

INA MITITELU

***HISTORY OF BRITISH LITERATURE
FROM ORIGINS TO THE AGE OF REASON***

CAHUL 2010

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COURSE CONTENTS ACCORDING TO THE CURRICULUM

I. The Anglo – Saxon Period:

Britain before the Anglo- Saxons
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 Anglo- Saxon Society
 Anglo – Saxon Literature

II. The Medieval Period:

The Norman Conquest
 The Reign of William the Conqueror and the Feudal System
 The Medieval Church
 The Medieval Literature

III. The Renaissance Period:

The Renaissance Spirit
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 The Elizabethan Era
 Humanism
 Renaissance Literature

IV. The Enlightenment Period:

The Age of Reason; Restoration England
 The Glorious Revolution
 The Revolution in Agriculture and Industry
 Early Neoclassical Literature
 From Neoclassicism to Romanticism

Compulsory Works for Reading:

1. *Beowulf*;
2. Jeoffrey Chaucer “*Canterbury Tales*”; The Prologue and Tales;
3. Edmund Spencer, *Sonnet 30*;
4. William Shakespeare. *Sonnet 130*. Tragedy *Hamlet*;
5. John Dryden. *A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day*;
6. Alexander Pope – from “*Essay on Criticism*” – *Epigrams*.
7. Robert Burns. *To Joe Anderson, My Joe*.

I. The Anglo – Saxon Period (449 - 1066)

Key- Words: *barbarism; paganism; Celtic tribes; amphitheatre; Germanic invasions; conquerors; kinsmen; epic poem; mead-halls; tribal heroes; heroic deeds.*

The first theme of this course is an introduction to the study of the origins of the British nation, as well as the general familiarization with the territory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. The student will have to possess several maps of the British Isles, according to the important historical events that occurred in the Anglo- Saxon Period. That information might be taken from any book in the History of Great Britain, starting with the map of the B.C. Britain before the Roman occupation, when the territory was occupied by Celts. Another map is of Roman Britannia in the II century A.D.

When speaking about **Britain before the Anglo- Saxons** students will remember that England was inhabited from about 3000 BC; the builders of Stonehenge were excellent astronomers, had extraordinary engineering skills and a complex social organisation. Celtic tribes invaded England around 700 BC, their bronze weapons ensuring their victory over the previous settlers. Consulting the books recommended for this topic the student will find out that the next invaders were the Romans. Julius Caesar made a brief visit to Britain early in 55 B.C., but it was a century later when the Romans arrived in 43 AD and stayed for 400 years. It is important to retain that the Romans brought many innovations in the life of Celts, because being skilled engineers they built military fortifications such as Hadrian's Wall in the North, as well as elaborate baths, villas, amphitheaters, and stone roads between key military posts. Even more important was that the Romans brought a system of laws and a unity of government to Britain. They also planted the seeds of a religion that was spreading throughout the entire western world - Christianity. In A.D. 410 the sack of Rome by German barbarians signaled the end of Roman rule in Britain. The Roman legions were recalled to defend a crumbling Empire at home, leaving the islands open to invasion by the Germanic tribes who had been raiding the coast of Roman Britain for decades.

One important event in the history of Britons were **the Germanic Invasions**. The students will learn that the Jutes, a Germanic tribe from the

Danish peninsula, were the first to arrive, conquering the province of Kent in A.D. 449. They were followed by the Saxons and the Angles, tribes from the Northern Germanic plain. The fierce, virile marauders destroyed much of the Roman civilization and either enslaved the Britons or drove them into the inaccessible highlands of the North and West. Weakened by Roman dominance, the Britons in the Southeast did not put up a sustained fight. However, in the fifth or sixth century one Celtic chief won a minor victory over the Saxons before being driven west. This chief might have been the legendary King Arthur. The steady infiltration of tribes into Britain continued for over a hundred years. By the middle of the sixth century, the invaders, now known collectively as Anglo-Saxons, were established in various parts of Britain. Their culture became the basis for "Angle-land," or "English," culture; their vigorous language became the spoken language of the people, the language now known as Old English.

The issue of **the Anglo-Saxon Society** is of great importance because the Anglo-Saxon society itself was in a way the 'cause and source' of Anglo-Saxon literature, i.e. poetry. The student will have to look for this topic in Meyer "*Literature. Purple Level*" and find the way historians called the six centuries of the AS Period. This period was marked by bloody conflicts, ignorance, violence, and barbarism. Of great value is that pagan ideas and practices that gradually gave way to Christian ideals and to a concern with Christian ethical values.

The history of Old English literature follows closely the history of the above mentioned conquering tribes and peoples. They brought along with them not only a new way of political and social life but also a literature of their own, recounting their ancient mentality, traditions and glorious past. The student will have to describe the life style and values of the Anglo-Saxons and mention that their outlook was essentially fatalistic. Life for them was a struggle to be endured; evil and death were inescapable realities; and fame was the only true immortality. Their religion was an informal system of god-heroes with few priests and formal rituals. They also were a remarkably adaptable people, gradually assimilating many of the customs, arts, and laws of conquered peoples, while retaining their uniquely Germanic traditions and values. In time, the pagan Anglo-Saxons adapted to the Christian religion, which had been introduced in Britain before the Germanic invasions of the Celtic-Roman Island.

The student will search for information on the hierarchical organization of the Anglo – Saxons and will have to be able to describe the responsibilities of each social class.

The students will get familiarized with the warlike Danes, or Vikings, that invaded Britain during the late eighth and ninth centuries (bn. 856 – 876) and their impact on the culture of Britons. Students will be familiarized with King Alfred, who led a successful campaign against the Danes and sought to raise the level of culture by providing for the establishment of schools and the rebuilding of monasteries. A well educated man; he translated Latin works into English and encouraged others to do the same and to produce original works in English. During Alfred's time, English history was systematically recorded in a series of chronicles, which were the first historical records kept in English.

When referring to **The Anglo- Saxon Literature** the student will determine that the Anglo- Saxon invaders brought with them a tradition of oral poetry and the oral tradition was the earliest mode of literary expression. It reflected essentially pagan values; it was far from uniformly Christian, though the coming of Christianity was a crucial event in the making of Old E. Literature. Heroic epics such as *Beowulf* were later recorded by unknown Christian writers, yet they celebrate the traditional Anglo-Saxon virtues of loyalty, courage, and strength and the heroic adventures of early Germanic warriors. The Anglo-Saxons gathered in great "mead halls" where kings and nobles lavishly entertained friends and strangers alike, often to celebrate successful battles or expeditions. The favorite drink was mead, potent liquor made of fermented honey and water, often with spices, fruit, and malt, which was drunk from beautiful cups and bowls. The scop, a professional bard / singer, entertained the company with retellings of stories and poems about tribal heroes. The king's warriors and comrades and sometimes the king himself also sang of their own adventures.

The oral Anglo-Saxon literature reflects the somber temperament of these Germanic people and the bleak environment in which they lived. Not much of the imagery of brief English summers appears in this literature; winter prevails, and spring comes slowly, if at all. The Anglo-Saxons were serious minded, and the reader finds little humor in their literature. Life was difficult, and most of the stories and poems of this period present heroic struggles in which only the strong survive.

The 7th and 8th c. poetry is essentially pagan in spirit, with the Christian thought and morals superadded to it. This poetry, with a prominent didactic character, emphasizes the transience and brevity of human life, speaking of dangers, of the horrors of Hell, of the fear at Judgment Day, for those whose vices outweigh their virtue, and of the Devil for ever leading mortals on the path of sin. All manner of struggle is the eternal theme between man and man, nation and nation, between human and inhuman powers.

Beowulf represents the most familiar of the Anglo-Saxon poetic forms is one of the few surviving Anglo-Saxon poems of this type. Also among the remnants of Anglo-Saxon literature are riddles, a kind of folklore that exhibits a delight in sound, rhythm, and imagination.

The two great representatives of the OE Poetry were **Caedmon** (658 - 680) and **Cynewulf** (750). The poems of these two monks deal with themes and subjects from the Bible and Church tradition, yet they are distinctly Germanic in their fascination with the sea and with heroic deeds. Written in Old English, these poems are similar in imagery, rhythm, and spirit to the literature derived from Anglo-Saxon oral tradition.

Virtually all written literature of the Anglo-Saxon period dates from Christian times. Unlike OE Poetry, which is partly Anglo-Saxon in origin and partly native, OE prose has no Germanic origins, it developed on English soil alone. Prose developed much later than poetry. Much of the prose of older Christian England is written in Latin. The earliest records in the English language are in manuscripts produced at monasteries and other religious establishments, beginning in the 7th c. Literacy was mainly restricted to servants of the church, and so it is natural that the bulk of Old English literature deals with religious subjects and it is mostly drawn from Latin sources. The prose conveys historical information, teaching and preaching Scriptures and lives of Saints and martyrs.

Bede (673 - 735) and **King Alfred** (871 - 901) can be considered the founders of OE. Prose *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, initiated in the ninth century by King Alfred, and the Old English translation of Bede's *History* are classic examples of Anglo-Saxon prose style. Much of this early prose is a somewhat dull recital of events, year by year, but it is still an invaluable source of information to the historian.

The student will complete the answers with information taken from *The Annotated Old English Literature* by Procopie P. Clonca, A. Miu, I. Vi an. – Pitești: Ed. Universitatii, 2002.

Questions for Check-up:

1. Define the term *Anglo-Saxon*.
2. What was the impact of the Roman occupation on the life of the Celts?
3. Speak about the Germanic invasions.
4. Name the Anglo-Saxon social classes.
5. What kind of people were the Anglo-Saxons and what social values did they have?
6. Explain the impact of Christianity establishment on the literature of the period.
7. Speak about the roots and tone of Anonymous Old English Poetry.
8. Talk briefly about Non- Anonymous Old English Poetry, i.e Caedmon and Cynewulf.
9. Make some general remarks on the O.E. Prose.
10. Name the two representatives of the O.E. Prose.

Seminar on Beowulf

The students will refer briefly to the literary form of epic poem which is a long narrative poem that describes heroic deeds in a formal, "ceremonial" style.

Like all narrative poems, an epic tells a story, generally in chronological order. All epics share common characteristics.

First, the hero, the main character, is of noble birth or at least of high social position. Often the hero is a prominent historical or legendary figure.

Second, the setting is vast, involving entire races, the world, or the universe. Third, the action consists of deeds requiring great courage and valour. Sometimes supernatural forces gods or demons-help or hinder the actions of the hero, who might also possess superhuman capabilities.

In addition, a few structural characteristics are common to most epics. Often, the speaker begins by stating a theme, a controlling idea or message, or by invoking a Muse, or higher power, for inspiration. Then the

narrative begins, usually without any presentation of background information. The reader or listener is plunged immediately into the midst of a crisis. Epics frequently include long formal speeches and "catalogues," or lists, describing warriors, battles, or objects, such as Shild's burial ship.

As the students saw from the list of compulsory bibliography "Beowulf" is the epic poem read for the Anglo – Saxon Period. It can be read from *Annotated Old English Literature* by Procopie P. Clon ea, A. Miu, I. Vi an. Pite ti: Editura Universitatii, 2002 and McDougal, Littell *Literature*, Purple Level, McDougal, Little & Company, New York, Dallas 1985.

The student has to read the entire poem, including the parts *The Prologue, Grendel, The Battle with Grendel, Grendel's Mother, The Fire Dragon, The Death of Beowulf*. During the reading the student will pay attention to the following elements of the narration in the light of their analysis at the seminar.

1. The Plot / the Contents.
2. The Structure of the Poem.
3. The Time of the Action in the Poem.
4. The Place of the Action.
5. Critical Ipohesis on the Authorship.
6. Talk about the Poetic Voice.
7. Christian and Pagan Elements in the Poem.

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The Medieval Period (1066 – 1485)

Key- Words: *king; battle/field; courtroom; church; Norman Duke; confiscated property; reciprocal loyalties/ feudalism; nobles; clergy; serfs; freemen; Roman Catholic Church; holders of land/ vassals; ballad; knight; romance; mystery, miracle, morality plays; printing.*

The Norman Conquest marked the end of the Anglo- Saxon period in British History. The students will have to learn the circumstances under which the life conditions of the Anglo –Saxons changed. It is known that in 1066 a well armed, highly trained army led by William, Duke of Normandy, defeated Harold, King of England, at the Battle of Hastings. This event, and the subsequent occupation of England by the Normans, marked the end of the Anglo-Saxon Period and the beginning of the Medieval Period, one which lasted more that 400 years.

The Normans were descendants of the Viking invaders that occupied a wide part of Northern France, called Normandy. A highly adaptable people, they had adopted the French language of the land and its Christian religion. The Normans were great builders of castles and magnificent churches. They were shrewd in the courtroom, exact in the counting house, skilled in the marketplace, and fearsome on the battlefield. Although they were never more than a ruling minority in England, the Norman presence radically transformed the government, the economic system, the church, and even the language of this Anglo-Saxon land. The Reign of William the Conqueror and the Feudal System; Although the dukes of Normandy were technically subjects of the king of France, they were, in effect, independent rulers, a status that was enhanced by their becoming kings of England.

William the Conqueror, the most powerful duke in France, ruled England with strength and efficiency. Within four years he established his rule all over the country, maintaining it through his barons. An intelligent, energetic administrator, William centralized power by appointing representatives to collect taxes, supervise legal and administrative matters, and organize the military. These representatives were directly responsible to the king, bypassing the Anglo-Saxon earls. To eliminate arguments and

establish a firm basis for awarding confiscated lands, William ordered an extensive survey of all property, the results of which were recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086.

William introduced into England the system of reciprocal loyalties called feudalism. Under feudalism the land is the property of the king, not of the tribe. He kept huge areas for himself, but made grants of land for his nobles and the great princes of the church to use (but not to own) in return for their acceptance of his rule. Land was also granted for use to the king's military elite, called knights, in return for their army services. These people all rented out part of their lands to others below them in rank in return for their services. In William's system all vassals, or holders of land, owed military service directly to the king, an innovation that assured the continued strength of the monarchy. About one person in thirty belonged to the nobility or clergy. A small percentage of the population was made up of freemen who were independent farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen, and hired laborers.

Most people were serfs, a class consisting of slaves and lower class freemen under the old Anglo-Saxon system. Serfs worked for a lord in exchange for protection and the right to farm a small plot of land. They lived in wretched poverty, doomed to remain on the land on which they were born, unable to marry or even to visit a relative without permission of the lord, required to "donate" labor and a portion of their crops to the lord and his family.

The Roman Catholic Church was the unifying force of the age, as well as one of England's most powerful institutions.

The Medieval Church is a theme that requires special attention on the part of the students, mostly because the religious writings were very popular during the medieval period, and due to the great influence the church had, both as an institution and a judicial instance. The conquest resulted in the change of English – speaking upper class with French -speaking one, a new Anglo – Norman ruling class. New French names were given only to new built castles and newly founded abbeys (Belvoir, Battle, Jervaulx). William accelerated the introduction of new clerical elite into England. Within 10 years of the Conquest only one bishop, of Worcester, and only 2 major monasteries remained under control of English abbots, the rest were Normans appointed by the king, who controlled the wealth of these church estates. Later the relations between the crown and church became complex. Conflict often arose between church and crown; in England it was settled by compromise.

The Roman Catholic Church was the unifying force of the age, as well as one of England's most powerful institutions. Clergy and scholars at the abbeys performed the traditional services of educating clergy and nobles and of writing, translating, copying, gathering, and storing manuscripts. Many of these institutions also were vast estates within the feudal system, administered by worldly, well educated abbots and abbesses. Churchmen also held civil offices and served as advisors to the crown. The great churchmen were subject to the king as landholders; they also represented the European power of the papacy and had enormous influence over the king's subjects due to their claim to be God's representatives on earth.

In the years following the contest senior clerics from Normandy ordered the rebuilding of English cathedral and abbey churches. These buildings, notably the new cathedrals at Canterbury, Ely, London, Durham, constructed between 1066 and 1200 were Romanesque in style, with arches, domes, thick walls, and small windows. In the later Gothic style, interiors became important. Church officials and lay benefactors commissioned artists to create stained glass, paintings, mosaics, and sculpted statues to decorate these buildings.

From the late 11th to the early 13th centuries, the Church sponsored a series of Crusades to recapture the Holy Land from the Moslems. Their major impact on England, however, had to do with the opening of new avenues of trade and the introduction of new ideas, foods (rice, sugar, apricots), and fabrics (cotton, damask) into England.

When the kings had to raise money for crusades they sold freedoms to the towns, thus giving the merchants political power. The crusades were not successful in driving the Muslims out of Palestine, but many fortunes were made and profitable trading in spices, valuable textiles, and jewels was established. Contact with Arab science brought mathematical, astronomical and medical knowledge of great value to Europe. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw great advances in learning and the arts: the universities of Oxford and Cambridge had some of the best scholars of Europe.

Even in the early Middle Ages, the tremendous influence and wealth of the Church inspired the jealousy of England's nobility and led to a long series of secret power plays and open clashes between clergy and barons, bishops and kings, and popes and kings. The issues often concerned the Church's right to tax English subjects, the position of Church courts within the British legal system, and the right of the monarch to appoint English

bishops. At stake was control-over revenue, over government, and over the lives of ordinary Englishmen.

Referring to **The Medieval Literature** one should take notice that for two hundred years after the Norman conquest of England, French (a dialect of old French that we call now Anglo- Norman) was the language of the rulers; Latin that of the clergy and scholars; English the language of the servants and serfs. Without a ruling class to preserve English traditions, the custom of transcribing vernacular texts in an earlier form of the West – Saxon dialect was abandoned, and both language and literature were allowed to develop unchecked in new directions.

If most OE literature seems to be uttered by a single aristocratic voice, grave, speaking in terms of high communal aspirations, ME literature is uttered by different voices addressing themselves to different audiences – learned and unlearned, aristocratic and middle class, male and female, maybe to several of these at the same time.

The native English language and culture continued side by side with, and heavily influenced by, the language and culture of the A-Norman ruling class. English lit-re, of course, continued as before, in oral tradition, but we don't have them in literary texts before the beginning of the 13th c. Much of it carries the stamp of popular or semi popular origin. In ME works light humour flashes anywhere, even in the most solemn moralisations.

The loss of Normandy in 1204 encouraged the nobles to stay in England and to learn English. By 1300 English was used by all classes, having been greatly enriched by the huge number of French words imported into the language by the new users. Writing in English flourished from this time, a great deal of which has been preserved.

The early medieval traditions were oral and dramatic.

The Medieval literature comprises the following forms and individual writers:

1. Ballads- One of the most popular forms of literature in the Medieval P. was the ballad, a narrative song. Ballads told of common folks and of characters and events from legend and folklore. The student will read several ballads and analyze their contents and structure.

2. Chivalry and 'Courtly' Love Lit-re. 12th – 13th c.– The courtly tradition of the Medieval Period preserved of the Norman period was written in French; it was courtly in nature, not heroic. It was not intended for a warrior audience as in Anglo-Saxon days, but for a refined Christian aristocratic society in which women played an important role, and knights

obeyed their king. The forms of this literature were *love songs* ("chansons courtoises") and *romances* or fantastic tales of the adventures of chivalrous knights. Early romances were related by troubadours or minstrels, first in France and later in Norman England. The source of much of the English courtly romantic literature was a history of Britain written in Latin in the early twelfth century by the Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth recording the Celtic legends of King Arthur. By the late Middle Ages, an entire body of romances concerned the legendary hero King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Thomas Malory (?-1471) retold the tales in *Morte d'Arthur* (printed in 1485), the first version of the Arthurian legends written in English prose.

In such style were written the two anonymous ME poems *Sir Orfeo* (early 14th c.) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

4. English Lyric Poetry- It was written in the 13th, 14th, 15th centuries and remains anonymous. They are love-lyrics, French – inspired. They render a new fascination with service to a fair lady rather than to a feudal king.

5. Religious Literature and Drama in English of the 14th c. - Medieval religious literature also appeared in dramatic form. Popular were mystery plays, based on stories from the Bible, and miracle plays, which portrayed the lives of saints. The Morality Plays arose in the fourteenth century and were sermons in dramatic form about the lifestyle of the good Christian. The best known is the anonymous fifteenth century *Everyman*. Although these plays probably were written first in Latin for special church services, they eventually were written in English and performed outside churches, in towns, and in inns.

There was much religious poetry, often also personally expressive, as it was part of the great movement of religious enthusiasm and reform which had led to the founding of many new orders.

6. W. Langland's *The Vision of Piers Plowman* – 14th c. A radical criticism of society is to be found in the famous allegorical poem: *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*. written around 1362 in Middle English. Fifty manuscripts have survived, which indicate its popularity. The poem describes major historical events, such as the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, and the Peasants' Revolt. The poet was probably a poor cleric without a benefice. He reviews the problems of his time in allegoric form: vices and virtues appear as characters in the story.

7. The most famous writer of the Medieval Period, the 'Father of English

Literature', was **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1345?-1400), a poet who demonstrated the potential of Middle English as a literary language. Chaucer is the greatest writer of the period. He was the son of a wealthy London wine merchant; he became a page in a noble household, and later a high official in the royal service. He travelled widely in Europe negotiating financial treaties for the crown, and thus became acquainted with the works of Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. As an educated Englishman he knew and loved French literature and as much of classical culture as was known in his time. It was his cosmopolitan European orientation which made him into one of the most original of English writers. There are three stages in his work: at first he wrote in the French courtly style (the allegorical romance *The Romaunt of the Rose*); then he came under the influence of Dante and Boccaccio, producing the masterpiece *Troilus and Cryseyde* (c 1380). He borrowed freely from his Italian source: this was standard medieval practice, as originality counted for little but the weight of a revered authority much. Chaucer made something unique out of the story about the son of the king of Troy and his unfaithful lover. It is told in verse - the seven-line "rhyme royal" (so called because King James I used it). Chaucer's characters are drawn with a subtlety and psychological insight characteristic of the novel, not found hitherto. *The Canterbury Tales* of 1386, the most famous of Chaucer's works, is a collection of stories told (so the framework) by 31 pilgrims resting in a tavern on their way to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket, the archbishop murdered in 1170 in Canterbury cathedral by the Norman king Henry II. Boccaccio's *Decameron* has a similar structure: his characters entertain themselves having fled to the countryside from the plague. The characters are introduced in the Prologue: they nearly all come from the middle ranks: professional men such as a doctor, lawyer, an official; a merchant, a sailor; there are craftsmen, servants, a woman who has outlived five husbands; a nun, priests and monks. They are further characterised by their stories, so that we get a panorama of medieval life as well as a survey of popular literary genres: fables, classical legends, lives of the saints, tales of chivalrous adventure as well as of decidedly unchivalrous erotic exploits. Most of the tales have a continental source, but through the framework in which they are placed they are woven together, each tale commenting ironically on its predecessor and contributing a further facet to the complex and sophisticated whole. Chaucer's work consists of 23 tales written in verse: most in heroic couplets. These were given the name "heroic" in the eighteenth century because they were used to translate Homer's heroic epics

into English. The "couplets" are lines rhyming in pairs; each line has five measures; heroic couplets are written in iambic pentameter that is each of the five measures consists of a short syllable followed by a long, a pattern resembling the rhythm of ordinary speech. *The Canterbury Tales* bear witness to the strength and self-confidence of England's fourteenth century urban citizenry to which Chaucer belonged. We see the spirit of the Renaissance and Reformation at work in his satirical depiction of churchmen's worldliness and corruption, in the respect shown for the labour of the decent ploughman and the honest cleric, in his detached and critical powers of observation. The most striking feature of Chaucer's art is surely his ironic sense of humour. In **Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose***, the librarian poisons anybody who reads Aristotle's book on comedy; he believes laughter subverts authority, as it results from understanding, thus reducing fear. Chaucer's ironic approach to the evils of his time will no doubt have had a liberating impact on his listeners. He is not angry, does not incite to rebellion; the nobility, the princes of the church do not appear - neither do the unfortunate serfs. But his sharp-sighted and amused observation of the reality behind the respectable mask in the middle ranks must have encouraged his audience not to accept blindly what they were told, but to scrutinise things for themselves. From Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* we see that there was much enlightenment in the Middle Ages.

William Caxton (1424?-1491) had a tremendous influence on the preservation of English literature. A respected translator, Caxton traveled extensively in Europe and probably learned the printing trade in Germany. After returning to England, he opened his own printing business. Before his death fifteen years later, he had printed practically all of the English literature available at the time, including *Morte d'Arthur* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

Questions for Check-up:

1. Why was the historical event of 1066 important for the English society?
2. Describe the Medieval feudal system.
3. What were the factors that led to the decline of feudalism?
4. Why was the Medieval Church such a powerful institution during the medieval period?
5. Compare the Anglo- Saxon Literature with the Medieval one.
6. Name the forms of the Medieval Literature.

7. What individual writers of the medieval P. do you know?
8. Why Jeffrey Chaucer is considered the 'father' of English Literature?
9. What did Jeffrey Chaucer include in *Preface* to *The Canterbury Tales*?
10. Analyze the contents of *The Canterbury Tales*.

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The Renaissance Period (1485 – 1660)

Key- Words: *revival; secularism; individualism; ancient Greek and Latin texts (classical antiquity); classical styles; individualism; scientific investigations; monarch; dynasty; heretics; Protestants; Puritans; Humanism; House of Commons; Book of Common Prayer; Anglican Church.*

The Renaissance Spirit in Britain manifested itself much later than in Italy where it originated. At certain times in history a series of factors cause dramatic shifts in human values and perceptions. One such shift occurred in Italy about the middle of the fourteenth century and initiated a period in European history known as the Renaissance. The Renaissance, which literally means "rebirth" or "revival," was marked by a surge of creative energy and the emergence of a world view more modern than medieval. From its source in Southern Europe, the Renaissance spread north throughout Europe in the mid-fifteenth century and brought new vitality to English life during the sixteenth century.

The Renaissance spirit manifested itself differently in each region. However, certain fundamental characteristics remained constant. One was the tendency toward secularism. During the Middle Ages, the world was conceived as a place in which human beings prepared for life after death. Thus the church was the focal point of society. Renaissance Europeans were worldlier. They delighted in art and literature, in the beauty of nature, in human impulses, and in a new sense of mastery over the world. Renaissance scholars looked to the achievements of the pre-Christian past. They studied ancient Greek and Latin texts and advocated the imitation of classical styles in literature, art, and education.

Closely related to secularism was the Renaissance emphasis on the individual and on the importance of developing human potential. The ideal "Renaissance man" was a person who cultivated his innate capabilities to the fullest. He was a many-faceted individual who might be an engineer, philosopher, and painter or an architect, astronomer, and poet. Perceiving himself as the centre of his own universe, he synthesized the emotional, rational, social, and spiritual forces in his life into a harmonious balance. The natural result of secularism and individualism was a general revolt against

authority. Renaissance Europeans less conformed to the dictates of Church and government, and harder accepted the scientific medieval theories.

The Renaissance was an expansionist age that pushed back the scholarly, psychological, and geographical boundaries of the medieval world. The translations of ancient Greek and Latin texts brought new knowledge of astronomy, botany, medicine, physics, and mathematics, which in turn stimulated scientific investigation. Technological advances in printing led to more literate persons than those of the Middle Ages and more cognizant of new ideas. Innovations in shipbuilding and the invention of navigational devices gave rise to trade and made possible geographical expansion. The discovery of a route to the East around Africa and the exploration of America brought some Europeans new wealth and leisure and profoundly altered the narrow medieval perceptions of the world.

The factors that contributed to the decline of feudalism set the stage for the Renaissance in England. Not until the restoration of domestic stability after the Wars of the Roses, however, did the spirit of the Renaissance take hold and flourish there.

It is very important for the students to get acquainted with the **Reign of the Tudor Monarchs and the English Reformation**. Towards the end of the middle Ages, after the loss of the English territories in France, England suffered thirty years of civil war fought by rival aristocratic families for the throne: the Wars of the Roses. The Welsh Tudor family was victorious and proceeded to secure its position. The dynasty ruled from 1485 to 1603, and was succeeded by Scottish relatives - and former opponents - the Stuarts. The military power of the aristocracy was removed: private armies were forbidden; only the crown was entitled to raise an army. The nobility's great economic power based on land ownership remained intact. The Tudors elevated loyal supporters to the aristocracy, thus weakening hostility among defeated rivals. Aristocratic titles derive from land, and that became available for the monarch to dispose of with the Reformation, the expropriation of church property and with the conquest of Ireland. The Tudors therefore no longer shared power with the aristocracy as in the middle Ages, but ruled alone, or absolutely. Parliament existed, was involved in the legislative process but did not determine it. The Church of Rome was another factor limiting the monarch's power which the Tudors dealt with. During the reign of Henry VIII, the Reformation, or Protestant Revolt (fights against Catholic Roman Church Dominance), plunged parts of Europe into bloody conflict. England, however, remained Catholic until Henry became obsessed with

having a male heir to the throne. After eighteen years of marriage, he and his Spanish queen Catherine had only one surviving child, a daughter. Now, he was attracted to Anne Boleyn, a young lady of the court who he thought would produce the desired son. Failing in his attempt to obtain an annulment from the Church in Rome, Henry declared himself Supreme Head of the English Church, received a "divorce" from a church court, and married Anne. At its inception, the new Church of England, or Anglican Church, was not Protestant but was essentially the Roman Catholic Church, without ties to Rome.

What was the **Reformation**? To those who supported it, it was a return to pure Christianity—cleansing the church of all the corruption and idolatry that had accumulated over the centuries.

To the Roman Catholic Church it was, of course, damnable heresy. For medieval people, the Roman Catholic Church was a universal, infallible, omni-competent guide to the conduct of life from cradle to grave. They were instructed by its teachings, corrected by its discipline, sustained by its sacraments, and comforted by its promises. A vast system of confession, pardons, penance, absolution, indulgences, sacred relics, and ceremonies gave the hierarchy great power over their largely illiterate flock. The Bible, the order of the Mass, and most of the theological discussions were in Latin, which laypeople could not understand; however, religious doctrine and spirituality were mediated to them by priests and hierarchy, by church art and music, and by the liturgical ceremonies of daily life festivals, holy days, baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

When Luther revolted against the ancient church, was cast out by it, and founded his own church, he did so in the name of private conscience enlightened by a personal reading of the Scriptures. The common watchwords of the Reformation were these: only the Scriptures (not the church or tradition) have authority in matters of religion, only God's grace and personal faith (not good works or religious practices) can effect a Christian's salvation, and only the enlightened private conscience (not priests or ministers or hierarchies) can determine what an individual must believe and do. Despite differences in many matters of doctrine and church order, these principles were common to Lutherans in Germany, Calvinists in Geneva, and other Protestant groups throughout Europe.

In England, however, the Reformation did not begin with ideological controversy. In the time of Chaucer, John Wycliffe had mounted a challenge to some practices and doctrines of the church, elements of which lasted into

the sixteenth century. But the split with the Church of Rome was caused by a man who considered himself a Catholic champion against Luther and his opinions: Henry VIII, who received from Pope Leo X the title "Defender of the Faith" for writing a book against Luther. Henry's motives for the break with Rome were dynastic, not religious: he needed a legitimate son and his queen, Catherine of Aragon, could not give him one.

Thomas Cromwell, Henry's powerful secretary of state, dissolved the monasteries, and Henry distributed their property to his courtiers, thereby binding them firmly to his cause. In his earlier role as Defender of the (Roman Catholic) Faith, Henry persecuted, drove out of England, and in 1536 executed the great English translator of the Bible, William Tyndale. But after his break with Rome, Henry authorized a vernacular translation (The Great Bible), making the Bible available in English to anyone who could read. Henry's son (by his third wife, Lady Jane Seymour) was the boy king Edward VI (1537-1553). In his brief reign (1547-53) the English Reformation acquired a strong doctrinal basis and spiritual energy, as Lutheran and Calvinist theologians from the Continent swarmed into England. The Book of Common Prayer was published in 1549 and 1552, and by 1553 the beliefs of the English church were officially defined in forty-two articles, thoroughly Protestant in formulation.

The successor to the short-lived Protestant king was his older sister, Mary Tudor, the half-Spanish and devoutly Catholic daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon. In her reign, the leading Protestants either fled to the Continent or were burned at the stake as heretics. Mary tried to reverse the doctrinal changes of the Reformation, but some of its practical consequences, like the distribution of monastery lands, were irreversible. Mary maintained her Roman allegiance, she burned many Protestants at the stake, but she could not undo the work of her father and half-brother. Had she been able to produce an heir she might have done so, but failing that, her death in 1558 brought the Protestants back to power. The Protestant exiles returned from the Continent to become a potent force in English society during the long reign of Mary's half-sister, Elizabeth Tudor, daughter of Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn.

Henry VIII died in 1547, widowing his sixth wife and leaving his frail, sickly ten-year-old son as the heir to the English throne. The six-year reign of King Edward VI is noteworthy because of the spread of Protestantism throughout England.

The English Reformation, which had begun as a political movement, assumed a strong religious direction at this point. Edward's successor attempted to stop Protestantism and to reinstate Catholicism as the national religion. Mary, Henry's eldest child, was half Spanish and a fervent Roman Catholic. She married her cousin, Philip II of Spain, and together they drove Protestant leaders out of England and ordered Protestants burned at the stake as heretics. Queen Mary named "Bloody Mary" was highly unpopular and at her death in 1558, after a five-year reign of terror, most of her subjects looked forward to a change. Under Henry's daughter Mary, Catholicism was restored and Protestants persecuted: 400 were burnt as heretics.

The Elizabethan Era is called after Queen Elisabeth, the unwanted child of Henry VIII and Ann Boleyn, ascended the throne in 1558 and ruled triumphantly for almost half a century, until 1603. Her reign is the most glorious period in E. history, a time of unprecedented prosperity, artistic achievements, and international prestige.

Vain and headstrong, E. also was practical and disciplined, a brilliant scholar, educated in Latin and Greek, and keenly interested in art and literature.

In the matter of religion Elizabeth reinstated the Anglican Church as the national church and ended religious persecution. Elizabeth's church encompassed both a high church, which was similar to the Roman Catholic Church, and a low church, whose members wanted to "purify" the English church of Catholicism. Although neither uncompromising Catholics nor radical Protestants approved of this church, they tolerated it as a stable buffer zone between extremist groups. Queen Elizabeth established the English church in terms acceptable to the vast majority of her subjects. She imposed a form of service (retaining much of the old Roman ritual). That compromise satisfied neither the Roman Catholics, who sought to return to Rome, nor the Puritans, who pressed for more radical reform. But it accommodated most of the populace, who now looked neither to Rome nor to Geneva as the prime source of authority in religion, but to their own sovereign.

In Elizabeth's reign, when England was under threat of invasion by Spain, Catholics were regarded as foreign agents and persecuted accordingly. But those Protestants unwilling to accept the authority of the new state church also found themselves in trouble with the law. These became known under the general name of Puritans because they demanded that Protestantism be purified of all traces of Catholicism. They felt the

reformation had not gone far enough. Nonetheless, Elizabeth regarded such religious democrats as potentially dangerous and acted accordingly. They were on the whole courageous, upright people. They had a considerable impact on English literature, as will be seen.

Elizabeth's death in 1603 marked the end of the powerful Tudor monarchy and the beginning of the weaker Stuart dynasty. Stuart England established the House of Commons (parliament) as the true centre of power.

In 1601 begins The **Reign of the Stuart Dynasty**. The first Stuart monarch was Elizabeth's cousin James IV of Scotland, who became James I of England. James was intelligent, well educated, and peace loving, but he was overly confident to the point of arrogance. James's son Charles I, (1625) also was autocratic and uncompromising. Both father and son believed in the divine right of kings, and they considered themselves God's representatives in all religious and civil matters.

The Stuart kings met with rising hostility among the English people and within the Puritan- dominated House of Commons. The first conflict between crown and Parliament erupted when James demanded that the Puritans and other religious groups practice the rituals of high church liturgy. The Puritans, who wanted to simplify doctrine and ritual, were outraged. The split between king and people widened under Charles, who swore to make the Puritans conform or "hurry them out of the land."

A second conflict centred on the Stuart kings' chronic need for money. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, because of inflation and a decline in revenue from royal lands, the Stuart kings could not balance the budget. The Puritans in the House of Commons, who were shocked at the scandals and extravagance of the Stuart court, refused to legislate additional revenues. James and Charles both tried to circumvent Parliament by imposing royal import duties, extorting loans from merchants, and selling titles of nobility.

The Puritan Revolution/ The Civil War. When the Bishop of Edinburgh tried to use a new Anglican prayer book in a Scottish Presbyterian service, an angry woman threw a stool at him. This incident touched off a riot in which rebels seized Edinburgh Castle, abolished high church rule, and rejected the authority of the king. Faced with rebellion, Charles reconvened Parliament in 1640, hoping to get enough money for an army to suppress the Scots. The House of Commons responded by stripping the king of his power as head of the Anglican Church and by ordering the execution of his chief minister and archbishop. Charles tried to arrest the ringleaders in this

political revolt, but the spirit of dissent was too strong, and both sides began to prepare for civil war.

The Civil War was an ideological rather than a class or regional struggle. In general, however, the conservative north and west and the nobility supported the king, while the middle class town dwellers and country squires tended to side with the Puritan Parliament. Under the skilled leadership of a gentleman named Oliver Cromwell, the Puritans formed a devout, well disciplined army of "Roundheads," so called because of their closely cropped hair. The royal army was composed mainly of long-haired, devil-may-care aristocrats known as "Cavaliers." The Puritans soundly defeated the royal forces in 1645, and within a year Charles surrendered. Cromwell's army, now in control of the government, ordered the execution of the king and retaliatory measures against royal supporters, Anglicans, and Catholics.

Cromwell ruled England as a military dictator, first at the head of the Commonwealth, then as Lord Protector for Life. He ordered theatres closed, and festivals and most other forms of recreation suspended. He declared Sunday a day of prayer when even walking for pleasure was forbidden. When Cromwell died in 1658, his son inherited his father's title, but he was unable to control quarrelling generals, discontented government officials, and a restive public.

The Cromwellian government had proved no less autocratic than the Stuarts, and, by 1660, almost everyone wanted a return to the old constitutional rule, with a king or queen, a House of Lords, and a House of Commons. Early that year, a special session of Parliament invited the exiled Charles II, the son of the executed king, to assume the throne.

The restoration of the monarchy marks the official end of the Renaissance Period in English history.

The Intellectual Context of the Renaissance: Humanism. During the fifteenth century a few English clerics and government officials had journeyed to Italy and had seen something of the extraordinary cultural and intellectual movement flourishing in the city-states there. That movement, generally known as the Renaissance, involved a rebirth of letters and arts stimulated by the recovery and study of texts from classical antiquity and the development of new aesthetic norms based on classical models. It also unleashed new ideas and new social, political, and economic forces that displaced the otherworldly and communal values of the Middle Ages, emphasizing instead the dignity and potential of the individual and the worth

of life in this world. These Renaissance ideals were variously reflected in the poetry of Petrarch, the philosophy of Pico della Mirandola, the art of Leonardo da Vinci, and the statecraft of Lorenzo de' Medici. But it was not until Henry VII's reign brought some measure of political stability to England that the Renaissance could take root there, and it was not until the accession of Henry VIII that it began to flower.

Humanism was a fundamental intellectual current in the Renaissance, the first major exponents of which in England were Sir Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. More rose to become Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII: his masterpiece, *Utopia*, written in Latin, was a critique of European social, political, and religious institutions and practices. In English he chiefly wrote controversial tracts against Martin Luther and the Protestants and also a vivid and impressive history of Richard III.

Education of the gentleman was a prime concern of the English humanists. The education—conducted by tutors in the great families or in grammar schools—was ordered according to the subjects of the medieval *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) but with new emphasis on rhetoric and classical texts. The grammar studied was Latin grammar, and the rhetoric was a rigorous discipline in all the stylistic devices used by classical authors. The purpose was to train the sons of the nobility and gentry to speak and write good Latin, the language of diplomacy, of the professions, and of all higher learning. Their sisters were always educated at home or in other noble houses. They chiefly learned modern languages, religion, music, and art, but they very seldom received the firm grounding in Latin and classical literature so central to Renaissance culture. The poets Virgil and Horace, and the orator Cicero, the classics were also studied for the moral, political, and philosophical truth they contained and as a means to inculcate moral values. This period is known as the Renaissance because of a rebirth or flowering of learning due to discoveries of unknown classical Greek and Roman works of art. It was a period which revolutionised three areas of knowledge: about the nature of the universe, about our planet, and the classical European past. Francis Bacon said that three important discoveries were responsible for the changes: the magnetic compass, which allowed ships to leave the coast lines and sail across the oceans; gunpowder, which destroyed the power of feudalism; and printing (invented by William Caxton in 1476), which made knowledge accessible.

Copernicus published a tract in 1530 on his theory that the earth circled around the sun. This shook the foundations not only of astronomy but also of religion and philosophy. It was an overwhelming and troubling discovery that the universe was not a harmonious system revolving around the earth, as had been thought since the days of the Greeks, but that the earth revolved around the sun and was merely one of many planets, indeed a speck of dust in an infinite cosmos. Copernicus's theory was not proven until Galilei turned his telescope on the stars, though in 1633 the latter was forced by the Inquisition to recant. But there could be no doubt about the geographical discoveries made on this planet. It was found to be not only so much larger than believed, but also to be inhabited by peoples who had never heard of Christ, and some of the early travellers considered that they lived better lives than those that had. It was an unsettling time for those who needed the old certainties to cling to; stimulating in the extreme for those who had the spirit to face up to the new realities. Of the latter there were many in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The philosophy inspiring these people was humanism. They believed, as Alexander Pope was to phrase it much later, that "the proper study of mankind is man", rather than scholastic theology. Theology was no longer accepted as the mother of all sciences, and the first rifts appear between the two. For humanists the divine principle of reason was the guideline and that they found better realised in the classical world of antiquity than in the Middle Ages. They hoped to create a new civilisation in Europe at least equalling that of the old world.

Thomas More (1478-1535) was an intrepid questioner of authority, making his case in a new genre of literature: the utopian novel. He was a lawyer, a scholar, a friend of Erasmus of Rotterdam and of Holbein the painter; he was greatly esteemed by Henry VIII, who made him Lord Chancellor in 1529. But Thomas More would not accept Henry as head of the church, and would not publicly deny the authority of the pope. Henry thought to enforce the support of the distinguished man by imprisoning him in the Tower of London. More would not capitulate, and was executed in 1535 for treason. (He was canonised four hundred years later.) His *Utopia* (meaning: nowhere) was published in Latin in 1516 while he was in Flanders on a diplomatic mission for the king. The information (and treasure) coming back to Europe from America was of burning interest; More's brother-in-law had explored parts of Northern America. *Utopia* is a fictitious travel report on the strange nature and customs of a newly discovered people. It is an

astonishingly radical critique of the modern European form of society, which had only recently become established. More satirises the fetish character which money had come to acquire: it does not exist in Utopia; jewels are children's play toys which they soon grow out of; gold and silver are used for chamber pots and as chains for criminals. Utopians live as in a kibbutz: property is held in common, everybody works, everybody receives good education; there is complete freedom of religion; what we would today call consumerism is despised. Conditions in England are contrasted most unfavourably with those in "primitive" Utopia: the greed, corruption, cruelty to the poor and ignorance are denounced.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was a philosopher, an essayist and a lawyer; like More, he questioned authority and received opinions, but he was not a man of personal integrity. Like More, he became Lord Chancellor, but in 1621 was removed from office after three years having been impeached for corruption. (His defence was that he had accepted presents from both sides but had always decided the cases according to his conscience!) In his *Advancement of Learning* of 1605 and *Novum Organum* (*The New Method*) of 1620 he presents a theory of knowledge to replace the Aristotelian one that had dominated European thought for a millennium. His scientific principles mark a break with the medieval approach in which the authority of tradition, of treasured books was paramount. Bacon insists that experience is the source of knowledge, and advocates the experiment as the ultimate authority. He urges that nothing be accepted merely because it always has been. He discusses those factors which lead to a distortion of our experience and knowledge of the world, maintaining that awareness of them can correct the distortion. He believed that the purpose of research and scientific study should not be personal ambition or profit but concern "for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate" or life.

Renaissance Literature in the Elizabethan Age. During the Renaissance the creative energy of the English people burst forth into the greatest harvest of literature the western world had yet known. The centre of literary activity was London, by the late 1500's a bustling city of over 100,000 with the largest population of middle-class citizens in all of Europe. The many printing presses and publishers there found an audience eager for popular romances, religious tracts, accounts of travels, sensational "news stories," political pamphlets, literary criticism, and the earliest novels. Readers and listeners, poets and playwrights all delighted in the vigour and beauty of the English language.

The glittering Elizabethan court was a focus of poetic creativity. Members of the court vied with one another to see who could create the most highly polished, technically perfect poems. The appreciative audience for these lyrics was the elite artistic and social circle that surrounded the queen. The queen herself wrote lyrics, and she patronized favourite poets and rewarded courtiers for eloquent poetic tributes. Among her protégés were poets Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh; among those who courted her favour with little success was Edmund Spenser who wrote the epic *The Faerie Queen* (1590) in honour of Elizabeth.

Elizabethan poetry evidences a major shift away from the mood and subjects of medieval poetry. Now in vogue were quiet, contented pastorals, in which carefree nymphs and shepherds cavort in Idyllic rural settings. Also popular were lyrics that express passionate desire for a beautiful, intriguing, and elusive woman. The poetry of this period appeals to the intellect as well as to the emotions, blending the classical reverence for truth with the Renaissance appreciation for beauty.

The Elizabethans viewed nature as intricate, complex, and beautiful. To them, however, the natural world was a subject not for imitation but for improvement by creative minds. Nature provided raw material to be shaped into works of art. Elizabethan poets created ingenious metaphors, elaborate allegories, and complex analogies, often within the strictures of the sonnet, originally an Italian verse form.

The poetic creation had been enriched by **Thomas Wyatt** and the **Earl of Surrey** bringing back from Italy works of Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto, and in particular the *14-line sonnet* form; this had been used by Petrarch for his love poetry, and was to be adopted by Shakespeare and many of the best lyric poets after him.

Another form of poetry was the *unrhymed or blank verse*, as it was called, was introduced to England by the Earl of Surrey in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) was the Elizabethan master of Arcadian or pastoral poetry, and one of those who contributed to the cult built up around "Gloriana" or *The Faerie Queen*, the title of his epic in praise of the monarch. - Elizabeth was the first monarch to travel the country to show herself to the people; she saw the importance of establishing strong personal links with the wealthy citizenry of England and of making herself loved by the commoners. She presented herself as the Virgin Queen wedded to the nation, and her immense popularity may have derived to some degree

from the cult of the heavenly Virgin Queen of Catholicism now deposed by the Reformation. - Spenser was the son of a well-to-do cloth maker who was given high office in Ireland during the colonial wars. He wrote much of his poetry there while in charge of bringing English settlers to live on the confiscated lands. His castle was burnt down by some of the expropriated in 1598 and the last volumes of the *Faerie Queen* destroyed; he died in poverty in London the following year. The glaring discrepancy between the idyllic pastorals of his literary work and the brutal reality of the desperate peasantry starving in the countryside around his residence in County Cork was only exceptional in its crassness: pastoral poetry about shepherds and their loves and lives in a peaceful rustic setting resulted from the nostalgia of city writers living in difficult times for a fantasy world of simplicity, quiet and virtue. Spenser's pastorals were also political allegories on the condition of England. He combined medieval poetic forms with contemporary Italian and French; his mastery of technique and of language was virtuosi.

Elizabethan and 17th Century Drama. The greatest literary achievement of the English Renaissance was Elizabethan drama, a genre that emerged from three sources. One was the medieval miracle, mystery, and morality plays performed in churches, inns, and private homes and outdoors in towns and rural marketplaces. A second source was the popular entertainment provided by itinerant minstrels, jugglers, acrobats, and actors. By the sixteenth century, some noble families maintained their own companies of actors who doubled as household servants. To amuse their aristocratic patrons, these companies frequently presented brief farcical "interludes" that ridiculed the manners and customs of the commoners. A third source was the Latin and Greek dramas that were revived during the Renaissance and studied at university centres such as Oxford and Cambridge.

Among the early Elizabethan playwrights was Christopher Marlowe, who first exploited the potential of the English language as a dramatic medium. His tragedies and satires show the kind of psychological probing that is a hallmark of the finest Elizabethan and seventeenth-century dramas. One playwright influenced by Marlowe was William Shakespeare, whose plays represent the height of the English dramatic tradition.

In retrospect, Shakespeare dominates the theatre of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the early 1600's, however, the comedies of a rugged, boisterous poet and playwright named Ben Jonson were equally admired. His plays provided a satiric, somewhat cynical commentary on lives of ordinary Londoners. Jonson's masques were especially popular

among aristocratic and royal audiences, who flocked to the spectacular pageants with their elaborate scenery, costumes, music, and dance.

Renaissance Theatre. Important new work had also been underway in the theatre. The great noble families had private theatres, the actors and writers employed as their servants. The first public theatres were built between 1570 and 1600 outside the city of London, on the river near the bear gardens and brothels, where the city fathers could not forbid them - the latter did not relish the idea of the lower orders leaving work to see the dramas, which were performed during the daytime. The theatres were frequented by people of all ranks: the plays therefore had to appeal to people of high education and those of none at all; to people with the most fastidious of tastes and those who enjoyed cock and dog fighting, boxing and bear tormenting; the dramas had to be of interest to apprentices, students, citizens and nobility alike. **Thomas Kyd** (1558-94) managed to do this with his very popular Spanish Tragedy, a romantic, melodramatic piece dealing with love, betrayal, revenge, madness and very many murders. The first play by **Christopher Marlowe** (1564-1593) was *Tamburlaine the Great*, presenting an Asiatic cattle owner who set out to conquer the world, a grandiose individual whose ambition and military genius are matched by his cruelty, and who defies death to achieve glory, power and splendour. In *Dr Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* he again presents exceptional individual characters whose fate is determined by their own nature and by circumstance - new concepts in the theatre. Sir **John Lily** (1554-1606) was the inventor of the Elizabethan love comedy; and **Ben Johnson** (1572-1637) the creator of a new type of drama, the witty comedy of manners, satirising social conventions. Shakespeare was a friend of Ben Johnson's, acted with him in Johnson's plays, and built on his work.

The Poetry and Prose of the Seventeenth Century. The literature of the seventeenth century begins to reflect certain dissatisfaction with the extravagance, romance, and enthusiasm of the Elizabethan Age. Also evident is a general tone of melancholy, a growing sense of disquiet that parallels the political polarization of the era.

As a poet, Ben Johnson revolted against the romantic style of Elizabethan lyrics and imitated the grace, craftsmanship, and forms of classical poetry. Johnson's followers, the "Tribe of Ben," were sophisticated young Cavaliers, among them Robert Herrick, Robert Lovelace, and Sir John Suckling. Cavalier poetry is light-hearted, charming, witty, and sometimes cynical and licentious. It deals mainly with themes of love, war, chivalry, and

loyalty. Wathrone introduced second major style in seventeenth-century Poetry produced by John Donne whose intense poems are by thoughts elaborate metaphors and paradoxical imagery death, physical love, and religious devotion. Whereas Johnson and the human subjects, Donne and other Cavaliers tended to treat limited, "metaphysical poets" tried to encompass the vastness and contradictions and to express an awareness of life's complexities.

The poet **John Donne** (1571-1631) became Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and a famous Anglican preacher after having been a Catholic, a lawyer, lived at court, run away with his master's niece, gone to sea with the Earl of Essex, and to prison for his elopement and secret marriage. He is one of the great English poets, and as original as one might expect from such a background. He is remembered for his love poetry and his religious poetry. The love poetry is startlingly intimate: very often a conversation with his mistress in bed; it is witty, impudent and fireworks of unexpected imagery, comparisons and irreverent paradoxes. The religious lyrics were written after the death of his beloved wife, and in them the ingenious imagery gives intense and original expression to his anguish over the paradox of life and death. The wit remains too: in his last poem, written when he was dying, he bargains with God about forgiving his sins, punning in the last lines on his name: "And, having done that, Thou hast done: / I fear no more."

Significant in the development of English prose are the essays of Sir Francis Bacon. In a compact, clear style, Bacon explores the controversial new views of the world and of the cosmos postulated by Renaissance philosophers and scientists.

A book that has done more to mould English prose style than any other book ever written is the King James Authorized Bible (1611). This translation, which was the first to make extensive use of Greek and Hebrew texts, represents the combined efforts of fifty leading Biblical scholars, both Anglican and Puritan.

The last of the great English Renaissance men was **John Milton**, the only major Puritan writer of the seventeenth century. His concerns are not only different from those of his contemporaries, but also more complex, grandiose, passionate, devotional, and universal than almost any other English writer. Using the classics as stylistic and thematic inspiration, he ignores the raging religious and political controversies of his time and speaks to an unborn audience of the future. In his personal life and in his epic

masterpiece *Paradise Lost* (1667~), he demonstrates the triumph of human over nature that characterizes the spirit of the English Renaissance.

Renaissance literature: the Age of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's works. William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-on-Avon in 1564, and died there in 1616. His father had a glove business and became mayor of the town. When he was eighteen, William married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, whom he had made pregnant. There is a record of him acting and writing plays in London in 1590; in 1592 the theatres closed for two years because of plague, which would have left him and his family penniless, but his aristocratic patron supported him during the bad times, and bought him a share in the new Globe Theatre Company, which later became King James' company, thus eventually acquiring both prestige and commercial success.

Shakespeare's family remained in Stratford and, once he could afford to do so, he bought a fine house there, to which on giving up the theatre he retired for the last seven years of his life. He was, according to accounts of his contemporaries, an excellent actor and kind good friend: he too had good friends, especially Ben Jonson, who after his death undertook the arduous task of publishing his collected works.

Shakespeare is not only the greatest dramatist in the English language, but also the greatest poet. His 154 sonnets are love poetry, addressed to a man and to a woman. The man was Shakespeare's young patron, a nobleman from whom he received inestimable help. Platonic friendship between men was cultivated during the Renaissance; artists were also expected to write, paint and compose for their patrons, but these poems, never intended for publication, transcend the conventions and give us unique insight into Shakespeare's emotional life. The woman of the sonnets, the "Dark Lady" though neither beautiful and good, nor kind, enslaved his soul, and took his innocent young patron as her lover, thus tormenting the poet doubly. Shakespeare wrote comedies, history plays and tragedies. The comedies can have classical or contemporary sources: Shakespeare always transformed his material, giving old conventions life in a new world, and through fusion and innovation creating forms all his own. *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* is peopled with spirits and fairies of English folklore, never before found in drama; in the history plays and in the tragedies he creates out of traditional stereotypes comic figures such as Falstaff and the fools, thereby giving an entirely new dimension both to the stock figures and to the genre. The sparkling brilliance of the dialogue, the poetic quality of the songs, the inventiveness of the plots, the wit of the satire are irresistible. *Much Ado*

About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, A Midsummer's Night's Dream are among the great achievements. In some of the comedies, such as Much Ado About Nothing or The Merchant of Venice he stretched the genre to its limits, bringing them to the brink of tragedy. Shakespeare raised the relatively new genre of comedy to heights it has rarely since attained. The history plays, written between 1590 and 1613, are based on Holinshed's Chronicles of England. They are reflections on the dangers of Shakespeare's own time and products of the sense of nationhood to which England's history and astonishing rise in the world had led. When he began these plays, Elizabeth's reign was drawing to a close; the question of her succession was unclear; a recurrence of civil war did not seem unlikely. Political advice offered by her subjects was something Elizabeth did not appreciate, so plays set in the past were a useful medium for a playwright concerned about the ambitious nation's future. The breakdown of civil society, the terrors of civil war caused by rivalry for the throne, or by the brutality, vice or weakness of the monarch are dominant themes. The attributes of good rule are presented directly or indirectly: it is a leitmotif that without the loyalty of the subjects, there can be no government, and that furthermore that loyalty must be earned by the sovereign through wise leadership carried out for the good of the nation. These lessons emerge from the history plays through elements of extravagant melodrama, hilarious comedy, exquisite poetry and stark tragedy. That the transition of 1603 from the last of the Tudors to the first Stuart king from Scotland was so unexpectedly peaceful may well have increased the popularity of these plays. Among the most interesting are Henry IV, Richard II, King John. The tragedies are generally regarded as Shakespeare's supreme achievement. Many of the main figures are kings and queens, as in Greek tragedy, or at least patricians - ordinary citizens are not yet considered appropriate vehicles for edification. Despite the upsurge of national pride evident in the history plays, there is only one Scot (in Macbeth) and one Briton (in King Lear) among the main figures: the others are Danes (in Hamlet), an Egyptian (in Anthony and Cleopatra), a Moor (in Othello), Romans (in Julius Caesar), Venetians, Veronese (in Romeo and Juliet). However, we do not remember Hamlet because he is a Dane, or a king's son, but because of his personality. During the Tudor age the fate of the nation depended to a greater extent than in medieval times on the personal character of the rulers; it is therefore not surprising that drama produced the greatest literary individuals the stage had ever seen. The tragic fate of these individuals is not caused by external forces outside their control

but is of their own making: their downfall is caused by specific features of character or weaknesses exposed under exceptional circumstances. The tumultuous nature of his time had made Shakespeare acutely aware of the precariousness of fortune and how quickly the veneer of civilisation could disintegrate under adverse conditions. He has given us character studies of extraordinary psychological depth of men and women struggling in vain to extricate themselves from the traps and nets of their passions, their blindness, or even their self-awareness. For four hundred years his works have fascinated readers the world over, perhaps more so than ever before in our century with its unmatched progress, hubris and barbarism.

The momentous astronomical, geographic and scientific discoveries of the age led to an unprecedented blossoming in the arts, the splendour of which was unique. Dante and Michelangelo in Italy, Cervantes in Spain, Rembrandt in Holland, and Shakespeare in England were innovators and pioneers who changed perceptions as radically as did the explorers and scholars. The English language, which Shakespeare was to transform, had already grown through printing, acquiring enormous numbers of new words from Latin, from science and from the communication within the nation generated by the new medium. It was also developed by King James's Bible of 1611, the Authorized Version, a new translation based on the Greek, Latin and previous English ones, which is a masterly work of English. Shakespeare had the good fortune to come to the theatre at a time when the language, like the country, was in flux, when he could use a standardised form becoming common to the nation, and when the vigorous and colourful language and songs of the people in villages and market places offered material rich and real for poets and dramatists to work with. Shakespeare's poetic dramas are the crowning glory of Renaissance England, a nation with a profusion of artistic work of all kinds. His plays would be unthinkable without the brilliant courtly culture of his time: without the music, the pageantry, the poetry and above all the drama, which he fused with the popular culture of the people, to create something unique and unequalled. Since the nobility had been deprived of their armies, the Tudor monarchs were careful to offer compensation in form of magnificent court life with lavish entertainment to keep them in view and out of mischief. The pleasures included, in keeping with the Renaissance ideal of the generally accomplished gentleman and woman, sports and hunting, the best of music, masques, tournaments and theatre.

Questions for check-up:

1. Define the term *Renaissance*.
2. Find the general characteristics of the Renaissance spirit in Britain.
3. Who were the Tudors?
4. Why the Tudors were called absolute monarchs?
5. Define the term *reformation*.
6. Speak about Henry VIII and his reign.
7. Who ruled England after Henry VIII?
8. Why was Queen Elizabeth such a remarkable monarch?
9. Speak about Elizabethan poetry: forms, themes, representatives.
10. What is specific for the poetry of the 17th century?
11. Characterize the Renaissance Theatre.
12. Speak about Renaissance Drama: playwrights, themes.
13. Refer to W. Shakespeare as the greatest playwright of the Renaissance period: life, literary activity, works.
14. Related to the tragedy *Hamlet* by W. Shakespeare:
 - a) Speak about Hamlet's types of behaviour: passive, assertive or aggressive?
 - b) Refer to the conflict in the tragedy *Hamlet*.

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The Age of Reason (1660- 1798)

Key-Words: *Pure Christianity; idolatry; heresy; sacraments; confession, pardons, penance, absolution, indulgences, sacred relics, and ceremonies; religious doctrine and spirituality; liturgical ceremonies; Scriptures; Lutheran and Calvinist theologians, reason; revolution; critical essays; first novels; bourgeois; agricultural flourishing; Neoclassical.*

The Age of Reason. Restoration England. After Cromwell's death in 1658 parliament was re-reinstated, in 1660 it decided to restore the monarchy and invited the executed king's son to take the throne. This event, known as the Restoration meant the restoration of Parliament and of the established Church of England.

Following the Restoration era (1660-1700), England settled into a long period of relative stability, which lasted throughout most of the eighteenth century. Politically and socially, the status quo prevailed, with Protestantism, Parliamentary Rule, and the dominance of the landed aristocracy representing traditional values. Reason, balance, and order permeated political and scientific theory, philosophy, and literature.

Charles II supported science, the arts, the empire, and overseas trade, setting up the East India Company; no conflict with parliament arose during his reign. Reason, balance, and order permeated political and scientific theory, philosophy and literature. No conflict with parliament arose during his reign. Charles had spent much of his exile in France, where he had acquired a taste for the glamour, elegance, and intrigue of the French court. Although in actuality Charles was clever and astute, he appeared cynical, lazy, and frivolous. His rejection of traditional moral code scandalized most Englishmen who were church-going, hard-working, and decidedly conservative. It seemed God's wrath arisen when three disasters struck the country.

At this moment England was alarmed by the alliance between Charles and France, because the latter was the most powerful nation in Europe, England's historic enemy, and because Charles the II was closely tied to it, the English saw France as a potential threat to the balance of power, to their security at home and in the 16 American colonies it had.

Speaking about **religion** in this period it must be mentioned that Charles, the head of the Anglican Church, favoured tolerance, but Parliament, strongly Anglican, composed of bishops and country squires, instituted harsh measures against Protestant dissenters and against Catholics who to them represented French influence. By law, anyone refusing to conform to the Church of England was branded a traitor and was barred from holding public office or attending a university. In fact, it passed a law in 1673 which prevented Catholics from occupying public posts, with which was intended to prevent Charles II from embracing Catholic faith, to which he was greatly attracted.

Speaking about **politics** in restoration England, it must be taken notice that most members of Parliament at first were royalist, but soon it was polarized into two distinct political parties: **The royalists, or Tories**, supported the traditional monarchy in which the king or queen was the active leader of government. The Tories were mainly the aristocracy and the conservative element of the Anglican Church. Their opponents, **the Whigs**, opposed the interference of the monarch in government. They favoured toleration of religious dissidents and a severing of ties with France. The Whigs included certain powerful nobles, wealthy merchants and financiers, and representatives of the increasingly prosperous middle class.

But his brother James II, who was a Catholic, defied parliament by removing discriminatory laws keeping Catholics out of high office, and he was deposed in favour of his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. In 1689 they accepted a new legal framework for a constitutional monarchy in which the sovereignty of parliament was paramount. The act of parliament is known as the Bill of Rights, which guaranteed important civil liberties, though it discriminated against Catholics. The settlement is sometimes rather dramatically called "the Glorious Revolution".

In 1707 the Act of Union was established – a political alliance between England, Scotland and Ireland, under which England was transformed into Great Britain in fact as well as name.

In the seventeenth century, the legal framework for parliamentary democracy was established, and so were the foundations of modern science.

The Revolution in Agriculture and Industry After the "Glorious Revolution", political power was shared by the monarch, the aristocracy and representatives of merchant interests. Wealthy merchants had since Elizabethan times bought land in order to qualify for membership of the lower house of parliament; as their financial power grew, so did their number

in the House of Commons. They were not representatives of the people as a whole, the great majority of whom had no vote. In the eighteenth century the political structures we know today emerged, with two parties dominating politics (the Tories or Conservatives and the Whigs or Liberals), the Prime Minister formulating policy and no longer functioning merely as servant of the monarch. The merchants retained their skills at buying and selling in political life, which became extremely corrupt. Money was flowing into Britain from overseas: from India, where the East India Company had a monopoly on trade in tea, silks and spices; from the Caribbean, where slave labour on sugar plantations produced immense fortunes. Perhaps the most lucrative trade was that in African slaves. They were bought by English captains from African or Arab middle-men in exchange for guns, tools, cloth, alcohol; they were shipped to the Americas, sold for labour on the cotton and sugar plantations, the ships returning home with cargoes of colonial produce. It began in 1562, and by the eighteenth century had turned the ports of England into thriving centres of commerce.

That success and the prosperity of America was built on some fifteen million victims of an African holocaust. The new wealth did not greatly affect the 90 per cent of British people working in agriculture, a substantial number of whom still spent their lives precariously close to want, but it transformed the cities, providing the capital required for major urban development and for large-scale investment in the infrastructure. Canal building began to facilitate the transport of heavy goods such as coal or iron; work began on improving roads. In 1700 it took over a fortnight to get from London to Edinburgh: by 1800 the journey by coach took three days.

Intellectual Context: Science and Arts. The political turbulence of the 17th c. diminished until the next century, and the literature of Restoration also reflected a conflict of values.

The town and the country followed different ideas about art and the conduct of life. The ordinary life of the nation did not radically change. Rural manners remained conservative and old-fashioned. The London citizens, middle class and respectable, were scandalized by the behaviour of upper-class man who regarded their daughters as fair game.

King Charles II himself was pleasure loving and amorous, involved in love affairs with many mistresses, but he also had serious intellectual interests and was a patron of the arts. He was interested in the progress of science. In the seventeenth century, the legal framework for parliamentary democracy was established, and so were the foundations of modern science.

King Charles II gave the Royal Society its charter in 1662: scientists met regularly in London, published a journal with articles in English and in Latin, thus catering for a non-scholarly commercial or artisan public interested in science, and providing scientists with both a national and an international forum of communication. Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle were among the members. In 1687 Newton published his *Principia Mathematica*. His studies of astronomy and mathematics had led to the discovery of the force of gravity: he could prove that everything in the universe, from the apple falling off the tree on earth to twin stars revolving around each other in distant space were governed by the same universal and calculable laws. Scientists discovered that the human body too was subject to the laws of physics - the doctor, William Harvey, for example had found in 1616 that the heart was a pump allowing the blood to circulate.

The king's love of music and painting led him to import from Continent composers, musicians, new musical instruments, the French and Italian opera. His interest in the theatre was demonstrated by the chartering of two companies of actors in 1660, both under royal patronage.

It is natural, therefore, that the most characteristic art of the period reflected the interests and tastes of those who supported it. Arts 'addressed' themselves to 'court' and 'town'. Except in the theatre, literature was not in itself a gainful profession (as it was to become in the 18th c.) and writers looked for patronage from the court and the great nobles.

Enlightenment. The eighteenth century is often called Enlightenment with reference to the philosophy that prevailed in this period. The name comes from the belief held by many humanist thinkers and artists of the time that human reason could bring light into the darkness of the world that it could prevail over tyranny, ignorance and superstition. It focuses on two major concepts: *the nature of human understanding and the nature of human beings*.

As the 17th c. drew to a close, its temper became more secular, tolerant and moderate. The new age wanted to settle within the limits of human intelligence and the material world. This was expressed by its most influential philosopher **John Locke** in his **Essay Concerning Understanding** (1690) in which he reflects upon *the nature of human understanding*, trying to discover its powers, how far they reach. He claims we should be cautious with things exceeding its comprehension, "to stop, sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities. Our business here is not to

know all things, but those which concern our conduct". These words might be taken as the creed of 18th c. England. But if the 18th c. brought recognition of human limitations, it also took an optimistic view of human nature.

Some 18th c. philosophers asserted that human beings are naturally good and find their highest happiness in the existence of virtue and benevolence. Such a view of human nature we describe as 'sentimental'. It found the source of virtue in instinctive and social impulses rather than in a code of conduct sanctioned by divine law. And people began to feel pleasure in the exercise of benevolent impulses. This led to social reforms such as improvement of jails, the relief of imprisoned debtors, the establishment of foundling hospitals and homes for prostitutes, and later to the abolition of slave trade. The doctrine of natural goodness seemed to suggest to many that it is civilization that corrupts us and that 'noble savage', those who live in a state of nature, might be models of innocence and virtue. Such notions encouraged an interest in primitive societies. Thus, it helped to prepare, late in the century, for the warm reception given to the peasant poet Robert Burns, an "original genius", as well as W. Wordsworth's interest in children and in simple, rural people.

Literature in the Age of Reason. The literary style that prevailed during the Restoration period and throughout most of the eighteenth century is called *neoclassicism*, or '*new classicism*.' Neoclassical writers believed that the writers of ancient Greece and Rome had discovered the universal truths or 'rules' informing about life and literature. They modelled their works on the classics, emulating their restraint, rationality, and dignity. Like classical writing, Neoclassical prose and poetry was orderly, clear, concise, unified, and well proportioned. Reflecting the Enlightenment emphasis on society and on the human intellect, Neoclassical writers chose public rather than private themes and avoided emotionalism, imaginative speculation, and expression of personal feelings.

The literature in the Age of Reason can be divided into three periods: **the Restoration Age** (1660-1700), which begins with the restoration of Charles II and ends with the death of Dryden, the foremost figure of the age; **the Augustan Age** (1700- 1750), also called the Age of Alexander Pope after the poet who dominated the literature of the period; and **the Age of Johnson** (1750- 1798), named for Samuel Johnson who set the literary standards of his day.

Early Neoclassical Literature. During the Restoration Age **drama** flourished once again. Influenced by the French comedy of manners,

dramatists portrayed and often satirized the artificial, sophisticated society centred in the Stuart court. Their plays were characterized by stereotyped characters, clever plots, and witty repartee. Equally popular with fashionable audiences were heroic dramas, tragedies and tragicomedies that featured idealized heroes, virtuous heroines, despicable villains, exiting action and spectacular staging. While the comedy of manners was written in prose, the heroic drama was written in heroic couplets, the dominant verse form of the Age of Reason.

Both the comedies of manners and the heroic plays appealed primarily to the elite.

Attracting a much wider audience was the **prose** of **John Bunyon**, who along with **John Milton** (1608-74) represented the enduring Puritan tradition in Restoration England. Bunyon, a religious, dissenter, wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), an allegory that extols the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity and condemns vices in the form of characters such as Wordly Wiseman, Mr. Live-Loose, and Mr. Hate-Light.

John Milton is another Puritan whose life is as significant as his work. He was the son of a notary and musician; he damaged his eyes as a child through too much reading by candlelight. In 1644 the revolutionary parliament had just ordered the reinstatement of censorship, which it had denounced while the king was doing the censoring. Milton addressed parliament with a speech entitled *Areopagitica*, a passionate appeal for freedom of the press. (Areopagus was the hill in Athens of antiquity where the highest court sat). Milton argues that censorship is tyrannical, that it is therefore unworthy of the revolution; that it is counterproductive, as it cannot suppress the truth; that it is an insult to the independence of mind of the English people. The splendid rhetoric of the speech corresponds to the courage of the speaker; the images are universal in their validity wherever and whenever "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely" is denied. It had no impact on the Puritans now learning the ways of tyranny.

Milton nevertheless wrote many pamphlets in the parliamentary cause; he was appointed secretary to the Revolutionary Council after 1649 with the task of defending its actions, for example the execution of the king, which had outraged many former parliamentary supporters. After the restoration Milton was imprisoned for a short time and heavily fined. Though now blind, he began in prison to compose his major work, the verse epic *Paradise Lost*. It is monumental in its scope, encompassing not only the creation, fall and redemption of the human race, but also the revolt and defeat

of Satan and his rebel angelic armies in their battle against the divine ruler of heaven. Power soon corrupted many of the Puritan military victors; many others were narrow, rigidly dogmatic fundamentalists; but the heroic prophetic element in the Puritan rebellion against the tyranny of absolutism finds expression in *Paradise Lost*. The themes of rebellion, defeat, loss, and hope of ultimate victory are placed in a dramatic cosmic context: the revolution defeated in one small part of the earth can now be understood as a mere episode within a universal struggle of mythical dimension. The blind artist who embarked on such a vast undertaking - the work consists of 10,000 lines of verse in 12 books - broke with the literary conventions of his time. He adopted for his poem the blank verse which Shakespeare had introduced for drama. In the preface explaining his choice of verse we hear Milton speaking as an innovator of the Renaissance, who looks back with pitying contempt on the "modern" literature of the Middle Ages, and who venerates the classical authors of antiquity. He calls rhyme a "jingling sound of like endings", which he says Homer and Virgil would not have countenanced: he declares it the "invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter". He proclaims that he has performed a service for epic poetry in setting an example: "the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming." His portrait of Satan is equally unorthodox, so much so that the Romantic poets Blake and Shelley regarded the defeated angelic rebel as the real hero of the epic. Milton would not have agreed, but Satan is not only one of the main characters of the epic, he is at the centre of the first two books, and above all, he is portrayed in despair, in doubt, in torment, opting for evil in an almost tragic attempt to preserve his dignity Milton's language can be compared in its solemnity and splendour to the music of Bach.

It is the language of the bible, of the epic masterpieces of Latin and Greek, and it has a unique dramatic quality. Milton makes extraordinary use of contrast, for instance of images of darkness and light. He draws on the experience of an artist deprived of sight, and also on his knowledge of the scientific discoveries of the age - he had visited the defeated astronomer Galilei in prison in Italy, encountering there a painful contrast between darkness and light of which he was to gain direct personal knowledge himself later on. Milton's last works were *Paradise Regained* of 1671, on Satan's unsuccessful temptation of Christ, who thus restores mankind to paradise, and *Samson Agonistes* of the same year, in which the blinded biblical figure Samson, betrayed by his wife, imprisoned, humiliated and

tormented by his enemies the Philistines, destroys them and himself by pulling down the pillars supporting their palace. Milton's beautiful sonnets "On His Blindness" and "On His Deceased Wife" give insight into the poet's personal frame of mind.

The Height of Neoclassicism. In Britain the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14) is often called the Augustan age because it was considered as distinguished in literature as that of the Roman Emperor Augustus, during whose reign Virgil, Horace, Ovid lived. They compared London to Rome, referred to the English king as "Augustus," and imitated the works of the classical poets. It was an age badly needing light. Political life was corrupt; women were in law the property of their men folk; over 200 crimes were punishable by public execution; the average life expectancy was 35 years. However, the middle classes were becoming better educated; perhaps half a million of the six million population could read.

A new market thus arose for a new type of literature. Newspapers became popular, as commerce required up-to-date information; journalists were needed; writing became a livelihood. Since the 1650s, coffee houses had provided customers not only with the fashionable drink, but also with newspapers, and became a meeting place for businessmen and gentlemen interested in politics, good conversation and literature. The court was no longer the centre of the country's intellectual life, but London's coffee houses. As in Arab countries today, coffee houses were not open to women.

Satire reigned supreme in this period. **Alexander Pope** was the master of satiric verse.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), one of the great poets and wits of the century, was an autodidact, the son of a Catholic London shopkeeper. He wrote for the small, well educated traditional reading public, but gave them unusual fare. He excelled in mock-heroic poetry, in which he wittily imitated the dignified form of classical epics in writing about trivial contemporary issues, with satiric effect. Thus his *Rape of the Lock* (1714) would have reminded his cultured readers as of the Roman rape of the Sabine women, but it was written to persuade two families who were good friends of his to resolve a foolish quarrel about a stolen lock or curl of hair. It presents an ironic portrait of the life of the age. In the *Dunciad* of 1743, a verse satire, he denounces dunces, dullness and pedantry in the arts and sciences by celebrating the goddess Dullness in her kingdom of confusion and bad poetry, and describing famous people of the past and present who come to pay homage at her court. Pope's *Essay on Man* of 1734 is a philosophical

poem investigating nothing less than the nature of the universe, the world and human beings; it comes to the conclusion (with which Shakespeare might have agreed) that the latter are "the glory, jest [joke] and riddle of the world".

Essayists **Joseph Addison** (1672-1719) and **Richard Steele** (1672-1729) were the masters of satiric prose, they catered both for the new and the traditional readers with their newspapers, *The Tatler* founded in 1709 and *The Spectator* of 1711. They set out to improve public taste by providing information and discussing with wit and originality a multitude of topics. Acting on a desire to reform the manners and refine the tastes of the general public, they published periodicals comprised of sketches and essays on the theatre, literature, politics and society.

In marked contrast to their subdued, sensible, and kindly approach are the incisive satires of **Jonathan Swift** (1667-1745). Appalled by the hypocrisy and sham he perceived around him, Swift castigated educators, politicians, churchmen, and all categories of human beings for failing to exercise their innate reason.

In his works of one does not encounter many human beings who could be described as "the glory" of the world. In *Gulliver's Travels* he has a character sum them up as "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth." His *Tale of a Tub* of 1704 is a mordant satire of sectarianism and self-righteousness is a tale about three sons, representing the Catholic Church, the Church of England and the Puritans or Dissenters, who quarrel incessantly about a coat their father had bequeathed them. Though Swift claimed he was only satirising the Church of Rome and the Dissenters, but not the Anglican Church, the head of that institution did not agree, and she was right. Swift had to return to Ireland where he became Dean of Saint Patrick's Protestant Cathedral in Dublin. There he was confronted with the grim realities of colonial rule and proceeded to make them the theme of his writings.

He wrote the most extraordinary piece of satire in the literature having witnessed three years of famine and destitution in the mid 1720s. He called it: *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of the Poor in Ireland from being Burdensome, and for making them Beneficial*. Swift was a master of masks, and here he imitates the voice and mind of the Schreibtschmörder, the bureaucratic exterminator, the kind who had drawn up plans to deal with the native peoples of the Americas, or the troublesome Irish. The proposal presented by this philanthropic entrepreneur is that the poor should sell their infants as food to their landlords, since they had

nothing else with which to pay their rents. The message of the text is that a landlord system - and the government that allows it to drive the rural people into starvation - is criminal, murderous and cannibalistic. The light emanating from such writing was painful, and many closed their eyes to it. Swift's most famous work, known to millions of children who have never heard of him, is *Gulliver's Travels* of 1726. The sea-captain Gulliver recounts his adventures in the land of the tiny Lilliputians, in the land of giants, on the floating island of the scientists Laputa, and in the land where the horses are civilised and humans (Yahoos) bestial. Swift through Gulliver confronts his readers with an experience similar to his own when in Ireland he encountered the image of Britain seen in the Irish mirror: disconcertingly different to that admired in London. Gulliver is forced to reappraise himself and his impact on those around him, to see himself from the perspective of the Lilliputians as a threat and a burden. Their pomp and circumstances, their wars and heroic feats - in no way different to those of Gulliver's nation - seem grotesquely trivial from Gulliver's point of view. The kindly giants are appalled at Gulliver's report about his nation's system of government. It is the ingenuity of a satirist who found himself in an ambivalent and paradoxical position: a champion of Ireland's rights, yet in the colony as a high official of an alien state church forcibly maintained by a miserably poor peasantry adhering to the persecuted Catholic church. The third adventure satirises the foolishness, vanity and corruptibility of the learned: some scholars enthralled by Swift's exposure of the scoundrelism of politicians have been less amused and impressed by this section. In the last adventure Swift conducts an evolutionary experiment: the horse develops into equus sapiens, our tribe into homo Yahooensis, a particularly unpleasant breed capable of reason but without it.

The Rise of the English Novel. In this period we have new lengthy works of fiction that captured the imaginations of large numbers of middle-class prose readers. Beginning with loosely constructed, episodic works such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1721) by *Daniel Defoe* (1660-1731), the novel emerged as a narrative genre that encompassed works as varied as the sentimental novels of *Samuel Richardson*, the rollicking comedies of *Tobias Smollett*, and the clever narratives of *Laurence Sterne*. *Henry Fielding* provided the bawdy Ton Jones (1749) whose hero demonstrates impulsiveness and an indifference to morality and manners abhorrent to the Neo-classicists and a hard-headed view of life alien to the sentimentalists.

From Neoclassicism to Romanticism. The Age of Johnson was a period of transition that witnessed the waning of Neoclassicism and the first stirrings of Romanticism. The writer, poet, critic, journalist, essayist, scholar, and lexicographer **Samuel Johnson** (1709-84) and his biographer **James Boswell** reaffirmed Neoclassical ideals and deplored the increasing interest among writers in the primitive, exotic, and antiquated, in simple folk and their traditional literature, in country life and the beauties of nature; and in human emotion and personal expression. Samuel Johnson undertook the enormous task of producing *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) to standardise spelling, pronunciation and explain the etymologies of words. He worked on it with six clerks for nine years; he defined 40,000 words, illustrating their usage with 100,000 quotations. Many of the definitions illustrate the author's sense of irony, for instance - "Lexicographer: A writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge." Like Goethe, Dr Johnson had his Eckermann: James Boswell used a detailed record of Johnson's conversations to write a fascinating biography of the humorous and brilliant man of letters.

In **drama**, the plays of W. Shakespeare attracted large audiences as did burlesque, melodramas, pantomimes, and the spirited comedies of **Richard Sheridan** and **Oliver Goldsmith**.

Especially popular near the end of the century were the *Gothic novels*, eerie, mysterious tales set in medieval castles and monasteries and often involving the supernatural.

Questions for Check-Up:

1. Define the term *Restoration*.
2. Speak about Charles II and his reign.
3. What was the condition of religion in Restoration England?
4. Determine the condition of politics in the Age of Reason.
5. Who ruled England after Charles II?
6. Speak about the Bloodless Revolution and its settlement.
7. Name the monarchs of the 18th century.
8. Define the term *Enlightenment*.
9. Speak the Enlightenment concepts.
10. Define the term *Neoclassicism*.
11. Classify the neoclassical literature.
12. Refer to the early neoclassical literature: characteristics, forms.

13. Determine the popular forms and representatives of the Augustan Age.
14. Bring arguments to the Age of S. Johnson being a period of transition.

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Guidelines to Analyzing Poetry

Content of a poem- is what the poem is about: themes, ideas, and storyline that it contains.

Poetic voice of a poem – to identify the ‘speaker’ of the poem. Whose ‘voice’ do you hear in the text? Is it the third- person or the first-person? If it is first-person writing, is it the voice of the author, or are they taking on a role? In poems, in particular, writers sometimes write with the voice of an object (for example a mountain/the wind), an animal, or even a god, as well as with the voices of people or characters. In many cases the poetic voice may well be the poet’s, but it may be that the words of the poem are ‘spoken’ through a character that the poet has created or a narrator figure other than the poet. Identifying the speaker also helps to determine a number of other aspects of the poem such as tone, mood and the overall intention behind the poem.

Tone of a poem – the poet’s ‘voice’, like any other voice, can project a certain tone that gives the listener certain messages. The tone might be angry or reflective, melancholy or joyful, bitter or ironic. The tone of the ‘poetic voice’ tells us a great deal about how the poet or the narrator of the poem feels.

Mood of the poem- is the atmosphere that the poem creates. Very often tone and mood in a poem are closely linked and a certain tone produces a certain mood.

Imagery- an image is language used in such a way as to appeal to the senses of the reader, to help us see, hear, taste, feel, think about or understand more clearly or vividly what is being said, or the impression that the writer wishes to convey. Images can be used literally to describe something.

Figurative images – are used when the thing being described is compared to something else with which it has something in common to make the description more vivid to the reader.

The simile – are easy to spot because they make the comparison quite clear often by using the words ‘as’ or ‘like’. Compared are things from two different groups.

The metaphor – it creates a comparison as the simile, but it is less direct, as it doesn’t use ‘as’ or ‘like’. Often the metaphor actually describes the subject as being the thing to which is compared. Ex.: Mother-nature.

Personification- when poets attribute an inanimate object, animal. Or abstract idea with human qualities or actions.

Aural imagery – are images that rely not upon the ‘pictures’ that they create in the mind of the reader but on the effect that they have on the ear, or a combination of both.

Alliteration – a device that involves the repetition of the same consonant sound, usually at the beginning of each word, over several words together.

Assonance – a device that involves the repetition of a vowel sound to achieve a particular kind of effect.

Onomatopoeia – refers to words that by their sound reflect their meaning. On a simple level words like ‘bang’ or ‘thud’ actually sound like the noise they describe.

The Sonnet is a very popular form in English poetry. In basic terms a sonnet is a fourteen- line poem and the lines are usually arranged in one or two ways. First, there is the **Petrarchan or Italian Sonnet**(so called simply because it is named after the Medieval Italian writer, Petrarch). This kind of sonnet is arranged with a first part that consists of eight lines (the octave) and a second and concluding part of six lines(the sestet). There can be variations in the rhyme scheme but generally it follows the pattern *abbaabba cdecde*.

The other form is the **Shakespearean or English Sonnet**. The rhyme scheme of this divides up into three quatrains and a concluding couplet. The rhyme scheme in this kind of sonnet usually follows the *abab cdcd efef gg*.

Tones– affectionate, angry, apologetic, arrogant, avuncular, bullying, calm, cheerful, conciliatory, condescending, cynical, dry, emphatic, fatherly, flippant, friendly, gentle, gloomy, harsh, impartial, jocular, level, light, matter-of-fact, nasty, objective, ominous, patronizing, peremptory, petulant, plaintive, (un)pleasant, pompous, reflective, sarcastic, serious, sharp, sober, soothing, stern, strident, subdued, sulky, threatening, triumphant, urgent, welcoming.

Moods - angry, bad, benign, bitter, black, buoyant, cheerful, confident, depresses, ebullient, euphoric, extravagant, foul, gloomy, good, happy, jovial, mellow, optimistic, passing, pensive, pessimistic, somber, suspicious.