice and Benedick are tricked by friends into believing that each loves the other. Shakespeare keeps the tragic overtones muted by contriving that the forces of evil are already in the process of being discovered.

As You Like It is a romantic pastoral comedy which contrasts the intrigue of court with the wholesome country life. Rosalind has the richest sense of humor. She represents Shakespeare's fullest portrait of a young heroine who is full of both wit and determination without being naive. Touchstone is a great comic character. From Touchstone on, Shakespeare's comedian tends to be a wise fool, the philosopher in motley. Jaques suggests Shakespeare's reaction to the growing literary trends: the satire and the appearance of the figure of malcontent. Jaques is the melancholic man, an intellectual who has lost the capacity for wonder and love. When all things are romantically settled at the end, Jaques is still the voice of lost illusion.

Twelfth Night or What You Will is a romantic comedy of mistaken identity. Being shipwrecked, Viola comes to believe that her twin brother Sebastian is lost in the storm. She disguises herself as a boy, calls herself Caesario, and enters the service of Duke Orsino as a page. The Duke uses Viola as a messenger to his beloved, Olivia, who falls in love with the messenger. Sebastian, who is looking for his sister, is mistaken for Caesario by Olivia, and quickly agrees to marry her. Orsino is angered, but the appearance of Sebastian explains the mix-up. The Duke discovers his love for Viola and marries her.

The plot of *Twelfth Night,* which is considered as Shakespeare's most perfect comedy, resembles that of the *Comedy of Errors,* but the emphasis is not upon mere misunderstandings of identity, but upon the joyous triumph of love. Orsino woos Olivia through a messenger rather than confronting her face to face; that is, he is in love with love, not in love with Olivia. Olivia is actually in love with her own grief. She marries Sebastian because when Caesar appears, she forgets her grief and falls in love with Caesar. Viola is agonizingly feminine beneath the male garments. In spite of her sorrow, her love and courage never leave her.

All's Well That Ends Well is a tragicomedy. Helena, with a prescription bequeathed by her father, cures the King of France of his illness. For reward she claims Bertram as husband. Bertram unwillingly marries her, but sets off for war, leaving her a message: "When thou canst get the ring upon my finger which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband."

In Florence, Bertram arranges to meet Diana at night. Helena takes the place of Diana, is made pregnant by Bertram, and secures his ring. When Bertram is confronted by the evidence, he promises to love and cherish his Helena.

Helena is called Shakespeare's "loveliest character" by Coleridge. She is a full-blown Shakespearean heroine. She is a relentless female pursuing her male, one who struggles hard to get Bertram's hand in marriage, and succeeds in conquering him completely.

Measure for Measure is a tragicomedy related to the question of justice and enforcing law. The Duke of Vienna, who is accused of not punishing the seducers, appoints Angelo as his deputy and pretends to visit Poland, but he stays in Vienna disguised as a friar. Claudio, who has seduced Juliet, is condemned to death by Angelo. Isabella, Claudio's sister, will not yield to Angelo to save her brother's life. The disguised Duke advises Isabella to accept Angelo's offer and substitute Mariana, Angelo's forsaken fiancée, for the assignation. Angelo nevertheless orders the execution of Claudio, an order which is not carried out. The Duke reveals himself and Angelo realizes that a sinful man cannot enforce laws against sinful people. The Duke orders the marriage of Angelo and Mariana and that of Claudio and Juliet. He himself will marry Isabella.

Angelo condemns Claudio for the sin that Angelo himself also commits. He is a humorless man who tries to rule without acknowledging human passions. Of course, the Duke dominates the whole action of the play and converts a tragedy to a tragicomedy only to prove his philosophy of moderation.

Troilus and Cressida has its source in Chaucer and Chapman's translation of Homer without inserting the characters' dignity found in the sources.

Troilus, son of the king of Troy, falls in love with Cressida whose father Calchas, knowing that Troy will fall, has deserted to Greeks. Cressida lives with her uncle Pandarus who acts as a go-between and brings Troilus and Cressida together. Calchas persuades the Greeks to exchange the Trojan prisoner Antenor for Cressida. This being done, Cressida yields to Diomedes.

The play is full of cynical comments and Cressida is reduced to the position of a prostitute, but the speech of Ulysses on order and degree is significant. Although the play is called a tragedy, its heavy mood of cynicism makes it different from other tragedies. None of the characters manifests the greatness of spirit needed for a tragic figure. Thersites and Ulysses, who

are introduced as commentators, are two cynics. Thersites, a foul-minded and foul-mouthed cynic, reduces the Greeks to vulgar nastiness. Ulysses, the sly counselor, probes the weakness of both the Trojans and the Greeks.

Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and *Macbeth* have been known as the great tragedies, especially since the publication of AC. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1903). *Hamlet* has often been considered as the most popular, *Othello* the most dramatic, *King Lear* the most tragic, and *Macbeth* the most poetic tragedy by Shakespeare.

Hamlet is the fine flower of the English revenge tragedy which began with Kyd who is important for what he added to Seneca. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare dignifies, perfects, and humanizes the revenge tragedy. After creating an atmosphere of awe and mystery, the Ghost comes to life as the starting point of the action. When the play starts, Hamlet has passed through a terrible disillusion. He is now a broken man whose faith in his mother has been shattered. His keenly emotional nature is strongly drawn to Horatio whose attitude towards the harsh realities of life is one of equipoise. Only to such a friend can he confide the secret of the murder.

Shakespeare's supreme achievement in the revenge tragedy is that he makes the issue turn on the character of the avenger. Hamlet is both the ideal Renaissance prince, the traditional avenger and a sensitive idealist in a brutal world. To him, the tragedy of human life is reflected in the paradox of guilt and justice. When a crime has been committed, justice demands appropriate action, while no action is ever appropriate; no punishment can fit the crime because no punishment can undo the crime. Thus Hamlet's tragedy is, to some extent, that of moral frustration. The justification of revenge is not the central issue; the dramatist's interest is concentrated on the dilemma of the hero who has found himself surrounded by a world of injustice and begins a desperate search for some means of putting it right. That is why the tragedy is dominated by one single character. Shakespeare creates a conflict between Hamlet and a society which in no way answers to his own aspirations and ideals. He sees the poisoning of human intercourse by deception and hypocrisy, the replacing of the old order by a new kind of pragmatic opportunism. His mother's hasty re-marriage has shattered his belief in human loyalty and truth, and with it the whole society for him has grown into an "unweeded garden".

Therefore, life is nothing but a depressing burden to him. The only function of the ghost is to give utterance to some voice within Hamlet himself.

Hamlet is the most philosophical of all Shakespeare's characters. He is so great that his tragedy prevents our tears. The problem is that we have an Aristotelian hero in a Senecan tragedy; one who, unlike Hieronimo, does not suspend morality; one who, like Oedipus, seeks knowledge and truth. There is an evident contrast between Hamlet's whole personality and the part he is demanded to play. He knows what an uncomplicated and unscrupulous revenger would have done in his position. The tragedy's moral impact is much more in tune with Hamlet's concept of guilt and retribution than swift revenge because for him it is not just a matter of simple revenge, but a fundamental ethical conflict in which he feels himself called upon to combat all the evils infecting the society.

Othello, the second of Shakespeare's great tragedies, has a greater unity of aim and scope. It is a study of anguish, not jealousy. It is the story of Othello, a Moor, who is a general in the Venetian army. He secretly marries Desdemona, the daughter of a Senator. Since the Turks have attacked Cyprus, Othello proceeds to the island's defence. In Cyprus, Iago, Othello's ensign, who is jealous of Cassio who is promoted, makes a plot to ruin Othello. He convinces Othello that Cassio is Desdemona's lover. Othello smothers his wife; Iago's treachery is revealed, and Othello commits suicide.

Shakespeare demonstrates how Othello's nobility and credulity are responsible for his crime and death. Iago is Shakespeare's villain, a man that according to Coleridge is the embodiment of "motiveless malignity", one who wants nothing but the destruction of Othello. Coleridge believes that Iago is ignorant of his own motive and his soliloquies suggest "motive hunting of motiveless malignity." Iago introduces himself as the slighted man who finds it impossible to rise in this world without hypocrisy and deception. He is determined to destroy innocence. Othello's credulity gives Iago power to make the heroic figure dance to his piping.

Othello is the greatest poet among all Shakespeare's characters, but he is a simple-minded hero who lives in a society of which he has little knowledge. The fact that he cannot believe his happiness makes it possible for Iago to deceive him. The belief that Desdemona, his angel, has fallen from the heaven of her native innocence, brings about a civil war in his heart. She is the

fountain from which the stream of his life originates; but under the influence of Iago, he feels that the origin of his life is stained and his honor as a husband is offended. When she came to love him, he could not believe it, and now his world is shattered and "chaos is come again".

All the action of the play comes to involve the process by which Othello comes to see the world through the eyes of Iago. He is thus transformed from a noble soldier to a monster, and in this guise, as an act of justice demanded by honor, he murders the wife who with her dying breath attempts to shield his crime from discovery. She remains "the precious pearl", but he becomes "the base Indian" who throws the pearl away. In spite of his tragic flaws that prepare the ground for his downfall, the only action that seems proper in the circumstances is to kill Desdemona and thus shield his moral universe. When the truth is out, he regains his nobility and finds life no longer desirable. The fact that in spite of everything Desdemona's faith in Othello and in herself for choosing him remains, prevents the tragedy from being altogether too painful to read or witness.

King Lear deals with the error of judgement, moral blindness, and gaining insight through suffering. The aging King Lear decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. In the love test Cordelia, Lear's youngest and dearest daughter, fails and she is disinherited. The kingdom is divided between the two elder daughters. Kent is banished for protesting, and the dowerless Cordelia marries the king of France. The elder daughters display base ingratitude toward the old king who dashes out alone into a wild storm where he goes mad. Gloucester is blinded for helping Lear. Edgar helps his blinded father to Dover where Cordelia has landed with French troops to help Lear who regains his sanity. Cordelia and Lear are defeated, and he dies while carrying the dead body of Cordelia.

The first scene shows the old king at the head of a unified Britain. He gives two reasons for the division of the kingdom: "To shake all cares and business from our age" and "future strife/ May be prevented now." The catastrophe is the consequence, not of the original plan, but of the alteration of that plan. Lear is not corrupted by flattery because above all others he prefers Kent and Cordelia who are incapable of flattery or hypocrisy. Lear is thinking of the balance of power to prevent the future strife. Since Cornwall and Albany are the geographical extremities of Britain, Lear is actually deceiving the elder daughters by giving them the northern and southern

parts which he could not control. He keeps the "more opulent" part for Cordelia. Coronets, not crowns, are to be given to the husbands of elder daughters. Lear did not intend to give his crown away. He intends to live with Cordelia alone and live on as king with Albany and Cornwall acting as his deputies in regions which he could not control without their loyalty. Concerning Cordelia's marriage, Lear prefers the Duke of Burgundy to the king of France to keep the balance of power. Thus Lear's original plan is politically sound and it can prevent future strife.

The shares were determined before the love test which is only a foolish trick in Cordelia's interest, but her blunt response, her "nothing", ruins the original plan. It is true that Lear's whim for the impossible is not justifiable: he wants the honor and glory of power without its responsibility, but his real tragic flaw is anger and hot temper.

Shakespeare makes use of many aspects of Aristotle's philosophy of anger expressed in *Rhetorica.* The hero is an old man who, as a rule, is more subject to anger than others, and he is humiliated by his dearest daughter who ought to respect him more than others. Once his self-esteem is injured by Cordelia's speech, he gives way to anger which deforms his humanity, and consequently his personal emotions invade the realm of duty. Anger changes him from a human being to a "dragon". He tells Kent: "Peace Kent, /Come not between the dragon and his wrath." Cordelia is somehow responsible for his anger However, hereafter animal imagery pervades the play. It takes time for him to restore his humanity, and when he does, Shakespeare stops using animal imagery. Suffering restores Lear's greatness. He gains a greater majesty because he becomes aware of love which makes majesty, authority, and humanity both meaningful and valuable.

King Lear strongly agitates our passions and interests our curiosity. The striking opposition of contrary characters, the sudden changes of fortune, and quick succession of events fill the mind with perpetual tumult of pity and fear which lead to a health-giving catharsis.

Macbeth, a tragedy of evil, is the story of an ambitious general who encounters three witches called Weird Sisters. They tell him that he will be king, and greet Banquo as the father of kings. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth kills King Duncan who, as his kinsman and lord, has honored him by visiting him as a guest. Aiming at capturing the future, Macbeth kills Banquo and many others. Lady Macbeth becomes insane from guilt and commits suicide. The enemy troops

headed by Malcolm, Duncan's son, approach Macbeth's castle. Macbeth is killed and Malcolm is proclaimed king of Scotland.

Macbeth deals with the yielding of a great and ambitious man to temptation which is followed by the degeneration of his moral nature. The tragedy has a close thematic link with the other three great tragedies in which the question of how evil comes into society and why it has such power over individual characters is only touched on. This question is right at the heart of *Macbeth* in which the villain and criminal has become the tragic hero who stands for human corruptibility and ruthless lust for power. Lear asks, "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" The answer is given in *Macbeth:* ambition and lust for political power are the cause of hard-heartedness. The play is concerned not with the victims of wickedness and sin, but with wickedness and sin itself.

Aristotle believes that the best tragedy concerns a man who does the deed of horror in ignorance, but Macbeth is not confused about the criminal nature of his deed. When he kills the king, who is his guest and generous lord, he knows-as Oedipus, Othello, and Brutus do not-that he does a "horrid deed". He suffers even before he kills the king, and he knows that he has yielded to the temptation of his wife who functions as his bad angel. Macbeth is a halfhearted criminal, and Lady Macbeth is a wholehearted fiend, although his character is much more complex. He is as imaginative and ambitious as Milton's Satan. Both of them commit crimes consciously regardless of the consequences.

The first scene of the play suggests moral confusion, evil influence, and temptation in the wilderness. The paradoxical theme of the play is expressed by the Witches: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair", a theme that is echoed in Macbeth's first speech: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." The Witches only anticipate the future; they do not make him commit crimes. Ambition makes Macbeth and Faustus sell their souls to Satan. The seed of evil is in him before meeting his wife, when in an apostrophe to the stars, he speaks of his "black and deep desires". Lady Macbeth's first soliloquy throws light on his character: He is an ambitious man who needs an evil angel to guide his evil action. That is why he yields to his wife in the temptation scene. He learns how to "look like the innocent flower/ But be the serpent under it."

Macbeth tries to capture the future, and he succeeds for a while, but he degenerates so much that he tells murderers: "I to your assistance make love". Blood imagery permeates the play to the extent that he compares himself to a man wading in the river of blood. His downfall starts when Macduff flees to England. He can no longer capture the future. Images of clothes, garments, or robe show that kingship is "like a giant's robe" and Macbeth is like "a dwarfish thief." Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking scene is there to show poetic justice, and this happens long after her being driven to the background and isolated.

Macbeth is completely dehumanized, but Lady Macbeth's death suggests that the devil in him dies. His pessimistic comment on her death is the sign of his being completely disillusioned. He calls the Witches "these juggling fiends", becomes a great warrior once more, partly attracts our sympathy and dies in the single combat with Macduff.

Antony and Cleopatra, which is a "Fall of Princes" tragedy, is considered by some critics as one of the greatest tragedies, but it lacks action. The plot offers no complication: Antony is recalled to Rome where his quarrel with Octavius is settled by Antony's marriage to Octavia, sister of Octavius. Octavius defeats his rivals and starts the war against Antony who is defeated and commits suicide. Cleopatra also commits suicide. Octavius becomes the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

Antony and Cleopatra is a twofold tragedy: the tragedy of Antony, the downfall of a great man who has given himself to sensuality, and Cleopatra's tragedy which involves her triumph over death. The play encompasses the whole Roman world from Rome to Alexandria. Antony's passion and Cleopatra's charm dominate the first three acts. The buffets of fate and suffering transform the selfish, wanton Cleopatra into a true queen who achieves self-mastery and dies triumphantly.

Timon of Athens seems unfinished. Timon, a noble Athenian, ignores the warnings of his faithful steward Flavius, and beggars himself by lavishly entertaining his friends who later desert him when he seeks their help in his subsequent poverty. He invites the ungrateful friends to a pretended banquet where the uncovered dishes reveal only warm water. Timon retires to a cave and scorns all mankind. The only honest person that Timon finds is Flavius, the faithful

steward, who is not allowed to comfort him. In dealing with false friends and ingratitude, *Timon of Athens* looks like those Morality plays which emphasize the danger of excess.

The Tragedy of Coriolanus is a "Fall of Princes" tragedy. Coriolanus, who is honored by Romans, is banished because of his arrogant contempt for the masses. He joins his former enemy Aufidius and attacks Rome. He refuses to spare his native city, but he finally yields to the plea of his mother, his wife and his son. He is finally murdered at the instigation of Aufidius who repents and resolves to honor the memory of the great Coriolanus.

Coriolanus seems to be an attempt by Shakespeare to portray pure aristocratic ideal, but he does not humanize Coriolanus who loves humanity but is contemptuous of the mob. He is a political leader who cannot stand politics.

Pericles, Prince of Tyre is a dramatic romance. Pericles in a tournament wins and weds Thaisa, daughter of King Simonides. Husband and wife sail for Tyre, but Thaisa is mistakenly thought to have died immediately after having given birth to a daughter. Her body is set afloat in a casket which is washed ashore. Thaisa enters the temple of Diana. Pericles leaves his baby daughter Marina with governor Cleon whose wife plots to kill her sixteen years later, but she is captured by pirates and then ransomed by another governor. Two visions lead Pericles to the whereabouts of his wife and daughter. Thus the play ends with serenity and peace rather than the ecstasy of earlier comedies.

Cymbeline is a tragicomedy in which Princess Imogen is at the center of the story. Imogen, the daughter of Cymbeline, the king of Britain, secretly marries Posthumus who is banished when the secret marriage is revealed. Iachimo makes a plot to accuse Imogen of infidelity. Posthumus decides to kill her. In a mountain cave she finds her two brothers who were kidnapped by Belarius when they were infants. The Roman army is defeated chiefly because of the courageous Belarius, the two sons of Cymbeline, and Posthumus. In the elaborate recognition scene all are reunited. Imogen is as innocent as Desdemona, but she is much cleverer. She is a great heroine who is both charming and resolute.

The Winter's Tale is a dramatic romance. King Leontes of Sicilia falsely believes that his friend King Polixenes is the lover of his queen Hermione who is imprisoned. In prison she gives birth to a daughter who is exposed by Leontes' order. The oracle of Apollo at Delphi states that

Hermione and Polixenes are blameless and that "the king shall live without an heir; if that which is lost be not found." Leontes' little son dies of grief and Hermione is reported dead. The baby girl, who is abandoned on the seacoast, is brought up by a shepherd as his daughter, Perdita. FIorizel, the son of Polixenes falls in love with Perdita, but their marriage being opposed by his father, they sail to Sicilia where Leontes finds that Perdita is his long-lost daughter. It also becomes clear that Hermione is not dead. The play ends with the arrangement for the marriage of FIorizel and Perdita. Hermione is an example of a patient woman, more patient even than Chaucer's Griselda. The play is well constructed, moving, and rich with individualized characters.

The Tempest, Shakespeare's last play (1611), is a dramatic romance. Prospero, the Duke of Milan, who is absorbed in books and magic, is expelled by his brother Antonio and cast adrift with his baby daughter Miranda in a leaky boat. Prospero dwells on a desert island and makes servants out of the ethereal spirit Ariel and the subhuman Caliban. Twelve years later when the play opens, Prospero causes tempests and shipwreck. He contrives to isolate Ferdinand, Antonio's son, who falls in love with Miranda. He frees Ferdinand from his spell and entraps Antonio who is forgiven but must restore the dukedom to Prospero who renounces his magic, frees Ariel, and sails for Italy, leaving Caliban the sole resident of the island.

Prospero is often considered as Shakespeare, the magician-dramatist himself. Prospero buries his magic books just as Shakespeare leaves the theater and retires to Stratford.

Part IV:

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Chapter 21
The Early Seventeenth Century
1603-1660

1603: Death of Elizabeth Tudor, accession of James I, first Stuart king of England.

1605: The Gunpowder Plot, a failed effort by Catholic extremists to blow up Parliament and the king. Responsible for prolonged and bitter anti-Catholic feeling: Guy Fawkes Day (November 5) still preserves the memory of one of the Conspirators.

1620: Arrival of the Pilgrims in the New world aboard the Mayflower.

1625: Death of James I, accession of Charles I.

1642: Outbreak of civil war: theaters closed.

1649: Execution of Charles I, beginning of Commonwealth and Protectorate, known inclusively as the Interregnum (1649-1660).

1660: End of the Protectorate, Restoration of Charles II.

According to the usual division of English literary history by periods, the "early seventeenth century" extends from the accession of the first Stuart king (James I) in 1603 to the coronation of the third (Charles II) in 1660. But the events, literary and otherwise, that occurred between these boundaries make much more sense if they are seen in a larger pattern extending from 1588 to 1688Between these two dates massive political and social events took place that, in their cumulative effect, bridge the gap between the Tudor "tyranny by consent" of the sixteenth century and the equally ill-defined hut equally functional constitutional monarchy of the eighteenth century.

Accompanying that vast political change, and intimately related to it, are parallel changes that have as common denominator a growing skepticism of dogmas old. and new, and an increasing tolerance of divergence. In religion, politics, literature, commercial practices, and social observances, the traditional codes and hierarchies of English life gave way to new (and often bitterly resented) diversities. At the heart of this century of rapid change lies the Puritan Revolt of 1640-60. The quarrels and controversies that culminated in this upheaval began to reach an inflammatory stage shortly after 1588; its tremors and aftershocks largely subsided after 1688. In more senses than one, the revolt and its civil wars were the pivotal events of the century.

Armada year, 1588, changed dramatically the tone of Elizabeth's reign. Like most of her subjects, she had reason to expect that the island nation's triumph over a long-awaited, much-hated invader would release a tide of patriotic good feeling. Nothing of the sort happened; quite the contrary. Deep fault lines crisscrossed the structure of Elizabethan society, both before and after Armada year; the deepest of them pitted those who wanted to preserve the established privileges and monopolies of class and religious authority against those increasingly vociferous and organized groups who were discontented with them. Because of the Spanish threat, these interior tensions had been largely muted in the interests of national unity; once the nation was safe from Spain, they surfaced again, in the form of bitter and divisive quarrels. These were fought out most conspicuously between the aging queen, aided by her council, and headstrong individuals (later groups) in her successive Houses of Commons. But the same issues also emerged in local encounters throughout the land. Wherever a stiff-necked parson encountered a strong-Willed bishop, a grumbling consumer confronted an unjust monopoly, or a truculent House of Commons man complained that his freedom of speech was being abridged" the frictions of society built up. Individually, perhaps, many of the grievances were minor, but being neglected or irritated over the years, they festered and tended to reinforce one another. The queen's traditional measures of cajolery and grandiose rhetoric failed to placate the malcontents, and throwing the ringleaders into jail simply infuriated them. The peaceful accession of Elizabeth's Scottish cousin James did nothing do diminish the growing list of grievances. By pleas and remonstrations, and by voting to withhold taxes from the royal administration, the

Commons sought redress, but to little avail. Agitation against the authoritarian episcopal church continued, mostly subsurface, but flaring up occasionally in acts of fierce despair, as when a little band of Puritans left their native land forever rather than submit to episcopal rule. (They went to Amsterdam in 1608, and then in 1620 to the wilderness of Plymouth, Massachusetts, where, for subsequent Americans, they became the Pilgrims.) Under the increasingly strict rule of James's son Charles, discontent spread more widely if less openly; the complaints became secular as well as religious. From Puritan preachers and their relatively small congregations, agitation spread through the merchant classes, the lawyers, the Parliament-men, and the gentry-to the mercantile towns, through the cloth-making countryside of East Anglia. By the late 1630s tempers were strained, and an attempt to introduce Anglican forms of worship into the presbyterian-minded Church of Scotland led, in 1639, to the first of two half-hearted wars between England and Scotland. But domestic peace was an ingrained habit in most of the island, and it was not until 1642, after five years of muted struggle and neogotiation, that open conflict broke out within England itself.

In the wars that followed, the forces of insurrection (the parliamentary, Puritan, or Roundhead armies) were successful in one of their aims. They rendered King Charles powerless, brought him to trial, and executed him (1649). But they failed to set up a stable government of their own, free from the faults of the one they had destroyed, and they failed to set up a new national church to replace the episocopacy that they had long criticized. The Long Parliament, convened by Charles in 1640 and variously purged after that of its royalist and other opposition groups, lingered on until 1649, when Cromwell sent it packing and set up a military government of his own, which was declared a Commonwealth and then, in 1653, a Protectorate. After Cromwell's death in 1658, his son Richard tried to succeed him as Protector. But without Cromwell's iron force of character, the Protectorate-which was in any case no more than a makeshift effort to contain a political instability that had got out of hand-could not survive. When Charles II was recalled from exile (1660) and put back on his father's throne (but without the most troublesome of his father's powers), it became clear that England was bound to have, in politics as well as religion, some sort of organization looser than anyone had anticipated, looser than most people wanted. But its exact from was subject to constant pulling and hauling among

the parties, and no solid settlement was reached until Charles's brother and successor, James II, was ejected from the throne and sent into exile. (He was a Roman Catholic, as, to be sure, his predecessor Charles had been, but Charles kept quiet about his beliefs and James did not. Besides, the presecution of Protestants in France after 1685 inflamed traditional English hatred of Catholicism.) Replacing the now permanently dismissed Stuarts were the Dutch Protestant William of Orange and his wife, Mary, daughter of James II. Neither was properly in the line of royal succession, hut there was little complaint. After 1688, its social problems compromised if not solved to universal satisfaction, the country settled down to a long constitutional nap under a series of monarchs who made little trouble for their parliaments and therefore had little trouble sticking on their thrones. The crisis was over.

Though infinitely complex in details, the main social problems that exercised the seventeenth century can be broadly stated, with their solutions, in two sentences. In the religious sphere, the basic issue was, "How far should the reformation of the Protestant church be carried'?" and the solution accomplished in 1688 was, "As far as each individual self-defined religious group wants." In the sphere of constitutional politics, the basic issue was, "How much authority should the monarch have independent of Parliament?" and the solution accomplished in 1688 was, "Almost none."

BEFORE AND AFTER THE PURITAN REVOLT

To gain a clearer sense of the immense changes wrought by the Puritan Revolt and its many reverberations, it may he useful to anatomize roughly the value structure of English society before and after the event. Under Elizabeth Tudor the court was the undisputed center of national authority, influence, power, reward, and intelectual inspiration. Careers were made and fortunes established through court connections. London was the center of the kingdom, and the court was the unchallenged center of London. This was particularly true in matters of the intellect, of literature and the arts. The characteristic forms of literature under Elizabeth were courtly, and court life, whether praised or criticized, was a principal focus of literary attention. Courtiers patronized the theater by attending plays (of which the middle class generally disapproved) and by lending the prestige of their names to different acting companies. The sonnet sequence, the pastoral romance (Sidney's *Arcadia),* the chivalric allegory (Spenser's

Faerie Queene), the learned sermon, the erotic idyll (Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* or Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis),* the masque, the epic-all these were courtly forms, implying courtly readers and writers who were either courtiers themselves or concerned with pleasing courtiers. For patron -age flowed, when it flowed at all, from courtly donors, and apart from the precarious rewards of the theater, patronage was almost the only way for the writer to live by writing.

The same pattern continued under the first two Stuarts, James I and Charles I. Whether in his poems or in his sermons, a man like John Donne wrote primarily for courtiers and for the sharp-witted lawyers who clustered around the court. Versatile and various as he was, Ben Jonson channeled almost all his energies into writing for court and courtiers. Carew, Suckling, Lovelace, and a host of lesser writers were themselves courtiers, full- or part-time. The poet George Herbert was much remarked because he could have been a courtier and chose not to be. There were exceptions, of course: country doctors, soldiers, university dons, tutors to the gentry. But the court influence was predominant, and so far as a literary society existed, it took its tone from the court. Because court circles were narrow, a poet did not have to wait for publication to be well-known to those readers who mattered most. Manuscript collections of poems by one author, or by several, circulated through the court; a poem could become popular, be set to music several times over, yet never appear in print. The books that were printed appeared, as a rule, in small editions and, being destined for an audience trained in the classics and the court literature of the European Renaissance, could take for granted a good deal off specialized information. A court preacher like Lancelot Andrewes assumed in his hearers acquaintance with at least the rudiments of three ancient languages: Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Courtly romances imitated from Sir Philip Sidney and the Continental authors whom he imitated continued to attract readers, as in the case of Lady Mary Worth's *Urania* (1621) and Francis Quarles's *Argalus and Parthenia* (1629); better known than either was the Latin romance *Argenis* (1621) of John Barclay, a Scotsman resident in France. All these artificial, elegant. long-winded romances assume familiarity not only with the codes of romantic pastoralism hut with the conventions of genteel courtly behavior. For court society had many characteristic and distinctive values. It implied a belief in hierarchical order within a strict framework of social

uniformity, involving obedience to the established church, loyalty to the anointed monarch, and deference to one's social superiors. Within a strict framework of social uniformity, involving obedience to the established church, loyalty to the anointed monarch, and deference to one's social superiors. Within that framework, it tended to produce intricate, allusive, and highly decorative writing. Courtiers generally valued the heroic passions -love (hut not necessarily marriage), warfare (largely free of a political context), and devotional piety (quite separate from practical morality). The controlling principle behind all these distinctions was an emphasis on honor as the supreme principle in life, not to be estimated in any way by criteria of mere prudence. Literature written within this framework-rarely taking it with complete solemnity and sometimes questioning its assumptions-was prevalent, though not universal, under the old regime.

After 1660, and even more strikingly after 1688, the pattern of values was quite different. The court, largely dissolved during the twenty years of the Puritan Interregnum, could not, after the Restoration, any longer pretend to be an unchallenged center of intellectual and literary influence. It did not have the power, social or financial, to be anything of the sort. For now money and influence no longer flowed exclusively from the court. London City (a network of bankers and merchants, financiers, jobbers, brokers, tradesmen, and credit managers) was one rival source of power and influence. Another was Parliament itself, which had executed one Stuart king and in 1688 would throw out another, appointing a Dutchman to be his successor. Instead of purporting to stand above interest as the sole fountain of honor, the court thus clearly became one of several competing interests. The relatively conservative "landed interest" tended toward the court, as the more innovative "money interest" found its chief support in the City. Members of Parliament, ranking themselves under the deliberately meaningless nicknames of "Tory" and "Whig," sided with either interest as they chose, or alternately with both. One's connection with an interest was not through the inflexible principle of honor but through the infinitely fluent one of ... interset itself.

In the same way, the established church, which had once claimed to be sole guardian of the spiritual welfare of the English people and, therefore, of their worldly behavior-the authoritative voice disciplining every individual's private interests-became after 1660 simply one of many

religious communities. (It was the most powerful, the most acceptable socially, and for the moment the largest one; but it was not, and could not be made, the only one.) The Puritan sects, originally factions within the English church, had been freed to multiply their numbers and expand their independence during the Interregnum; after the Restoration, they could not be got back into the episcopal (Anglican) church by force or persuasion. When several sects exist side by side in open competition, they are all voluntary. Each interprets Scripture after its own fashion; all agree (at least in public) in not trying to exterminate one another. But that creates problems of descipline: a member of a particular sect who does not like its social code simply transfers to a more understanding sect (or out of them all). Thus alongside the established Anglican church there appeared in villages all across England the Nonconformist chapel, an alternative approach to God.

Anglicans could drive Puritans from their posts in the church, forcing them to preach in the chapel, but to stop their preaching was impossible. Many dispossessed parsons opened independent academies for the young; some were so good that they attracted, and thus influenced, the children even of the Anglican gentry. Censorship of books and plays did not disappear overnight, but it became much less strict. What could an episcopal censor hope to accomplish when Thomas Hobbes (considered the most subversive thinker of the Restoration era) enjoyed the special indulgence of Charles II and when the merry monarch could be found almost every evening guffawing with his mistress (or mistresses) at the bawdiest plays his playwrights could devise? In the publication of books, something like a "literary marketplace" sprang up. Booksellers began specializing in books of a certain sort-Anglican, Nonconformist, whatever. Before long, they were hiring writers to turn out titles on order. The booksellers thus began to supplant the once unchallenged courtly patrons as makers of public taste.

Around the broad social changes sketched above took place a set of intellectual and spiritual changes no less striking. The Elizabethan court, like the Elizabethan church, had been hierarchical in organization. Queen, courtiers, and clergy united in declaring that this was in accord with the inevitable, God-given structure of things. Every creature, according to this conservative myth, had its place in the great order of divine appointments, and the different families of being were bound together by a chain of universal analogy or correspondence. The

monarch was to his or her subjects as the lion was to other beasts, as the eagle was to other birds, as gold was to other metals-as the bishop was to his pastors and the pastors to their parishioners. Throughout, the higher power ruled the lower. The head ruled the other parts of the body because, as the seat of reason, it was the noblest part. Reason, which (supposedly) ruled in man, made him the natural ruler of the family because passion was supposed to rule in woman. And the greater part of all this ruling was necessary because of Adam and Eve's fall, as a result of which not only human psychology but the whole structure of the once-harmonious universe had been disordered. Though they differed over the form of rule and the name of the ruler, almost all the contestants in the civil wars agreed that the people needed strict discipline of some sort, because in themselves they were radically imperfect-tainted by the original sin and then by lots of other, subsequent ones. But while the various leaders were disputing over forms of discipline, the people, simply as a result of slow experience (by living under an "illegitimate" secular authority and without much religious conformity at all), demonstrated that they were less imperfect and needed less rigid discipline than had been supposed.

One universal truth emerged from the revolt and civil wars-that no one universal truth was to be had, whether by sword, prayer, or study. Nor was it really needed. Individuals, it seemed could hold differing views about foreign policy, the nature of Christ's presence in the sacrament, or the lawfulness of infant baptism without necessarily precipitating social chaos. A single true belief in these matters, and in many others, was unnecessary. And thus the whole notion of human beings as radically fallen creatures, who needed a special saving truth and a dose of stiff preacherly discipline to redeem their faults, slowly began fading toward obsolescence. A reasonable person (one who behaved sensibly and didn't bother the neighbors) seemed to be almost as good as need be. In a long list of controversies over which people had once been willing to slit throats, it turned out that nobody was right and nobody was wrong. And thus the English community changed from one founded on the concepts of hierarchy, uniformity, and personal loyally to one founded on the concepts of difference (verging sometimes on indifference) and mutual toleration. In less than a hundred years, the notion had passed through a stage of blood, hatred, and profound anxiety to a renewed sensation of relative calm. On the surface, it may have looked as if relatively little had changed. But subsurface, the whole

character of the society had shifted, from a strict authoritarian regime legitimated (in its own eyes) by eternal divine constititutions-to a vigorous, materialistic, pragmatic community of competing pressure groups. Differences within the community were to be contained and managed, not eradicated. Slowly, the notion that a critic of the government must be a heretic and traitor gave way to a gentler formula, which in the nineteenth century achieved classic expression: one could be "a member of His Majesty's loyal opposition."

LITERARY CROSSCURRENTS

With the obvious and important exceptions of Milton and Marvell, plus a scattering of minor poets like Francis Quarles and George Wither, very little of the enduring literature of the early seventeenth century was the work of Puritans or Puritan sympathizers. The great Puritan art forms of the age were the sermon and the religious tract. This is not just the joke it may seem. Puritan sermons, of which there were many thousands, explored in intimate detail the psychology of the Christian groping for evidence of salvation, and Puritan tracts developed forceful ways of exciting the zeal of their readers. Yet on the whole, the Puritans mistrusted the adornments of literary art of the same principle that they suspected graven idols (statues, stated-glass windows, and paintings), music, and religious rituals. These were all allurements and enticements of the sensual world, they threatened to contaminate and diffuse the pure spiritual energy of divinely infused faith. Though the Puritans did not directly compete with the old forms of courtly literature. they subjected those who did follow the old forms to heavy moral and social pressure. And on another level entirely, philosophers like Bacon and Hobbes campaigned unrelentingly against the use of insignificant words and merely decorative language. Like the Puritans, hut from another angle, they insisted on a plain, direct manner of unequivocal prose. Though doubtless not put forward with this intent, one effect of the new plain language (sometimes summarized as "one-word-one-thing") was to undermine the whole intricate structure of the correspondent universe.

A sense of deep disquiet, of traditions under challenge, is felt everywhere in the literary culture of the early seventeenth century. Long before the term was applied to our own time, the era of Donne and Robert Burton (the obsessive anatomist of melancholy) deserved to be called the Age of Anxiety. One may well think of the "Metaphysical" poets who followed Donne (such

as Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, and Cowley) as trying to reinforce the traditional lyric forms of love and devotion by stretching them to comprehend new and extreme intellectual energies. In the other direction, Jonson and his "sons" the so-called Cavalier poets (such as Herrick, Suckling, Lovelace, Waller, and Denham) generally tried to compress and limit their poems, giving them a high polish and a sense of easy domination at the expense (sometimes) of their intellectual content. Though these alternate "schools" do not by any means represent watertight compartments (Donne wrote some poems that sound like Jonson, Jonson some in the manner of Donne), the common contrast of Cavalier with Metaphysical docs describe two poetic alternatives of the early century. Yet both styles were wholly inadequate containers for the sort of gigantic energy that Milton was trying to express.

For Milton, with his deep sense of moral imperative, his heroic ambitions for poetry, and his proud English Protestantism, the fashionable verses of his contemporaries must have seemed unbearably constricting. Like any great artist, Milton was capable of profiting from the study of craftsmen with temperaments and styles very different from his own; and he did profit by a study of Donne and Jonson, no doubt about it. But for his central inspiration Milton reached back beyond Metaphysicals and Jonsonians to a potent predecessor- Edmund Spenser. In youth, particularly, his mind ran to Spenserian projects, including epics of Arthurian and pre-Arthurian heroes, semi allegorical narratives, biblical pastorals, and similar fanciful schemes. Milton's style was fully formed by the late 1630s-it is usual to say that he found his voice in *Lycidas* (1637), and he might well have proceeded to complete one or more of these visionary projects. But it is not altogether a loss that the civil wars intervened and prevented him for twenty years from engaging his mind full-time with poetry.

Agonizing as they were, the wars did not involve constant bloodshed; rather, they were intervals of fighting separated by periods of negotiation and argument and accompanied by a constant, deep-seated turmoil of popular agitation. Especially on the parliamentary side, enthusiasts for a wide array of causes-political, social, and religious-began appealing for public support in the only way available to them, through the printing press. Most of their pamphlets, broadsheets, and newsletters made no pretensions to literary art; but some achieved a direct and forceful prose style that can be sampled in the excerpts we print from John Lilburne's The

Picture of the Council of State and Gerrard Winstanley's Declaration to the Powers of England, and a few attained not only eloquence but distinction of thought. The pamphlet wars, in which over twenty thousand verbal shots were fired off, wrought a mighty change in English public life. They accustomed thousands of English men and women, whose thinking had previously been fenced by close to what we now call public opinion. And in the experience of Puritanism gave to English life a strong, steady moral tone, never so widely or deeply established before.

Thus when Milton returned to his epic ambitions after 1660, neither he nor his potential audience was anything like what it had been before the wars. Chivalric romance was out of the question; the issue on Milton's mind, and the nation's, was whether God maintained, behind the chaotic reversals of history, a sustaining plan for his favored people. The theme could not be approached through the favorite metaphors of Spenser, jousting knights, lovely ladies, dark enchanters, and hospitals for sick souls. It had to be approached through the central and very simple biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. As the work of Milton's fifties, Paradise Lost was deeper, larger, and more evangelical than anything he might have written in his thirties; it was well suited to a nation that had just passed through a massive spiritual crisis. Its author could never have dramatized so vividly the twin temptations of pride and despair had he himself not experienced both in full measure.

But *Paradise Lost* was also, inevitably, the product of Milton's surpassingly thorough classical education. It is thus a major monument-one of the last, one of the most admired-of the Renaissance tradition of Christian humanism. This is the assurance, shared by many writers of the period, that classical learning and the classical virtues (such as justice, magnanimity, and temperance), when joined in the service of Christian faith, strengthen both it and themselves. Gathering together in a grasp of unparalleled amplitude these major strands of European culture and forging them into a poised and balanced structure of epic dimensions, Milton created a poem that would be regarded for centuries as a supreme literary achievement.

Under the first two Stuarts, stage tragedy took on a particularly dark coloration. The oppressive mood is almost unbroken in the work of writers like Webster, Ford, Tourneur, and Middleton. But alongside this somber, sometimes morbid, tragedy, and serving as a relief from it, flourished a great variety of tragicomic spectacles, romantic comedies, and pastoral

entertainments. Very often these plays were influenced by the masques so popular at court-that is, they included a great deal in the way of display, pageant, music, and sometimes fantasy. Though Shakespeare died in 1616, though Jonson-the great comic dramatist of the early century-gradually lost much of his creative power, and though none of the successors to these two men quite met their measure, the stage continued vigorously active right up to the onset of civil war. But then a Puritan edict shut the theaters, abruptly and apparently forever. By the time they reopened in 1660, most of the playwrights of the early century were dead, and the players had to rely at first on a backlog of old plays. The revival of drama depended very largely on the work of one man, Sir William Davenant, and on the example of the French stage, then at its height. Gradually the theaters built up a repertoire of new comedies (generally bawdy) and tragedies in the rhetorical, declamatory manner that gave them, and the couplets in which they were cast, the name "heroic." Both these fashions, like so much else in the Restoration, were extreme and temporary. Dryden, who practiced both modes, lived to see them both at an end - heroic tragedies under the weight of their own pomposity, bawdy comedies under the onslaught of an infuriated clergyman, Jeremy Collier.

Beyond, and perhaps outside, literature as such, but influencing it strongly, lies a change in the intellectual tone of the century, which was basically a shift in the relative importance of the intellectual disciplines. The great minds of the early century were mostly lawyers and theologians. Coke, Bacon, Selden and Spelman among the lawyers and Laud, Andrewes, Cudworth, Ussher, and Chillingworth among the theologians were men famous in their generation. Of the lawyers, some are still consulted as authorities to this day-Coke is a name to conjure with in English law, and Selden's *treatise Titles of Honor* (1614) is obsolete only because the subject itself is. As for the theologians, their work too has lost its topicality; but a brief browsing expedition through the *Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology* cannot fail to convince the student that they were men who worked, in their chosen trade, to very high standards of precise and authoritative scholarship. And yet, as the century's intellectual weather changed, these disciplines ceased to be at the centre of things. There were great lawyers after 1660, but they were not the makers and shakers of society; there were famous clergymen, but they did not determine society's central codes of belief. Starting about mideentury, the great

names belong to other disciplines- they are physicists like Boyle, Hooke, and Newton; John Wallis the mathematician; Edmund Halley the astronomer; and William Harvey the anatomist - not to mention Hobbes and Locke, who as philosophers had particular inl1uence on the assumptions of psychology and the exercise of precision in language. Few of these powerful figures set out deliberately to reconstruct an entire view of the cosmos; and Newton, who did so most successfully, retained to the end shreds and patches of the old beliefs. (He wrote a commentary on the Book of Revelation that has rather baffled those who admire his scientific works.) But a secular, materialist world view was in fact what emerged from the cumulative work of the scientists; even while some Puritans still clung to their dream of a community of saints, others of their own party were finding biblical texts to show that the kingdom of heaven might be brought closer by a dedicated pursuit of earthly knowledge.

BIRTH AND DEATH OF LITERARY FORMS

The stress and strain of revolutionary age can thus be read at large in the century's literature, from the somber, sluggish melancholy prevalent in the early decades, through the hoarse, incoherent warfare of the middle years, to the slow firming up of new standards of correctness and decorum after 1660. Still another mark of violent change is provided by the number of literary forms that perished or dropped from favor in the course of the century, even as others were being born.

Sonnets, for example, were all the rage in the last years of Elizabeth and the first years of James. Almost always they dealt with erotic themes, often they were linked together in sequences to suggest, if not to tell, a story. Donne turned the sonnet entirely to religious themes; Milton's sonnets arc mostly on religion and politics, though a few arc personal. And many seventeenth-century poets had no use at all for sonnets: the form simply faded from the poetic repertory, not to revive again until the Romantic era. Allegory suffered an even more curious fate. It was the essential method of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and t he figures of Sin and Death in the midst of Paradise *Lost* testify to its survival. But when Dryden used allegory (exceptionally, as in *The Hind and the Panter* [1687], a kind of grotesque comedy clung to it, as if the form were fundamentally a joke. Serious allegory had slid far down the social scale; it was

now the natural mode for an inspired primitive like John Bunyan, who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680).

Blighted by the frosts of Puritan disapproval, the masque and the madrigal both perished. The one was a courtly and the other a popular form, hut both were suspect as vain, sensual, and worldly. Madrigals, as a blend of folk and art songs, were particularly to he regretted. For many years they had been sung in the yeoman's home or the merchant's parlor, to the accompaniment of lutes, viols, or recorders. Many made use of complex polyphonic harmonies; distinguished musicians devoted their talents to madrigals. But they faded away. and beside them faded all sorts of folk arts and folk customs - rounds and carols and morris dancing, maypoles, rural pageants, and country games-to make way for psalm singing and sermon listening. For the gentry after the Restoration, indigenous music was replaced by oratorios and operas, many of them imported from Italy, Germany, or France.

Alongside perishing forms, new ones developed. As had the Spenserians, the Metaphysical poets often preferred intricate stanzaic forms. When these lost favor, rhymed couplets-of which Johnson was an early and Waller a later exponent -came to the fore. Couplets are a superb meter for verse argumentation because they can combine the Slinging effect of epigrams with the impetus of cumulative rhythms that build into splendid verse paragraphs. Whether coincidentally or as a consequence, the rise of regular couplets and discursive argument accompanied a perceptible decline for the lyric impulse. Elizabethan and Jacobean lyrics make up (to imitate the memorable title of an older collection) a "paradise of dainty devices." Restoration lyrics, though occasionally elegant and sometimes magnificently indecent, are far less numerous as well as less expressive.

The growing regularity of most Restoration metrics contrasted with a brief and not very widespread vogue for vehement and irregular verses fashioned after what Abraham Cowley understood by the Great Odes of Pindar. Modern opinion generally holds Cowley to have misunderstood his Greek models and finds a more accurate conception of Pindar in Jonson's *Ode on Cary* and Morison. Most of Cowley's *Pindaric Odes* (1656) were in fact not only extravagant but clumsy. His influence, however, was better than his examples, and modified Pindarics continued to be used occasionally through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to

express loftly and dignified sentiments. These latter-day Pindarics (as by Dryden, and subsequently Gray and Wordsworth) don't sound much like Cowley, but Cowley's precedent did something to free them from the stiffness that is the besetting fault of the Great Ode in English.

Formal verse satire, which had been a self-conscious novelty at the beginning of the century, was a well-established mode of poetry by its end. Under the molding of many hands, satire grew subtler and more various; satirists recognized their responsibility to divert their readers as well as to insult their antagonists. Indeed a whole new mode of sharp gentlemanly discourse grew up after the Restoration; it went sometimes by the name of "raillery," sometimes "banter," and amounted to nothing more than light irony. But serious things could be said in it, about which nonetheless a gentleman might not want to show himself too earnest. Below satire, burlesque was another literary mode that the seventeenth century nurtured, with the aid of France. After the unrelieved earnestness of the Puritans, derision and buffoonery delighted the popular taste, and with the advent of burlesque, we find ourselves on the very threshold of the modern novel, one vein of which reaches as far back as *Don Quixote*.

The advent of the novel was also prepared for by major changes in the character of English prose, which took place especially in consequence of the pamphlet wars and the twenty-year hegemony of Puritan taste from 1640 to 1660. Prose as an art form flourished under the first Stuarts, not always without a flavor of self-display. Donne, preaching before King James or the societies of leaned lawyers at the Inns of Court, put on pyrotechnical exhibitions of wit, ingenuity, and visionary eloquence. Not that he was insincere; his mind worked that way, and so did the minds of his auditory. Similarly with the infinitely erudite, infinitely patient Lancelot Andrewes, and so with dozens of less renowned clerics, who saw that the path to preferment lay through a special sort of witty eloquence. Like these witty preachers, Sir Thomas Browne wrote in response to his own private impulses and turnes of feeling, but for inward, meditative, and very learned readers. A kind of embryonic fiction flourished quite widely in the form of "characters"-detailed, static, humorous accounts, generally of social types, on whom the writer exercised his wit. Most character writers tipped their pens with a touch of satire; all implied,

sooner or later, a moral attitude. Witty moralists like Owen Felltham and Dr. Thomas Fuller (the latter notable also as a church historian and annalist) contribute to our sense of prose in the age of Donne and Browne as a flourishing and various art form.

Milton as a prose writer represents a specially instructive case. His learned and often intricate style was formed well before the revolt, in the privacy of his library, to the taste of an imagined aristocracy of learning. But then it was first brough forth into the turmoil and rough confusion of the civil wars to jostle for public favor with productions of the butcher, the baker, and the unlearned candlestick maker. For all his flights of soaring eloquence (to which posterity has paid ample respect), Milton was not in his own time an effective controversialist. His ideas were too complex and erudite; their expression was too allusive. How could a pamphlet called *Areopagitica* hope for popular success when most potential purchasers could not pronounce (far less understand) the title?

The lesson taught by the pamphlet wars on the advantage of a simple style was reinforced by the teachings of the philosophers Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke and by the example of the scientists who began quietly meeting during the Protectorate as a "Philosophical College" and became after the Restoration the Royal Society. Plain speech became, first, a technique to be learned and then a natural formula for "transparent," apparently artless prose. Dorothy Osborne tells a fine story about an old uncle of hers who despised metaphorical speech. Trying to communicate with a friend, he told his secretary to say he would have written himself, but had the gout in his hand. What the fellow wrote was that the gout in his hand would not allow his master to put pen to paper-a piece of fancying-up that so enraged the old gentleman that he flung the inkwell at his servant's head.

Whether untutored and "natural" or carefully practiced, the plain style (Which inevitably developed into a thousand different degrees and sorts of plainness) proved immensely useful. In Locke's philosophical writings it became the vehicle of a commonsense British empiricism; in Dryden's prefaces it adapted to careful critical balances; and in politicians it served to express graceful, unemphatic innuendos. Genteel comment on occasional, and sometimes on learned, topics was voiced by Abraham Cowley and later by Sir William Temple. For better or worse, the first English newsletters, and then newspapers, sprang up during the civil wars. Political

commentators started to make themselves heard, and lzaak Walton completed his series of reverential biographies of English divines. As the century passed, preacheres found that they could no longer entertain audiences with intricate similitudes and microscopic, word-by-word explication of texts; ranting and raving (known more politely as "zeal") were also out of fashion. Instead, they turned increasingly to plainly phrased, commonsense discussions of practical morality and found that such discourses pleased their audiences about as well as anything.

All these developments presupposed a reading audience responsive, alert, and eager to he informed - not necessarily instructed in classical culture or trained in courtly conventions, hut ready to follow a sustained discourse in unrhetorical, commonsense English. Such an audience, so turned and so motivated, not expecting too much from its reading, hut responsive to acute arguments or vivid touches of the imagination, is a first premise of modern literature. We are apt to consider it as normal and natural a phenomenon as the air we breathe, hut it is not. It had to he created slowly, hesitantly, without much conscious direction on anyone's part, by a process of gradual accretion and expansion. Its existence is the foundation of the new literary age and the culminating achievement of the early seventeenth century.

Being diverse out of harsh necessity and tolerant only reluctantly, the century was often halting and unsteady in its taste. It was forging new standards, not accepting the guidance of old ones. Women did important work on both sides during the civil wars; their letters and diaries provide vivid pictures of a rapidly changing social landscape. But their contributions to *belles-Letters* were not many. For centuries, the most elementary learning had been begrudged to most of them; not even fine ladies were always sure of their spelling and punctuation. The humanists who urged most strongly educations for women did so only on the score that education would make them more devout and docile Christians. Love, which was the major theme of renaissance versifying, was not acceptable as a theme for a girl or a woman to write about. Katherine Philips, whose sobriquet "the matchless Orinda" indicates her status as the most renowned female poet of the mid-century, made a specialty of celebrating her platonic relationships with friends of both sexes. Naturally, a woman of great wealth and social prestige, like the duchess of Newcastle, was less inhibited from writing and publishing; hut Lady Mary Wroth, after one rash act of publication, was silenced for the rest of her life. Though the women struggled (and with

only partial success) to find voices of their own, the age to come would speak more assuredly because of them.

Science also advanced gropingly through a series of corrected errors and inspired guesses. The same age saw Sir Kenelm Digby's solemn proposal that one Gould cure wounds by medicating the sword that caused them, and William Harvey's proclamation of the circulation of the blood. Though much of Inigo Jones's work in architecture was destroyed, some of his actual structures and more of his important translations of Italian books on architecture survived, to provide a lead for neoclassical building in England and North America during the eighteenth century. Though the Puritan commonwealth went to smash as a political organization, many of the ideas expressed during those hectic mid-century years maintained an underground existence and blossomed at the time of the American Revolution, more than a century later.

Thus the early seventeenth century brough to its culmination much that had been characteristic from the beginning of the English Renaissance and at the same time advanced boldly across the threshold of the next age, whatever one prefers to call it. Although its elapsed time is relatively brief, the period changed not only the tone of literature but the very definition of what literature could be. Like all great cultural shifts, this one was too complex to be captured in a single phrase or attributed to a single cause. It had neither a fixed beginning nor a precise end. But in the seamless web of history we can hardly fail to notice new colors and textures that, over the short course of the early seventeenth century, enter into the warp and woof of the nation's literary as of its social life, to make it look and feel like a whole new piece of cloth.

Chapter 22
JOHN DONNE
1572-1631

1601: Secret marriage to Ann More.

1615: Becomes an Anglican priest.

1612: Apointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral.

1633: First publication of *poems.*

Donne himself originated an observation about his life and character that, though only partly accurate, has become commonplace. In a private letter, he distinguished Jack Donne, an adventurous young spark who wrote bawdy and cynical verses to an assortment of mistresses, from the grave and eloquent divine, Dr. Donne, the dean of St. Paul's. The contrast is striking, but the key to both characters is the same: it is a restless, searching energy that scorns the easy platitude and the smooth, vacant phrase; that is vivid, immediate, troubling. Whether he is flaunting his pleasure at chasing every woman in sight (as in The Indifferent) or voicing total repentance and devotion to God (as in the Holy Sonnets), Donne's poetry demands imaginative effort of the reader, whom it absorbs in a tense, complex experience.

Donne was born into an old Roman Catholic family, at a time when anti-Catholic feeling in English was near its height and Catholics were subject to constant harassment by the Elizabethan secret police. His faith barred him from many of the usual avenues of success, and his point of view was always that of an insecure outsider. Though he attended both Oxford and Cambridge universities, as well as Lincoln's Inn (where lawyers got their training), he never took any academic degrees and never practiced law. After quietly abandoning Catholicism some time during the 1590s, he had scruples about becoming an Anglican. He had no gift for commerce, and though he inherited money from his father (who died when he had to make his

way in the world indirectly-by wit, charm, learning valor, and above all, favor. Partly from sheer intellectual curiosity, he read enormously in divinity, medicine, law, and the classics; he wrote to display his learning and wit. He traveled on the Continent, especially, it would seem, to Spain; even in later years, he did a good deal of moving around. With Ralegh and Essex he took part in two hit-and-run expeditions against Cadiz and the Azores. He put himself in the way of court employment, danced attendance on great court ladies, and generally lived the life of a brilliant young man hopeful of preferment.

When in 1598 Donne was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, one of the highest officials in the queen's court, his prospects for worldly advancement seemed good. He sat in Elizabeth's last Parliament; he cultivated those who wielded power and had patronage to despense. But in 1610, he secretly married Lady Egerton's niece, seventeen-year-old Ann More, and thereby ruined his own worldly hopes. The marriage turned out happily, but Donne's bad faith to his employer was neither forgotten nor forgiven. Sir George More had Donne imprisoned and dismissed from his post, and for the next dozen years the poet had to struggle at a series of a makeshift employments to support his growing family. In his mid thirties, Donne was far from the brilliant young gallant of the 1590s; sick, poor, and unhappy, he wrote, but dared not publish, a treatise of the lawfulness of suicide (*Biathanatos*). A" he approached forty, he published two anti-Catholic polemics (*Pseudo-Martyr*, 1610; *Ignatius his Conclave*, 1611); they scaled publicly his renunciation of the Catholic faith. In return for patronage from Sir Robert Drury, he wrote in 1611 and 1612 a pair of long poems, the *Anniversaries*, on the death of Sir Robert's daughter Elizabeth. None of these activities represented a full employment of Donne's pent-up intellectual energy. To be sure his social position should not be painted too blackly. He still had friends among courtiers, politicians, poets, and the great ladies around court, like Lucy, countess of Bedford, and Magdalen Herbert with her two poet sons, George and Edward. Donne was never quite without resources; yet, broadly speaking, the middle years of his life were a period of uncertainty and discontent.

Though Donne had flatly refused in 1607 to take Anglican orders, King James was certain that he would some day make a great Anglican preacher. Hence he declared that Donne could have no preferment or employment from him, expect in the church. Finally, in 1615, Donne

overcame his scruples, not the least of which was the fear of seeming ambitious, and entered the ministry. He was in due course appointed Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn. In the seventeenth century among court circles and at the Inns of Court where lawyers congregated, preaching was at once a form of spiritual devotion, an intellectual exercise, and a dramatic entertainment. Donne's metaphorical style, bold erudition, and dramatic wit at once established him as a great preacher in an age of great preachers. Fully 160 of his sermons survive. In 1621 he was made dean of St. Paul's, where he preached to great congregations of "City" lawyers, courtiers, merchants, and tradesmen. In addition, his private devotions were published in 1624, and he continued to write sacred poetry into his late years. Obsessed with the idea of death, Donne preached what was called his own funeral sermon, just a few weeks before he died. It is a terrifyingly personal meditation on dissolution, as befits a man who arranged for a final portrait of himself to be painted, dressed in his shroud.

The poetry of Donne represents a sharp break with that written by his predecessors and most of his contemporaries. Much Elizabethan verse is decorative and flowery. Its images adorn, its rhythm is mellifluous. Its frequent "conceits" (elaborately sustained metaphors) arc often variation on comparisons passed down through generations of poets in a line from Petrarch in the fourteenth century. But Donne, taking his cue from recent Continental poets who had freshened the Petrarchan tradition by developing a more intellectualized form of conceit, created highly concentrated images that involve a major element of dramatic contrast or of intellectual strain. The clichés of earlier love poetry-bleeding hearts, checks like roses, lips like cherries, Cupid shooting the arrows of love-appear in Donne's poetry only to be mocked or in some ingenious transmutation. The tears that flow in A Valediction: Of Weeping arc different from, and more complex than, the ordinary saline fluid of unhappy lovers; they are ciphers, naughts, symbols of the world's emptiness without the beloved; or else. Suddenly reflecting her image, they arc globes, worlds, they contain the sum of things. By using such conceits, the poet not only displays his own ingenuity but may express a deep vision of the world and the strands of analogy that seem to hold it together. Donne's conceits leap continually in a restless orbit from the personal to the cosmic and hack again.

Donne likes to twist and distort not only images and ideas but traditional rhythmic and stanzaic patterns. His speech patterns are colloquial and various. Ben Jonson expressed the shock of some contemporaries by saying that "Donne, for not keeping of accent [i.e., metrical uniformity], deserved hanging"-though he also said that Donne was "the first poet in the world in some things." While Donne sometimes uses traditional verse forms, and indeed very simple ones. he is also fond of inventing elaborate and intricate stanzas. His penchant for compressed and elliptical expression often produces difficulty for the reader. In the satires, which Renaissance writers understood to he "harsh" and "crabbed" as a genre, Donne's distortions often threaten to choke off the stream of expression entirely. But in the lyrics (both those that are worldly and those that arc religious in theme), as in the elegies and sonnets, the verse repeatedly achieves a complex and memorable melody.

Donne and his followers are known to literary history as the "Metaphysical school" of poets. Strictly speaking, this is a misnomer. There was no organized group of poets who imitated Donne, and if there had been, they would not have called themselves Metaphysical poets. That term was invented by John Dryden and Samuel Johnson. But the influence of Donne's poetic style was widely felt, especially by writers whose taste was formed before 1660. George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and Abraham Cowley are only the best known of those in whom this influence is recognizable. The great change of taste that took place around 1660 threw Donne and the "conceited" style out of fashion; during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both he and his followers were rarely read and still more rarely appreciated. Finally, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, three new editions of Donne appeared, of which Sir H. J. C. Grierson's, published in 1912, was quickly accepted as standard. By clarifying and purifying the often-garbled text, Grierson did a great deal to make Donne's poetry more available to the modern reader. Almost at once it started to exert an influence on modern poetic practice, the modern poets being hungry for a "tough" style that would free them from the worn-out rhetoric of late-nineteenth-century Romanticism. And Donne's status among the English poets quickly climbed from that of a curiosity to that of an acknowledged master.

No more than a couple of the poems on which Donne's modern reputation is built were published during his lifetime, though most of them were widely circulated through courty and literary circles in handwritten copies. There were practical reasons for this halfway state of affairs. Many of the poems would have constituted black marks on Donne's reputation as an earnest and godly divine, and because they were difficult and allusive, only a few people wanted to read them. Thus Donne was known, outside the relatively limited circles that had access to manuscript collections, primarily as a preacher and devotional writer. His collected poems were first published in 1633; in the second edition (1635), the poems were divided into nine generic groups (one of which includes only a single long poem, *The Progress of the Soul*). The Songs and Sonnets, which open the volume, are generally amorous in theme; the *Divine Poems*, which close it, treat religious themes. In between fall groups of epigrams, love elegies, epithalamia (wedding songs), satires, verse letters, and funeral elegies. For convenience, our selections from the poetry, like those of most other editors, generally follow the order of the 1635, edition, sometimes supplemented and corrected by reference to other early editions and to manuscript materials. Recent editions, especially those by Helen Gardner and W. Milgate, have also been consulted.

Chapter 23
BEN JONSON
1572-1637

1598: *Everyman in his Humor*, Jonson's first published play

1606: *Volpone*.

1616: Jonson appointed poet laureate; published his works.

1629: Decisive failure of *The New Inn*.

Ben Jonson did so many different things in the literary world of the early seventeenth century, and made use of so many different styles to do them, that he is difficult to see as a whole person. Actor, playwright, poet and poet laureate, scholar, critic, translator, man of letters, and head, for the first time in English, of a literary "school," the so-called Sons of Ben, he was a giant of a man. Yet we cannot easily take a perspective of him.

Jonson's life was tough and turbulent. The posthumous child of a clergyman, he was stepson to a master bricklayer of Westminster. He was educated at Westminster School by the great classical scholar and antiquarian William Camden, worked briefly at his stepfather's trade, and then entered the army. In Flanders, where the Dutch with English help were warring against the Spaniards, he fought single-handed with one of the enemy before the massed armies and killed his man. Returning to England about 1594, he began to work as an actor and playwright but was drawn from one storm center to another. He killed a fellow actor in a duel and escaped the gallows only by pleading "benefit of clergy" (i.e., by proving he could read and write, which entitled him to plead before a more lenient ecclesiastical court). He was jailed for insulting the Scottish nation at a time when King James was newly arrived from Scotland. He took furious

part in an intricate set of literary wars with his fellow playwrights. Having converted to Catholicism, he was the object of deep suspicion after the Gunpowder Plot of Guy Fawkes (1605), when the phobia against his religion reached its height. Yet he rode out all these troubles, growing mellower as he grew older (and reconverting to Anglicanism); in his latter years he became the unofficial literary dictator of London, the king's pensioned poet, a favorite around the court, and the good friend of men like Shakespeare, Donne, Francis Beaumont, John Selden, and Francis Bacon as well as of dukes, diplomats, and distinguished folk generally. In addition, he engaged the affection of younger men (poets like Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, and Sir John Suckling and speculative thinkers like Lord Falkland and Sir Kenelm Digby), who delighted to christen themselves his "sons." Sons of Ben provided the nucleus of t he entire "Cavalier school" of English poets.

The first of Jonson's great plays was Every Man in His Humor, in which Shakespeare acted a leading role. It was also the first of the so-called comedies of humors, in which the prevailing eccentricities and ruling passions of men (i.e., their "humors") were exposed to satiric deflation. Though Jonson's classical tragedy *Sejanus* (160J) has not been much liked (it is gloomy in mood, static in action and weighty with antiquarian lore). *Volpone* (1606) and *The Alchemist* (1610) arc two supreme satiric comedies of the English stage. Both have been repeatedly "adapted" and "modernized," hut even now the original texts arc likely to seem more lively and vital than the doctored versions. Meanwhile, starting in 1605, Jonson began writing for the court a series of masques-elaborate semi theatrical displays involving spectacle, allegory, and compliment to the king or queen. Thus he became closely involved with the life of the court, a connection that was formalized in 1616, when he was appointed poet laureate with a substantial pension. In the same year, he published in a splendid volume his collected *Works,* a body of plays and poetry to which he kept adding in the years before his death. Though his later plays were not very successful, he turned out many occasional poems, verse letters, translations, complimentary verses before other poets' volumes-finding in all these different forms a grave, incisive pattern of formal speech through which the reverberations of his immense classical learning make themselves heard.

The bulk of Jonson's poetry falls, without undue strain, into five groups, based mostly on stylistic qualities. He wrote a number of poems of festive ceremony, poems celebrating those qualities of ordered richness and dignified delight that represent his image 01 the good life. A poem like *To Penshurst* turns a physical building and its surrounding countryside into an emblem of modest yet noble opulence; the poem *Inviting a Friend to Supper* is an imitation of Horace, yet its tonality is thoroughly English, and the "modest little supper" to which he invites his friend would scandalize a modern weight watcher. Quite a different side of Jonson's talent is represented by his elegies and epitaphs; they arc brief, full, simple poems, such as one could imagine king carved on a marble slab-direct, impersonal, inevitable. Allied to these arc his compliments and tributes; often prefixed to his friends' hooks but sometimes simple tributes of friendship and admiration, they summarize warmly yet judiciously an author's or a patron's character and achievement. Jonson the pure poet finds expression in his songs, sometimes occurring in the plays and masques hut sometimes standing alone, often intended for musical accompaniment, but generally beautifully melodic even without it. Finally, Jonson wrote (in imitation of the Roman poet Martial) a great number of epigrams, sometimes lewd, sometimes nasty, and occasionally funny. We have largely lost the taste for this sort of thing today, hut epigrams were a vital Renaissance genre, and Jonson's profane epigrams can usefully he compared with Crashaw's sacred ones.

Jonson took his calling as a poet with the greatest seriousness, asserting the dignity of the profession with (sometimes) a kind of pedantry and emphasis that contrasts with Shakespeare's inconspicuous anonymity. When Jonson published in 1616 his collected works - *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* -it was the first time an English author had been so presumptuous. Yet he succeeded in making the fact of professional authorship somehow respectable; an author like John Dryden, who owed so much to Jonson on stylistic grounds, owed him a social debt as well. His career stood on foundations that Ben, with his pedantry and his pugnacity, was the first to lay down.

Chapter 24
JOHN MILTON
1608-1674

1673: *Lycidas*

1640-1660: The Pamphlet Wars

1651: Blindness

1667: *Paradise Lost*

The life of John Milton falls conveniently into three divisions. There is a period of youthful education and apprenticeship, which culminates in the writing of Lycidas (1637) and Milton's foreign travels (1638-39). There is a period of prose and controversy (1640-60), when almost all his verse was the by-product of events public or private, and when his major preoccupations were political and social; and finally, there are the last fourteen years of his life, when he returned to literature, a mature and somewhat embittered figure, to publish his three major poems, *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, the elder son of a self-made businessman, who, under the title of scrivener, drew up contracts, lent money at interest, and dealt in real estate. From the beginning, young Milton showed prodigious gifts as a student of languages. At St. Paul's School he mastered Latin and Greek, and before long he was adept in most modern European tongues, as well as Hebrew. Sent to Christ's College, Cambridge, he graduated A. B. in 1629 and A. M. in 1632, meanwhile continuing to read voraciously and writing (too infrequently for his own satisfaction) an occasional poem. In the normal course of events, an education like this would have culminated in ordination to the ministry and a career in the church. But after his A. M., Milton, who disliked the trend of religious and civil affairs in England, did not take orders; leaving the university, first for London, then for his father's

country house at Horton in Buckinghamshire, he read, day and night, under his own direction, for six more years. It seems likely that Milton in his lime read just about everything of importance written in English, Latin, Greek, and Italian. (Of course, he had the Bible by heart.) In 1634 he wrote, at the invitation of a noble family in Shropshire, the masque known as *Comus*: and in 1637 he contributed to a volume memorializing a college classmate the elegy Lycidas. Finally, in 1638, his most indulgent father sent his most avid of students abroad, to put the finishing touches on an already splendid education. For a little over a year Milton traveled on the Continent, visiting famous literary figures and scenes; then, hearing rumors of impending troubles in English, he returned home.

Of Milton's complex and troubled career in controversy, we need not say much. It too is divided into three major phases. He began by publishing antiprelatical tracts, against government of the church by bishops. These are rough, knockabout, name-calling pamphlets in the style of the times, which take a popular position on a relatively popular issue. In 1644, responding to a hook by a German exile in English named Samuel Hartlib, he wrote a short *essay Of Education*; later in the same year, responding to a severe if ineffectual parliamentary ordinance to regulate printing, he published his defense of a free press, *Areopagitica*. But in the meanwhile his personal circumstances had led to a second series of pamphlets that earned Milton a reputation as a radical. In Mayor June 1642, he had married Mary Powell, daughter of a royalist country squire. The bride was just seventeen years old, half her husband's age. Within a few weeks she left him, to return to her parents' house; and from 1643 to 1645, Milton published a series of pamphlets arguing that divorce should he granted on grounds of incompatibility. Respectable Englishmen, already disturbed by the social troubles of the lime, took a dim view of what they called "divorce at pleasure"; it looked like the end of all social order. In fact, Milton's position appears moderate today and is accepted practice in many modern societies; hut it was scandalous in his time, and Milton was much embittered by ridicule of his ideas. After the execution of Charles I in 1649, he published a third set of pamphlets; they were Latin disputations against Continental critics of the Cromwell regime, and they explicitly defended the execution of Charles. In the middle of this work he went blind, as a result of eyestrain continued over many years. With the help of assistants, however, he was able to fulfill his duties as Latin

secretary to Cromwell's Council of State and to contribute very substantially 10 the diplomatic dignity of the new government.

Meanwhile, his wife had returned to him in 1645, and having borne him three daughters, died in 1652. In 1656 Milton married Katherine Woodcock, who died in childbirth in 1658. Final1y, in 1660, the whole political movement for which Milton had sacrificed so much went to smash. Though Milton boldly published pamphlets in its support to the very last minute, the Good Old Cause was defeated, and Charles U recalled from his travels. For a time under the Restoration, Milton was imprisoned and in danger of his life; but friends intervened (among them, Andrew Marvell), and he escaped with a fine and the loss of most of his property.

In 1663 Milton married his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, and in blindness, poverty, defeat, and relative isolation, he set about completing a poem "justifying the ways of God to men," which he had first envisaged many years before. It was published in 1667, as *Paradise Lost*; and despite the many difficulties that it presented, despite its unfamiliar meter (blank verse was rare outside drama), despite the unpopularity of its attitudes and Milton’s reputation as a dangerous man, it was recognized at once as a supreme epic achievement. In 1671 Milton published *Paradise Regained*, an epic poem in four hooks describing Christ's temptation in the wilderness, and *Samson Agonistes*, a "closet" tragedy (i.e., not intended for the stage). He died, of complications arising from gout, in 1674.

In the writing of Milton, the work of two tremendous intellectual and social movements comes to a head. The Renaissance is responsible for the rich and complex texture of Milton's style, the multiplicity of its classical references, its wealth of ornament and decoration. Paradise Lost, being an epic, not only challenges comparison with Homer and Virgil hut undertakes to encompass the whole life of humankind -war, love, religion, hell, heaven, the cosmos. It is a poem vastly capacious of worldly experience. On the other hand, the Reformation speaks with equal, if not greater, authority in Milton's earnest and individually minded Christianity. The great epic, which resounds with the grandeur and multiplicity of the world, is also a poem of which the central actions take place inwardly, at the core of the human conscience. Adam is Milton's epic hero, but unlike his classical predecessors’, his fate cluminates in an act of passive suffering, not of active heroism. He does not kill Hector of Turnus, much less Satan; with Eve,

he picks up the burden of worldly existence and triumphs over his guilt by admitting it and repenting of it.

These two contrasting aspects of Milton's life and thought place him within the long tradition of Renaissance Christian humanism. His literary art places him in the small circle of great epic writers.

Sonnets Between 1630 and 1658 Milton wrote twenty-four sonnets. Five he wrote in Italian, no doubt partly as linguistic exercises, the rest in English, on a variety of occasions, both public and private. Unlike the sonnets of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, those of Milton do not form any sort of sequence, and they lay very little emphasis in erotic themes. Neither are they devotional like the Holy Sonnets of Donne. They are more often public and political than simply personal. Yet, whatever their theme, they speak with a massive and authoritative voice like none other in English.

The form of the sonnets is Petrarchan rather than Shakespearean; one is a "tailed sonnet, with two little extra units, each consisting of a half line and a couplet. A special feature of Milton's later sonnets is the way he runs on the sense from line to line, deliberately avoiding end-stopped lines (see particularly *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont*). In this as in other respects, Milton was following the example of an Italian sonneteer, Giovanni Della Casa, who broke sharply with the Petrarchan tradition of metrical regularity. Milton's break with his English predecessors was just as sharp.