

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (HONOURS)

SGB24EG101MC

MAJOR COURSE

Four Year UG Programme

**SELF
LEARNING
MATERIAL**



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

(The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala)



Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Introduction to Literature

Course Code: SGB24EG101MC

Semester - I

**Four Year Undergraduate Programme
English Language and Literature (Honours)
Major Course
Self Learning Material**



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SGB24EG101MC

Introduction to Literature

BA English (Honours)

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear Learner,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Four Year UG Programme in English Language and Literature offered by Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Established in September 2020, our university aims to provide high-quality higher education through open and distance learning. Our guiding principle, 'access and quality define equity', shapes our approach to education. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our academic offerings.

Our university proudly bears the name of Sreenarayanaguru, a prominent Renaissance thinker of modern India. His philosophy of social reform and educational empowerment serves as a constant reminder of our dedication to excellence in all our academic pursuits.

The Four Year UG Programme in English Language and Literature covers all relevant areas aligned with English language and literary studies. We have incorporated the latest trends in English studies to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum. Moreover, the programme encompasses flexible options for learners to choose from a range of Ability Enhancement Courses, Multi-disciplinary Courses, Value Added Courses, and Skill Enhancement Courses, complemented by discipline-oriented Advanced and Additional Advanced Courses.

Our teaching methodology combines three key elements: Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling, and Virtual modes. This blended approach aims to provide a rich and engaging learning experience, overcoming the limitations often associated with distance education. We are confident that this programme will enhance your understanding of English language and literature, preparing you for various career paths and further academic pursuits.

Our learner support services are always available to address any concerns you may have during your time with us. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or feedback regarding the programme.

We wish you success in your academic journey with Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Best regards,



Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.
Vice Chancellor
Sreenarayanaguru Open University

01-09-2024

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BLOCK - 01

Introduction to Literature

Unit 1

What is Literature?

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ have an understanding about literature
- ▶ identify the various forms of literature
- ▶ get a comprehensive idea about the different genres of literature
- ▶ show familiarity with some major literary works

Prerequisites

Picture yourself in a bustling bookshop, surrounded by shelves upon shelves of colorful volumes. As you browse, you notice the diversity of genres - novels, poetry collections, plays, biographies, and more. A child nearby giggles at a picture book, while a teenager eagerly flips through a fantasy epic. An elderly gentleman pores over a historical tome, lost in another time.

What unites all these different works? What makes them all “literature”? Is it the artful use of language, the exploration of the human condition, or something more intangible? And how has our understanding of literature evolved over time, from ancient oral traditions to modern digital formats?

These questions have intrigued readers, writers, and scholars for centuries. As we embark on our exploration of literature, we’ll delve into its various forms and functions, and discover how it enriches our lives and helps us make sense of the world around us

Keywords

Oral, Written, Visual, Poetry, Prose, Fiction, Non-fiction, Drama

Discussion

The word “literature” is derived from the Latin word *litteratura*, which means, “writing formed with letters.” To define literature is a very hard task. The definition of literature is constantly changing and evolving. It is defined as, “written works, especially those con-

sidered of superior or lasting artistic merit” (*Oxford Dictionary*). It is the writings of the past civilizations as well as the present that will stay as the voice and life of the people that lived through the time. It comprises the views, opinions, and interests of the people who lived during a period. It has its manifesta-

tions in folk tales, poetry, songs, pamphlets, biographies, novels, essays and articles. The

main genres of literature are poetry, prose, drama, fiction and nonfiction.

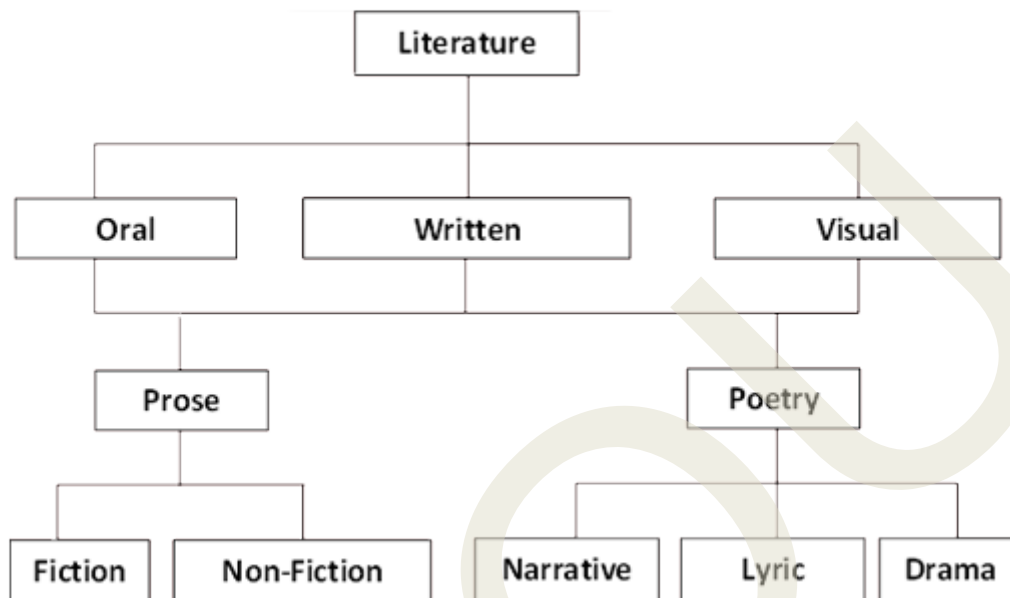


Fig 1.1.1: Classification of literary genres

Forms of Literature

- ▶ **Oral Literature** – Literature that is passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth.
E.g., The ballads that were sung by the bards during the ancient periods.
- ▶ **Written Literature** – Literature that is in manuscript and printed form.
E.g., The poems of William Wordsworth or the novels of Dan Brown.
- ▶ **Visual Literature** – Literature that is meant to be performed before the people or the audience.
E.g., The plays of Shakespeare performed on the stage, or movies.

1.1.1 Genres of Literature

1.1.1.1 Prose

It is a representative form of language, which makes use of grammatical forms and mode of utterance that is free of any rhythmic structure. While there exists disputes regarding the composition of prose, the simplicity of its structure has made it possible to use it in normally uttered dialogues. Its simplicity and

loosely defined structure have led to its adoption for the majority of spoken dialogue, scientific discourses as well as in the composition of fictional works. It is the form of language commonly used in newspapers, journals, movies, and writings on history, philosophy, science and law.



Fiction

It is the kind of prose that deals completely or partially, with information or incidents that are not real, but rather imaginary. Even though it is an important genre of literature, it can also denote theatrical and cinematic works. Fiction differs from non-fiction in many respects. However, the main difference is that while fiction is primarily imaginative, non-fiction deals completely with facts or events that have really happened, or descriptions of real places or things, observations, etc. Fiction is usually read for pleasure.

The different kinds of fiction are:

a. Fairy Tale

Hope you have read the story of the young girl, who was mistreated by her cruel step-mother and stepsisters. Remember her going to dance at a ball, in her pumpkin chariot wearing her glass shoes and winning the heart of the prince? Whose story was that? Yes, of Cinderella! And, where did you read it? In your Fairy Tales collection! Yes, this is a fairy tale, and do you know what a fairy tale is? A fairy tale is a story, often meant to be read by children, that presents astonishing, unbelievable, and imaginary characters like fairies, elves, gnomes and magicians. They are also tales of kings, queens, princes and princesses, often in supernatural settings, and the settings are usually magical worlds. “Snow White” and “Thumbelina” are other examples of fairy tales.

b. Mythology

We know that the picture displayed below is of the Kurukshetra war. Can you identify the characters in the picture? Lord Krishna and Arjuna. As both the Pandavas and the Kauravas were very dear to him, Krishna had vowed not to take up any weapon during the war. His sole responsibility in the *dharma yudh* was

to act as Arjuna’s charioteer. The Kurukshetra war, and the story of Krishna depicted in *The Mahabharata* are familiar to most Indians, as they belong to Indian mythology. So, what is mythology?



Fig 1.1.2: An illustration of Kurukshetra war

It is a collection of myths or stories about specific persons, especially gods and goddesses, about cultures, religions or any groups with shared beliefs and rituals. Mythologies have been a great source of inspiration for many novelists, poets, and dramatists.. The stories about the twelve labours of Hercules and of Prometheus are examples of mythologies.

c. Legend

Robin Hood used to rob the rich and donate them to the poor and the needy. Although the story of Robin Hood and his gang was written by Howard Pyle, it was based on a popular story of a person who once lived in England. Similar fictional characters have been created by many writers. It is a story about the heroic deeds of historical figures who lived at a particular time. Legends are based on real facts, and they present real situations. *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* is the best example.

d. Novel

“Please sir, I want some more.” Have you heard this somewhere? Yes, it is Oliver’s plea for more soup. Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* is the story of the young orphan at the work-house, realistically portraying the suffering of the downtrodden in a class-conscious Victorian society. The novel ends where Oliver be-

comes rich by inheriting a fortune. Let us have a glance at what a novel is. A novel is a long narrative, which presents a story of imaginary characters, incidents and settings. It presents a connected sequence of events. The word, “novel” derived from the Italian word *novella*, means “new.” The main elements in a novel are plot, character, conflict, setting and theme. The major types of novels are:

- ▶ Prose romances
- ▶ Realistic fiction
- ▶ Gothic novel
- ▶ Picaresque novel
- ▶ Epistolary novel
- ▶ Domestic novel
- ▶ Regional novel
- ▶ Historical novel
- ▶ Psychological novel

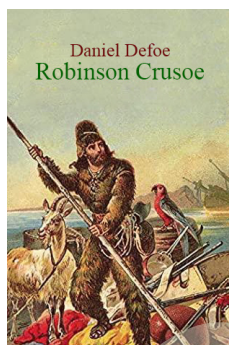


Fig 1.1.3:
Cover page of
Robinson Crusoe

Do you know
which is the first
published novel in
English?

Robinson Crusoe
(1719)

e. Novella

It is a narrative, almost similar to that of a novel, but different in terms of its length. A novella is longer than a short story, but shorter than a novel. D.H. Lawrence’s *The Man Who Died* is a good example of a novella.

f. Short Story

It is a work of fiction that is shorter than a novella. Its main focus will be on a single event or incident, and has a smaller number of characters. A short story can mostly be read in a

single sitting. “The Postmaster” by Rabin-dranath Tagore, “An Astrologer’s Day” by R.K. Narayan, “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut and “Gooseberries” by Anton Chekov are examples of famous short stories.

g. Fable

The wolf, in the disguise of a sheep, is able to stroll into the pasture and eat the sheep. Later, the wolf itself is slaughtered by the shepherd, mistaking it for a sheep. What is the message you get from this story from *Aesop’s Fables*? Seek to do harm and harm will come to you! So, what do you think is a fable? Yes, it is a story with animals as its main characters with a moral lesson. Although highly philosophical, it is simple enough to be understood by small children. Another example is the fable of the hare and the tortoise.

h. Parable



Fig 1.1.4: An illustration of *Parable of the Sower*

The multitude that had gathered around Jesus was delivered the *Parable of the Sower*. In his parable, Jesus described a sower who went out to sow seeds. Some seeds fell on the stony path, and were consumed by the birds. Some fell on the rocky areas, where the seeds sprouted quickly but perished as they did not have deep roots. . Some seeds fell where thorny plants grew, and when they sprouted

they were choked. Some seeds fell on good soil, and hence they produced good crops. People of all ages, including young children, may benefit from the short and simple stories that Jesus told to the people of his time to convey morals. These stories are known as parables. Parables are brief moralistic stories, in prose or verse, explicating one or more lessons or ideologies. The difference between a fable and a parable is that the fable uses animals as characters, whereas human beings are the characters in parables.

i. Allegory

Animal Farm by George Orwell is a novel about revolution and authority. It examines issues of authoritarianism, the perversion of ideas, and the influence of language through the story of a group of farm animals that revolt against the owner of the farm. Such a story can be called an allegory. It is a story in which the characters, things, or incidents have hidden or symbolic meanings. It is meant for teaching or explaining things, or moral principles.

Non-Fiction

It is a type of account, narrative, or a piece of communication that proposes claims and descriptions that are considered by the writers to be historically accurate. Non-fiction works are read by people in order to learn things, or to get information. It is not of a complex nature like fiction since the facts are stated directly. It makes use of text features, table of contents, charts, graphs, pictures, glossary, etc.

The different kinds of non-fictional works are:

a. Autobiography

It is the life story of a person, written by the person himself. It is written from the first-person point of view. It comprises memoirs, testimonials and historical and eye-witness accounts. Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography*,

Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* belong to the genre of autobiography.

b. Biography

It is the life story of a person written by another person. It is written from a third person point of view. It is mostly about celebrated persons who have accomplished something great. It is generally written in chronological order. *Helen's Big World: The Life of Helen Keller* written by Doreen Rappaport is an example.

c. Newspaper

It is a collection of articles in printed and published versions about various current events and news. It is usually published daily or weekly. *The Hindu*, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, etc. are the leading English newspapers in India.

d. Magazine

It is a periodical publication in print, usually published on a regular schedule, consisting of diverse contents. It contains articles and illustrations. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, first published in 1731 in London, was the first general-interest magazine.

e. Journal

It is a publication containing articles written by researchers, professors and other experts, which focuses on particular disciplines or areas of study. It is meant to be read by academicians and scholars, and not for common readers. There are specific scholarly journals for literature, science, social sciences, etc.

1.1.1.2 Poetry

It is a form of art which makes use of aesthetic features of language, such as rhythm and metre, in order to induce meanings.

The Mahabharata is the longest poem in the world. It is an Indian epic poem, having around 1.8 million words.

a. Narrative

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;”

These are the lines from the poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. Read the rest of the poem. You may have also been in such a situation at some point of time, right? Yes, when you had to struggle hard to make choices, and sometimes very difficult choices. Don’t you find this poem to be like a story, a kind of poetry that narrates a story? Yes, this is the feature that makes a narrative poem different from other kinds of poems. The entire story is narrated from the point of view and voice of the narrator or the characters. Narratives may be short or long dealing with simple or complicated issues. Narrative poems mostly have a dramatic nature and are written in metrical verse. Novels, stories, epics, ballads, idylls and lyrics are the different kinds of narrative.

b. Epic

It is a long narrative poem on a great and serious subject related in an elevated or grand style. Epics mostly present the adventures of heroes. The protagonist of an epic is heroically larger than life, and is often the source and subject of a legend. Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are examples of epics.

c. Ballad

It is a long narrative poem, often in short stanzas, commonly called the ballad stanza. Ballads have been passed on from one gen-

eration to the next in oral form. Ballads employ refrain and incremental repetition. “The Ballad of Chevy Chase” and “The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens” are examples of ballads in English.

d. Idyll

It is a narrative poem dealing with a scene or incident related to pastoral, rustic or rural country life. It usually employs a romantic and sweeping tone to describe things. E.g., Alfred Tennyson’s *English Idylls and Other Poems*, and Robert Browning’s *Dramatic Idylls*.

e. Metrical Romance

It is a narrative poem which portrays the emotions of a person or the stages of life. In metrical romances, the story is communicated in a simple, frank and authentic way. E.g., John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and S.T. Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

f. Lyric

It is a type of poetry that presents the personal feelings of the speaker. Lyrics were originally meant to be sung with the accompaniment of a lyre. Although lyrics differ from other types of poems in lacking a rhyme scheme, it is famous for its musical quality. E.g., Emily Dickinson’s “The Heart Asks Pleasure First”, and W.B. Yeats’ “He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven”.

g. Song

It is a lyric poem meant to be sung, especially with music, harmony and rhythm.

h. Sonnet

It is a lyric poem consisting of fourteen Iambic pentameter lines. There are two types of sonnets – the Italian sonnet or the Petrarchan sonnet, and the English sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet. It is Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey who brought the sonnet form to England. The sonnets of William Shakespeare



and William Wordsworth are examples of English sonnets.

i. Ode

It is a type of lyric poem admiring or praising an incident or person, or illustrating nature both in rational as well as emotional terms. The Regular or Pindaric Ode is passionate while the Horatian ode is calm and meditative. P.B. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind", and John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" are examples of odes.

j. Elegy

It is a type of poem lamenting or commemorating the death of someone. The mood of an elegy is melancholic, contemplative and mournful. E.g., John Milton's "Lycidas," and Lord Tennyson's "In Memoriam."

- ▶ *Metrophobia* is the fear of poetry.
- ▶ *Metromania* is the compulsion to write poetry.

1.1.1.3 Drama

It is a literary form primarily designed for the theatre and is accompanied by dialogue and performance. It presents fictional, or non-fictional

elements, or incidents through performance. Dramas can be performed on stage, through films, or through radio. They are also known as plays, and the writers are known as playwrights. A closet drama is intended to be read rather than performed. Lord Byron's *Manfred* is a typical example.

The plays of Sophocles and the plays of William Shakespeare are classical dramas, whereas *Long Day's Journey into Night* by Eugene O'Neill is an example of a modern play.

a. Historical

It is a play meant to be enacted on the stage, having historical plot and settings. E.g., Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

b. Comedy

It is a play meant to be enacted on the stage, having a plot with a happy ending. E.g., Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

c. Tragedy

It is a play meant to be enacted on the stage, having a plot with a tragic ending, culminating in the death of the main characters. E.g., *Oedipus Rex* written by Sophocles.

Recap

- ▶ Literature – written, oral, visual
- ▶ Different types of literature – prose, poetry and drama
- ▶ Prose – fiction and non-fiction
- ▶ Fiction – fairy tale, mythology, legend, novel, novella, short story, fable, parable, allegory
- ▶ Non-fiction – Autobiography, biography, newspaper, magazine, journal
- ▶ Poetry – Narrative – Epic, ballad, idyll, metrical romance, lyric, song, sonnet, ode, elegy
- ▶ Drama – Historical, Comedy, Tragedy

Objective Questions

1. Which form of literature originated first?
2. Give an example of a historical play.
3. What does the term *literature* mean?
4. What is a story that uses animals as characters, and has a moral lesson called as?
5. What is a poem about rustic life called?
6. What is a poem lamenting the death of someone called?
7. What is mythology?
8. Movies are examples of which form of literature?
9. Name the genre of poetry that communicates personal and emotional feelings.
10. Give an example of an oral form of literature.
11. What is a poem of 14 lines called ?
12. What is a narrative shorter than a novel, but longer than a short story called?
13. What is the life story of a person written by someone else called?
14. What is a play having characters from history called?

Answers

1. Oral
2. Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*.
3. Writing formed with letters
4. A fable
5. An idyll
6. Elegy
7. The story of gods and goddesses
8. Visual
9. Lyric
10. Ballad
11. Sonnet
12. Novella
13. Biography
14. Historical play

Assignments

1.State five differences between fiction and non-fiction.

Fiction

Non-Fiction

2. Fill in the details of a novel you have read recently?

Characters

Plot Summary

Name of the novel:

Name of the novelist:

3.What are the different genres of literature? Explain.

4. Differentiate between the different kinds of poetry.

5. What are the major differences between tragic and comical plays?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Heinle, 1999.
- ▶ Bate, Jonathan. *English Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2010.
- ▶ Hudson, William Henry. *An Introduction to English Literature*. Rupa, 2015.
- ▶ Rainsford, Dominic. *Studying Literature in English: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2014.
- ▶ Rees, R.J. *English Literature: An Introduction for Foreign Readers*. Macmillan, 1973.

Unit 2

Literature and Society

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ become familiarized with English literature, and learn how the historical contexts influence the works of literature
- ▶ become aware that intersections among race, gender, class, sexuality, and/or national and global history play an important role in literary works
- ▶ get acquainted with how literature has influenced society

Prerequisites

You are attending a play in Shakespeare's time - the Globe Theatre filled with people from all walks of life, from nobles to commoners. The performance not only entertains but also reflects and comments on the social issues of the day. Fast forward to the 19th century, where Charles Dickens' novels shine a spotlight on the harsh realities of industrial England, sparking public outrage and social reform.

Literature has always been inextricably linked with the societies that produce it. It can mirror social norms, challenge the status quo, or envision entirely new ways of being. From ancient myths that explained the world to modern dystopian novels that warn of possible futures, literature both shapes and is shaped by the cultural context in which it exists.

But how exactly does this interplay between literature and society work? What role does literature play in social change, and how do societal shifts influence literary trends?

Keywords

Society, Culture, Values, Morals, Functions

Discussion

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." This is the opening sentence of Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. This observation depicts the

behaviour of the wealthy men of nineteenth century England, whose sole aim in life was to accumulate wealth and get married. This novel portrays a society which encouraged women to look for 'good' marriages and find wealthy and propertied husbands.

Literature is a mirror which reflects the true life and culture of people. The distinct features that discriminate the literatures of a particular society from that of other societies are the characteristics of the societies themselves. The subject matters, premises and problems portrayed by each piece of literature are in fact, the reflections of the activities and situations that occur in that particular community. The greatness of a literary work is determined by the magnitude with which it communicates the culture of the society to the world.

Society imposes its influence on literary works in different ways. Literature is integrally related to society, and the relationship is universal. The extent of the impact of society on literature is on par with the dominant social systems, the operative social forces: the prevailing system of social organisation – including the class structure, the economic system, the political organisation, and the inherent customs and conventions, the governing viewpoints; the distinctive feelings and emotions, the notions about the traditions and the existing realities.

There exists an extremely complicated association between literature and society, and hence it will be a very hard task to identify which element in the society has influenced literature. So, it will be difficult to choose a single element, economic or philosophical, and delegate it the status of influencing a particular literary work. The complete set of elements that determine the culture of a society, the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions, may perhaps be considered and found to be encompassing the power to decide the way a literary work should be written, or a particular character should be created. Thus, society plays the role of a model for the writers. Literary works not only embody both abstract as well as concrete notions of the society, and portrays subjects like alienation, assimilation

and transformation in society, but also mirrors the social, political, and economic conditions of the society. The intention of any writer will be to present the society with all its genuineness through his work. Hence, it can be said that literature and society cannot exist without each other.

On examining literary works, whether it be of a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, or an essayist of any period, being the by-products of their period, it can be noted that a social incident or situation of the time has commonly affected the writers. Their writings distinctly present the images of the society. It is found to be mirroring the characteristic features of the society of the particular period when it is created.

The writers chose those elements of the society that cause deep impact on them, and pattern them in such a way that it satisfies their own views of art and life. A good example of the influence of the society on the literary works of a period can be found in the literature of the Elizabethan period. There is a marked difference between the drama and poetry of the Elizabethan period. The drama of the period enjoyed, and still enjoys a prominent position in the history of literature. It had the privilege of speaking directly to the audience, and it portrayed the true life of the people of the time, with all its psychological aspects. The destiny of any literary work was in the hands of the upper classes, the lords. Any poet who aimed to get his work published had to procure the patronage of a great lord. Any bard who wanted to get an income from the printing was able to obtain it only as gifts for their efforts. They were able to find the means for their living only from the castles of their lords.

Thus Spenser, the chief poet of the Elizabethan period, in his celebrated work, *The Faerie Queene*, states that the aim of the work is “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in



virtuous and gentle discipline.” His only intention behind the work was to educate the high-class society only. When compared to the poetry of the period, the Elizabethan playwrights enjoyed a freedom that the poets were denied. They were free from the fetters of the dependence on the patrons. The Elizabethan playwright was no longer dependent on the benevolence of a single patron. Although the companies of actors were thought of as being under the service of the lords, this was nothing but a formality to assure legality.

The lords and nobles continued to exert their power upon literature until the eighteenth century, when society began to be exposed to reading. Although the aristocrats were, as a result of this, replaced by the publishers, the condition of the writers continued to be the same.

A good example of the influence of social situations upon literature can be seen in the literature of the Romantic Period. The French Revolution caused a deep impact on the literature of the time. The Revolution gave Europe the optimistic feeling of political independence and social reforms. Despite the fact that this optimistic feeling was shattered with the power being handed over to Napoleon, its place was taken by the interest in the struggle of the nations against outdated customs. William Wordsworth was intensely affected by the doctrines of the French Revolution. His great work, *The Prelude*, is a portrayal of the advancement of his political considerations. S.T. Coleridge, like Wordsworth, also underwent such a stage of revolutionary passion. The influence of the French Revolution can be seen in most of his works. It made him look at things with a cynical attitude, which resulted in his redirecting his thoughts to spiritual idealism which delivered emotional fulfilment to him. The influence of the Revolution is also strikingly noticeable in the poems of P.B. Shelley.

Although it can be seen that sociological settings play a major role upon the writer and his works, it does not end there. The influence happens in the reverse manner too. It is not only the writer who is affected by the society and its settings, but the society is also influenced by the literary works. Literature not only has the power to portray life and situations, but also has the potential to mould it. Society has always been influenced by the lives of the characters in many literary works. The excitement caused in the readers, by a great poem cannot be ignored. Shelley has aptly, in his *Defence of Poetry*, addressed poets as, “the unacknowledged legislators of mankind.”

Novels have been thought of as having the power to make people think. They have helped people in creating movements that have transformed the lives of many. The impact of literary works on society can either be direct or indirect. The direct influence can be perceived in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This novel was accountable for stirring the movement against slavery in America. The same influence, although an indirect one, can be seen in the novels written by Charles Dickens. His novels, like *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*, produced in the people of his period an urge to control and eliminate the social evils prevailing in the society. His novels proclaimed the inevitability of social reforms. Shashi Deshpande’s novels have gone a long way in breaking the shackles of conservative attitudes towards women in Indian society.

1.3.1 Functions of Literature in Society

Educational Function

Literature teaches society about many aspects of life. It is used to present the facets of life that can be seen by the people, and even those

that they can never dream of. It teaches people about the prevailing social, political and economic systems. For example, the strong political allegory in George Orwell's novel *The Animal Farm* makes us aware of the corruption of socialist ideals in the Soviet Union at that time.

Cultural Function

Literature has an inseparable relationship with culture. It portrays the life and culture of people of a particular place or society. It presents the traditional notions and conventions that have been handed down from one generation to another. For example, a reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* opens the eyes of the readers to the customs and traditions of the Igbo community.

Ideological Function

Literature influences society by inculcating revolutionary ideas and diverse means of thinking in its members. W.B. Yeats' poems present strong revolutionary ideals which were prevalent during the time of the Irish Revolution.

Linguistic Function

Every literary work makes use of language. Hence, literature acts as a means of development in the language skills of the readers. Apart from this, it also helps in enhancing their vocabulary and grammar.

To Entertain People

Other than the educational function, literature has a function of imparting pleasure to the readers. It transforms the readers to imaginary worlds. S.T. Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" transports the readers to the supernatural world of Xanadu.

To Liberate People

A literary work acts as a source for the liberation of minds from the fetters of unfavourable conditions. It also helps people in identifying and overcoming political oppression, social injustice, inequalities of gender, caste, creed and colour. For example, after reading Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, a person who faces or confronts the social evil of untouchability can be awakened against enduring or practising that tradition.

To Critique the Society

Literary works can serve as a means to critique the society by alluding to the social injustices and evils. On reading them, the society becomes aware of these, and it determines to take prevention measures. Osman Conteh's novel, *Unanswered Cries* condemns the practice of female genital mutilation in some African societies.

Thus, it can be seen that literature is a means to reinforce the culture and tradition of the society it takes into consideration. The assumptions, beliefs, caste, creed, myths, and religion, together with historical, political, and social factors, influence a work of literature. Apart from this, the revolutionary power of literature in reforming society cannot be overlooked.



Recap

- ▶ Society - influences literature.
- ▶ Literature - causes impact on society
- ▶ Writers - influenced by the prominent incidents of their period.
- ▶ Different functions of literature
- ▶ Educational function
- ▶ Cultural function
- ▶ Ideological function
- ▶ Linguistic function
- ▶ Entertainment function

Objective Questions

1. P.B. Shelley's revolutionary poem "Ode to the West Wind" can be considered as an example of which function of poetry?
2. Which societal influence caused the lack of freedom for the writers of the Elizabethan period?
3. Give an example of the entertainment function of literature.
4. What can be considered a mirror to society?
5. What does the linguistic function of literature help to improve?
6. Give an example of a novel that portrays the society after industrialization.
7. Which function of literature does Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* serve?
8. Whose poems depict the ideological function of literature?

Answers

1. Ideological function
2. Patronage
3. S.T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"
4. Literature
5. Language skills
6. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*
7. Cultural function
8. W.B. Yeats

Assignments

1. Write a paragraph on how Indian culture has influenced literature.
2. Write a note on the adverse effects of literature on society.
3. What are the functions of literature in society?
4. Discuss a literary work you have read recently by mentioning the social relevance it imparts.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Glicksberg, Charles I. *Literature and Society*. Martinus, 1972.
- ▶ Halsey, A. H. *A History of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature and Society*. Oxford UP, 2004.
- ▶ Lowenthal, Leo. *Literature and Mass Culture: Communication in Society*. Transaction, 1984.
- ▶ Milner, Andrew. *Literature, Culture and Society*. NYU, 1996.

Unit 3

What is Literature? What is a Text?

- Mario Klarer

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ acquaint themselves with different forms of literature
- ▶ familiarise themselves with different concepts and key terms related to literature
- ▶ create awareness regarding the written form of language
- ▶ identify the importance of primary and secondary sources in writing

Prerequisites

In a university lecture hall, a professor scribbles on a whiteboard: “What is literature? What is a text?” The students look puzzled. Surely, they think, the answers are obvious. But as the discussion unfolds, they realize these seemingly simple questions open up a world of complexity.

Mario Klarer’s exploration of these fundamental concepts challenges us to think more deeply about the nature of literature and texts. In our digital age, where we encounter written words in countless forms every day, how do we define and categorize different types of writing? And how have these definitions evolved over time?

Keywords

Oral, Written, Genre, Text type, Discourse, Primary source, Secondary source



Fig 1.4.1: Mario Klarer

Mario Klarer, a professor of American Studies at the University of Innsbruck, is the author of several textbooks, monographs on literature and the visual arts as well as literary utopias.

Discussion

The meaning of the term literature has not been defined clearly in any encyclopaedia. Although it is referred to as the whole of written works, there is a restriction that every written document cannot be categorised under literature. Hence those works that have an “aesthetic” or “artistic” quality are referred to as works of literature.

The etymological meaning of the word literature is “litteratura,” a Latin word derived from “littera” (letter), which is the smallest unit of the alphabet. The word *text* is related to “textile.” As the origins of these two words do not help in defining literature, it is best to look at literature or text as the product of culture, or of history.

The primary purpose behind a literary production is the human wish to leave behind a trace of oneself through some kind of creative expression. The earliest examples of such a wish can be seen in the prehistoric paintings in caves, which are the sources of encoded messages in the forms of signs.

Literature cannot be confined to written words alone, they can be in spoken form too. Oral literature originated even before the birth of pictographs and alphabet. This mostly happened in the form of oral poetry, propagated by bards and minstrels. Most of the classical and Old English epics were produced in the spoken form, and later on preserved in the written form. This spoken component of literature has now been revived with the arrival of radio and other audio-transferring media.

The visual and oral components of literature became almost extinct during the course of history. In the Middle Ages also, the visual component of literature enjoyed a prominent status in the form of decorated handwritten

manuscripts. This status later diminished in the modern age with the arrival of the printing press. The “iconoclasm” or the hostility towards pictures irreconcilably broke the relationship between the written and the spoken medium of literature.

The only form of literature that still preserves this relationship is drama. An advanced form, which more obviously upholds it, is film, which is of recent birth. Since the spoken and written elements are recorded in films, as in books, it is preferred in textual studies. The methods used for textual and literary criticism are hence frequently applied to such media. The most recent hybrids that sustain the correlation between the spoken and written elements are computer hypertexts and the internet. Although the written medium is given utmost importance in the study of literature, other media, such as the stage, painting, film, music and even computer networks are also taken into consideration.

This conglomeration of modern textual studies with other media has resulted in controversies in defining the “texts,” and this has resulted in the development of new ways of literary expression and analysis.

1.4.1 Genre, Text Type and Discourse

Literary criticism, like biology, uses the concept of evolution or development to distinguish different genres of literature. The former area is known as literary history, whereas the latter is known as poetics, and both are closely interrelated.

Genre is a term used to refer to one of the three classical literary forms – epic, drama, or poetry. Epic is not categorised under poetry, although it shares the features of the latter. Epic can be considered a precursor of modern



novels, as it has structural features similar to that of the novel, like plot, character presentation and narrative perspective.

Texts that do not come under the acknowledged genres of fiction, drama and poetry are presently dealt with in modern linguistics. Those works, which were considered worthless or irrelevant, are taken for textual analysis nowadays. The term text type also comprises the highly conventional written documents, like instruction manuals, sermons, obituaries, advertising texts, catalogues, and scientific or scholarly writings. This includes the three major genres of literature and their sub-genres.

Another important term used in theoretical treatises is discourse, which means any kind of classifiable linguistic expression. It has gained significance in referring to areas of content and theme, like discourses related to gender, political, sexual, economic, philosophical and historical matters. While text type denotes written documents, discourse includes both written and oral ones.

In short, it can be concluded that genre can be used for the three classical forms of literary tradition, text type can be used for “non canonical” written texts, and discourse for a variety of written and oral works which share similar thematic or structural features.

1.4.2 Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary sources are those traditional objects of analysis in literary criticism, which include texts of all literary genres, such as fiction, poetry or drama.

Secondary sources are texts, like articles or essays, book reviews and notes, primarily published in scholarly journals. It is through journals that the readers are informed about

the latest advancements in research. Essays are published as collections or anthologies. They are compiled by one or more editors. If an anthology is published in honour of a famous researcher, it is known as a festschrift, which is a German term. Monographs are lengthy scholarly treatises, like dissertations and scholarly books.

Secondary literature gives importance to scholarly practices that have been established for scientific discourse, including objectivity, documentation of sources, and general validity, which enable the readers to check the validity of the statements. The reader of a secondary source should be able to refer back each quotation or paraphrase to the source from which it has been derived.

Critical apparatus is the formal criteria that has evolved in literary criticism, which includes footnotes or endnotes, a bibliography and an index. In the following table, different elements of secondary sources, publishing media, aspects of secondary literature and content are given.

Forms of Secondary Sources	Publishing Media
Essay (Article) Note Book review Review article Monograph	Journal Anthology (Collection) Festschrift Book Book
Formal Aspects of Secondary Literature	Aspects of Content
Footnotes Bibliography Index Quotations	Objectivity Lucid arguments General validity of thesis

Identifying the difference between a primary source and a secondary source is not an easy

task. An examination of the literary essay form of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shows that this type of classification did not exist in those days. These essays possessed the stylistic qualities of the primary sources, as well as themes and questions, which are the features of secondary sources. Hence, the literary essay can be considered a mixture of both.

A deliberate attempt to neglect the classification can be seen in the works of twentieth century writers. A famous example from English

poetry is T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land," in which the poet includes footnotes in the primary text. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a mixing up of elements in the primary and secondary texts, where elements of the primary source are included in the secondary one, and vice versa. Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* is an example for this. The fact that this work is categorised under the genre novel, although it has a poem as its centre, displays the phenomenon of breaking of rules in the modern period.

Recap

- ▶ Term 'literature' - not clearly defined
- ▶ Primary purpose of writing - to leave behind a trace of oneself
- ▶ Oral literature - pictograms - written literature
- ▶ Literary history - evolution of literary genres
- ▶ Poetics - development of literary genres
- ▶ Genre - epic, drama or poetry
- ▶ Text type - written documents
- ▶ Discourse - both written and oral documents
- ▶ Primary sources - texts of all literary genres, such as fiction, poetry or drama
- ▶ Secondary sources - texts, like articles or essays, book reviews and notes, primarily published in scholarly journals
- ▶ Festschrift - an anthology published in honour of a famous researcher
- ▶ Anthology - a collection of essays
- ▶ Critical apparatus - footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, index
- ▶ Distinction between primary and secondary sources - blurred in the modern period

Objective Questions

1. What is the etymological meaning of the word literature?
2. Which are the two forms of literature?
3. Name a most recent hybrid form of oral literature.
4. In what form did the visual component of literature gain prominence during the Middle Ages?
5. Who propagated the earliest forms of oral literature?



6. What is the development of different genres of literature called?
7. What can be considered a precursor of the modern novel?
8. What is the term used for highly conventional written documents?
9. What is the term used for oral and written works that share a common feature?
10. Give an example of a primary source.
11. What informs the readers about the latest developments in research?
12. What is a collection of essays called?
13. Dissertations are examples of?
14. What is an anthology published to honour a single person called?

Answers

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Letter | 8. Text type |
| 2. Oral and written | 9. Discourse |
| 3. The internet | 10. Fiction |
| 4. As handwritten documents | 11. Journals |
| 5. Minstrels and bards | 12. Anthology |
| 6. Poetics | 13. Monographs |
| 7. Epic | 14. Festschrift |

Assignments

1. Find out two examples from works of English literature that tend to blur the differences between primary sources and secondary sources.
2. Identify a few examples for festschrifts.
3. Mention the features of journals.
4. Write a note on the earliest forms of literature.

Suggested Reading

- Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 9th ed. The Modern Language Association, 2021.
- Klarer, Mario. *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. Routledge, 2005.

BLOCK - 02

Major Periods of Literature - 1

Unit 1

Old English and Middle English Periods

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into the historical evolution of English literature
- ▶ familiarise themselves with some of the linguistic developments of the period
- ▶ identify some of the major literary features of the period
- ▶ familiarise themselves with some of the major writers and works of the selected periods

Prerequisites

You are walking through a misty forest in 5th century Britain. The crunch of fallen leaves beneath your feet is suddenly drowned out by the thundering hooves of approaching horses. Through the trees emerge fierce warriors with long hair and beards, brandishing swords and axes. These are not native Britons, but Anglo-Saxon invaders from across the sea.

As they sweep across the land, everything changes - the language, culture, and very identity of Britain is transformed. Old Celtic words give way to strange new Germanic ones. The lyrical songs of bards are replaced by the booming voices of scops reciting epic tales of heroes and monsters. Christianity slowly spreads, blending with and eventually supplanting pagan beliefs.

Fast forward several centuries. It's now 1066, and you're standing on a hill overlooking the fateful Battle of Hastings. Norman invaders clash with Anglo-Saxon defenders in a struggle that will once again reshape the linguistic and cultural landscape of Britain. In the aftermath, French becomes the language of the nobility while English is relegated to the common folk.

Yet English proves resilient. Over time, it absorbs French and Latin influences, evolving into something new. In market squares and taverns, you might hear the lyrical Middle English of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. In monasteries, monks painstakingly copy manuscripts, preserving knowledge through the tumultuous Medieval period.

This is the story of how Old English became Middle English - a fascinating journey of invasion, cultural exchange, and linguistic evolution that laid the groundwork for the modern English we speak today. Let's explore the literature, historical events, and cultural shifts that defined these formative periods of the English language.

Keywords

Old English, Middle English, Modern English, History of language

Discussion

2.1.1 The Old English/Anglo-Saxon Period (450-1066 CE)

The origin of the English language can be traced back to the migration of the Germanic tribes, such as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes into various parts of Britain in 449 AD after the fall of Rome. This mass migration, known as the Anglo-Saxon conquest, is one of the most crucial events in the history of Britain. It had such far-reaching consequences that, in its aftermath, the native Britons were reduced to a mere minority and had to flee to other places for survival.

Moreover, the Anglo-Saxon conquest is the first recorded event in English history. This slow and steady arrival of a diverse group of tribes and their settlement into the Roman provinces of Britain began during the mid-fifth century and lasted till the sixth century. By the next century, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had almost completely covered the areas of modern England. Their impact was so huge that by this time, there were no traces left of the Celtic language that was used in Britain till then. The Angles and Saxons were natives of Germany, but the Jutes came from even farther North.

Many researchers regard the people, language, and culture of England during this time to be Anglo-Saxon. However, historians and linguists now prefer the name “Old English” since it emphasised the link and continuity from this period to present times.

In fact, the term ‘England’ is derived from *Anglia* – which means ‘land of the Angles’. Previously, the Romans had named it *Brittania* during their occupation of the island for

four centuries. However, the Angles, Saxons, and the Jutes who later conquered England renamed it after themselves. After the Saxons battled and conquered regions of native Britain to the south of the Thames, they were renamed Sussex, Wessex, Essex and Middlesex.

Gradually, they developed into the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England:

1. Northumbria
2. Mercia
3. East Anglia
4. Essex
5. Sussex
6. Kent
7. Wessex

Similarly, the Angles occupied regions like East Anglia, Norfolk and Suffolk in the mid and northern parts of England. Meanwhile, the Jutes were mostly concentrated in the south-east of England – what we call today, Kent. The native Celts who lost their homeland had to flee to places like Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

Since the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were illiterate, they produced little written output – only oral compositions were available at the time. However, the Christian clerics who later recorded these compositions have endowed most of these works with their Christian values. This is particularly clear in the case of *Beowulf*, the epic which narrates the heroic adventures of the eponymous Germanic hero, Beowulf, who is embellished as the classic representative of Christian values.

Here is a sample of Old English prose from *Homily on St. Gregory the Great* by Aelfric. Can you identify any similarities between this



language and modern English? “Eft he axode, hu ðære ðeode nama wære þe hi of comon. Him wæs geandwyrd, þæt hi Angle genemnode wæron. Ða cwæð he, Rihtlice hi sind Angle gehatene, for ðan ðe hi engla wlite habbað, and swilcum gedafenað þæt hi on heofonum engla geferan beon.”

You can read the translation of the text into modern English here:

“Again he asked what might be the name of the people from which they came. It was answered to him that they were named Angles. Then he said rightly are they called Angles because they have the beauty of angels, and it is fitting that such as they should be angels’ companions in heaven.”

Notice how certain words like *axode*, *engla* and *heofonum* closely resemble modern English. As you might have deduced from the translation, these words mean ‘asked’, ‘angels’ and ‘heaven’ respectively. However, such instances of modern English retaining the words from Old English are few and far between. Most of the Old English words have been replaced with completely different ones in our modern vocabulary due to the influence of a later development in English known as Middle English.

Some of the major writers of the Old English period were:

Cynewulf (c. 800 – 825)

Not much is known of this poet except his name. Cynewulf is associated with four religious poems in Old English: “The Fates of the Apostles” and “Elene” from the *Vercelli Book*, and “Christ II” and “Juliana” from the *Exeter Book*. All these poems are based on Latin compositions and are attributed to him due to the runic letters of his name spelt out in the epilogues.

King Alfred (c. 849 – 899)

King Alfred, the King of Wessex, is known as the greatest among the Anglo-Saxon Kings. It is because of his strong influence that the kingdom of Wessex grew extremely powerful. Moreover, the West-Saxon dialect soon became superior to the three other dialects of Old English – namely Northumbrian, Mercian and Kentish.

King Alfred, a poet and translator himself, led almost all the translation works during this period and it was in his court that the written English language originated. He also brought Mercian scholars to his court to translate numerous prose works into English. In addition, he co-authored the national history, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which traces the history of England till the ninth century.

Venerable Bede (c. 673 – 735)

This monk is known as the father of English history due to his masterpiece *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. The major historical record on the Old English period, this work was translated from Latin to English by King Alfred. Bede is credited with the modern method of dating history – AD (Anno Domini). Furthermore, he is the only English writer mentioned in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

Caedmon (c. 657 – 684)

He is generally regarded as the first English poet whose works have survived to date. In the work, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Venerable Bede has narrated an account of how Caedmon got inspired to write poetry for the first time. According to Bede’s account, Caedmon was an illiterate farmhand who was struck by a vision to sing poetry praising the Almighty’s creations. This eventually led to his work *Caedmon’s Hymn*.

Aldelhm (c. 639 – 709)

Aldelhm is the earliest known English poet. Unlike Caedmon, none of Aldelhm's English works have survived. However, the surviving Latin works of this saint-poet, such as the *Carmina Ecclesiastica* are highly regarded for their literary value. Aldelhm's poetry was highly valued by King Alfred. Furthermore, Bede has also written in praise of Aldelhm's style and erudition.

2.1.1.1 Old English Verse

Similar to all literature across the world, poetry came before prose in Old English as well. The travelling poets and performers of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom were known as the scop (wandering minstrels). They were invited to recite poetry in front of the courts with an accompanying string instrument – most often a harp. The scop composed poems to praise the victories of heroes or to mourn their valiant death.

Beowulf

Beowulf is the longest and most important Old English poem, consisting of around 3182 lines. Though its poet and original date of composition remain anonymous, it is said that the *Beowulf* manuscript was written by two scribes and it is around 1000 years old. However, this fascinating poem had been found only centuries before. *Beowulf* is a testament to the past times, during which the concept of a singular poet did not exist. Instead, it is a fascinating form of oral poetry, passed down from one generation to the next, and which has changed its form accordingly. Thus, poetry during the Old English period was not considered an individual pursuit or original creation, but rather a form of collective memory and shared inheritance.

The oldest epic poem, *Beowulf* is divided into three sections: the first is about *Beowulf*'s duel with Grendel the monster, the second is on his duel with Grendel's mother, and the third part ending with the hero succumbing to death after fighting and defeating a dragon. *Beowulf* remains significant because this poem is the only remaining clue to the social and courtly lives of the Anglo-Saxons and their elaborate customs, adventures and lifestyle.

The Dream of the Rood

Widely known as 'the choicest blossom of Old English poetry,' this poem was mistakenly attributed to Caedmon and Cynewulf in the past. *The Dream of the Rood* centres around the poet's dream in which the Holy Cross narrates its tale to him.

Features of Old English Verse

Old English poetry is generally unrhymed, and each line contains alliteration. There are no regular stanzas and the writing style is found to vary highly across the work. The use of compound words/ kenning and metaphorical phrases is another key feature of Old English works.

- ▶ Regular alliteration in every line.
- ▶ Each line is divided into two halves.
- ▶ Use of kenning/ compound words.

The use of a figurative compound word/phrase in place of a common noun is known as Kenning. Examples include:

- ▶ *ring-giver* for king
- ▶ *battle-light* for sword



- ▶ *whale-road* for sea
- ▶ *bone-house* for body

Old English poetry is strikingly similar to Old German and Old Norse poetry with its heroic and narrative themes. However, despite being traditional heroic poetry, the growing influence of Christianity can also be found in these works – the best example being *Beowulf*.

2.1.1.2 Old English Prose

Arguably, Old English prose remains far inferior to Old English poetry. Following are the major prose works of the period:

- ▶ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* by King Alfred - is considered the first great work in English prose and the first historical narrative in English.
- ▶ *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Venerable Bede – One of the key texts on Old English history, it traces the history of England beginning with Julius Caesar's invasion in 55 BCE. Written in a simple and pedestrian style, the work focuses on the evolution of Christianity in England.
- ▶ *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius – The central philosophical work of the Middle Ages. Composed while being imprisoned for treason, this work is written in the form of a series of dialogues between the writer and the personification of philosophy called 'Lady Philosophy'.
- ▶ *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* by Orosius – written as a counter-narrative to the pagan histories by other writers, this work is an explicitly Christian take on ancient history.

From these few examples, it becomes clear that Old English was rich in both poetry as well as prose.

2.1.2 Middle English Period (1066-1475)

Similar to how Old English came into being with a historical process called the Anglo-Saxon conquest, it found its decline too with another historical event – the Norman Conquest of 1066. William, the Duke of Normandy invaded England and defeated Harold, the King of the Anglo-Saxons during the battle of Hastings in 1066. This event brought irrevocable changes to not only the socio-political and economic lives of the people but to their language and culture as well. Thus, it signalled the birth of a new era known as the Middle English.

Middle English is the period that lasted from 1066 to about 1500, when the literary language became standardised due to the influence of the London dialect and grew closer to the modern English we use today. Moreover, French took over as the language of the court for the subsequent two centuries, putting an end to four centuries of English reign.

As the use of Norman French became a symbol of prestige and status, English started to gradually decline. It was barely spoken and even little was written during this period. As it resurfaced later in the form of Middle English, it had lost most of its connection to Old English and resembled Norman French more. During the beginning of the Middle English period, there was no significant literary output. It is only towards the mid-thirteenth century that we see this trend slowly beginning to change.

Salient Features of Middle English:

- ▶ Rise of standard English
- ▶ Simplified grammar
- ▶ A large number of loan words from French and Latin
- ▶ Loss of inflectional endings
- ▶ Focus on courtly love and romance

The socio-political background of the age is important as it witnessed many significant historic events, such as the Black Death, Peasant's Revolt and the Enclosure Movement.

- ▶ Black Death (1348-1349): The deadly plague outbreak that cost the lives of nearly two-thirds of the English population.
- ▶ Peasant's Revolt (1381): The first great revolt in England against the heavily-imposed poll tax of 1381.
- ▶ Enclosure Movement (1450-1640): With the Enclosure Acts, the government took over the ownership of private farmlands and reallocated them to different farmers.

In general, Middle English society was centred around wealth and status. It was the age of knighthood and chivalric values. Merchant guilds were formed by tradesmen to control trade as well as politics. Women's position in society became even more inferior compared to the Old English period. Education and scholarship were also at one of the lowest points during this time.

There was a general sense of spiritual barrenness, yet the church remained powerful and highly influential in society. The period witnessed the moral degeneration of society at large and the clergy in particular. This widespread corruption in the church led to major revolts by the Lollards, a Christian group led by John Wycliffe.

But, there were some significant changes taking place in the field of literature in the Middle English period. For example, the revolutionary introduction of printing by William Caxton helped in the standardisation and stabilisation of English orthography. Moreover, the language used by Oxford and Cambridge universities has begun to be considered standard English.

Some anonymous poems in Middle English are:

- ▶ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – known as the most accomplished chivalric romance of Middle English, this anonymous work narrates the adventures of Sir Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's court.
- ▶ *Layamon's Brut* (1205) – composed of 30,000 lines by the English priest Layamon, this is one of the major works in Middle English on British history.
- ▶ *The Pearl* – this allegorical poem on spiritual vs human life, also attributed to the anonymous Gawain poet, narrates a dream vision full of religious symbolism.
- ▶ *The Owl and the Nightingale* – this humorous poem describes a debate overheard by the poet between the two birds, regarding numerous earthly matters such as love and marriage.

2.1.2.1 The major writers of the period:

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 -1400)

Chaucer is known as the father of English poetry. He is the poet who elevated the English language to its current prosperity. His major



works were *The Canterbury Tales*, *The House of Fame*, *The Legend of Good Women*, *The Book of the Duchess* and *Troilus and Cressida*.

The Canterbury Tales is the earliest masterpiece in English literature. Its realism, detailed characterisation, subtle humour and pervasive humanity continue to captivate modern readers even today. The poem centres on 30 pilgrims on their way to visit the shrine of St Thomas Beckett in Canterbury, narrating tales to each other to ward off their boredom. The detailed portrait of characters drawn from all walks of life, including the Knight, the Wife of Bath, and the Pardoner provides a fascinating view of Middle English society. In his *Preface to the Fables*, Dryden famously remarked on the work: 'here is God's plenty.'

William Langland (1332-1400)

A 14th-century English poet who is best known for his masterpiece, *Piers the Plowman*. It is a religious satire composed of over 15,000 lines in simple, unrhymed, and alliterative verse, delivering a scathing criticism of the moral degeneracy of the aristocracy and the clergy. Langland's allegorical poem narrates a series of spiritual dreams of a peasant. Here, Piers represents the moral, hardworking and spiritual peasant who lives by the values of truth, duty and love.

John Gower (1332-1408)

A Middle English poet who wrote in three languages, French, Latin and Middle English. His best-acclaimed work, *Confessio Amantis*, is his only work in English and is composed of 34,000 lines that narrate the didactic tales of the seven deadly sins.

Sir Thomas Malory (1415-1471)

An English writer whose identity is under debate. He is best known for his work, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The work narrates the legends of

King Arthur, the knights of the Round Table, and their quest for the Holy Grail. This compilation of French Arthurian romantic tales went on to inspire a great number of poets such as Milton, Spenser, Dryden, Tennyson, and so on. Malory is generally regarded the 'first great, individual prose stylist'.

John Wycliffe (1330-1384)

Wycliffe is known as 'the morning star of the Reformation' for his part in the revolt against the corrupt clergy. Wycliffe also translated the Bible into English to make it more accessible to the common man in another revolutionary move.

Features of Middle English Verse

- ▶ Rhymed verse (exception: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*)
- ▶ Poetry based on French works and their translations
- ▶ Traditional ballads such as "Sir Patrick Spens" and "Chevy Chase"
- ▶ Representative author: Geoffrey Chaucer

Features of Middle English Prose

- ▶ Prose based on French works and their translations
- ▶ However, the new prose was highly original and innovative
- ▶ Realistic and self-critical
- ▶ Representative author: Sir Thomas Malory

2.1.3 Middle English Drama

Drama developed in the Middle Ages mainly through the churches which used it as a vehicle for religious purposes. Initially, dramas were composed in Latin, the official language

of the church, and performed exclusively by clerics. The plots were mostly centred on the Old and New Testaments. However, soon this art form grew so popular that it began to be composed in vernacular English. Eventually, it completely broke away from its religious roots and developed into a true art form of the common man.

The three major forms of drama produced during the Middle Ages were: Mystery plays, Miracle plays and Morality plays

2.1.3.1 Mystery Plays

These picturesque religious dramas, also known as cycle plays, depict a series of events from the Bible – mainly the mysteries of God. Mostly produced by merchant guilds, these were highly popular during the time, performed annually in major towns, and drew huge crowds.

- *The Second Shepherds' Play* – With a blend of comedy and satire, this play narrates the events during the birth of Christ.

2.1.3.2 Miracle Plays

These plays dealt with the real or fictitious accounts of the lives of saints – mostly on the Virgin Mary or St. Nicholas. It usually involved *deus ex machina* (god from the machine), a dramatic technique where a character of divine power is lowered onto the stage using a mechanical contraption to resolve the plot. There are few surviving miracle plays in English since King Henry VIII perceived them as a threat to his church and banned

them during the sixteenth century.

- *St. John the Hairy* – In this play, the eponymous character murders a princess, but after he confesses and revives her, he is acquitted of his crime and becomes a bishop.

2.1.3.3 Morality Plays

As its name indicates, morality plays are aimed at teaching morality by depicting the actions and characters of ordinary people. There is less focus on religion and more focus on the internal conflicts of the character, who has to go to either heaven or hell by the end of the play. This moral conflict between the good and the evil forces – the highlight of these allegorical plays – is achieved through the dramatic personification of virtues and vices. The good forces (represented by the good angel and the virtues) and the bad forces (bad angel and the vices) are depicted as constantly battling for the human soul.

- *Everyman* (1510) – The titular character who represents humankind is forced to face death and confront the choices and decisions of his life. The archetypal characters of this drama such as Death, Beauty and Strength can be seen as a precursor to the Elizabethan stage – especially to classics like *Dr Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe. Moreover, among medieval morality plays, this drama is considered the closest to modern English.



Recap

- ▶ Anglo-Saxon conquest is the first recorded event in English history
- ▶ Old English - the earliest form of English language
- ▶ *Beowulf* - Old English epic which narrates the adventures Beowulf
- ▶ Scop, the travelling poets and performers of Anglo-Saxon Kingdom
- ▶ Kenning is a figurative compound word or phrase
- ▶ Norman Conquest- the 11th century invasion of England by Duke of Normandy
- ▶ Influence of Norman French caused the decline of Old English language
- ▶ Black Death, Peasant's Revolt, Enclosure Movement
- ▶ Chaucer is known as the father of English poetry
- ▶ Mystery, Miracle and Morality plays

Objective questions

1. What is the origin of the term 'England'?
2. Who was the king of Wessex?
3. Who is the only English writer mentioned by Dante?
4. Which is the oldest extant epic in English?
5. Give a few examples of kenning.
6. Name the first historical narrative in English.
7. In which year did the Norman Conquest take place?
8. Which language had the biggest influence on Middle English?
9. What is the plague outbreak in England during 1348-49 known as?
10. Who is known as the father of English poetry?
11. Name the work Dryden was referring to when he remarked "here is God's plenty".
12. Who translated the Bible into English?
13. What are the major types of drama in Middle English?

Answers

1. Anglia.
2. King Alfred.
3. Venerable Bede.
4. *Beowulf*.
5. Swan-road, Bone-house.
6. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.
7. 1066.
8. Norman-French.
9. Black Death.
10. Chaucer.
11. *The Canterbury Tales*.
12. John Wycliffe.
13. Mystery, Miracle, and Morality plays.

Assignments

1. Why is the Anglo-Saxon conquest significant in the history of England? Write a short note substantiating your reasons.
2. Explain Norman Conquest.
3. Write a brief note on the contributions of Middle-English writers.
4. Write a brief note on the representative genres of each literary period.
5. Write short notes on Mystery, Miracle and Morality plays.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature, Volume 1: From the Beginnings to Milton*. Mandarin, 1994.
- ▶ Baker, Peter. *Introduction to Old English*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- ▶ William Machan, Tim. *English in the Middle Ages*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- ▶ Nevalainen, Terttu. *An Introduction to Early Modern English*. Oxford University Press, 2006.



Unit 2

Renaissance

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into the historical evolution of English literature
- ▶ familiarise themselves with some of the socio-cultural developments of the period
- ▶ identify some of the major literary features of the period
- ▶ acquire details regarding some of the major writers of the period

Prerequisites

The 15th century Florence, Italy. You are strolling through bustling piazzas filled with artists, philosophers, and merchants. The air buzzes with excited conversations about rediscovered ancient texts, revolutionary scientific ideas, and daring new forms of art. This is the dawn of the Renaissance - a period of rebirth and renewed interest in classical learning that will transform European culture.

As these new ideas spread north, they begin to take root in England. Picture the court of Henry VIII, where humanist scholars debate theology and politics. In London's first printing shops, presses clatter as they churn out books in unprecedented numbers, making knowledge more accessible than ever before.

Step into the Globe Theatre on the banks of the Thames. The crowd roars with laughter and gasps in suspense as Shakespeare's latest play unfolds on stage. His words, brimming with wit and insight into the human condition, captivate everyone from groundlings to nobility.

In quiet studies across the country, poets like Edmund Spenser craft intricate verses celebrating love, chivalry, and the glory of England. Meanwhile, explorers set sail for distant lands, returning with tales of strange new worlds that fire the imagination of a nation.

The English Renaissance was a time of momentous change - the medieval worldview was giving way to modern ways of thinking. The influence of the Church was waning as individual expression flourished. A new middle class was rising, hungry for education and culture. And at the center of it all was a renewed faith in human potential and the power of reason.

This vibrant period saw an explosion of creativity in literature, drama, art, and science that would lay the foundations for centuries to come. Let's delve into the works and ideas that defined this pivotal era in English cultural history.

Keywords

Renaissance, Classics, Humanism, Reformation, Elizabethan literature

Discussion

As we have already learned from the first unit, the French term ‘renaissance’ implies rebirth. In contrast with the preceding Middle Ages, the age of Renaissance shed new light on all walks of Western life – from its literature, arts and sciences to even its language and culture. Also known as the early modern period, the Renaissance marked the transition of English society from the Medieval era to the Modern age. Since the fall of the Roman empire, no other cultural or artistic movement has managed to impact Western society as much as the Renaissance.

2.2.1 The Origin of Renaissance

Have you wondered how Renaissance came to be called so? The term was popularised by the 19th-century French historian Jules Michelet. He redefined the French term ‘renaissance’ to refer to the cultural, intellectual and artistic revival that emerged in 14th-century Italy and it subsequently spread to the rest of Europe.

The origin of the Renaissance can be traced back to 1453 when the Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople, the seat of the Eastern Roman Empire. During this time, many scholars were forced to flee and seek refuge in other European nations. Some of them settled in Italy and it soon began to evolve into the hotbed of learning and scholarship in Europe. Eventually, this led to the intellectual efflorescence of not only Italy but the whole of Europe.

Education, scholarship, and the pursuit of knowledge became the primary focus of Renaissance society. The technological innovation that changed the face of Europe during the Renaissance was the invention of the

printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century.

While life during the Middle Ages was fraught with war and despair, the Renaissance period was relatively stable. The Renaissance scholars who recognised the shocking dearth of intellectual output during the Middle Ages made a conscious attempt to revert to the golden age of the classics. Their primary aim was to elevate the status of man from the stagnant Middle Ages to the glory of the bygone classical era.

One of the earliest literary works that paved the way for the Renaissance movement was *The Divine Comedy* (1320) by Italian poet Dante Alighieri. This epic poem in three parts depicts the poet’s fictional journey to Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. Composed of around 15000 lines, the work is a fascinating mixture of Christian theology, Greco-Roman mythology and contemporary politics. Regarded as the greatest literary work in the Italian language, it is an allegory of the whole of Western history and European civilisation.

Dante’s vision of the afterlife has influenced generations of writers and artists across Europe – Chaucer, Milton and Blake to name a few. Moreover, Dante deliberately chose to write his work in the vernacular Tuscan language instead of Latin, the language of the learned. *The Divine Comedy* is the work that established the former as the official Italian language and inspired the rise of countless writings in vernacular languages all over Europe. Chaucer’s choice to compose *The Canterbury Tales* in vernacular English is also considered to be the influence of Dante.



2.2.2 Renaissance Humanism

The idea of humanism was central to the Renaissance. Unlike the previous eras, which put God at the centre of the universe, this philosophy firmly placed man at its centre and began to view things from a more humanitarian angle. Logic and reason prevailed, eventually gaining more traction than the ideas of religion or faith. Knowledge became the ultimate weapon of Renaissance man. The fourteenth-century Italian scholar and poet Petrarch is generally known as the Father of Humanism. With the rise of humanism, history began to be increasingly perceived as a man-made event instead of its previous conception as a series of divine chronicles. Instead of considering man as a puppet of fate, Renaissance humanism viewed man as the maker and champion of his destiny. Moreover, humanism viewed the universe as a product of nature and believed that nature in turn can be examined and explained using science and reason. As it considered society to be fundamentally rooted in human agency, the focus was on maximising the potential of the human mind through adequate scholarship and learning. This is why the Greek and Latin classics and philosophers were highly revered during this period.

The Humanists examined the fundamental question of what it is to be human. Realising the human potential to better one's individual and social life, the Renaissance scholars made a collective attempt to emulate the classical age where people used to live with dignity and goodwill. Even the fundamental beliefs of society, such as God and fate were questioned, developing a strong spirit of enquiry and criticism. Moreover, Renaissance artists valued self-expression and realism, which many of the artworks of the time reflect. As models of excellence, the perusal of classical literature, arts and sciences was highly encouraged.

2.2.2.1 The Renaissance Man

A typical Renaissance man would be someone who is a master of all trades – from science and Mathematics to art and literature. Can you think of an example of such a figure?

The Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci is considered a classic example of the Renaissance man. This polymath proved his exceptional craftsmanship not only in painting but in many other art forms, such as architecture and sculpture as well. Moreover, da Vinci was also reputed as a master engineer and even has several scientific inventions to his credit. Another example of a master craftsman would be the famous artist Michelangelo, who is equally skilled in painting, architecture and sculpting. Here are some more examples of the 'Renaissance man' from literature: The eponymous hero of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare: "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! (*Hamlet* Act 2 Scene 2).

The hero of *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe:

"Lines, circles, letters, characters—
Ay these are those that Faustus
most desires.
O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honor, and omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan!"
(*Doctor Faustus* Act 1 Scene 1)

The English Renaissance (1485 - 1660)

As usual, Renaissance took some time to finally reach the shores of England. It was only during the 15th century that English society started exhibiting clear signs of a developing Renaissance movement. While the Italian

Renaissance mostly centred around paintings and sculptures, English Renaissance was most vibrant in the fields of literature and music.

English Renaissance can be considered to have begun with the end of the Wars of the Roses and the establishment of the Tudor Dynasty in 1485. The Wars of the Roses was a series of wars fought from 1455-1485 for the English throne between the House of Lancaster and the House of York. The War got its name from the badges of these royal families, which were red and white rose respectively.

The Oxford Reformers

A group called 'Oxford Reformers' is widely credited with introducing Renaissance to the land of England. These pioneers of the English Renaissance were central in linking humanism with religious reform. The priest John Colet founded St. Paul's grammar school to felicitate the study of classics. Meanwhile, Dutch scholar Erasmus mocked the folly of the church in his classic work *The Praise of Folly*. The visionary masterpiece *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More narrated in detail his model of an idealistic yet impractical human society.

We have discussed at length the Renaissance man, but how about the Renaissance woman? Unfortunately, we find that the status of women during the Renaissance period does not reflect the progressive ideals of the time. Rather, the position of women in society seems to have deteriorated during this period as they were mostly restricted to the realms of home and children.

You might find this rather surprising considering that England was under the reign of the much-renowned Queen Elizabeth I during the time. Nevertheless, her indomitable character seems to have left a strong impression on the

artists and writers of the time. The presence of several outstanding female characters such as Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Rosalind in *As You Like It* is a testament to this.

2.2.3 The Reformation

This religious movement which began in the 16th century was aimed at reforming the practices of the Roman Catholic church. Martin Luther heralded the Reformation when he nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* to a Wittenberg church door in 1517. This direct challenge to the Catholic Church's power eventually led to the establishment of the Protestant church in England.

The ideas of the Reformation made a significant impact on 16th and 17th-century English literature. In a way, Reformation can be seen as the true manifestation of Renaissance humanism and its individualistic spirit. It insisted on the dignity of the human soul and its ability to connect to God without the interference of intermediaries like the church or priest.

The Renaissance period in England can be further divided into four based on the rulers of the time: Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline and Commonwealth periods.

Let us look at these classifications in detail.

1. The Elizabethan Period (1558-1603)

It is widely acknowledged that the Renaissance ideals were at their peak during the Elizabethan era. Society progressed in leaps and bounds in terms of economy, education and technology. The establishment of the printing press in England in 1475 by William Caxton played a significant role in the diffusion of literature to the masses. It also resulted in an increased number of translated classic works from other literature into English.



Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, English society found peace, stability and prosperity like never before. The Spanish Armada, the fleet launched by the Catholic King of Spain to invade Protestant England, was defeated by the English fleet in 1588. Furthermore, the long-anticipated union of Scotland and England also helped resolve the conflicts both within and outside the country. Thus, the Elizabethan era cultivated a renewed sense of national pride in their land and culture among the English. England continued to expand its geographical boundaries through travel, trade and explorations.

The literature produced during the period of the reign of Elizabeth to the time of the early Stuart Kings is known as Elizabethan literature. Queen Elizabeth was a connoisseur of literature and thus all genres flourished during her period including poetry, prose and drama. Deeply rooted in the conventions of classical literature, Renaissance literature produced several unrivalled masterpieces.

The defeat of the Spanish Armada ravaged by storms gave rise to the saying, '*God blew and they were scattered.*'

Elizabethan Age: The Golden Era of Sonnets

When it comes to Renaissance poetry, no other literary form grew more prominent than the sonnet. A sonnet is a poem of 14 lines with a standardized rhyme scheme and fixed meter – usually the iambic pentameter. There will also be a 'volta' or turn in the ending lines which express a significant shift in theme or tone. Deriving from *sonetto* – the Italian word for 'little song', most sonnets were centred on the theme of unrequited love. Usually written from the male point of view, the sonnet narrates his lady love but mostly focuses on the lover's emotions instead of his beloved. The

English poets often tried to imitate the melancholic and introspective tone of the original Italian sonnets.

Petrarchan sonnet is a sonnet form named after the 14th-century Italian poet Petrarch, who helped to popularise it. Its stanzas are divided into an octave (8-line stanza) and a sestet (6-line stanza). Moreover, this form is usually filled with poetic devices, such as metaphors, similes and conceits.

The publication of the anthology of poetry *Tottel's Miscellany* (also known as *Songes* and *Sonettes*) in 1567 marked the beginning of the golden era of English poetry. Known as the first printed collection of English poems, Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey were the major contributors to this anthology. This work revolutionised English literature by making lyric poetry, which was strictly restricted to the court, accessible to the general public.

Elizabethan literature can be broadly categorised into two periods: The Age of Spenser (1558-1579) and the Age of Shakespeare (1579-1603).

Now let us take a look at some of the major Elizabethan poets. Elizabethan England was known as 'the nest of singing birds.'

Elizabethan Age: Major Poets

► Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)

Sir Thomas Wyatt is credited with the introduction of the sonnet, originally from the Italian language, into English. Not only did he compose original sonnets but he also translated several Petrarchan sonnets from Italian to English. Although Sir Thomas Wyatt had introduced the Italian sonnet to English literature, it was later adapted and perfected by the fellow courtier poet Surrey.

► **Earl of Surrey (1517-1547)**

Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey is usually regarded as the creator of the English sonnet form. His style and lyricism are considered to be far superior to Wyatt. In his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Surrey introduced the blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) which eventually became the most widely used poetic form in English.

► **Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)**

The famed courtier of Queen Elizabeth I with a reputation for chivalry and nobility, Sidney's most important contribution to English poetry is his work *Astrophil and Stella* (1591). The Petrarchan sonnet was introduced to English through this work; written on his lover, Lady Penelope's marriage to another man. Composed of 108 sonnets and 11 songs of remarkable lyricism, this poem became the most influential sonnet sequence in English literature. Major works: *Astrophil and Stella* (1591), *Arcadia* (1580).

► **Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)**

Spenser is considered the next great poet to emerge in England after Chaucer. Known as the 'poet's poet' for his peerless lyrical beauty, he is the greatest of all the Elizabethan poets. His work *The Shepherdes Calendar* (1579) is considered to be a landmark in the genre of pastoral poetry. It is comprised of twelve eclogues – short, dramatic poems set in the countryside, usually involving a series of dialogues between shepherds. Interestingly, the twelve eclogues here correspond to the twelve months of the year. His marriage poems *Epithalamion* (1595) and *Prothalamion* (1596) also showcase Spenser's intricate poetic craft. **Major works:** *The Faerie Queene*, *The Shepherdes Calendar*, *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, *Prothalamion*, *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*.

The Faerie Queene was originally conceived

in twelve books; Spenser was able to finish only the sixth and a part of the seventh book of this great allegorical poem dedicated to Queen Elizabeth. Rich with layered meanings, this epic touches upon several political, moral and religious issues. Each book in this massive work centres on a knight who represents a particular virtue. Similar to the Earl of Surrey's blank verse, Spenser's major innovation in poetic form was the Spenserian stanza. The Spenserian stanza consists of nine lines – with the first 8 lines decasyllabic and the last line having twelve syllables (alexandrine).

Elizabethan Prose

The Elizabethan era is considered the origin of English literary prose with its abundance of pamphlets, treatises and tracts. With the rising number of Bible translations, the language of the common man prospered during the time. One of the most remarkable contributions of this period was the development of the essay form by Francis Bacon.

Moreover, *The Defense of Poesy* (1590), the first major work on literary criticism in English, was produced by Philip Sidney during this period. Also known as *An Apologie for Poetry*, this treatise made a solid defence for poetry, highlighting its infinite power to teach and delight.

► **Sir Thomas More (1478 – 1535)**

Sir Thomas More was a true Renaissance scholar with expertise in versatile fields, such as politics, philosophy, literature and law. A pioneer of humanist thought, More's literary reputation mostly rests on his fantasy prose work *Utopia*, originally written in Latin. This work gave rise to the genre of utopian fiction (set in an ideal, fantastical world) and dystopian fiction, its antithesis. Major works: *Utopia* (1516), *History of King Richard III* (1513).



► **Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626)**

Another ideal Renaissance scholar, Bacon was not only a writer but also a reputed lawyer, philosopher, politician and scientist. He is regarded as the harbinger of the modern scientific method of research and experimentation. Moreover, he is also credited with the introduction of the essay form in English through his first published book *Essays* (1597). Bacon modelled his essay form on Montaigne's essays in French. Major works: *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), *Novum Organum* (1620), *Essays or Counsels: Civil and Moral* (1625).

► **Sir Walter Raleigh (1554 – 1618)**

Sir Walter Raleigh, yet another example of a classic Renaissance man, was a renowned writer, soldier, explorer and courtier close to Queen Elizabeth. He was among the first Englishmen to take part in the colonization of North America. His incomplete historical work *The History of the World* is considered a landmark in English prose. Major works: *The Discoverie of Guiana* (1595), *The Last Fight of the Revenge* (1591), *The History of the World* (1614).

► **John Lyly (1553 – 1606)**

A pioneer of English prose, John Lyly helped establish and elevate the genre to new heights. The extravagant and figurative language in his famous epistolary romance *Euphues* gave rise to a distinct literary style in English known as euphuism. Although this style soon fell out of favour with the public, Lyly's works enriched English prose with their generous use of allusions, puns and other literary devices. Major works: *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), *Euphues and His England* (1580).

► **Robert Greene (1558 -1592)**

As a writer of both prose works and dramas,

Greene was one of the most celebrated authors of the time. He established the blank-verse romantic comedy in English, a genre soon perfected by Shakespeare. Many of his works informed and inspired later works. For example, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* was based on Greene's pastoral work *Pandosto*. Major works: *Pandosto* (1588), *The History of Orlando Furioso* (1594), *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1594).

Elizabethan Drama

Among the numerous literary genres that flourished during the age, drama is unquestionably the one that made the biggest impact on society. Theatre grew so prominent in the Elizabethan era that it soon became an indispensable part of English life. The first group of professional playwrights in England was collectively known as the University Wits because most of them were associated with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. They created plays of popular entertainment, often comical and romantic.

The University Wits:

- Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe (Cambridge)
- Thomas Lodge and George Peele (Oxford)
- Thomas Kyd
- Christopher Marlowe

The Elizabethan drama witnessed its height of dramatic verses in Marlowe. With his exquisite language, exaggerated power struggles, volatile human passions and dramatic conflicts, Marlowe raised the bar of Elizabethan tragedy to such a height that it went unmatched by all except Shakespeare. Marlowe transformed and established blank verse as the standard English verse form – what Ben Jonson famously referred to as 'Marlowe's mighty line'.

As we have already discussed, Doctor Faustus – the titular character in *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, is a towering example of the Renaissance spirit. In his relentless pursuit of knowledge and power, Faustus sells his soul to the devil and ends up with a tragic fate. In a similar vein, most of Marlowe's larger than life heroes tend to be hard to categorise as either heroes or villains and are often a mix of the two. Major works: *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1588-89), *Hero and Leander* (1598), *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (1599-1600), *Tamburlaine, Parts I and II* (1588), *The Jew of Malta* (1589), *Edward II* (1593)

► William Shakespeare

No discussion of English literature would be complete without mentioning this towering figure. Indeed, Shakespeare has become so ubiquitous that his name is used almost synonymously with English literature today. His staggering literary power and extensive understanding of human nature have made his works unrivalled in terms of popularity and universality.

At the same time, his works are unequivocally the products of the Renaissance and the Elizabethan era. Shakespeare based most of his plays on Italian sources and has drawn much inspiration from classic mythology and literature. Many of his plays such as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are the embodiment of the true Renaissance spirit.

There are 38 plays in the Shakespearean canon and each one remains significant with unparalleled literary merit. For ease of learning, we can broadly categorise his works into three: comedies, histories and tragedies. His poetical works are also included here.

- **Major comedies:** *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Tempest* etc.
- **Major history plays:** *Richard II and III*, *Henry IV, V, and VI*.
- **Major tragedies:** *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.
- **Major poetic works:** *Sonnets*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Venus and Adonis*.

Not only as a playwright but Shakespeare also excelled as an actor in his theatre company 'The Lord Chamberlain's Men', which later established the famous Globe Theatre in 1599. Many of Shakespeare's most notable plays including *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* were performed here.

2. The Jacobean Period (1603-1625)

In contrast to the preceding Elizabethan Age, the Jacobean era, named after King James (*Jacobus* – Latin for James), was much more politically unstable. Most of the Jacobean literature has a dark, sombre tone. Some of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, Bacon's essays and Ben Jonson's satirical works were produced during this time.

One of the major literary outputs of this period was the *King James Bible* published in 1611. Although countless Bible translations have appeared before, the King James version received the highest popularity among the general public. Its elevated language and style made a mark both in the language of the common people and in the literature of the time.

Jacobean Drama

Unlike the comical and entertaining dramas of the Elizabethan period, the Jacobean drama



was mostly satirical and filled with dark humour. Jacobean theatre explored the dark side of humanity, with themes of sex, violence and evil being freely portrayed on the stage.

Major Playwrights of the period: William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Webster, John Fletcher, Thomas Middleton, George Chapman.

Major Jacobean Plays:

- ▶ *The Duchess of Malfi, The White Devil* – John Webster
- ▶ *The Changeling* – Thomas Middleton and William Rowley

▶ **Ben Jonson (1572 -1637)**

Widely considered the first ‘professional’ author in English, Ben Jonson proved his excellence in numerous literary genres including prose, poetry and plays. Most of his works exhibited generally bitter and pessimistic view of human nature.

His major contribution to English drama was innovation of the ‘comedy of humours’, where each character is dominated by one particular ‘humour’. This dramatic genre developed by Ben Jonson was based on the Renaissance theory that the human body is built up of 4 humours/liquids:

- ▶ Blood
- ▶ Phlegm
- ▶ Yellow bile (choler)
- ▶ Black bile (melancholy)

Major works: *Volpone or the Fox, The Alchemist, Bartholomew Fair, Every Man in His Humour, Every Man Out of His Humour.*

3. The Caroline Era (1625-1649)

Named after King Charles I (*Carolus* – Latin for Charles), the Caroline Age was plagued with the English Civil War (1642-51), which divided the public into supporters and opponents of the King. The supporters of the King came to be known as the Cavaliers, whereas the Parliament supporters or the Puritans were known as the Roundheads. The era came to an abrupt end when Charles I was beheaded in 1649 by a Puritan uprising led by Oliver Cromwell.

Due to the numerous political upheavals, Caroline Age witnessed the gradual deterioration of the Renaissance spirit. Moreover, it marked the end of Renaissance drama as the theatres were closed down by the Puritans in 1642 through an Act of Parliament. Thus, the literary developments of this period were strictly limited to poetry and prose. The two styles of poetry that developed during this period were Metaphysical poetry and Cavalier poetry.

Metaphysical Poetry

In stark contrast to the lyrical and extravagantly allusive Elizabethan poems, Metaphysical poetry presented a sharp and cerebral form of poetry. Written in a casual, argumentative form, these poems usually open with an arresting statement addressed to someone. Moreover, Metaphysical poetry makes use of extensive and elaborate comparisons between starkly different images – what we call the metaphysical conceit. According to Samuel Johnson, “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together” in these poems.

The paradox is the central device of metaphysical poetry, typically represented by John Donne’s poems. Donne uses realism and iro-

ny to examine the sexual nature of love in many of his poems like “The Canonization,” “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” and “Flea.” His exaggerated, artificial, and sometimes outrageous imagery was highly praised by later poets like T S Eliot. Other major Metaphysical poets are George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, Richard Crashaw and Henry Vaughan.

Cavalier Poetry

Cavalier poets were a group of courtly poets who were supporters and allies of King Charles. This group which includes poets such as Richard Lovelace, John Suckling, Robert Herrick, and Thomas Carew, mainly created poems on courtly themes like chivalry, love and courage. Cavalier poems were written in a direct, lively, and engaging style and often propounded the philosophy of *carpe diem* (seize the day). Some of the major Cavalier poems include:

- ▶ *To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time* by Robert Herrick
- ▶ *To Althea, From Prison* by Richard Lovelace

4. The Commonwealth Period/Puritan Interregnum (1649-1658)

Soon after King Charles I was executed, England came under parliament rule and was declared a Commonwealth (constituting England, Scotland, and Ireland) in 1649. This parliament led by Oliver Cromwell came to be known as the Protectorate. The period between the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the Restoration of the monarchy in England by his son Charles II in 1660 is known as the Interregnum – a period where England had no king. This period marked the transition between the Caroline and Restoration eras.

As the theatres remained closed for eighteen years, the literary form of drama vanished entirely during this period. Poetry also diminished and there was an expansion of nonfiction prose in its place. A wealth of political writings led by John Milton was the major contribution of this period. *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes was one of the most influential political and literary texts of the era.

Recap

- ▶ 14th century Italy witnessed cultural, intellectual and artistic revival.
- ▶ *The Divine Comedy* - Dante
- ▶ Humanism - the main emphasis of Renaissance
- ▶ Example for Renaissance man - *Hamlet*, *Dr. Faustus*
- ▶ Wars of the Roses - a series of wars between House of Lancaster and the House of York
- ▶ The invention of the printing press - Johannes Gutenberg in 15th century
- ▶ Oxford Reformers - widely credited for introducing Renaissance to the land of England
- ▶ Reformation of the Catholic church - Martin Luther heralded the Reformation



- ▶ The golden age of English literature - The Renaissance period
- ▶ Sonnets were mainly centered on the theme of unrequited love.
- ▶ Elizabethan literature can be classified into Age of Spenser and Age of Shakespeare.
- ▶ Blank verse - Earl of Surrey and Spenserian stanza - Edmund Spenser
- ▶ Francis Bacon - developed the essay form
- ▶ Elizabethan drama - Theatre flourished prominently during this period
- ▶ University Wits - 16th century playwrights associated with the universities (Oxford and Cambridge)
- ▶ King James Bible - published in 1611
- ▶ Comedy of humours - dramatic genre developed by Ben Jonson
- ▶ English Civil War - happened during the Caroline Age
- ▶ Cavalier poetry discussed courtly themes, such as chivalry, love and courage.
- ▶ Metaphysical poetry - John Donne is the founder
- ▶ Interregnum - a period where England had no King

Objective Questions

1. Who invented the printing press in the 15th century?
2. What was the first printed collection of English poems called?
3. How many lines are in a sonnet?
4. What type of sonnet did Petrarch popularize?
5. Who introduced the sonnet to English literature?
6. Who is known as the “poet’s poet” of the Elizabethan era?
7. Who introduced the essay form to English literature?
8. What work by Philip Sidney is considered the first major work on literary criticism in English?
9. What poetic form did the Earl of Surrey introduce in his translation of Virgil’s Aeneid?
10. What famous theater did Shakespeare’s company establish in 1599?
11. In which year was the King James Bible published?
12. Who developed the “comedy of humours”?
13. Name three Cavalier poets.
14. Who is considered the founder of Metaphysical poetry?
15. What was the period of parliamentary rule after Charles I’s execution called?

Answers

1. Gutenberg
2. Tottel's Miscellany
3. Fourteen
4. Petrarchan
5. Wyatt
6. Spenser
7. Bacon
8. The Defense of Poesy
9. Blank verse
10. Globe
11. 1611
12. Jonson
13. Lovelace, Herrick, Carew
14. Donne
15. Protectorate

Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the characteristic features of Elizabethan literature and Caroline literature.
2. 'Elizabethan age is the golden era of English literature.' Do you agree? Substantiate your answer with reasons.
3. Make a timeline of the Renaissance and list out the rulers and major writers of each period.
4. Write a short note on the concept of the Renaissance man. Give examples of both literary as well as real-life figures.
5. Analyse the development and deterioration of theatre throughout the various periods in Renaissance.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Johnson, Paul. *The Renaissance: A Short History*. Modern Library, 2002.
- ▶ Wells, Stanley. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- ▶ Hart, Jonathan. *Reading the Renaissance: Culture, Poetics, and Drama*. Routledge, 1996.



Unit 3

Neoclassical Age

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire details on the origin and development of the Neoclassical movement in England
- ▶ familiarise themselves with the impact of Classicism and Neoclassicism in English literature
- ▶ describe the major genres, writers, and works of the Neoclassical period
- ▶ familiarise themselves with the different periods within the Neoclassical age

Prerequisites

An elegant 18th century London coffee house. Well-dressed gentlemen sip from delicate cups as they engage in lively debates about politics, philosophy, and the latest literary works. This is the world of the Neoclassical Age - a time when reason and order were prized above all.

Inspired by the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome, writers and artists sought to emulate the clarity and restraint of ancient works. They valued symmetry, proportion, and adherence to established rules. Yet within these constraints, they produced literature of remarkable wit and insight.

From the biting satire of Jonathan Swift to the polished verses of Alexander Pope, Neoclassical literature held a mirror up to society, celebrating human achievements while skewering human follies. Let's explore this Age of Reason and the enduring works it produced

Keywords

Classicism, Neoclassicism, Mimesis, Restoration, Satire, Sensibility

Discussion

2.3.1 Classicism and Neoclassicism

In simple terms, classicism is the predominant literature or art style of the ancient Greco-Roman period, whereas Neoclassicism is the literature or art produced later in imitation of such classics. The artistic and cultural movement of Neoclassicism originated during the 17th century in France and remained prominent in Europe till the early 19th century.

In essence, Neoclassicism propounded a revival of the ancient forms of literature and art. Classical standards were deemed as the ideal in most art forms including painting, sculpture, literature, architecture and music. Neoclassicism staunchly advocated the absolute superiority of the classical genres and viewed them as the perfect models. It explicitly tried to copy the aesthetic principles and techniques of these classical models and determined their artistic value based on the concept of mimesis. In *The Republic*, Plato described art as mimesis, the Greek term for imitation. That is, art is the imitation or representation of nature/ reality through another medium. Thus, the closer an artwork is to reality, the higher its perceived merit or value.

Rules of Composition

Neoclassical literature insisted on the strict adherence to certain classical rules. These include:

- ▶ Decorum/ propriety
- ▶ Verisimilitude (resemblance to reality)
- ▶ Purity of forms and genres
- ▶ Unities of time, place, and action

Neoclassical literature gave great importance to the theory of decorum or propriety. It viewed an art/ literary work as a combination

of parts compiled together based on their internal and external harmony. A literary work should exhibit consistency and unity in all aspects, and the form/genre of literature should be appropriate for its subject. Moreover, this sense of propriety also entails closely following the social rules and norms of the time. When it comes to drama, this means that the actors should only perform roles that correspond to their social status.

Neoclassical literature also followed the principles of classical aesthetics, such as the hierarchy of genres and the dramatic unities of time, place and action.

Each genre had a fixed place in this hierarchy. For instance, tragedy, epic, and ode were considered high genres, whereas comedy, satire, and fable were considered low. The mixture of the high and low genres – such as the tragicomedy – was highly discouraged.

Neoclassicists maintained an almost scientific approach to art, insisting that art should be conceived using reason, logic and intellect. They followed the artistic principles of classical philosophers like Aristotle and Horace. Though both Renaissance and Neoclassicism attempt to revive the classics, there are significant differences between the two movements. Let us take a look at some of the major differences between Renaissance and Neoclassicism:

- ▶ Renaissance regarded art to be a creative and spontaneous process, whereas Neoclassicism viewed it as a product of conscious study and effort.
- ▶ In contrast to the humanistic approach of the Renaissance, Neoclassicism believed that man is essentially imperfect and flawed.



- ▶ Renaissance focused on self-expression while Neoclassicism emphasised self-restraint. Moreover, Neoclassicists viewed art as, objective, rational and impersonal.
- ▶ In contrast to the creative and innovative spirit of the Renaissance, Neoclassicists believed that art attained its height of excellence during the Classical Age. To achieve similar perfection, they insisted on closely following the classical style and theories.
- ▶ Instead of the high individualism of the Renaissance, Neoclassicism viewed human nature as general and universal.

2.3.2 The Neo-Classical Age (1660-1785)

As we have already learned from the previous unit, during the Commonwealth Period/ the Interregnum, England was under parliament rule for a period of 11 years (1649-1658). However, with the ascension of Charles II – the exiled son of Charles I – in 1660, the monarchy was restored in England. The English society was finally free from the orthodox morality of Puritanism. Following Charles II's reign which lasted from 1660 to 1685, his younger brother James II took over the English throne till 1688.

The Neoclassical Age remains significant in English history as it sparked many fundamental transformations in society. This was the period during which the first political factions emerged: the Tories (conservatives) who supported Charles II's ascension and the Whigs (liberals) who opposed it. During the peak of the Neoclassical Age, England grew into a formidable empire with its aggressive, expan-

sionist, and colonialist policies in countries like India and Australia. During this period, England also took part in the practice of the African slave trade.

With the increasing trade and commercialism, the Neoclassical period marked the formation of the middle class, in addition to the existing binaries of the wealthy and the poor. The emergence of the literate middle class led to an increased demand for literary entertainment, and the fields of fiction and journalism began to develop. In short, the Neoclassical period popularised the emerging genres of magazines and newspapers, revived public theatre and conceived the genre of the novel.

The coffee houses of London city became a hotspot for reading circles and witnessed many heated discussions on the latest magazine articles. The act of drinking chocolate – expensive and exotic – became a status symbol of sorts. The modern forms of commercialism, commodification, and consumption have their roots in this age, as advertisements for clothes, furniture, etc., first made their appearance in the periodicals of the time.

Salient Features of Neoclassicism

- ▶ Imitation of Greco-Roman classics
- ▶ Age of reason and enlightenment
- ▶ Idealization of order, symmetry and harmony
- ▶ Adaptation of classical literary genres, such as epics, odes, pastorals and satires
- ▶ Idealistic and artificial
- ▶ Fostered in a highly political and urbane environment
- ▶ Elegance in structure and form
- ▶ Emphasis on wit, decorum and civility

- ▶ Restraint of emotion/imagination and focus on intellect
- ▶ Obsession with external appearances
- ▶ Emphasis on universal truths and general ideas
- ▶ The predominance of comedy and satire
- ▶ Development of journalism
- ▶ Development of the genres of diary and periodical essay
- ▶ Birth of the novel

The Neoclassical Age is also known as the Age of Reason and Enlightenment due to its emphasis on logic and rationality. Neoclassical literature can be seen as a sharp reaction against the extravagance of Renaissance literature and the complexity of Metaphysical poetry. In contrast, realism and intellect became the preferred method with which art was created and appreciated during the Neoclassical period.

The Neoclassical Age can be further divided into the Restoration Age, the Augustan Age and the Age of Sensibility.

I. The Restoration Era (1660- 1700)

As its name signifies, the Restoration era is the period during which the monarchy was restored in England. With the crowning of Charles II in 1660, the Stuart line was restored and continued its reign in England till 1700. Restoration literature is generally considered to have begun and flourished under the reign of Charles II. It was a period of conflicting and contradictory writings – from the seminal *Paradise Lost* to the biting satire of Dryden, the spiritual journey of *The Pilgrim's Progress* to the licentious comedy of the Restoration drama – it had it all.

Restoration Verse

During this era, poetic devices, such as enjambment and blank verse were discarded, and the heroic couplet became the standard form of Neoclassical verse. The heroic couplet is a rhymed couplet of iambic pentameter used in epic and narrative poetry, first introduced by Geoffrey Chaucer. Generally, Restoration poetry was written as either long verse narratives or in the form of mock epics. They often had a satirical tone and employed elevated diction and extensive allusions modelled after the classics.

▶ John Milton (1608-1674)

Major works of John Milton are *Lycidas* (1637), *L'Allegro* (1631), *Il Penseroso* (1645), *Areopagitica* (1644), *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), *Samson Agonistes* (1671). With his unconventional and rebellious writings, Milton defies the neat categorisations of periods or movements. Though he lived mostly during the Puritanical era and was a staunch supporter of the Protectorate, Milton often rebelled against the hypocrisy of Puritanism through his poetry. In this way, Milton can be considered both a Renaissance figure as well as a Restoration writer.

After Charles II's restoration, Milton was imprisoned for his support of the Protectorate. His highly erudite, lofty and Latinate literary style has left an indelible mark on English literature. His pastoral poems *L'Allegro* (1631) and *Il Penseroso* (1645) are companion poems, each narrating the conflicting states of the human psyche – joy and melancholy – respectively. His later work *Lycidas* (1637) was a pastoral elegy written for Edward King, his classmate at Cambridge who was drowned in the Irish Sea.



- ▶ *Paradise Lost* (1667): This epic poem is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of English literature. Composed of twelve books in the manner of the classic *Aeneid*, this literary epic in blank verse narrates the original Fall of Man. Milton's humanistic and compassionate portrayal of Satan in this work received criticism from his peers and won admiration from later Romantics.
- ▶ *Paradise Regained* (1671): A brief epic in comparison to *Paradise Lost*, this work also examines the theme of temptation – of Christ this time. However, the major difference is that Christ succeeds in resisting temptation and restores the paradise lost by man.
- ▶ *Samson Agonistes* (1671): Published along with *Paradise Regained*, this closet tragedy narrates the downfall and redemption of Samson, closely modelled after the conventions of the Greek tragedy.

▶ John Dryden (1631-1700)

Major works of John Dryden are *Mac Flecknoe* (1682), *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), *The Medal* (1682), *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). The most influential and representative writer of the Restoration – so much so that the period itself is referred to as the Age of Dryden. Moreover, Dryden is also considered to be the first Neoclassical critic. He made his mark in all the literary styles and genres of the time such as satire, comedy, tragedy, ode, heroic play and criticism.

Dryden's satirical poems *The Medal* and *Mac Flecknoe* can be considered to be the originators of the Neoclassical movement in English

poetry. With his characteristic style of elegant and dignified satire, Dryden praised the reign of Charles II in *Absalom and Achitophel*. Furthermore, in his mock-epic *Mac Flecknoe*, Dryden ridiculed and satirised his rival, the Whig poet Thomas Shadwell.

The mock-epic/ mock-heroic is a neoclassical genre that imitates the grand style of the classical epics while dealing with common and trivial subjects. This inversion provides a highly jarring and humorous effect to the work. Dryden also wrote numerous heroic dramas which were immensely popular on the stage such as *The Conquest of Granada* (1672) and *All for Love* (1677).

- ▶ *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668): Titled the father of English criticism by Samuel Johnson, Dryden created a milestone in modern English prose with this work. Written in the form of a debate on drama, *Essay* delineates Dryden's conflicting views on the Neoclassical rules. Though he advocates for the necessity of verisimilitude in literature, Dryden also points out the liberal use of supernatural elements by Shakespeare. He admits that by breaking the Neoclassical rules, Shakespeare has achieved greater excellence than many conventional writers.

▶ Samuel Butler (1612-1680)

Major Work of Samuel Butler are *Hudibras* (1633,1664,1678). Samuel Butler was a poet and satirist. Butler's most famous work is his long poem *Hudibras*, a bitter satire on the Puritan commonwealth. Written in octosyllabic couplets, the poem was published in three parts – in 1633,1664 and 1678.

Restoration Prose

The Restoration period witnessed the flowering of prose, with a renewed interest in language studies, grammar and dictionaries. Moreover, as individualism and self-reflection heightened, emerging genres, such as letters, diaries, essays and biographies began to gain widespread popularity. The general tone of prose writing at the time was more or less pedagogic and the writer more often than not assumed the role of a moralist.

► John Bunyan (1628–1688)

Major Works of John Bunyan are *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (1680), *The Holy War* (1682). According to many critics the desire that first motivated him to write was merely to celebrate his religion and convert others, and he was educated, like other Puritans, to scorn the adornments of style and to regard writing as a means to a goal. His command of words, whether colloquial or biblical, is that of a skilled artist. Bunyan depicted the intense spiritual struggle of man in his work *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), one of the most celebrated texts of the Restoration period. It narrates the journey of a man from the city of destruction to salvation.

Restoration Drama

The Restoration Age is regarded as the greatest age of comedy and satire in English literature. With the restoration of the monarchy, the Puritan ban on theatres was lifted. Drama re-entered English life and society as theatres reopened all across England. As if to compensate for the harsh censorship during the preceding Puritanical era, the plot lines of Neoclassical drama became increasingly licentious and even crass at times.

The Neoclassical drama was often a ploy to poke fun at the frivolities of court life and the aristocracy. It gradually developed into a distinct genre called Restoration comedy – the height of the comedy of manners. Modelled after the French dramas of Molière, the comedy of manners reveals the frivolous nature and relationships of the fashionable upper-class society. Wit, urbanity, and sparkling dialogue were the characteristic features of this genre. As they often employed brilliant, polished repartee between the characters, these dramas became famous for their liberal use of wit.

Major Restoration Comedies:

- *The Country Wife* (1675) – William Wycherley
- *The Way of the World* (1700) – William Congreve

Moreover, another significant change occurred in the Neoclassical theatre. We witness for the first time the presence of women on stage as they began to play female roles instead of men in drag as was the custom at the time.

II. The Augustan Era (1700 -1745)

The Augustan Age in Rome, named after its Emperor Augustus, is considered to be the golden era of Latin literature due to the presence of classic poets like Virgil, Horace and Ovid. The era of Neoclassical writers who followed the conventions of these classic Roman poets came to be known as the Augustan era in English. Not only did these Neoclassical writers imitate the literary style of the classic Augustans but they also translated many of their works into English.



Let us take a look at some of the representative authors of the Augustan Age.

► **Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744)**

Major works: *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), *The Dunciad* (1728), *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), *The Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1734)

The Augustan Age is alternatively known as the Age of Pope. He was a pivotal figure in the early 18th-century Neoclassical movement. He is credited with perfecting the rhymed couplet form and using it for satiric and philosophical purposes. The Augustan era is considered to have reached its end with the death of Pope in 1744.

- *The Rape of the Lock* (1714): Initially composed in two cantos and revised later in five, this heroic-comical poem is a feminine and witty take on the epic genre. Pope delightfully narrates the tale of a lock of hair being stolen from a lady and exposes the folly and vanity of the aristocracy through this poem
- “Be Homer’s works your study, and delight, Read them by day, and meditate by night.” - *An Essay on Criticism*

An Essay on Criticism (1711): This poetical treatise is considered to be one of the foundational texts of the Neoclassical movement. It is a detailed study of the concepts of nature and wit and the clearest statement of the Neoclassical principles. Pope equates nature with Homer while exploring the function of the poet and the critic in this work. Composed in heroic couplets, the work is filled with famous maxims and epigrams such as:

- “To err is humane; to forgive, divine”

- “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”
- “A little learning is a dangerous thing.”

Pope and Dryden are considered to be the masters of the heroic couplet.

► **Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745)**

Major works: *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), *A Modest Proposal* (1729), *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), *The Battle of the Books* (1704)

Swift is largely regarded as the finest literary satirist in English literature history. His satirical outlook on human nature is expressed most clearly through his famous novel *Gulliver’s Travels*. Furthermore, Swift, as a Tory, used his works to mainly criticise Whig politicians.

- *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726): In this allegorical novel in four books, Swift criticised the religious and political events of the time and satirised the figure of Robert Walpole, the Whig Prime Minister. The novel narrates the tale of Lemuel Gulliver, a surgeon-turned sailor, and his fantastical adventures on various fictional islands.
- *The Battle of the Books* (1704): An allegorical prose satire depicting the battle between the Ancients and Moderns – a hotly contested issue of the time.

► **John Gay (1699–1745)**

►

Major works: *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), *The Shepherd’s Week* (1714).

English poet and playwright, John Gay is best known as the author of *The Beggar's Opera*, a work notable for its witty satire. He was close to Alexander Pope, who influenced much of Gay's work.

- *The Beggar's Opera* (1728): Another satire on Whig politicians in general and Walpole in particular, this work follows the form of the Italian ballad opera and reveals a corrupt and morally degenerate society.

Scriblerus Club: An informal literary club formed in 1713 which includes Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, and various other Tory wits.

Augustan Age: Major Prose Writers

- **Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729)**

Addison and Steele are the pioneers of the periodical essay – the genre considered to be the truest mirror of the Augustan era in England. Richard Steele invented this literary form when he launched *The Tatler* in 1709, in which Addison was a major contributor. Soon, another periodical, *The Spectator* (1711) by the duo also gained popularity. These satirical essays formed the foundation of modern English essays.

Augustan Age: Major Novelists

- **Samuel Richardson (1689–1761)**

Major works: *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740–41), *Clarissa Harlowe: Or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747–48)

Samuel Richardson invented and used the letter form to broaden the dramatic potential of the novel. Richardson's sentimental and di-

dactic novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are written in an intimate, and confessional manner. These epistolary novels were immensely popular at the time and revealed for the first time, the intricate details of the inner life, and psyche of a female character.

- **Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)**

Major works: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722), *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722).

Daniel Defoe is well known for his works *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). During his lifetime, he rose to prominence for his poems, political pamphlets, and journalism. Defoe is often regarded as having substantially fashioned the novel as a new form of English literature.

- *Robinson Crusoe* (1719): This intricate caricature of the solitary life of a man shipwrecked on an island for twenty-eight years and his struggle for survival remains highly popular even to this day. Defoe's striking realism and eye for minute details make this novel seem more like a biography than fiction.
- *Moll Flanders* (1722): This picaresque novel narrates the adventurous life of the titular character Moll Flanders – a fiercely independent and determined woman. Derived from the Spanish term *picaro* (rogue), the picaresque novel narrates the adventures of a rogue or a low-class character, using realism and satire.

- **Henry Fielding (1707-1754)**

Major works: *Shamela* (1741), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Tom Jones* (1749).



Along with Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding is also regarded as the pioneer of the English novel. Fielding wrote *Shamela* as a parody of the sentimental morality of Richardson's *Pamela*. Fielding's playful use of humour and satire also becomes apparent through his picaresque novels *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Fielding wrote these novels as a form of social commentary and sharply criticised the spiritual barrenness of the Neoclassical society.

► **Eliza Haywood (1693–1756)**

Major works: *The Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo* (1736), *Anti-Pamela* (1741)

Haywood wrote numerous sensational and passionate romantic novels heavily based on the scandals of the time. Her spirited works often drew intense criticism from her male contemporaries like Pope and Swift. As a reaction to the popular but problematic novel *Pamela*, Haywood wrote the parody *Anti-Pamela*.

Furthermore, she published *The Female Spectator* in 1744 – the first periodical to be written exclusively by and for women.

Augustan Drama

A reaction against the indecency and licentiousness of Restoration comedy, a new genre called Sentimental comedy began to develop in England. Instead of mockery and satire, these dramas portrayed the lives of the common people with sympathy and compassion. The virtues and morality of the middle class were highlighted instead of the vices. Often evoking tears instead of laughter, Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) is one of the major examples of this genre.

III. The Age of Sensibility (1744–1789)

As its title indicates, this era marks a major shift in ideology – from the Neoclassical focus on reason and logic to the original Renaissance spirit. Highly contradicting the intellectual inclination of Neoclassicism, the literature of this period emphasises qualities like instinct, emotion and imagination. Previously known as pre-romanticism, it was the critic, Northrop Frye who identified and named this period the Age of Sensibility.

This period witnessed the gradual waning of the Neoclassical spirit and a growing preference for emotional and aesthetic values instead. The Age of Sensibility precedes and anticipates the English Romantic movement and is sometimes referred to as the Age of Transition. The period ended when the French Revolution broke out in 1789. Alternatively, 1798 is also considered its end due to the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Representative Authors:

► **Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709 -1784)**

Major works: *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), *The History of Rasselas* (1759), *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), *The Life of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1781). Due to Dr. Samuel Johnson's towering presence and countless literary achievements in genres such as essays, biography, travelogue, journalism, and criticism, the period from mid 1700's to 1798 is commonly referred to as the Age of Johnson. Dr. Johnson's nine-year-long work *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) is one of the major literary outputs of the period. It remained the foremost dictionary

in English language until the publication of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1928). From 1750 to 1752, Johnson published a series of essays in his periodical called *The Rambler*. Using highly ornate and elevated language, Johnson touched on various topics, such as politics, morality and religion.

- ▶ *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1781): From Milton to Gray, Johnson chronicled the lives and works of 52 major poets of English literature. The work is remarkable for its detailed, comparative analysis of the life, social context and works of each poet.
- ▶ Dr Johnson's biography, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, was written by his close friend James Boswell in 1791.
- ▶ *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765): This work remains as one of the earliest and most influential pieces of literary criticism where Johnson defended Shakespeare for his apparent violation of the classical rules.

Novel of Sensibility

Pioneered by writers such as Richardson and Fielding, the novel grew into a more prominent and popular form during the Age of Sensibility. Instead of action, the novels of this period relied on the emotional response of the characters as well as the reader to advance the plot.

- ▶ **Laurence Sterne (1713–1768)**

Major works: *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) An Irish born English novelist, Laurence Sterne's masterpiece, *The Life and Opinions*

of Tristram Shandy, is a highly experimental novel in nine volumes. It is a delightful blend of the comic and absurd with moral and sentimental elements. In essence, *Tristram Shandy* is considered an anti-novel – the parody of the genre of novel. Moreover, the work contains many postmodern elements such as self-reflexivity, stream of consciousness and pastiche. Pastiche is the combination or imitation of the styles of past arts or literature.

- ▶ **Frances Burney (1752–1840)**

Major works: *Evelina: Or The History of A Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), *Cecilia: Or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) Frances Burney, often known as Fanny Burney, an English novelist and letter writer who wrote *Evelina*, a seminal work in the evolution of the book of manners.

- ▶ *Evelina* (1778): Burney's skilful use of domestic comedy in this epistolary novel became the classic model for later writers like Jane Austen.

2.3.3 Drama

As a reaction against sentimental comedy, a new genre known as anti-sentimental comedy was developed by playwrights like Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan during this period. Brilliantly employing wit without resorting to indecency, this genre distinguished itself from the licentious Restoration drama and the maudlin sentimental comedy.

2.3.3.1 Major Dramatists

- ▶ **Oliver Goldsmith (1728 -1774)**

Major works: *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), *The Citizen of the World* (1762). Goldsmith's remarkable career began as a writer for Ralph Griffith's *Monthly Review*.



He also contributed to *The Bee* and *The Public Ledger* with writings. Goldsmith's reputation as a poet, writer, and dramatist grew as a result of his pleasant, accessible writing style and the assistance of numerous prominent acquaintances. *She Stoops to Conquer*, subtitled 'The Mistakes of a Night,' is a comedic drama filled of misplaced identities and clever repartee that cemented his playwriting talents. *She Stoops to Conquer* was a massive hit and has become one of the most popular English-language plays from the era.

- ▶ *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766): Goldsmith's only novel is a memoir of the fictional Dr. Primrose and the fortunes and misfortunes that befall his family.
- ▶ **Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816)**

Major works: *The School for Scandal* (1777), *The Rivals* (1775), *The Critic* (1781).

Richard Brinsley Sheridan is yet another Irish playwright who advanced the genre of anti-sentimental comedy apart from Goldsmith. Sheridan is well-known for his quick-witted and humorous comedy of manners.

The School for Scandal (1777): A daring mixture of sentimental comedy and comedy of manners. The complex plot of this play exposes the disparity between the appearance and reality of its characters.

Poetry

As the Neoclassical ideals of reason and logic began to wane, a group of poets termed the Graveyard School of Poetry began to explore themes of mystery, mortality and melancholy. Elegy was the preferred form of this school and their works anticipated the Gothic novel in English.

Major works:

- ▶ *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751) by Thomas Gray
- ▶ *Night Thoughts* (1742) by Edward Young
- ▶ *The Grave* (1743) by Robert Blair

The Neoclassical period in many ways strongly advocated the return of classicism. The period attempted to bring back ideals of the classical times such as order, structure, and logic into literature and life. Thus, the Neoclassical period also contributed in shaping the literary tastes and values of the succeeding periods.

Recap

- ▶ Neoclassicism - the revival of classicism
- ▶ Rules of composition - Neoclassical literature strictly followed certain classical rules in its composition
- ▶ Mimesis - the Greek term for imitation
- ▶ Decorum - the appropriate deliverance of action, speech, character or scene
- ▶ Dramatic unities - time, place and action
- ▶ Neoclassical age is also known as Age of Enlightenment and Age of Reason
- ▶ Restoration Age - Monarchy restored in England
- ▶ Heroic couplet - it became the standard form of Neoclassical verse
- ▶ John Milton - Renaissance figure as well as Restoration writer
- ▶ Dryden - considered the first Neoclassical critic.
- ▶ Restoration comedy - made fun of the frivolities and the court life and the aristocracy
- ▶ Periodical essay - Richard Steele invented this form
- ▶ Sentimental comedy - it developed as a reaction against the Restoration comedy
- ▶ Age of sensibility - previously known as pre-romanticism
- ▶ Age of transition - the period witnessed the gradual waning of Neoclassicism
- ▶ Graveyard School of Poetry - explored themes of mystery, morality and melancholy

Objective Questions

1. Where did the Neoclassical movement originate?
2. Name the work in which Plato describes the concept of mimesis.
3. What are the three dramatic unities?
4. Which classical genres are considered to be high genres?
5. Which are the major classical genres that were adapted by the Neoclassical writers?
6. What are the subdivisions of the Neo-classical Age?
7. Who is called the father of English criticism?
8. Name an important mock-epic by Dryden.
9. What was the standard form of Neoclassical poetry?
10. Name two major Restoration comedies.
11. What is the alternative name of the Augustan Age?
12. Name the literary club of Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and John Gay.
13. Who launched *The Tatler* in 1709?
14. When was *The Spectator* launched?
15. Who was the creator of *The Female Spectator*?



16. Name the writers known as the pioneers of the English novel.
17. Which critic named the period the Age of Sensibility?
18. Who is the representative author of this period?
19. When was *A Dictionary of the English Language* published?
20. Name the periodical by Dr Johnson.
21. Who wrote *The Life of Samuel Johnson*?
22. What are two examples of anti-sentimental comedy?
23. What is the name of the group of 18th century poets who wrote mournful poems on death?
24. Which major period of English literature is preceded by The Age of Sensibility?

Answers

1. France.
2. *The Republic*.
3. Time, place, and action.
4. Tragedy, epic, and ode.
5. Epics, pastorals, and satires.
6. The Restoration Age, The Augustan Age, The Age of Sensibility.
7. John Dryden.
8. *Mac Flecknoe*.
9. Heroic couplet.
10. *The Country Wife*, *The Way of the World*.
11. Age of Pope.
12. Scriblerus Club.
13. 1711.
14. Richard Steele.
15. Eliza Haywood.
16. Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding.
17. Northrop Frye.
18. Samuel Johnson.
19. 1755.
20. *The Rambler*.
21. James Boswell.
22. *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The School for Scandal*.
23. The Graveyard School of Poetry.
24. The Romantic Age.

Assignments

1. Write a brief note on the characteristics of Neoclassical period.
2. Write a short note on the major differences between Classicism, Neoclassicism and Renaissance.
3. Comment on the major themes used in literary works during the Neoclassical period.
4. Why is the Neoclassical Period called so? Explain.
5. Write brief note on the different ages in the Neoclassical Period.
6. What are the basic similarities and differences between classicism and neoclassicism?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Charles, Victoria. *Neoclassicism*, Parkstone International, 2019.
- ▶ Hart, Jonathan. *Reading the Renaissance: Culture, Poetics, and Drama*. Routledge, 1996.
- ▶ Johnson, Paul. *The Renaissance: A Short History*. Modern Library, 2002.
- ▶ Wells, Stanley. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.

BLOCK - 03

Major Periods of Literature - II

Unit 1

The Romantic Age

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into the socio-cultural background of the period
- ▶ detail the characteristics of the period
- ▶ identify some of the major works of the period
- ▶ define features of the dominant literary genres of the period

Prerequisites

A misty English meadow at dawn. In the distance, you spot a solitary figure scribbling furiously in a notebook. As you approach, you realize it's a poet, utterly absorbed in capturing the beauty around him in verse. This scene embodies the spirit of the Romantic age in literature.

The air is charged with possibility. Change is sweeping across Europe - new ideas about individual rights and democracy are spreading like wildfire. The old certainties are crumbling, and people are questioning everything they once held true. It's an exhilarating and terrifying time to be alive.

In this atmosphere of upheaval, artists and writers are turning inward, exploring the landscapes of the heart and mind. They're rejecting the cold logic of the past in favor of emotion, imagination, and a deep connection with the natural world. Nature becomes not just a backdrop, but a living, breathing presence in their work.

You might stumble upon a group of friends gathered by a fireside, sharing ghost stories that send shivers down your spine. Or perhaps you'd find yourself in a cozy London bookshop, leafing through a newly published collection of poems that speaks of love, longing, and the sublime beauty of a starry night.

The Romantic writers are rebels, pushing against the constraints of tradition. They celebrate the individual, the unique, the original. They find beauty in the simple and the everyday, giving voice to people and experiences often overlooked by society.



But it's not all flowers and sunsets. There's a darker undercurrent to the age - a fascination with the mysterious, the gothic, the supernatural. Ruined castles loom in the mist, and ancient legends come to life on the page.

As we explore this era, we'll see how these writers forever changed the literary landscape. Their ideas about nature, imagination, and the power of the individual continue to shape our world today. So let's step back in time and immerse ourselves in the passionate, turbulent, and endlessly creative world of the Romantics.

Keywords

Imagination, Emotion, Nature, Individualism, Transformation

Discussion

You might be familiar with the term 'romantic'. Often, it refers to a situation where fantasies and emotions triumph over reality. The principle of romanticism, the literary movement that began in English literature in the late eighteenth century, is similar.

In reaction to the widespread upheavals that came about in the "age of revolutions", the Romantic Movement represents a shift of literary and artistic sensibilities. It is marked by a celebration of nature, emotions, imagination and common people, often focusing intensely on the unique perspective of individuals.

Here, we must note that such changes conflicted with the neoclassical style of writing which was dominant in the preceding era. Neoclassical philosophy viewed humans as inherently flawed, and upheld rational thinking as superior to feelings or emotions. The models of classical Greek and Roman texts were followed, giving great significance to form, order and decorum.

The neoclassicists discouraged experimentation and radical deviations from established models. Their insistence on self-restraint and refinement often led neoclassical literary output to very specific, repeated types of writings.

The "age of revolutions" is a period in European history, roughly spanning the years from 1775 to 1848. During this time, society witnessed 'revolutions' in almost all areas of life – political, social, cultural, economic and technological. This includes the American and French Revolutions as well as the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The impact of this era is widely discussed even today. Explore this in more detail.

'Romantic' Literature draws its name from 'romance', an old literary form where "dreams and desires prevail over everyday realities" (Drabble 888). The heroes of such romance stories were often knights and warriors who would set out on an adventure full of marvellous incidents and mysterious happenings. Most literatures in the world have such narratives. Can you think of any in your language?

With the emergence of the romantic movement, the attention fell to the inner workings of the individual writer's mind. No single model could be used to capture the unique emotions or viewpoints that each person is capable of. Such aspects could not be expressed in a particular form or order, nor could they be presented rationally. Therefore, Romanticism adopted new forms of expression that presented their 'radical' worldview of humans as diverse and free.

"The Tyger" – William Blake (1757-1827)

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,

Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
Explore the poetry of William Blake .

Of course, this does not mean that neoclassical and romantic writers were strictly separated by time. In fact, the later parts of the neoclassical era saw many writers moving away from the rigid literary ideals of the time. Their poetry displayed early tendencies of romanticism, such as a focus on nature and a shift towards simpler, more natural forms of expression. There was also a renewed emphasis on genuine emotion, creativity, sensibility and imagination. This came to be referred to as the 'Romantic Revival'.

"The Seasons", written by James Thurber, is widely considered to be one of the first poems of this school. Composed as a cycle of four poems between 1926 and 1930, the poem explored and celebrated the variety of nature. Following this, in the years leading up to the Romantic Movement, English poetry went through a phase of transition from neoclassicism.

The poets of this period are commonly considered to be the precursors of romanticism, as they set the stage for the later emergence of the romantic poets. Some of the most significant names in this context include William Cowper, George Crabbe, William Blake, Thomas Gray and Robert Burns.

Romanticism represents a shift towards a new 'literary sensibility.' It celebrated the individual, the subjective, the imaginative, the spontaneous and the emotional as valid, unique perspectives. It emphasised a sense of idealism and revolutionary zest. A common thread among the romantics was a deep appreciation of nature, specifically as a source of beauty and delight.

In general, romanticism exalted emotion over reason, and the senses over intellectual faculty. Unlike the literary model of neoclassicism, human personality, moods and mental activity would take centre-stage in romantic literature. There was a significance given to the "the genius, the hero, and the exceptional figure in general and a focus on his or her passions and inner struggles" (britannica.com). The creative spirit of the artist, his or her imagination, was given greater significance rather than their ability to mimic traditional rules. Folk culture, national and ethnic cultural forms, and references to the mediaeval era saw a revival in the literary output of the era. Further, the mysterious and the supernatural were also explored.

Even though romantic impulses could be seen much earlier, the year 1798 is seen as a milestone in the history of the English Romantic Movement. It witnessed the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems written by



William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. Deviating from the poetic pattern of the age, the works in this collection used “incidents and situations from common life” as their subject matter (B. Prasad 169). They used the language of plain, everyday life which could be understood by common people.

Yet, the ordinary subject matters of these poems were presented in a deeply imaginative manner. This was done so that the reader would view the subject in an unusual or mysterious way. For instance, Wordsworth transforms the simple act of seeing daffodils into a deep emotional experience in the poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”:

“They [Daffodils] flash upon that inward eye/
Which is the bliss of solitude;/And then my
heart with pleasure fills,/And dances with the
daffodils.”

This passion for discovering new pleasures in the ordinary world around them is a salient part of romanticism. The idea was that literature might be open to readers from all walks of life. However, this alone does not make up the entire range of romantic literature in English. Some of the major features of the Romantic movement are:

(i) A Reaction Against Neoclassicism

In the poem “Endymion”, John Keats writes, “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” The poem refers to the delight brought on by the sight of a beautiful object. Note the simplicity of the language used. The focus is on an incident taken from everyday life. This is an example of the way that Romantic literature resisted the neoclassical style of writing.

Romanticism rejected the neoclassical emphasis on rules, order and convention. Instead of the more lavish diction and themes favoured

by the neoclassical writers, the Romantic writers turned their attention to common life. More importance was given to spontaneity and originality than to the imitation of classical literature. Inspired by the message of the French revolution, the Romantic movement also leaned towards high idealism.

(ii) Emphasis on Imagination

The poem “Kubla Khan” opens with the following lines: “In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/A stately pleasure-dome decree.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge composed it, based on an opium-influenced dream that he saw. The poem uses fantasy and supernatural elements to great effect.

This illustrates the role of imagination in the works of Romantic writers. They considered imagination to be a powerful tool of the human mind. Often, it was defined as the opposite of intellect, which was celebrated in neoclassical writings. The critical writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, to name a few, discussed the power of the imagination to ‘create’ and ‘shape’ reality.

(iii) Representation of Nature

Walter Scott describes the beauty of the Scottish landscapes in his novel *Rob Roy*, “But certainly this noble lake, boasting innumerable beautiful islands, of every varying form and outline which fancy can frame, – its northern extremity narrowing until it is lost among dusky and retreating mountains, – while, gradually widening as it extends southward, it spreads its base around the indentures and promontories of a fair and fertile land, affords one of the most surprising, beautiful, and sublime spectacles in nature...”

The Romantic writers paid great attention to the representation of nature in their works.

Since they were writing during a period of heavy industrialisation, the writers of the age stressed the need for returning ‘back to nature’. Nature was presented as a source of spiritual renewal in their works. Accurate descriptions of natural phenomena, natural beauty and the appeal of nature to the senses are important aspects in Romantic literature.

(iv) Significance of Emotion

William Wordsworth famously defined poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.” As seen here, the Romantic movement placed emotions as a vital part of literature. Feelings, intuitions and impulses were celebrated in the works of the Romantic authors. The literature of the period came to be associated with expressing individuality and selfhood.

(v) Individuality

The unique, irrational and emotional perspectives of the ‘individual’ is crucial in the romantic movement. It provided a variety of subject matter. Further, romanticism also viewed the artist or writer as an ‘individual’ creator, whose output reflected his or her personality and mental state.

(vi) The Everyday and the Exotic

John Keats’ poem “Ode to a Nightingale” shares the speaker’s experience of listening to the beautiful song of a nightingale. The common, everyday incident is transformed into an exotic one.

“Ode to a Nightingale” – John Keats (1795-1821)

My heart aches, and a drowsy
numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I
had drunk...
But being too happy in thine happiness,
That thou, light-winged Dryad
of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows
numberless
Singest of summer in full-throated
ease.

Romantic writers to intermix happenings from common life with fantasy and mystery. This technique allowed them to transform the subject of their writings, often taken from everyday life, in a way that enriches their literary appeal.

(vii) Supernatural Elements

The supernatural and the occult were frequently used in Romantic literature. Many authors of the period presented elements that seemed to exist outside the natural. For instance, Lord Byron’s poem “Darkness” has a mysterious setting where “...the bright sun was extinguished ...”

Romantic literature often contained stories taken from supernatural and mythical sources. The imagery and symbols used in Romantic poetry, too, displayed the same inspiration. Castles, dark forests, magical beings, mystical visions and dreams would appear in these works. These elements often provided a way of exploring abstract, unexplainable ideas.

One of the influences on the Romantic movement in England is *Sturm und Drang* [Storm and Stress], a German movement of the late eighteenth century. It also celebrated nature, individuality, subjectivity and extreme emotions.



Some of the most significant names associated with this movement are Friedrich von Klinger, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller. It is often considered to be a forerunner of English Romanticism.

There are several recurring themes in Romantic literature, such as innocence, celebration of rural life, dangers of urban society, pantheism and the self. These themes are typically presented in an emotional, subjective style, though each individual author has their own unique approach. Romantic poetry emerged as the dominant literary genre of the period. This is largely due to the belief that poetry was closer to emotional expression than prose.

One of the most representative poets of the time was William Wordsworth (1770-1850), whose poetry changed the existing ideals of the genre. He objected to the rigid following of literary rules, over-stylisation and universal subjects in poetry.

Rather, Wordsworth tried to revolutionise poetry through his selection of simple incidents and humble people as the focus of his work. His poems were written in the 'language of conversation'. The style suited the everyday nature of its theme. The spirit of the French Revolution had deeply influenced the poet who went on to use themes of individualism and liberty in his poetry.

Troubled by the rapid industrialisation of the age, Wordsworth presented the "beauteous-forms" of nature as a healing power. In collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, he published *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) which gradually became a manifesto for other Romantic poets. In 1800, the second edition of the collection was published, which included a preface outlining Wordsworth's poetic principles.

It is here that he defines poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings..."

His other significant works are *The Prelude*, a long autobiographical poem, and *Poems, in Two Volumes*, a collection that includes "Ode to Duty" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality". His poetry often focuses on the beauty of common-place things. This is displayed in his well-known poems such as, "Michael", "The Idiot Boy", "Lucy", "The Solitary Reaper", "Daffodils", "The Rainbow", "Resolution and Independence" and the sonnet, "The World is Too Much with Us".

Another significant poet in the tradition of Romantic poetry is Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). He, however, represents a different kind of romanticism. Though he contributed four poems to *Lyrical Ballads*, his style of writing and ideas about poetry differed greatly from his collaborator's (Wordsworth).

In general, Coleridge's poetry showed some of the most visible features of Romanticism – love of liberty, revolutionary zeal, idealism, lyrical language and a focus on nature. But he put forward a different notion about the language of poetry.

Coleridge suggested that "every man's language varies ...according to the breadth of his knowledge, his mental faculty, and his temperament" (B. Prasad 188). In other words, the manner in which people express themselves differ according to their social and educational background.

Thus, the language of the common man, which Wordsworth used in his works, would not really be uniform. Rather, there would be many variations with their own features. Therefore, Coleridge chose to use poetic language that could be differentiated from the language of common speech.

Further, his themes were taken from a supernatural world full of magic, mystery, and awe, and beautified with rich imagination and narration. Using symbols from exotic and occult sources, Coleridge created poetic worlds that seemed like a fantastic hallucination. In his most famous poetic works, such as “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, “Kubla Khan” “Christabel”, and “Dejection: An Ode”, we can see the use of exotic imagery, supernatural elements, and melancholic themes.

His critical treatise, titled *Biographia Literaria* (1817), explores the creative process through which art is produced. In it, he discusses imagination and its powers of shaping and creating new forms out of pre-existing impressions.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were close friends and collaborators for most of their lives. However, both men had conflicting opinions on poetry. Each of them had their own ideas about the function of poetry and poetic language.

Robert Southey (1774-1843), a close associate of Wordsworth and Coleridge, composed poems in the romantic style, such as “Thalaba the Destroyer”, “Madoc”, “The Curse of Kehama” and “Roderick the Last of the Goths”. He drew heavily from mythological and supernatural sources for his works. A few of his best-known short poems include, “The Scholar”, “Auld Clouts”, “The Well of St. Keyne”, “The Inchcape Rock” and “Lodore”. He was made poet laureate in 1813.

Together with Wordsworth and Coleridge, Southey made up a trio of ‘lake poets’, so named for their residence in the Lake District. It must be noted that, even though all these poets were initially inspired by the French revolution, all of them would later condemn

the violence and terror unleashed during its course. Rather than liberalism, their political philosophies would shift towards conservative values.

The later era of romanticism in poetry witnessed the emergence of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), a poet who put forward radical views, revolutionary idealism and social upheaval. Influenced by the anarchist philosophies of William Godwin, his works called for change in the oppressive ways of society. While the language of his poetry was never ornamental or exaggerated, it was full of powerful imagery and symbolism.

The idea was to evoke powerful emotions in the readers that would persuade them to see the urgency for political and social reform. His body of poetry also highlighted imagination, nature, supernaturalism, melancholy, beauty, Hellenism, lyricism, subjectivity and idealism. His first significant poem was “Queen Mab”, which advocated for the elimination of certain social institutions.

This was followed by works, such as “The Revolt of Islam”, “The Cenci”, “Prometheus Unbound” and “Alastor, the Spirit of Solitude”. His shorter poetry includes “Ode to the West Wind”, “To a Skylark”, “Ozymandias”, “The Indian Serenade” and “When the Lamp is Shattered”. One of his most renowned works is “Adonais” which was written in memory of John Keats, a fellow poet.

William Godwin (1756-1836) was an English social philosopher whose writings supported atheism, anarchism, and personal freedom. He rejected religion and conventional government. His partner, Mary Wollstonecraft was a prominent



feminist. She wrote one of the earliest tracts on women's rights – *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Shelley entered into a relationship with Godwin's daughter, Mary, and eventually married her in 1816. Mary was herself an author, and published many works including *Frankenstein* (1818).

While Shelley's poetry was striking for its powerful imagery and call for transformation, John Keats (1795-1821) composed works that were compelling for their poetic beauty. His writing style features imagery that appeals to the senses. Keats' poetry contains many poetic devices, such as metaphors, alliteration, personification and assonance. This gave his works a distinctive musical quality.

Commonly, themes of love, beauty, joy, nature and mortality appear in his poems. The pursuit of beauty and the removal of the self are dominant concerns of his poetry. Yet, he holds the spirit of Romanticism in his focus on familiar things and everyday objects.

His most famous volume of poems is titled "Endymion", and it was followed up with works, such as "Isabella", "Lamia", "The Eve of St. Agnes", "La Belle Dame Sans Mercy", and "Hyperion". He has written beautiful odes on various subjects where romantic sadness, pensive mood and indolence are captured.

Some of his most significant odes are "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode on Indolence," "Ode on Melancholy," "Ode to a Nightingale," and "Ode to Psyche." He developed the concept of 'negative capability' which refers to the mental capacity of artists to pursue a thought even when it leads them to confusion and intellectual doubt.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) is, perhaps, considered to be the most flamboyant of the Romantic poets. His claim to popularity lies, just as much in his controversial public life as in his range of poems and satires. One of his early publications, *Hours of Idleness*, provoked severe criticism from the *Edinburgh Review*, a literary magazine. Byron's response was to write the satire titled "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" which brought him fame.

His ability to incorporate different writing styles including satire, neoclassicism, and romanticism makes him unique among the romantic poets. Despite this, we can identify him as a Romantic writer because of his championing of liberty, love of nature imagery and use of medieval elements.

Another significant poet of the age was Leigh Hunt (1784-1859). A supporter of liberalism, he associated closely with Wordsworth, Byron, Keats and Shelley. He wrote long poems such as "The Story of Rimini" and shorter poetic pieces such as "The Nile" and "Abou Ben Adhem". His works followed the style of Romanticism.

The period also saw the contributions of many other poets, such as Thomas Moore (1779-1852), Thomas Campbell (1777-1844), Samuel Rogers (1763-1855), James Hogg (1770-1835), Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) and John Clare (1793-1864).

Which among these romantic poets is your favourite? Why? Explore their works in more detail here: www.poetry-foundation.org.

Prose was another significant literary genre of the Romantic era. Despite the significance given to poetry, prose-writers of the romantic age were recognised for their contributions. The prose of the period saw changes in subject matter and manner of expression. There was no serious experimentation, however, with form.

There was a preference for spontaneity and entertainment rather than for formality and educational value. The best prose-writers of the age, thus, blended some stylistic aspects of romanticism with autobiographical elements.

The most well-known of the romantic essayists is Charles Lamb (1775-1834). He wrote in an intimate or personal style that helped to change the way prose was viewed. As can be witnessed in Lamb's *Essays of Elia* and *Last Essays*, the personality of the writer comes to the fore and engages with the readers. Taking on a conversational tone, the essays presented the author himself, his experiences and struggles in life.

Interestingly, he focused on urban life, its pleasures and occupations, and interpreted them with great insight and sympathy. His informality and gentle humour, according to Walter Pater, hides deeper meanings and profound feelings. Even though it might seem that his content is trivial, or unimportant, at first glance, it is a way of exploring the complexities of the world without being too obscure or problematic.

Lamb's essays are narrated through the sentimental, fictional figure of 'Elia' who stands in for the author himself. Often, his style has been described as 'quaint' since it has a charming, old-fashioned appeal.

In addition to this, he is known to change his vocabulary and tone according to the subjects

he is writing about. Starting in a tone of gentle persuasion, he leads his readers to see life as he views it. In this way, Lamb presents a combination of personal and universal interest, innovative style and quaint appeal, without over-imposing himself.

Charles Lamb, along with his sister, Mary Lamb, wrote a children's book titled *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). In it, they retold twenty of Shakespeare's plays as stories. Charles was responsible for rewriting the tragedies while Mary dealt with the retelling of the comedies.

The literary personality of William Hazlitt (1778-1830) was directly in opposition to that of Lamb's. He was aggressive and forthright with his judgment, and had strong opinions about the world. This is reflected in his essay-writing.

Of the many volumes of essays that he wrote, *The Spirit of the Age* is the most renowned. In it, he gives sincere, critical portraits of many of his contemporaries. His style intermixed humour with intellect, putting ideas forward in brief, abrupt sentences.

The interpretations made in his work reveal an acute and accurate power of observation. They carry an undercurrent of deep thought and feeling. One of the highlights of Hazlitt's prose is its clear, straightforward and outspoken nature.

For example, writing about Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher, Hazlitt states: "...He is one of those who prefer the artificial to the natural in most things..." (Ardhendu De). Such critical observations are typical of his writing. Throughout his works, there are references to other writers and echoes of their style mingled with Hazlitt's own way of writing.



Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) is known for his 'impassioned prose,' through which he described incidents of a personal nature in language suited to the different subjects dealt with. It could be said that his style combines the best elements of prose and poetry, combining imagination and melody.

His essays were closer to the decorative style of Elizabethan writers than the classicist writings of the era immediately before him. He incorporated long digressions, or deviations from the main theme, in his works. Often, he interrupted profound passages with a trivial joke. Being an intellectual writer with many interests, he wrote about all sorts of subjects including life in general, art, literature, philosophy and religion.

His works also consisted of autobiographical sketches, where he presented himself and his intimate experiences. The best-known of the same is his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which provides glimpses of his own life under the influence of opium.

Aldous Huxley, the English writer, famously described the 'essay' as a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything. Across time, essay writing has become an important professional and academic skill.

He has also written biographies of classical, literary, and historical personalities, and has composed analytical commentary on literature. His historical essay on Joan of Arc, and his interpretative essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" are examples of his skilful writing.

During the Romantic period, the genre of the novel was beginning to gain popularity. They became a source of entertainment for people

who had leisure time. Before the emergence of the Romantic novelists, a group of writers wrote novels centred around terror and medievalism. Such works were referred to as 'Gothic novels'.

Gothic novels were often set in dark, gloomy castles. Their plotlines were full of supernatural happenings, mysteries and secrets. Two of the most prominent writers of Gothic fiction were Horace Walpole and Anne Radcliffe. They wrote *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* respectively. Gothic works are often classified as pre-romantic in nature.

Jane Austen (1775-1817) is an important name in the history of English fiction for a variety of reasons. She is credited with refining and simplifying the English novel into a reflection of English life. Her portrayals of social life moved away from the extravagance of Gothic novels.

Importantly, she brought realistic, yet satirical portrayals of womanhood into the English novel that had either idealised or stereotyped women in multiple ways. In all, she wrote six novels — *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*. Of these, *Pride and Prejudice* is perhaps the most widely read.

Austen contained the world of her fiction in a narrow space, writing mostly about what she observed and understood from her surroundings. Simple country folk became characters in her novels, and their interest in social mobility and matrimony became her themes. Her fictional settings excluded political interests and the tragic struggles of life. Austen's accurate power of observation, impartiality, and delicate, ironical sense of humour enriched her fiction.

On the other hand, her contemporary, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), possessed qualities entirely different from Austen. It has been said that, where Austen's novels were domestic, Scott dealt with the broad canvas of history.

In other words, Scott's fiction is set on a much larger scale that covers high passions, struggles and great actions. Initially, he wrote novels of personal observation and local colour, such as *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality* and *The Heart of Midlothian*.

However, it was Scott's mastery of the historical novel that truly set him apart. He composed works, such as *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, *Quentin Durward*, and *The Talisman*. His writing often shifts into detailed descriptions of nature and interiors, creating beautiful passages of literature. Further, these works awakened Scottish consciousness because of their retelling and celebration of Scottish history.

The other popular novelists of the age include Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), John Galt (1779-1839), William Harrison Ainsworth (1805-82), George P. R. James (1801-60) and Frederick Marryat (1792-1848). These writers contributed novels that were popular at the time, but are not widely read today.

The significant dramas of the Romantic era were largely written by its major poets. The most popular genre of the period was tragedy. Wordsworth's *The Borderers*, and Coleridge's *Remorse* were some of the most important tragedies of the time. In line with the larger Romantic movement, the appeal of these plays were to the emotion, rather than the intellect. The protagonists were often rebellious, and the storylines promoted individualism.

Another prominent dramatic genre of the time was the 'closet-drama' – plays that were meant to be read instead of being presented onstage. These were also referred to as 'Mental drama'. Shelley's *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound*, and Lord Byron's *Manfred* and *Cain* are examples of the same.

Tracing the history of the Romantic period, we are able to see that there was immense output in poetry, prose, fiction and drama. The literature of the age produced new forms of expression and saw the emergence of new perspectives. In the works of the period, incidents and common experiences from everyday life were presented in beautiful and mysterious ways. In this way, Romantic literature found beauty in the life of common folks and the natural world around them.

The picaresque novel is an early form where the adventures of a rogue or a person from lower social classes are told. They were popular till the mid-eighteenth century when the modern novel began to rise. With this, picaresque novels began to be considered an inferior form of literature. Even so, in the Romantic period, Charles Lever found success with the publication of a picaresque novel titled *Harry Lorrequer* (1839). Find out more about this genre here: <https://www.britannica.com/art/picaresque-novel>



Recap

- ▶ Romanticism celebrates nature, emotions, imagination and common people
- ▶ Opposed to neoclassicism which focuses on order, intellect, reason and universalism
- ▶ Romanticism and the 'age of revolutions'
- ▶ Pre-romantics like William Blake and Thomas Gray set the stage for the emergence of the romantic movement
- ▶ 1798 publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge is a milestone
- ▶ Features of romanticism include reaction against rules and conventions, imagination, love of Nature, individualism, emotion, everyday themes, exotic sources, supernatural elements
- ▶ These features of romanticism can be seen in poetry, prose, fiction and drama
- ▶ Poetry given priority during this period - prose considered further from emotional expression
- ▶ Lake poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, brought in emotion, individual perspectives and new writing style
- ▶ Later romantics Shelley, Keats and Byron continued romantic characteristics with small changes
- ▶ Leigh Hunt and other minor poets
- ▶ Three significant prose writers Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey follow personal, forceful and ornate styles respectively
- ▶ Prominent novelists of the age are Austen and Scott who write domestic and historical fiction respectively
- ▶ Minor novelists
- ▶ Significant dramatic works by major poets of the period
- ▶ Closet-drama

Objective Questions

1. Which literary period came before the romantic age?
2. Who published *Lyrical Ballads*?
3. Whose works set the stage for the romantic poets?
4. What was the primary subject of romantic literature?
5. Why did poetry become a dominant genre in the romantic period?
6. Who are the Lake poets?

7. How did Wordsworth transform poetic language?
8. What is the name of Coleridge's critical treatise?
9. Which romantic poet is famous for powerful imagery and revolutionary zeal?
10. What is the title of Byron's satirical response?
11. Which artistic concept did Keats explore?
12. Who are the important romantic prose-writers?
13. Which style of novel focuses on terror and mysteries?
14. What is the difference between the themes of Austen and Scott?
15. What kind of drama is *The Cenci*?

Answers

1. The Neoclassical Age
2. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge
3. Pre-romantics
4. Nature
5. Poetry was considered to be closer to emotional expression.
6. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey
7. By writing about everyday themes in the language of common folks
8. *Biographia Literaria*
9. P.B. Shelley
10. "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers"
11. Negative capability
12. Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincy
13. Gothic Novels
14. Austen and Scott wrote domestic and historical fiction respectively.
15. Closet-drama

Assignments

1. Which poet wrote “The Solitary Reaper”?
2. What is ‘negative capability’?
3. Which novelist was famous for presenting portraits of womanhood?
4. Briefly describe the writing style of Charles Lamb.
5. Who were the pre-romantic poets?
6. Write a short note on the salient features of romanticism in English literature.
7. Briefly discuss the genre of the ‘Gothic Novel’ in English.
8. Explore the role of the Lake Poets in the history of Romantic literature.
9. How are imagination and emotion treated in Romantic literature?
10. Examine the contributions of the Romantic dramatists.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford UP, 1979.
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- ▶ Evans, Ifor. *A Short History of English Literature*. Penguin, 1965.
- ▶ Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Significance*. Rupa, 2015.
- ▶ Milne, Ira Mark. *Literary Movements for Students*. Gale, 2008.
- ▶ “Romanticism”. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiRWBI0JTYQ>

Unit 2

The Victorian Period

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into the socio-cultural background of the Victorian period
- ▶ detail the characteristics of the Victorian Period in English Literature
- ▶ identify some of the major works of the period in English Literature
- ▶ define features of the dominant literary genres of the period in English Literature

Prerequisites

Step onto the streets of Victorian London. The air is thick with coal smoke and possibility. Everywhere you look, there's evidence of progress - new inventions, grand buildings, a sense that anything is possible.

But beneath the surface, tensions simmer. The gap between rich and poor grows ever wider. Old traditions clash with new ideas. It's an age of contradictions - outward propriety and hidden desires, scientific advancement and stubborn superstition.

In drawing rooms and gentlemen's clubs, in factories and slums, stories are unfolding. Writers are grappling with the rapid changes around them, holding a mirror up to society and asking difficult questions.

Welcome to the Victorian age - a world of innovation and inequality, of empire and unrest, of great ambition and even greater hypocrisy.

Keywords

Age of Compromise, Crisis of faith, Moral purpose, Realism, Society



Discussion

The spirit of the age is one where both progress and traditions were upheld. In fact, the various artists and writers of the age have varying attitudes to the issue. While the earlier set of writers (late 1830s to 1870s) retained faith in the scientific and social progress of the period, later Victorian authors (1870s to 1900s) had an attitude of doubt and questioning. This may be seen in the different approaches taken up by the representative writers of the age.

At the same time, the radical changes of the period were beginning to affect the literature of the period. This was largely due to three factors:

- (i) Advancements in printing technology increased access to books and magazines.
- (ii) The newly emerged middle-class had higher rates of literacy and more leisure time to pursue reading as a hobby.
- (iii) The new middle-class readership looked for entertainment in literary works, and not education alone.

All these factors in combination affected the themes and styles of Victorian writing, especially prose and novels.

As you can imagine, Victorian writers had to meet the demands of the new market. This caused shifts in style from the earlier Romantic Age. There was a rejection of emotion, imagination and self-expression which were considered to be the romantic ideals.

Instead, the Victorians emphasised a scientific or empirical worldview. There was a view that prose-writing was more suitable for this purpose. Thus, the period became known as the “age of prose”, with immense developments in the genre.

3.2.1 Characteristics of the Age

Overall, the literature of the Victorian era shows certain common characteristics. They are as follows:

1. Moral Purpose

Victorian literature aimed to provide a moral education to the readers. This was because of the social and religious controversies of the time. Further, the Victorian writers also wanted to move away from the romantic way of ‘entertaining’ with literature.

2. Focus on Practical Aspects of Life

In *Oliver Twist*, written by Charles Dickens, the nine-year old Oliver is forced into labour at a workhouse. The residents of the workhouse are given very little food in return for their labour. One day, an extremely hungry Oliver goes up to the master who is serving food, and says: “Please sir, I want some more.” For this ‘crime’, he is beaten and scolded soundly.

This is an example of the Victorian focus on the practical problems and interests of life. The various literary works of the time prominently represented experiences of industrialisation, poverty, class division, women’s rights and other social issues. This also represents a shift away from the philosophical focus of Romanticism.

The Victorian novel, to a great extent, can be considered ‘social fiction’. They focused on issues related to industrialisation and on the condition of the nation. Often, social problems were highlighted in their plots. The writers of ‘social fiction’ include Mrs. Trollope (*Michael Armstrong: Factory Boy*, 1839-40) and Benjamin Disraeli (*Coningsby*, *Sybil*). The novels of Charles Dickens, too, fall under this category.

3. Realism

The Victorian novelist George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) suggested that truth and beauty can be found only through the humble and truthful observation of the world around. In her works of fiction, she presents the imperfections and moral failures of her characters. In doing so, she tries not to exaggerate or idealise reality.

This is a feature of the Victorian era, where there was an attempt to mirror reality in literature. They rejected the idealisation or over-dramatisation of people, events or philosophies. Instead, the emphasis was on reflecting the world as it is.

4. Crisis of Faith

In the poem “Dover Beach”, written by Matthew Arnold, “The Sea of Faith” was initially full and had covered the earth. The poet goes on to say that now he can only hear “Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar...”

This theme of the decreasing influence of faith and religion is repeated in many significant Victorian works. It can be viewed as a reaction to the rising importance of science in society. There was a sense of doubt and pessimism about the progress of science and technology which is reflected in several writings of the period.

5. Victorian Compromise

The Victorian period was an age of ‘compromise’ between different or conflicting aspects. On the one hand, there was a struggle to maintain religion in the face of scientific advancements. On the other hand, there was a tendency to strictly follow social and cultural conventions even as new reforms were being introduced. Similarly, industrialisation seemed to be increasing social ills just as much as it brought prosperity.

The literature of the period reflects the above contradictions in society. While certain authors attempted to strike a balance between these forces, others criticised those aspects which they found to be condemnable.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Age

An important aspect of Victorian society is their view of gender, i.e., the social roles of men and women. Women were not considered to be socially equal to men. They were often reduced to domestic roles, and celebrated as mothers and wives. Good marriages, house-keeping and bringing up children were considered to be their primary functions.

The literature of the age reflects these values in certain ways. For example, Coventry Patmore’s long narrative poem, “The Angel in the House”, describes the qualities of an ideal wife. She is presented as self-sacrificing, gentle and submissive. Her attention is entirely on her home, husband, and children, excluding the larger world outside.

‘Conduct Books’ that taught young women how to be ideal wives and mothers were very popular during the time. A popular Victorian conduct book for women was *Mrs. Beeton’s Book of Household Management* (1861). Around the same time, thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill (*On the Subjugation of Women*, 1869) wrote about the injustice of treating women as second-class citizens. Thus, the issue of women’s rights was one that was strongly debated during the period.

Men were allowed to enter into professions and public life. They could take up intellectual and adventurous pursuits. Many of the writers of the age brought up this double standard,



with some supporting the social norms and others fighting against it. Interestingly, Victorian literature witnessed many women writers gaining popularity, a fact that you will see as you read on.

Poetry continued to be a significant genre in Victorian literature. The language of the genre became more purposeful and narrational. It became a way of discussing socio-cultural issues and practical problems. The preference was for intellectual subject-matter. There were three major poets in the Victorian era whose works highlighted the spirit of the age.

The works of Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) are often considered to be representative of the Victorian age. His poetry shows a combination of reason and spirituality, two elements that were in conflict during the time. On one hand, his poems portray his struggle with the break in religious faith. On the other hand, his works display a belief in the theory of evolution and scientific progress. His most important poems include “Locksley Hall”, “The Princess”, “Maud”, “Idylls of Kings” and “In Memoriam”.

Tennyson’s style of writing has been noted for its perfection and diction. He often presents the virtues of perseverance and optimism in his poetry. Many of his works discuss the temptation to give up in the face of great struggles. However, they suggest the idea of struggling onwards in life with optimism. His poetry also expresses his love for the nation of England. His innovations of metre and lyrical forms are among his chief contributions to English poetry.

During this period, Robert Browning (1812-1889) emerged as another prominent poet. While Tennyson’s poetry paid attention to style, Browning considered the message of

the poem to be most important. His poetry dealt with subjects that are rough and common-place. One of his chief aims was to show the interplay between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in life. Among his significant poetic works are *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, *Men and Women*, *Dramatis Personae*, *Dramatic Idylls* and *The Ring and the Book*.

An important characteristic of Browning’s poetry is its dramatic quality. He used a poetic technique known as ‘dramatic monologue’. In it, the speaker of the poem takes on the persona or personality of a real or imagined individual. The poem is written in the form of a conversation with an invisible listener.

Much of Browning’s poetry takes this style, with the most famous ones being “Bishop Blougram’s Apology”, “Two in a Gondola”, “Porphyria’s Lover”, “Fra Lippo Lippi”, “The last Ride Together”, “Childe Roland to a Dark Tower Came”, “A Grammarian’s Funeral”, “Rabbi Ben Ezra” and “My Last Duchess”. His poetry included a psychological element in the depiction of the personae.

“My Last Duchess” is one of Browning’s most well-known dramatic monologues. In it, the speaker is a Duke who is showing the portrait of his late wife to a visitor. He describes the portrait sessions and the Duchess in some detail. However, as the poem continues, we realise that it was the Duke himself who caused her death.

*“That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now...”*

Another great Victorian poet is Matthew Arnold (1822-88). He reacted against the lyricism and ornamental language of the romantic poets. Instead, he believed firmly in the ideals of the neoclassical era. His works emphasised correctness and classical models rather than originality and imagination. Some of his most significant works include “Strayed Reveller”, “Empedocles on Etna”, “Sohrab and Rustum”, “The Scholar Gipsy”, “Thyrsis”, “Dover Beach” and “Memorial Verses”.

Arnold considered poetry to be a criticism of life mixed with art. As a result, his writings express ‘high seriousness’ along with artistic pleasure. Throughout his poetic output, he struggled with the questions of faith, discipline and religion. These subjects were treated in a realistic way in his poetry. Besides being a poet himself, Arnold was a great critic of poetry. His poetry and theories about writing have greatly influenced the poetic tradition of English.

Even as these three major poets of the Victorian era flourished, there were several other poets in the period. These included writers such as Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, who wrote *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and *Aurora Leigh*. Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861), another minor poet, wrote “Dipsychus” and “The Bothie of Toberna Vuolich”. These were writers whose works were significant in the time, but not representative of the age as a whole.

During the same time-period, a movement called the Pre-Raphaelite school of poetry also emerged. This referred to a group of artists and writers who revolted against the principles of the Victorian era. They believed in simplicity and accuracy of detail, modelling their works after mediaeval literature and art. Their focus on realistic, sensual depictions gave them the nickname ‘fleshly’ school of poetry.

The most prominent Pre-Raphaelite poets include Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), William Morris (1834-96) and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909). Rossetti’s contributions include poems, such as “The Blessed Damsel”, “Rose Mary” and “Troy Town”, and collections such as *Poems and Ballads* and *Sonnets*. His sister, Christina Georgina Rossetti published works, such as *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, *The Prince’s Progress* and *Verses*.

William Morris produced poetry that displays a love for the mediaeval era. His works include *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* and *The Earthly Paradise*. Swinburne is famous for composing *Atlanta in Calydon*, an English version of an ancient Greek tragedy. He has also produced studies of Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and dramatists.

The novel emerged as a literary form for discussing the issues of the time. Novel-reading became accepted as a tasteful hobby for the upper and middle-classes alike. Just as with poetry, there was an emphasis on morals and correctness. Often, novels dealt with the question of ‘respectability’, marriage, class, social status and decorum. We could say that the novel became a form of national literature during this period.

Another important aspect of the Victorian novel is that many of them were published in serial form in magazines and pamphlets. So, there would be a brief lapse between chapters. Since there was a need to keep readers attracted to the novel, writers would end chapters in a mystery. This would ensure that the readers would buy the next issue of the magazine or pamphlet to complete the story.



Sometimes, certain storylines end in a shocking or suspenseful way. Such endings are known as ‘cliffhangers’. They are meant to keep the readers engaged in the story. Sometimes, at the end of a chapter, the protagonist or the main character may land in a life-or-death situation.

At other times, someone might reveal truth or secret that changes everything. By ending the chapter or section in a ‘cliffhanger’, the writer ensures that the reader will be interested and curious enough to continue reading the story.

This age saw the emergence of three brilliant novelists. The first and most popular of these is Charles Dickens (1812-1870). His novels revolved around urban life in Britain, often highlighting the dangers of industrialisation, poverty and child labour. The main characters of his works were often individuals who faced hardships because of the social and political evils of the age. They represented the weak, the outcast and the oppressed of Victorian society.

They were portrayed as being trapped in exploitative systems including boarding schools, workhouses, factories and others. Some of his most important novels were *Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and the unfinished *Edwin Drood*.

Using humour and gentle criticism, Dickens’ novels aimed to teach society about the evils of class division and uncontrolled industrialisation. His works always concluded in a sense of optimism with a happy ending for the main characters. His writing style is journalistic with descriptions of incidents and people. As

a novelist, Dickens is famed for the humanitarianism displayed in his works.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), as a novelist, was more interested in the manners and morals of the elite class. His works centred around his observations and reflections on the rich and influential sections of society. He attempts to give accurate representations through satire and humour of the falsehoods of the Victorian upper class. The most important of his works include *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *Henry Esmond*, *Newcomes* and *The Virginians*.

Thackeray’s creation of lively characters in his novels has been praised. It is through the actions and words of these fictional characters that he exposes the hypocrisy of the Victorian public. His narratives provide insights into the psychological aspects of the characters. The cynicism of his novels in their criticism of Victorian life often presents a realistic picture of British life.

After this time-frame, Victorian fiction took a different direction. Later novelists emphasised different themes, styles and issues. Rather than looking at the novel as a way of social criticism, they began to explore deep, philosophical ideas through it. George Eliot (1819-1880), whose real name was Mary Ann Evans, wrote novels such as *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Romola* and *Middlemarch*.

Being highly observant, she was able to recreate details of rural life and speech. The settings of her novels were always in the English countryside. Eliot’s writings contain a moral purpose, and establishes duty as the purpose of life. She also established psychological realism in the inner struggles and emotions of her characters. Her novels mark a significant milestone in English fiction.

Another prominent writer of fiction in the Vic-

torian age was Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). His novels depict a pessimistic attitude to life and are often tragedies. In his works, fate or destiny is presented as a hostile power that is out to defeat humans. His characters are destroyed by chance and coincidence and not by any deliberate actions.

Generally, Hardy resists progress, modernisation and urbanisation. The settings for his works are Dorchester which he presents under the fictional name 'Wessex'. The most well-known of his works are *The Woodlanders*, *The Return of the Native*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy's main contribution to English literature is that he made novels a serious form that could deal with the fundamental questions of life.

There were many minor novelists in the Victorian period. Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) wrote works, such as *Vivian Grey*, *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred*. He was among the first to discuss issues of the working class.

The Bronte Sisters, Charlotte (1816-1855), Emily (1818-48), and Anne (1820-1849), produced masterful works of fiction. Using male pen-names, the sisters published works that are considered modern masterpieces. Charlotte Bronte made her mark with novels, such as *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor*, *Villette* and *Shirley*. Emily Bronte wrote *Wuthering Heights*, an original work with powerful themes of rebellion and love.

During the Victorian Era, women were not encouraged to do much besides domestic and homely activities. So, the Bronte sisters did not reveal their real names or gender in their novels. Instead, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte published their novels under the male names

Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell respectively. Are you aware of any other authors who similarly used pennames or pseudonyms to publish their works?

The genre of the mystery novel was pioneered by Wilkie Collins (1824-89) who wrote *The Woman in White*, *The Dead Secret* and *The Moonstone*. His novels contained clever plot-twists, with revelations made by letters and first person narratives. Often, supernatural elements were added to his stories.

Anthony Trollope (1815-88) wrote novels in which he presented real life without distorting or idealising it. His important novels are *The Warden*, *Barchester Towers* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-65) produced novels, such as *Cranford*, *Mary Barton*, *A Tale of Manchester Life*, *North and South*, *Ruth* and *Sylvia's Lovers*. Her fiction explored issues, such as industrialisation and poverty. She also wrote a biography of her friend, Charlotte Bronte.

The novels of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) were unique in the Victorian Era. Considering the demand for shorter, entertaining novels, he wrote tales of great adventure and mystery. The most popular of his works are *Treasure Island*, *New Arabian Nights*, *Kidnapped*, *The Black Arrow* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Thus, the genre of novels in the Victorian era displayed immense range and scope.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), an author and poet, was very popular among the Victorian public. A skilled storyteller, he is most known for his fictional works such as *Jungle Book*, *Kim* and *The Man Who Would Be King*. His works have been particularly well-received as children's literature. A supporter of Brit-



ish imperialism, he has prominently featured Indian imagery and settings in many of his works.

Victorian prose carried the main features of the age, such as moralism, realism and a shift towards empiricism. However, the prose-writers of the age showed great originality in dealing with characteristic themes, such as development of science, geographical exploration and economic change. Their works show a great variety of styles, displaying seriousness of tone and particularity. All the great prose writers of the period appear to have these qualities in common.

The dominant prose writer of the period was Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). He has recorded his personal struggle between doubt and belief, a feature of the Victorian age, in the work *Sartor Resartus*. His other important contributions include *French Revolution*, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, *Past and Present*, *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, *Latter-day Pamphlets*, *The Life of John Sterling* and *The History of Frederick the Great*.

To him, the purpose of prose was to root out moral weakness and social ills. Elements of modern life, such as materialism, empiricism, and utilitarianism were rejected by him in favour of spirituality. His works make use of certain techniques, such as the dropping of certain parts of speech, converting nouns to verbs, use of foreign words and literal English translation of foreign words. His style is unique in English literature.

Another important name in prose literature is John Ruskin (1819-1900). He gained fame as an art-critic and social thinker during the age. As a writer, he employed various literary forms including poetry, treatises, a travelling guide and letters. But it is the subject of his essays

that are significant to us. They were diverse and ranged from literature, education, myth, architecture and botany to political economy. One of his chief areas of interest was the connection between art, nature and society.

His most important works are *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *The Stones of Venice*, *Unto this Last*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Crown of Wild Olive* and *Praeterita*, an autobiographical piece. It has been said that Ruskin's prose has a rhythmic quality which helps the reader appreciate the beauty of his writings. His vivid descriptions are also a feature unique to his writing. His essays brought out the evils of the materialistic and competitive society around him. They attempted to present a solution to the most demanding problems confronting his age.

Two other writers of prose that deserve mention are Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59) and Matthew Arnold (1822-88). Lord Macaulay composed biographical, critical and historical essays which won him great popularity. It could be said that he represented much of the popular sentiments of the common British public. One of the most significant of his works is *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*. It documents the history of the nation from the seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century. As such, Lord Macaulay's writings are essential in understanding the history of England.

Lord Macaulay is familiar to us in a different context. He was the author of "Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education" (1835) which went on to establish English education in British India. Macaulay considered the introduction of English literature and language to be a method of incorporating western values to Indian society.

Matthew Arnold, well-known as a poet, has made serious contributions to prose as well. His writings contained social criticism of the highest order. As we discussed earlier, Arnold wished to bring in classicism to the age. The purpose of his prose was to raise the intellectual and cultural level of his readers.

This included works such as *On Translating Homer*, *The Study of Celtic Literature*, *Essays in Criticism* and *Culture and Anarchy*. He often attacked the middle-classes whom he saw as disinterested in intellectual pursuits. In the tradition of English prose, his works hold a special place for their wit and elegance.

Other writers of prose in the Victorian era include J.A. Symonds, Walter Pater, Oliver Wendell Holmes and T.H. Huxley. Victorian prose marks a new era in English literature with its renewed social focus and stylistic developments.

Another aspect of Victorian literature is the great shift in the field of drama. From the sentimental and romantic styles of the previous era, drama became a realistic art. Further, the Victorian middle-classes took to the theatre as a form of entertainment.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) wrote distinctive comedies which exposed the hypocrisies of Victorian society. In particular, he emphasised the rigid morality of the period. His dramas include *The Duchess of Padua*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *Salome*.

His use of wit, puns, comic dialogue, and funny characters made his plays extremely popular among theatre-goers. Wilde's style of writing showcases the beauty of language and provokes the audience to reflect upon the issues presented. The prevalence of dialogues, as opposed to action, was the hallmark of

Wilde's plays. His philosophy of writing was greatly influenced by the Art for Arts' Sake movement. Yet, social critique was incorporated within his dramatic works.

Art for Arts' Sake is a nineteenth century movement that argued for art to be judged on its own terms; it put forward the idea that art and literature should be understood according to its aesthetic merits and the effects that it produces on its viewers and readers.

The same era saw playwrights such as Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero, both of whom produced successful dramas. Jones achieved prominence in the English stage as a writer of comedies and melodramas. He also contributed to the development of the well-made play, often giving it a serious central theme.

Some of his most important dramas include *A Clerical Error*, *The Silver King*, *Saints and Sinners* and *The Liars*. Most of these drew upon the follies and hypocrisies of the wealthy, elite classes for their humour.

Arthur Wing Pinero is credited with founding the 'social drama' that would later become a popular mode in the early twentieth century. He initiated his literary career writing comedies and farces, later shifting to serious drama. Much of his plays discussed the hypocrisies of Victorian high society. His works span different genres such as comedy and tragedy as seen in *The Magistrate*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *The Schoolmistress*, *Dandy Dick* and *Iris*.

As in the Romantic age, several of the poets composed dramatic works as well. A.C. Swinburne wrote many verse dramas including *The Queen Mother*, *Mary Stuart* and *The Sisters*. Robert Browning produced dramas, such as *Colombe's Birthday*, *Pippa Passes*,



King Victor and King Charles and *In a Balcony*.

The plays of Jones and Pinero, along with those of Wilde and some of the early plays of G.B. Shaw, contributed to the development of the Victorian stage as a crucial era in English drama.

society that is struggling to understand itself. Its poetry, prose, fiction and drama reflect the conflict between different forces. The legacy of the Victorian age lies in its ability to cover such completely different aspects within its literature. No wonder, then, that we call this period the “Age of Compromise”.

At this point, when we consider the Victorian age in English Literature, we are looking at a

Recap

- ▶ Victorian era England under Queen Victoria – 1832 to early 1900s
- ▶ Social background of scientific progress and economic prosperity
- ▶ Increased literacy rate and political power of middle-class
- ▶ Darwinian revolution transforms thinking of people
- ▶ Both reflected in themes of literature of period
- ▶ Different factors created increase in readership
- ▶ Shift from Romantic literature
- ▶ Major features – moral purpose, practical issues, realism, lack of idealism, religious conflict, and mixed style
- ▶ Relevance of religion and women’s rights are crucial issues
- ▶ Tennyson, Browning, Arnold represent themes in varying styles
- ▶ Minor poets such as Elizabeth Browning and Clough also contribute
- ▶ Pre-Raphaelite poets revolt against Victorian style of poetry
- ▶ Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot introduce realism, social issues, philosophy in genre
- ▶ Minor writers include Disraeli, Bronte Sisters, Trollope and Stevenson bring different elements
- ▶ Prose-writers like Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold completely change genre of prose
- ▶ Macaulay’s biographical and historical essays
- ▶ Bring in seriousness and socio-cultural criticism in writings
- ▶ Major Dramatists are Wilde, Jones, Pinero
- ▶ Use comedy and satire to comment on issues such as social hypocrisy
- ▶ The age of compromise

Objective Questions

1. Who ruled England during the Victorian Age?
2. What is the general time period of the Victorian Age?
3. Which class emerged as powerful during the Victorian Era?
4. Which form of literature was considered important during this period?
5. What did Victorian writers consider to be the purpose of literature?
6. What is the literary attempt to portray reality as it is, called?
7. What were women encouraged to be in Victorian society?
8. Which poet shows a combination of reason and spirituality?
9. Whose poems use 'dramatic monologue'?
10. What ideals did Arnold want to bring back?
11. Who are the two significant minor poets of the age?
12. Why were the Pre-Raphaelite poets called the 'Fleshly school of poetry'?
13. Who wrote the work *Nicholas Nickleby*?
14. Who were the focus of Thackeray's novels?
15. What was the real name of George Eliot?
16. Which fictional place appears in Thomas Hardy's novels?
17. Which minor novelist brought up working class issues?
18. Who is the minor novelist who focused on adventure?
19. Which two prose-writers composed *Sartor Resartus* and *Modern Painters* respectively?
20. What was the purpose of comedy and satire in the dramas of Wilde?

Answers

1. Queen Victoria
2. 1832 to 1901
3. Middle-class
4. Prose
5. Both education and entertainment
6. Realism
7. 'Angels in the home'
8. Lord Tennyson
9. Robert Browning
10. Neoclassical ideals
11. Elizabeth Barret Browning and Arthur Hugh Clough
12. Their focus on realistic, sensual depictions
13. Charles Dickens



14. Upper class society
15. Mary Anne Evans
16. Wessex
17. Benjamin Disraeli
18. Robert Louis Stevenson
19. Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin
20. Social criticism

Assignments

1. What technical advancement increased access to books in the Victorian Era?
2. Why was the period known as the “age of prose”?
3. Who is credited with founding ‘social drama’?
4. Describe the contributions of the Bronte sisters to Victorian literature.
5. Write a short note on the Pre-Raphaelite school of poetry.
6. How did Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin influence Victorian prose-writing?
7. Briefly explore the treatment of morality in Victorian literature.
8. Examine the dramatists of the Victorian period.
9. Write a short essay detailing the literary features of the Victorian Era.
10. Provide a brief profile of the various women writers of the Victorian period.

Suggested Reading

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- ▶ Kerr, Gordon. *Short History of the Victorian Era*. Oldcastle, 2019.
- ▶ Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Significance*. Rupa, 2015.
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Unit 3

Modern Period

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into the social and cultural background of the Modern Age
- ▶ detail the characteristics of the Modern Age in English Literature
- ▶ identify some of the major works of the period in English Literature
- ▶ define features of the dominant literary genres of the period in English Literature

Prerequisites

A dimly lit jazz club in 1920s Paris. The air is hazy with cigarette smoke, and the music pulses with a frantic, almost desperate energy. At a corner table, a group of writers and artists argue passionately about art, politics, and the nature of reality itself.

The world has been turned upside down. The Great War has shattered old certainties, leaving a generation disillusioned and searching for new meanings. Everything feels fragmented, disjointed - like a cubist painting come to life.

In this brave new world, writers are experimenting wildly. They're breaking all the rules, trying to capture the dizzying pace of modern life and the inner workings of the human mind. Language itself is being pulled apart and reassembled in startling new ways.

You might find yourself lost in the winding streets of Dublin for a day, or spend years wandering through the labyrinth of a single consciousness. Time no longer moves in a straight line - it loops back on itself, fragments, stops and starts again.

The boundaries between real and unreal, past and present, begin to blur. Myths and ancient stories are woven into tales of ordinary lives. A trip to the lighthouse becomes an epic odyssey of the soul.

But amidst all this experimentation, there's an undercurrent of anxiety. The marvels of technology that promised to make life easier now seem just as likely to destroy us all. The glittering surface of modern life conceals a deep emptiness.



As we dive into the modernist period, we'll explore how writers grappled with these profound changes. We'll see how they invented new forms and techniques to express the complexities of the modern world. And we'll discover how their radical innovations continue to shape literature today.

So step into the whirlwind of the modern age - a time of exhilarating possibility and deep uncertainty, where nothing is quite what it seems.

Keywords

Modernism, 1922, Literary Features, Novel, Poetry, Drama

Discussion

The Modern age in English literature spans the early parts of the twentieth century. It emerged in reaction to the general attitudes and manners of Victorian writers. The chief mood of modern literature could be classified as 'rebellious'.

There was a questioning of everything that was sacred or certain. Deviating from earlier ages, the modern period deliberately broke with sources of authority and order. So the age saw a rupture with tradition.

The spirit of contestation took on extra importance in the face of two World Wars. Traditional values started to fail. All that was considered vital to society in Victorian England was challenged. As such, there was a 'loss of faith' in religion, family, marriage, rituals and social customs. The wars made clear the human capacity for evil, particularly during WWII. This led to an emphasis on feelings of alienation, loss and despair in the writings of the age.

Unlike the focus on nature and society in the previous eras, the modern age showed a preoccupation with machinery. It becomes a symbol for the modern experience of life.

The materialism, boredom and repetitiveness of modern social life were highlighted in the 'mechanical'. Factors, such as feelings or impulse, were often irrelevant in this sense. Thus, modern life could not be explained in the existing formats of literature.

As with other literary ages, here too, we may find some sense of overlapping. The writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Walt Whitman and Henry James depict early elements of modernism.

However, it was in the year 1922 that the movement truly peaked. It witnessed the publication of three important works – *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot, *Ulysses* by James Joyce and *Jacob's Room* by Virginia Woolf. All of them were experimental works that captured the essence of the modern age using new styles and techniques. Therefore, the year is often considered as crucial in the emergence of the modernist movement.

3.3.1 Characteristics of the Age

There were many features that set the literature of the modern period apart from any of the preceding ages. Some of the most significant of these are:

1. Strong and intentional break from tradition

Modernism highlighted a movement away from traditional and accepted literary styles and themes.

2. A new emphasis on subjectivity

The focus of modern literature was on how we see things as opposed to what we see. There was also a concern with the psychological life of individuals.

3. Rejection of objectivity

Modern literature moved away from objective positions or the idea of an absolute truth.

4. Blurring of boundaries between genres

Established literary rules and classifications were broken. For instance, novels may be written in a lyrical style or poems may take on a prose-form in modernist writings.

5. Fragmented Forms

Modern literature used broken or fragmented styles of writing to convey the disturbing experience of modern life. Narratives were often non-linear or discontinuous, with unstable or untruthful narrators.

6. Reflexivity

Modern works of literature often commented on their own nature as a poem, play or fiction.

7. Experimentation

The literature of the period encouraged experimentation in themes, writing style and form.

3.3.2 Key Authors, Literary Devices and Genres

The literary genre that effectively carried the mark of these different features was the novel. It surpassed poetry as the dominant literary

form during this age. Further, the period also saw the rebirth of drama. It is interesting to note that while fiction and drama were revitalised due to substantial experimentation in form and style, poetry did not attract radical experiments in form. However, it did transform in terms of theme and language.

Modernism also lay closely connected with various art movements. The different styles of painting also found an equivalent in literary techniques. For instance, impressionism is an artistic style that uses perception or viewpoint as the basis for reality. Many modern writers believed the same, and the writings of the age present individual perceptions instead of an objective picture.

Symbolism is a movement that tried to express individual emotions using symbols, whether in art or literature. In literature, this was seen in the works of French poets Baudelaire and Mallarmé who inspired modernist writers in English.

Imagism is a movement that included English and American poets who believed in using the 'exact word' to describe the subject of their poetry. They would present the subject directly and would not use any word that did not contribute to their description. The poems did not follow any rhyme or metre.

'Stream of Consciousness' is a narrative technique in which the individual's point of view is portrayed. This is usually done either as an internal monologue or as a description of the character's internal state. The subject's thought-processes are revealed as they are overheard in that person's mind or addressed to themselves.

Even though the modern period moves away from objectivity, it kept some elements of realism. The literature of the age contains frank depictions of the world, even at its worst.



Elements that are traditionally considered improper or shocking for literature are often used in modernist works. This creates an effect of shock which is part of the philosophy of modern literature.

These characteristic features and literary techniques could be seen across the fiction, poetry, and drama of the time-period. Reacting to the various historical events and social sentiments of the age, the literature also developed its own peculiarities within genres. The most popular and most experimented-upon form of modernism was the novel.

The modern novel revisited the experience of reality. Following perspectivism and impressionism, it captured the viewpoints of individuals. It no longer followed the linear narrative. Instead, the story was fragmented just as an individual's memory and perception are fragmented.

Further, the endings were often non-conclusive or open, with no concrete conclusion. Several common themes, such as reality of experience, search for meaning, loss of religious faith, lack of values and hopelessness could be seen in the modern novel.

There were several dominant novelists in the period who represented various aspects of modern fiction. The works of Henry James (1843-1916) could be seen as an early indicator of modernism. He uses techniques that convey the internal life of his characters. A realist writer of great skill, he serialised his novels in many popular magazines of the time.

His themes revolve around high society, sexual repression, class, and the individual. His output includes *Watch and Ward*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Europeans*, and *Daisy Miller*. He has also composed various short-stories, plays and

critical essays that were influential to the age.

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) is a Polish-born novelist and short-story writer. His works have been crucial in establishing psychological realism in the modern novel. The techniques used in his writings reveal the depths of his character's consciousness and perceptions. Conrad's narratives often placed his characters in adventurous settings. Their innermost thoughts and processes would be the subject of his novels.

The most significant of his works include *Almayer's Folly*, *Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, and *The Rescue*. He has also composed a memoir titled *A Personal Record*. His writing style influenced numerous novelists in the ages to come.

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) is one of the most influential writers of the modern age. He has produced over 40 novels, short-stories, poetry, plays, treatises and essays. His fame rests chiefly on his novels which were frank treatments of human relationships and sex. At the time, his works were thought of as obscene and shocking. His novels, such as *The Rainbow*, *Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* depict subtle portraits of individuals and their emotional lives. In Lawrence's work, we find a love for the natural combined with the hatred of mechanical life. He considered love and sex to be vital human experiences that needed to be discussed and understood. His uninhibited language and deeply emotional style of writing added to the canvas of modernism.

The novels of James Joyce (1882-1941) mark a shift in the novel genre. His experimental use of language and writing techniques are typical of modernist fiction. In particular, he used the interior monologue or 'stream of consciousness' to great effect.

His main subject is human relations, particularly the individual's relation to society. He represents the dark side of human life with frankness. Joyce's exploration of sex and desire is also an important aspect of his works.

To enrich this experience, he also used symbolisms and allusions from mythology, history and literature. The most representative of his works include *Ulysses*, *Finnegan's Wake*, *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce's portrayals were deep studies of the human mind and consciousness that were unparalleled in subtlety and expression.

Another prominent novelist of the period was Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) whose works represented a shift in structure and style. She was a member of the literary and social circle known as the Bloomsbury group. Her experimental writing techniques reviewed the language and form of the novel.

She has produced several acclaimed works, such as *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, *Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *Orlando*. Woolf also made huge contributions to the women's movement through her work, *A Room of One's Own*. Her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and subtle characterisation reveal the most internal psychological realities.

The Bloomsbury group was a set of writers, artists, and philosophers that frequently met in the houses of Virginia Woolf, and Vanessa and Clive Bell. Their meeting points were located in the Bloomsbury district of London, near the British Museum (and hence, the name). They discussed questions of literature and philosophy and questioned accepted ideas. Along with Woolf (novelist) and Bell

(Art critic), the most important writers of this group were E.M. Forster and Leonard Bell (novelists), Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant (artists), and John Maynard Keynes (Economist). Frequently, prominent figures such as T.S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell and Aldous Huxley would join them.

E.M. Forster (1879-1970) wrote several significant novels such as *Maurice*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *A Room With a View*, and *Howard's End*. He worked as a secretary for the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior. This experience resulted in the composition of his most famous novel, *A Passage to India*.

Using relatively simple language, he realistically captured the character of the English people. He was situated within the upper-middle class, but was removed enough to criticise their hypocritical ways and manners. He emphasises the importance of personal connections in the disconnected modern world.

There were several other novelists whose names deserve mention in the context of modernist fiction. Writers, such as Sir Hugh Walpole, William Somerset Maugham, and J.B. Priestley continued the 'traditionalist' style of the English novel.

Others like Dorothy Richardson, Wyndham Lewis, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Katherine Mansfield produced works that explored human psychology. With these writers, the modern novel took on a wide range of subjects, attitudes and experiments, rising in popular and critical interest.

Modern poetry would do away with many of the pre-conceptions of the earlier eras such as those seen in Romantic and Victorian tradi-



tions. Those established ideas and styles could not convey the essence of modern life. Rather, most modernist poets felt the need for creating a new language and structure for the genre that would portray changed elements of their life. Naturally, this meant that there was no uniform language in the poetry of the twentieth century. We find different lines of poetic works across the ages.

Poets such as Robert Bridges (1840-1930) arrived in the transitional period between Victorian and Modern ages. His poetry is noted for its metrical innovations. His work contains beautiful descriptions of nature and an obsession with the old world of the classics. The lyricism of his works including “The Testament of Beauty”, “A Passer-By, London Snow”, “The Downs”, and “The Growth of Love” were considered note-worthy.

More than Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) has displayed modernist characteristics. His experiments with metre and language have made his poetry unique in English literature. Despite the peculiar nature of his language, symbolism and poetic meter, his subject matter is traditional. He wrote about god, nature and humankind in various works like “The Wreck of Deutschland”. His theories about poetry have exerted great influence on modern poets.

Alongside these names, there emerged specific groups of poets such as the Georgian poets or the Trench poets. The first group wrote under the reign of George V (1911-1936) and did not respond to any contemporary issues in their writings. This included poets, such as Walter De La Mare (1873- 1957) and John Masefield (1878 – 1967) who composed poetry on nature, animals, life and so on.

The second group known as Trench poets were more influential. They were poets of war, re-

lating experiences of WWI. Specifically, they mentioned the horrors of war and its impact on their selfhood. Though they followed the characteristics of the Georgian poets, their writing engaged with profound issues. Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) and Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) were prominent among this group.

The most outstanding poets of the modern era emerged post-1910s. One of the most important names among these was William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). An Irish poet, he used symbolism from Irish settings to great effect. His poems followed a lyrical and romantic style. Most of them focused on themes of love, longing and loss. They contained elements of Irish folklore and mythology.

Yeats’s interest in the occult and supernatural made him a stranger in a world dominated by science and rationalism. The internal conflicts in Ireland as well as the World Wars influenced his poetry. This alienation and loneliness is seen throughout his poems. His poetic output includes *The Wanderings of Oisín*, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, *The Wild Swan at Coole*, *The Tower*, and *The Winding Stair*. His influence on English poetry is vast and considerable.

Few poets have characterised an age as T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) has characterised the modern age. With a combination of opposing characteristics, he has incorporated both tradition and innovation in his poetry. His style of poetry is both realist and visionary. He considered order to be of primary importance in the poetic genre. Yet, he continued to innovate in form and theme. This was due to the idea that the existing language of poetry cannot meet the demands of the modern age.

Eliot’s poetic language used words from common speech that were regarded as inappropriate in literature. He borrowed freely from

classical literature. In his poems, we may find both colloquial speech as well as ancient lines from the classics.

The most significant of his works are “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, “The Hollow Men”, and the *Four Quartets*, consisting of “Burnt Norton”, “East Coker”, “The Dry Salvages”, and “Little Gidding”. Of course, it was the publication of his poem *The Waste Land* in 1922 that marked the peak of modernism. He has a serious role in conveying the dangers and despair of modern civilisation. This makes him one of the most representative poets of the period.

The 1930s was dominated by a group of poets who had left-wing beliefs. They were known as ‘Pylon Poets’. They were known for utilising industrial and modern imagery in their poems. One of the most prominent of these poets was W.H. Auden (1907-1977). Much of his poetry was concerned with moral issues. He had an analytical style of writing that called for ‘objectivity’. The most important of his works include *Poems*, *Nones*, *The Age of Anxiety* and *New Year Letter*.

The poetry of Stephen Spender (1909-1995), another member of this group, showed awareness of human suffering. He argued that writers should stay in touch with the urgent political issues of their times. He produced insightful collections of poetry, such as *Vienna*, *The Still Centre*, *Ruins and Visions* and *Collected Poems*.

Other Pylon poets included Louis Macneice and John Betjeman, both of whom dealt with the problems of modern society. Along with Auden and Spender, their poetry employed images of machines, factories, modes of transport and power.

Another significant poet of the age was Edith

Sitwell (1887-1964), who used symbolism to great effect in her works. She has explored the use of sound as an element in poetry. Her writings reflected on the human condition, and had a philosophical quality. Her most renowned works were *Facade*, *The Wooden Pegasus* and *Bucolic Comedies*.

Dame Edith Sitwell’s poetry was highly experimental. Her poetic language challenged conventional ideas about poetry. She took up the editorship of *Wheels*, an annual poetry anthology, and published modernist poetry in it. Soon, she became one of the most significant literary figures of her age.

In the 1940s, the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) dominated British poetry. His output was very different from the modernists and the Pylon poets. He has often been termed a ‘neo-romantic’ poet because of his emphasis on emotion, imagination and spontaneity. His works were full of nature imagery, often connecting the workings of the universe with the life of humans. Some of his significant contributions include *18 Poems*, *Under Milk Wood*, and *In Country Sleep: And Other Poems*. His poetry belonged to the New Apocalypse style.

The 1950s saw the emergence of ‘Movement Poetry’. These were a group of poets who rejected the literary customs of the time. They reflected the pain, sufferings, anger and frustration of common people in their works. It was literature, not of the upper class, but of the middle classes of society.

The significant Movement Poets were Robert Conquest, Philip Larkin, Thomas Gunn, Elizabeth Jennings and George Macbeth, though many others were involved in the group. Their poetry highlighted realism, typically rejecting romantic styles of writing.



The most prominent writer in this group was Philip Larkin (1922-1985). His works include *The Less Deceived*, *The Whitsun Weddings* and *High Windows*. They display an awareness of life's limitations, often taking on a melancholic tone. His themes revolve around death and human solitude. Larkin's poetry used understated, subtle emotion to great effect.

Ted Hughes (1930-1998) composed poetry that was different from the traditionalism of the Movement poets. Most of his works focused on nature, but typically revealed the violent and savage side of animal life. There is a lack of sentimentality in his poems. His significant contributions include *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*.

While poetry took on a specific direction, modern drama developed new features as well. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) incorporated humour and satire in his plays in order to invite attention to the social and political issues of the time. His plays were anti-romantic, often deliberately portraying icons or influential figures in a comic manner. This attitude is referred to as 'iconoclasm'. Often, his dramas revolve around a conflict of differing ideas which brings out new social insights.

The most significant of his works are *Widower's House*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Arms and the Man*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Major Barbara* and *Pygmalion*. Apart from his influence as a dramatist, Shaw was also a member of the Fabian Society. His concern about the hypocrisy and class prejudices of his age were visible in his dramas. His contributions lie in the way he changed the language and themes of modern English theatre.

The plays of Shaw, John Galsworthy, Harley Granville Barker and W. Somerset Maugham followed the trajectory of realism. Their works appealed to socially and politically conscious audiences and were committed to bringing forth reform.

A significant development in modern drama is the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre by W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge. They aimed to produce works that were rooted in the culture, myths and traditions of Ireland. This came to be referred to as the Celtic revival in theatre, and included playwrights such as Sean O'Casey, J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn.

A significant presence in this movement was John Millington Synge (1871-1909). His dramatic productions revived Irish theatre. His plays are a reaction against the dominant realist style of the earlier era. Instead, he focused on Irish mythology and folklore, creating a new world in the drama of the age. His writing shows excellent insight into human nature, and characterisation. He does not take a moral or educational approach with his subjects.

The most significant of his works are *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *Riders to the Sea*, *The Well of the Saints*, *The Playboy of the Western World*, *The Tinker's Wedding*, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. His plays have seen a fair share of controversy in the light of the Irish independence movement.

Other contributions of the Celtic revival in drama include O'Casey's plays which revolved around the slums of Dublin, such as *The Shadow of a Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock*. W.B. Yeats composed the poetic drama titled *The Countess Cathleen*. Though his plays were well-crafted, they were highly difficult to stage.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) conceived of 'Epic Theatre' as a form of didactic drama. It presents loosely connected scenes and actions to break the dramatic form. Often the play is interrupted and the audience is directly addressed. Often, they are presented with ar-

guments and analyses.

The influence of Marxism on Epic Theatre is clear in the way that moral and social problems are engaged through such plays. Brecht's dramas, such as *Mother Courage and her Children*, *The Life of Galileo*, *The Good Person of Setzuan*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are examples of the same.

Apart from these dramatic genres, the modern era also saw the rise of avant-garde theatre. Playwrights of this movement produced experimental dramas that opposed mainstream cultural values, and rejected the traditional aesthetics of the stage. Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) contributed immensely to the development of this genre. Though he started his career writing short stories and novels, he soon shifted to crafting modernist plays.

His reputation rests on experimental plays such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Act Without Words I and II*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, and *Happy Days*. His emphasis is on the absurdity or meaninglessness of human experience. He highlighted the same through meaningless dialogue, purposeless situations, lack of logical plot development and tiresome repetition of actions and lines.

Another leading name in this context is Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994), whose dramas highlight the absurdity of human existence. His works move away from the conventions of traditional theatre, and often present parodies of life. The settings for his plays combine the atmosphere of a dream or nightmare with strange humour. Some of his most well-known dramas are *The Bald Soprano*, *The Chairs*, and *Rhinoceros*, all of which raise serious questions about the direction of humanity.

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) achieved fame as one of the most complex dramatists of his

time. His plays use small talk, hesitation, and silence to signify deep meanings. His characters' dialogues are often 'colloquial'. Their speech is disjointed and confusing, and sometimes filled with silent pauses. The difficulty of communicating in an alienating world is one of his key themes. His most well-known works are *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker* and *The Homecoming*.

Martin Esslin, a theatre critic, coined the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' to describe the plays of the kind that Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter were producing. Along with Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov and Tom Stoppard, these playwrights dealt with the meaninglessness of human existence. Many of their works were labelled as 'anti-plays' because they rejected or did away with logical characterisation, plot, action and dialogues.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett explores the meaninglessness of human existence through repetitive and absurd dialogues. The play opens with its two protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting under a tree for someone named Godot. The play progresses through their conversation with each other, and other characters that pass by. Vladimir and Estragon are not sure if they have waited for Godot before, or if they have been in the same place before. There is uncertainty about their motives and actions throughout the play. Finally, a man comes by and lets them know that Godot will not be coming that night. They then make the decision to leave but remain in the same spot even as the curtains go down. This 'anti-play' is best described by Estragon's famous dialogue: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!"



In the modern era, prose literature and essays continued to enjoy popularity. G.K. Chesterton (1874-1932) was a critic, essayist and short story writer. A prominent figure in society, he produced deep social and literary criticism in numerous essays. He has published his works in collected volumes, such as *The Defendant*, *Twelve Types* and *The Victorian Age in Literature*. As a writer of short stories, he is most famous for his Father Brown series which follows a priest who solves mysteries.

A member of the Bloomsbury Group, Giles Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) dominated the prose-scene of the 1920s. He is most known for *Eminent Victorians*, a collection of short biographical sketches of famous personalities of the Victorian age. The modern style of the biography was established through this work. In it, he captured the imperfections and failures of his subjects, all the while keeping an irreverent style. His other important contributions include *Queen Victoria* and *Portraits in Miniature*.

A.A. Milne composed many popular articles and essays such as *Not That It Matters* and *If I May*. Another essayist of the age was J. B. Priestley, who wrote *I for One*, *Open House*, *Apes and Angels* and *Self-Selected Essays*.

Virginia Woolf contributed with social and literary criticism, and produced works such as *The Death of the Moth* and *The Moment*. Aldous Huxley, too, has written many prominent essays that were published in collections such as *Along the Road*, *Essays New and Old*, *Do What You Will* and *Music at Night*.

We have now taken a brief survey of the modern age in English literature. It is evident that modernism represents a break from all that was conventional or established in the various literary genres. It responded to the horrors of the World Wars and the fragmented experience of twentieth century life. In doing so, modern literature opened out new forms and philosophies that would exert their influence on the coming ages.

Recap

- ▶ Modern period in literature roughly between 1910s and 1950s
- ▶ Response to major changes in thought as well as WWI and WWII
- ▶ Huge change in literary style, theme, and form
- ▶ Novel rises as important genre
- ▶ Rejection of tradition and Experimentation in form
- ▶ No objectivity and use of individual perspectives
- ▶ Impressionism, Imagism, Symbolism and Stream-of-consciousness in literature
- ▶ Experimental novels of James, Conrad, Lawrence, Joyce and Woolf
- ▶ Transitional poetry of Hopkins, Bridges, Georgians and Trench poets
- ▶ Modernist poetry of Yeats and Eliot change established poetic themes and style
- ▶ Modern Drama shaped by Shaw
- ▶ Celtic revival in theatre - J.M. Synge
- ▶ Modern drama discusses meaninglessness of existence in Beckett and Ionesco

Objective Questions

1. What is the chief mood of the modern period?
2. Why did traditional values start to fail?
3. Which three modernist works were published in 1922?
4. Which form of literature was considered important during this period?
5. Which artistic technique uses perception as the basis for reality?
6. What is symbolism?
7. Who wrote novels such as *The Turn of the Screw* and *Daisy Miller*?
8. What did Conrad establish in the modern novel?
9. Why was D.H. Lawrence's novels considered obscene?
10. Which technique is used by both James Joyce and Virginia Woolf?
11. Who were the Trench poets?
12. Which poet discussed god, nature and humankind?
13. Who were the two prominent modernist poets?
14. Whose plays use Irish folklore?
15. What does the plays of Beckett and Ionesco discuss?

Answers

1. Rebellious
2. Because of the two World Wars
3. *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* and *Jacob's Room*
4. Novel
5. Impressionism
6. Use of symbols to convey individual perspectives or emotions
7. Henry James
8. Psychological realism
9. Because of their frank depiction of relationships and sex
10. Stream-of-consciousness
11. Trench poets were poets who wrote about experiences of WWI
12. Gerard Manley Hopkins
13. W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot
14. J.M. Synge
15. Absurdity or meaninglessness of human life

Assignments

1. Who were the Trench Poets?
2. Name the novelist who wrote *A Passage to India*.
3. What is the name given to the dramatists who emphasised the meaninglessness of life?
4. Write a short note on the role of G.B. Shaw in the development of modern drama.
5. Explore the contributions of T.S. Eliot as a modernist poet.
6. Briefly discuss the 'stream of consciousness' technique in modernist fiction.
7. What is the Celtic Revival in theatre?
8. Provide a brief account of the characteristics of the modern age.
9. Write a short essay on the development of modern poetry.
10. Prepare a short video or audio clip discussing a modern writer of your choice.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford UP, 1979.
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- ▶ Kerr, Gordon. *Short History of the Victorian Era*. Oldcastle, 2019.
- ▶ Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Significance*. Rupa, 2015.
- ▶ Milne, Ira Mark. *Literary Movements for Students*. Gale, 2008.
- ▶ "Modern Age: History of English Literature."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXlmBPP5ed0>

Unit 4

Postmodern Period

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into the social and cultural background of the postmodern period
- ▶ detail some of the major characteristics of postmodernism
- ▶ identify some of the major works of the postmodern period
- ▶ define some of the features of the of the postmodern period

Prerequisites

Imagine flipping through TV channels, catching snippets of a historical documentary, a sci-fi movie, and a reality show, all in the span of a minute. Now picture a novel that reads the same way - jumping between styles, mixing fact and fiction, constantly winking at its own artifice. Welcome to the postmodern world, where everything is up for grabs and nothing is quite what it seems.

In this dizzying landscape, writers play with our expectations like cats with yarn. They mix high art and pop culture, serious philosophy and silly jokes. They build stories within stories within stories, until you're not sure which way is up.

You might find yourself reading a detective novel that turns into a meditation on the nature of storytelling itself. Or perhaps you'll stumble upon a historical drama where the characters are aware they're in a book and argue with the author about their fate.

The boundaries between different genres, between "serious" and "popular" literature, start to dissolve. Science fiction concepts pop up in literary novels, while comic books tackle profound philosophical questions.

It's a world of endless possibilities, where anything can be remixed, reimagined, recontextualized. But it's also a world where certainties are hard to come by. Every story contains multiple versions of the truth - or perhaps no truth at all.

As we explore postmodern literature, we'll see how writers grapple with a world saturated by media, where reality itself seems increasingly up for grabs. So prepare to have your mind bent and your assumptions challenged - nothing is off limits in the postmodern playground.



Keywords

Post WWII, Features, Fiction, Poetry, Drama

Discussion

Postmodernism is incomparable with other literary movements. This is because of its tendency to reject patterns or hierarchies. One way of approaching postmodernism is to understand it through its differences from modernist tendencies.

On the one hand, modernist literature possessed many different directions – symbolism, imagism, absurdism and so on. Postmodernism tends to collapse the boundaries between these various movements. It did not view them as fundamentally different literary expressions.

Both modernism and postmodernism rejected singular or universal meanings. Rather, readers were viewed as drawing their own meanings from literary texts, based on their individual perspectives. Postmodernism, however, emphasised the significance of the form in shaping meanings.

Modernism laments the loss of faith and social structure. Postmodernism celebrates the same. It stands for plurality, discontinuity, de-centring and fragmentation in theme and technique. As opposed to deliberately styling literature, postmodernism accepts incompleteness of form and content.

Where experimental and modern works attempted to look forward or into the future, postmodernism historicised, i.e., it gave historical context to its literature. While modernism tried to break down time and place, postmodernism asserted the particularity of time-space. It rejects the possibility that art, literature and theatre stand separate from each

other. Instead, all three borrow techniques, themes and styles from the others' fields. It deliberately mixes "high" and "low" art, "popular" and "elite" forms.

In effect, postmodernism is an extension of the modernist movement. It continues some of the major experimentations of modernism, including the use of self-conscious parody, irony, fragmentation, generic mixing, ambiguity, simultaneity and the breakdown between high and low forms of expression. The major difference between the two arrives with the tone of celebration that postmodernism takes.

There are certain common threads in the postmodernist movement. They include:

3.4.1 Key features of the Age

1. *Liberation from authority*

Postmodernism celebrates liberation from an age when faith and authority were intact.

2. *Fragmentation*

Postmodernist literature moves towards fragmentation in all aspects of literature. To achieve this effect, it uses collage-style forms, non-linear use of time, and significant jumps in character and place.

3. *Embrace of randomness*

In the absence of absolute or universal meaning and truth, postmodernist works use randomness and disorder.

4. *Playfulness*

Postmodern literary works use techniques, such as black humour, wordplay, pun and irony to create layered narratives.

5. Intertextuality

Postmodernists borrowed from previous literary and cultural texts to present interconnected meanings.

6. Pastiche

Postmodernist works often put together different types of literature and texts to create a pastiche or a new style made from the mixing of different existing types.

7. Metafiction

Postmodern literature emphasised the literary nature of the text, bringing in commentary on the constructedness of the work. This tendency of a work to refer to its own fictional nature is known as metafiction.

8. Open to multiple interpretations

Postmodern works often do not directly convey meanings. Rather, they are ambiguous and open to several interpretations.

Using these features in varying ways, postmodernism seeks to depict life as centrally meaningless and dehumanising. Individuals and activities in postmodernist literature are often portrayed as losing their specific characteristics, and becoming representative of an age or time.

3.4.2 Key writers of the Age

Theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Frederick Jameson, and Francois Lyotard have been influential in shaping postmodernism. Their concepts on centre/periphery, power, othering, narratives, and reality explore the various dimensions of the postmodernist movement.

The influence of writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Italo Calvino (1923-1985) can be seen in postwar British literature. Borges, an Argentinean poet and prose-writer,

is known for creating prose which incorporates serious scientific and social problems in the form of adventures or detective stories.

He uses real historical events and facts in relation with the fictional occurrences in his works. This creates the feeling of authenticity. Despite not belonging to the postmodern era as such, Borges employs postmodern techniques, such as intertextuality, pastiche and metafiction.

Italo Calvino (1923-1985), an Italian writer, has composed works that employ metafiction and self-reflexivity. For instance, his novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* narrates the story of a traveller who is attempting to read a work titled *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*.

An interesting idea of postmodernism is the concept of the centre/periphery. Imagine a circle. The centre of the circle represents the seat of power. It could be power or authority of any kind. The further you move away from that centre, the more powerless you are. Postmodern thinkers argue that the centre and periphery of power keep shifting. What is today the centre of power need not be so tomorrow. This concept is visible in much of postmodern thinking. Can you think of an example from your own experience to relate to this?

By the middle of the twentieth century, in the postwar period, the British novel had changed its tone and themes. The uncertainty of the war years is reflected in the rejection of positive optimism. Violence and sadism appear as themes, throwing light on the fact that the world had become accustomed to conflict, death and chaos.

The novel of this age is mostly a mixture of realism, cynicism, dark comedy, doubt and



satire. The search for purpose and stability is often portrayed as meaningless or futile. One of the subgenres of the novel that rose to popularity during this time is Science Fiction. It explores the world in terms of space, futuristic warfares and alien life.

The foundations of this category of novels had been laid with H.G. Wells, who wrote works such as *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men in the Moon* in the early twentieth century. Prominent authors of the genre in the postmodern era were Arthur C. Clarke, Douglas Adams, J.G. Ballard and John Wyndham. The novels of these writers may be considered postmodern in their creation of new realities and possibilities.

In 1948, Arthur C. Clarke wrote the short story "The Sentinel" for a BBC competition. The story was rejected, but Clarke would later use it as the basis for his 1968 novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*. That same year, Stanley Kubrick, the renowned director, would adapt the work into a popular and critically acclaimed movie of the same name. This would change the course of Clarke's life, with the novel selling almost 3 million copies by 1992. The movie has been classified as "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" and preserved in the National Film Registry of the United States.

There were foreshadows of postmodernism in the novels of several British authors. However, their fiction cannot strictly be classified as modern or postmodern. For instance, the works of Graham Greene (1904-1991) show tendencies towards postmodernism. His novels highlighted the materialistic ways of the world. They also dealt with the uncertainty and identity-crisis of the era. Most importantly, we may find elements, such as time shifts, pastiches, chaos and 'magic realism' in his

stories. The most noteworthy of his works are *It's a Battlefield*, *Brighton Rock*, *Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Quiet American*.

Writers such as Kingsley Amis (1922-1995) and Alan Sillitoe (1928-2010) are also important in this regard. Amis's stories revolved around 'anti-heroes', main characters who are morally and ethically imperfect. He portrayed such characters as trying to succeed within a social system that they despise, but are forced to compromise with. This is seen in his novels, such as *Lucky Jim* and *Take a Girl Like You*.

Alan Sillitoe's fiction revolves around working-class discontent. His works such as *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *A Start in Life*, and *The Widower's Son* criticise society and present anti-social behaviour as a means of fighting back.

While these works are not experimental in form, they represent the postmodern mood of scepticism and doubt. Their themes, characterisation and plotlines show the emergence of new attitudes towards the world. They are significant in the development of the postmodernist movement.

Perhaps, one of the earliest authors to explore the connection between humanity, order and violence is William Golding (1911-1993). His works discuss the human instinct to destroy that which is good, as seen in his novel *The Lord of the Flies*. His other works such as *The Inheritors*, *Pincher Martin*, and *The Scorpion God* focus on different aspects of this condition.

In a similar fashion, Anthony Burgess (1917-1993) wrote *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Wanting Seed*, *The Clockwork Testament* and *The Enderby Quartet* [four novels in a series]. His works depicted bleak and darkly humor-

ous settings. They often mingled horror, satire, and pessimism to provoke deep questions about society.

In the works of Golding and Burgess, the breakdown of order and the presence of violence appear as common threads. Both authors present symbolic stories about the nature of the world around them and the ills of their society.

George Orwell (1903-1950), an English author, produced renowned fiction in this period. He is best known for his allegorical novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. His imagination of dystopian realities in these works are crucial in the postmodernist sense. His style of writing is somewhat journalistic, excluding long, flowery descriptions. He does not use extended metaphors or unnecessary imagery. Rather, he conveys the story in direct, precise language.

Orwell is famous for coining neologisms or newly created words. His novels contain many words that were created to describe the imaginative situations or objects within the story. Many of these terms have, since then, started to be used in everyday language. His other famous works include *Burmese Days*, *The Clergyman's Daughter* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

The fiction of George Orwell had a tremendous influence on the English language, contributing many new words. Here are some of the most well-known and used of his neologisms.

- ▶ Newspeak (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*): Language that is designed to make independent thought impossible
- ▶ Doublethink (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*): Holding two conflicting

beliefs at the same time

- ▶ Thought police (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*): Politically unorthodox views held by a person

Upon closely examining these new words, we can see that Orwell was indeed criticising the control that those in power exert on the common people by controlling their thoughts and language.

While there are many novels in British literary history that display the features of postmodernism, one particular novel is often considered to be representative of the style. This work is John Fowles' (1926-2005) novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which revolves around the disastrous love affair between Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff, set around the mid-nineteenth century.

The plot uses real historical personalities, such as the Rossettis (Pre-Raphaelite poets), and authentic details. It offers multiple endings, leaving the reader unsure of a proper conclusion to the story. Further, the narrator's voice intervenes within the story with a personality of its own. Fowles' other works are also considered to be placed between modernism and postmodernism. His novels such as *The Ebony Tower*, *Daniel Martin*, *Mantissa* and *The Maggot* are well-renowned.

Another significant postmodernist writer is Graham Swift (1949-). His novel *Waterland* is concerned with the relevance of history as a source of meaning in stories. The main narrator of the story is a history teacher who narrates tales from his recollections and memories to his class. The reader, who follows this oral discussion, takes the position of one of his students.



The novel gathers different stories together into a single narrative. In the backdrop of the history teacher's individual story, larger historical events are depicted. This shows the interconnections between the personal and the historical – an important postmodernist theme.

Sometimes, the chapters in the novel do not conclude, and extend into each other (Nicol 115). The end of Chapter 2 is "...let me tell you..." The title of Chapter 3 is "ABOUT THE FENS". The opening line of Chapter 3 is as follows: "... which are a low-lying region in Eastern England." Read together, these separate phrases make a meaningful sentence.

Swift's works have been critically acclaimed, winning prestigious literary awards. The most significant of his works include *Shuttlecock*, *Last Orders*, *Light of Day* and *England and Other Stories*.

Julian Barnes' (1946) *Flaubert's Parrot* is similar in structure to *Waterland*. The novel's narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite, is obsessed with the French writer, Gustave Flaubert. He is on a quest to identify the stuffed parrot that inspired one of Flaubert's stories "Un Coeur Simple".

Flaubert published "Un Coeur Simple" ("A Simple Heart") in 1877 as one of the stories in his collection titled *Trois Contes* (*Three Tales*). Set in the nineteenth century, it follows the life of a humble servant named Félicité. We see how she is seen by those around her only as a wooden female – no one considers that she has human feelings. However, Félicité herself knows only how to serve others. She attaches herself to different people over the years, serving them, but they eventually vanish or die. Finally, she becomes attached to a stuffed parrot that she adores and worships in her old age.

As the novel progresses, its narrator tries to understand different aspects of Flaubert's life. He wishes to know the writer directly through various historical evidences. But, as the novel makes clear, it is impossible to know the past exactly. Braithwaite's investigation into Flaubert reveals that he is not an unchanging character, but a series of characters who conflict and contradict each other across a period of time.

Other than *Flaubert's Parrot*, Barnes has produced other significant novels. These include *The History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, *The Sense of an Ending*, *England, England*, and *The Only Story*. Most of them employ postmodernist literary techniques, such as unreliable narrators, self-conscious narration, and the blending of different genres.

Ian McEwan (1948-) uses experimental narratives in some of his most acclaimed novels, such as *Atonement*, *The Innocent* and *Black Dogs*. For instance, *Atonement* presents a story that seems to have taken place, only for the reader to realise that they had been reading a novel written by one of the characters. Such overlap between fiction and reality is an important feature of postmodernism.

As with other postmodernists, McEwan uses historical settings to convey his stories. While *Atonement* makes references to WWII, *Black Dogs* revolves around the aftermath of the Nazi era in Germany.

Martin Amis (1949-), another significant postmodernist writer, examines the power of 'market forces' on society in his novels. *Money*, *Time's Arrow*, *Success*, *The Night Train*, *Yellow Dog* and *The Information* are some of his noteworthy works. Amis is particularly noted for his skillful use of language, satire, and comedy. The emotional depth of his writing has often won him recognition as one of the best writers of the age.

Perhaps you have heard of the phrase “Death of the Author”. Since postmodernist works are open-ended, readers can construct their own meanings. Postmodern theorist Roland Barthes compares this condition to the death of the author. In other words, readers take on the role of the author in attributing meaning, including ones not considered by the author in the first place.

A key characteristic of the postmodern novel is the mixing of realism and fantasy. This is seen, for example, in *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter (1940-1992). Its heroine, Sophie Fevvers, claims to have hatched from an egg. She also says that she has wings. Such plotlines are seen in many of Carter’s works, such as *The Magic Toyshop*, *Heroes and Villains*, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Wise Children*.

The fictional output of Salman Rushdie (1947-) also carries this feature. His most well-known work, *Midnight’s Children*, follows India’s history through the character of Saleem Sinai who has supernatural powers. Similar themes and narratives are present in his other productions, such as *Grimus*, *The Enchantress of Florence*, and *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*. Such works are said to use a technique known as magic realism, where realistic aspects of the world are combined with fantastical or magical elements.

Over the years, there has been a steady introduction of Indian elements into the English language and culture. In the literary scene, Salman Rushdie has played a huge role in using Indianised English in his fiction. He coined the word ‘chutnification’ to refer to this process.

British poetry in the postwar era saw changes in different aspects. As with fiction, poetry

witnessed the influx of darker, more sceptical themes. The works of Vernon Scannell (1922-2007), Jon Silkin (1930-1997), and Neville Frederick Porter (1929-2010) are especially illustrative of the same.

Thom Gunn (1929-2004) explored themes of self-destruction, meaninglessness, and cynicism in his poetry. He used language economically to express countercultural ideas. The imagery that he used in his poetry was often startling, earning him comparisons to John Donne (a 17th century poet who used surprising imagery).

The most renowned of his works include *Fighting Terms*, *The Sense of Movement*, *My Sad Captains* and *Touch*. In the collection *The Man With Night Sweats*, Gunn powerfully examined his own sexuality, the AIDS pandemic, and the friends that he lost to the disease.

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was another important figure in British poetry. His works are acclaimed for their representation of a ‘pre-modern’ world. In other words, he wrote about the traditions, customs, and culture of his region, introducing them to the larger world. In works such as “Digging” and “The Grauballe Man”, Heaney expresses an interest towards history and politics. The most significant of his contributions are *The Death of a Naturalist*, *Door into the Dark* and *Electric Light*.

George MacBeth (1932-1992), a Scottish writer, is known for using a wide variety of styles. His poetry ranges from personal elegies, comic poems, and poetic fantasies to satires. He has published his work in collections such as *A Form of Words*, *The Broken Places*, *Shrapnel*, and *Anatomy of a Divorce*.

The Movement poets had put forward a traditionalist approach to poetry in response to the



High Modernism of the years between the two world wars. As a reaction against this conservative approach, a modernist-inspired literary movement was sparked in the 1960s.

This was known as the British Poetry Revival. The poets of the British Revival were not connected together by common themes, styles, or language. Rather, they were only loosely associated through their rejection of the Movement philosophy. The significant poets in this school included Bob Cobbing, Paula Claire, Jeff Nuttall, Andrew Crozier, Lee Harwood, Allen Fisher, Iain Sinclair, Paul Buck, Lawrence Upton, Maggie O'Sullivan and Denise Riley, among others.

From the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, a large number of writer-performers were active in Britain. This included poets, such as A. Mitchell, Jeff Nuttall, Tom Pickard, Alexander Trocchi and Heathcote Williams. This poetry used open forms, often composed in the manner of folk songs or protest songs. There was a reflection of the 'anti-war' sentiments of the time, as well as a love for experimentation. They would perform the songs in readings and events. This style came to be known as 'Underground Poetry'.

In the 1950s, a group known as the 'Liverpool Poets' came into prominence. The most significant poets of this literary movement were Adrian Henri (1932-2000), Roger McGough (1937-) and Brian Patten (1946-). They gained popularity by presenting and reading their works in clubs and coffee bars in Liverpool.

They wrote poetry meant to be read out aloud, with a young audience in mind. They wished for poetry to be considered a modern form of entertainment, much like a pop-song. In doing so, they democratised the art-form by making it accessible to a larger section of the public.

The influence of American Beat literature is evident in the works of the Liverpool poets.

Postwar British drama saw the emergence of many significant playwrights, such as Ann Jellicoe (1927-2017), Arnold Wesker (1930-2012) and John Arden (1932-2016). They pushed the boundaries of English drama through their works.

Jellicoe encouraged 'community plays' which were written and produced by professionals, but performed entirely by members of the community. She developed new forms that challenged audiences. *The Knack: A Comedy in Three Acts, Shelley, or The Idealist*, and *Three Jelliplays* are some of her notable works.

Wesker became known for his 'social optimism', wherein he celebrated working-class life. He began to move towards presenting plays in smaller venues, using mostly monologues. Some of his works contain autobiographical content. *The Kitchen, Chicken Soup with Barley, Chips with Everything*, and *Denial* are among his significant contributions.

Arden, on the other hand, mixed poetry and songs with dialogues in his plays. Often he left the strong tensions in his plots unresolved. Some of his important plays are *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance, Live Like Pigs, The workhouse donkey: a vulgar melodrama*, and *Stealing Steps*.

Around this period, John Osborne (1929-1994) produced plays that were critical of the political and social conventions of the time. His plays, such as *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* presented angry male characters who were unhappy with modern society. These types of plays were often called Kitchen

Sink Drama. They followed a sharp, realistic style that was different from the 'well-made' plays of the previous era.

Postmodern drama is chiefly concerned with the question of language and experience. Taking off from the Dadaist Movement and the Theatre of the Absurd, the playwrights in the postwar period deeply examined the understanding of reality.

One of the most significant postmodern dramatists was Harold Pinter (1947-2008). His writing career began in the late fifties, under the influence of modernism. However, his plays often challenged the boundaries between what is real and unreal. They also pointed out the instability of identity.

His dramatic style has been described as the 'comedy of menace', wherein dangerous situations are mingled with humour and comedy. This can be seen in Pinter's plays such as *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party*. The works of David Campton, Nigel Dennis and N.F. Simpson are also referred to using this term.

Dadaism is an artistic movement with political foundations. It endorsed anarchy, often attacking the very concept of art and literature. For instance, a French Dadaist sculptor and painter, Marcel DuChamp displayed a porcelain urinal which he titled *Fountain*. Another Dadaist author, Tristan Tzara would take a newspaper and cut out words and lines with a scissor. He would, then, randomly assemble these into a poem.

Another important name in postmodern drama is that of Tom Stoppard (1937-). His dramas

often explored philosophical themes using postmodernist techniques. Some of his most prominent contributions are *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Jumpers*, *Travesties*, *Arcadia*, *The Invention of Love* and *Rock 'n' Roll*.

His dramatic style is intellectual, incorporating word play and puns. He often reworks pre-existing material into paradoxical narratives. This is seen in the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, where two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* have been made the main leads.

The dramas of Edward Bond (1934-) had a tremendous role in the development of the British postmodern theatre. He has authored close to fifty plays, some of which are considered classics in contemporary English drama. The most renowned of his contributions are *Saved*, *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, *Lear*, *Restoration*, *The Under Room*, and *The Edge*. Influenced by Brecht, Bond's plays display a social commitment. They often have working-class subjects, complex dialogues and sexual puns.

As such, the postmodernist era in English literature provoked serious questions about language and identity. The concept of absolute meaning is also rejected in postmodernist literature. Rather, there is a celebration of fragmentation and plurality. Thus, postmodern works of art and literature 'played' with form and language, creating complex expressions.



Recap

- ▶ Postmodernism vs. modernism
- ▶ Emergence in 1960s, tendencies visible even earlier
- ▶ Challenged central ideas of modernism
- ▶ Atmosphere of suspicion towards reason and rationalism
- ▶ Blurred different literary movements
- ▶ No absolute truth, style, or technique
- ▶ Celebration of fragmentation and discontinuity
- ▶ Major features - randomness, playfulness, intertextuality, metafiction and pastiche
- ▶ Science fiction
- ▶ Early tendencies of postmodernism in Greene, Amis, Sillitoe
- ▶ Postmodernist themes in Golding, Burgess, Orwell
- ▶ Postmodernist Lit - Fowles, Barnes, Swift, McEwan, Martin Amis, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie
- ▶ Postwar poetry - Gunn, Heaney, Macbeth - darker themes
- ▶ British poetry revival against Movement poetry
- ▶ Underground poetry
- ▶ Liverpool poets
- ▶ Postwar Drama
- ▶ Kitchen Sink Drama
- ▶ Postmodernist dramatists - Pinter, Stoppard and Bond

Objective Questions

1. What precedes postmodernism?
2. What is celebrated in postmodernism?
3. Which Argentinian writer influenced postmodernism?
4. Which sub-genre of fiction gained popularity in the postwar era?
5. Who wrote the novel *The Power and the Glory*?
6. Which postwar British novelist explores the human instinct to destroy that which is good?
7. What has Orwell contributed to the English language?
8. What is the name of the heroine in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*?

9. Who is the narrator of *Waterland*?
10. Which historical event is used as a backdrop in *Atonement*?
11. What elements are intermixed in magic realism?
12. Who published *The Death of a Naturalist*?
13. Which British poet uses a wide variety of styles?
14. Which movement was A.Mitchell part of?
15. Where did the Liverpool poets present their poetry?
16. Who encouraged 'community plays'?
17. What was the name given to John Osborne's plays?
18. Who wrote 'Comedies of Menace'?

Answers

1. Modernism
2. Loss of faith and order
3. Jorge Luis Borges
4. Science Fiction
5. Graham Greene
6. William Golding
7. Neologisms
8. Sarah Woodruff
9. A History teacher
10. World War II
11. Magic/fantasy and realism
12. Seamus Heaney
13. George MacBeth
14. 'Underground Poetry'
15. In clubs and coffee bars
16. Ann Jellicoe
17. Kitchen sink drama
18. Harold Pinter

Assignments

1. Who were the major science fiction authors of the postwar era?
2. Which authors influenced the development of postmodernism?
3. Name the major Underground poets.
4. Who was Edward Bond?
5. Examine the contributions of George Orwell to English fiction.
6. Briefly discuss the development of postmodern English fiction.
7. Examine the early dramatists of the postwar period in English.
8. Explain the major differences between modernism and postmodernism.
9. Write a brief note on the various representative authors of the period.
10. Discuss the significance of postmodernism in English drama.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford UP, 1979.
- ▶ Drabble, Margaret. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 5th Ed. Oxford UP, 1985.
- ▶ Evans, Ifor. *A Short History of English Literature*. Penguin, 1965.
- ▶ Kerr, Gordon. *Short History of the Victorian Era*. Oldcastle, 2019.
- ▶ Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Significance*. Rupa, 2015.
- ▶ Milne, Ira Mark. *Literary Movements for Students*. Gale, 2008.

BLOCK - 04

Representative Texts - I

Unit 1

General Prologue, The Canterbury Tales - Introduction, Lines 1-31

- Geoffrey Chaucer

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ identify the style used by Chaucer
- ▶ become aware of the variety of English that was used in the Middle Ages
- ▶ become cognizant of some of the characteristics of England of the Medieval period

Prerequisites

A crowded medieval tavern on a chilly spring evening. The air is thick with pipe smoke and the smell of ale. Suddenly, the door swings open and in walks a motley group of travelers - a knight in battered armor, a plump nun, a gap-toothed wife, a wily merchant. They've just arrived in town, part of a larger group headed to Canterbury on a pilgrimage. As they warm themselves by the fire, the innkeeper suggests a storytelling contest to pass the time on their journey. Eyes light up around the room - everyone loves a good tale. Little do they know, they're about to embark on one of the most beloved story collections in English literature.

Key Themes

Influence of Religion (It is evident in that the poem takes place in a religious setting, all the people in the poem are going for a pilgrimage to Canterbury.)

Companionship (The theme of companionship is very strongly and evidently visible in this section of the poem. The members from different classes of the society get together, and become good companions on their way to visit the shrine.)

Discussion

Sir Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 – 1400)

- Father of English Literature
- Father of English Poetry

Major works: *The Book of the Duchess*, *Blanche of Lancaster*, *The House of Fame*, *The Legend of Good Women*, *Parliament of Fowles*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Canterbury Tales*.



Fig 4.1.1: Geoffrey Chaucer

4.1.1 Summary

Lines 1 - 31

At the time when April with its sweet showers has penetrated the drought of March to the root and submersed everything in such liquor that makes the flowers bloom, and when Zephyrus, the West Wind, with his sweet breath has roused the tender crops in every woods and hills, and when the young Sun has traversed half of his course in the sign of Aries the Ram, and small birds that sleep all the night without closing their eyes make melody, then people wish to go on pilgrimages to distant lands, to the shrines of saints, especially to the Shrine of the holy blissful Martyr Saint Thomas à Beckett, in Canterbury. Saint Thomas à Beckett has helped in curing them of their diseases.

It happened in that season, as I lay in bed in the Tabard Inn at Southwark, with my heart full of pious feelings, prepared for a pilgrimage to Canterbury, a group of twenty-nine people from various strands of life came there at night. For some reason or the other, they fell into fellowship. They were all pilgrims riding to Canterbury. There was ample space in the chambers and stables of the inn to accommodate them all. And, shortly before night, I spoke to each of them, and they invited me into their company. I agreed with them to wake up early to start our journey to Canterbury.

Did you know?

There are 857 lines in the “General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*.”

Word Meanings

Engendering - Producing

Zephyrus - The Greek god of the west wind

Grove - A small wood or other group of trees

Heath - Moorland

Ram - The zodiac symbol of Aries

Sundry - Various

Hostelry - Inn

Analysis

“The Prologue” begins in a very bright and blissful mood, with the description of April, the Spring season. The Spring shower is brought forth by the West Wind. Spring is a season that compels the natural world to grow, the birds to sing and men to visit pilgrimages. People travel to strange lands to visit the shrines of far-off saints. It is during this time that the people from all parts of England go to the shrine of St. Thomas Beckett at Canterbury. St. Thomas Beckett was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 to 1170, who was killed by the followers of King Henry II, inside the Canterbury Cathedral. The reason be-

hind the murder was a conflict between him and the King regarding the privileges and rights of the Church. He was, later, in 1772, canonised as a saint by Pope Alexander III. It is believed that visiting his shrine will help in relieving people of different kinds of ailments.

Modern readers are familiar with the account through the poetic dramas like Tennyson's *Beckett* (1884), T.S.Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and Jean Anouilh's *Becket* (1959).

The second stanza gives a brief description of the inn in which he stayed. It was the Tabard Inn in Southwark in London. There were twenty-nine people who joined him there, and all of them were on their pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Thomas Beckett. They were from different classes of the society. The inn had many rooms and stables, and was well-equipped to accommodate them. They all got acquainted, and decided to start their journey

the next morning itself.

The poem is written in Middle English, which was the form of English used from the 12th to the 15th centuries in England. These lines serve as an introduction to the context, and setting of the poem.

Although the general tone of the whole poem is satiric and ironic, this section of the poem does not present it heavily. The poem is written in iambic pentameter lines.

Iambic Pentameter

It is a line of verse consisting of five metrical feet, with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable.

Chaucer employs many symbols to present his views in this poem. In this section, the month of April stands as a symbol to represent rejuvenation and rebirth.

Recap

- ▶ Month of April
- ▶ Description of the beauty of Nature
- ▶ People wish to go on pilgrimages
- ▶ Shrine of St. Thomas Beckett, Canterbury
- ▶ The Saint is known for curing people from diseases
- ▶ A group of twenty-nine pilgrims assemble at Tabard Inn in Southwark, London
- ▶ Ample space for everyone to stay
- ▶ Host – Harry Bailey
- ▶ All the twenty-nine people are from different walks of life
- ▶ Decide to wake up early in the morning to start the journey

Objective Questions

1. Who was St. Thomas Beckett?
2. To which inn did the pilgrims arrive?
3. Who is the host of the Tabard Inn?
4. How many pilgrims arrived at the Tabard Inn?
5. Where is the Tabard Inn situated?
6. Where is the Shrine of St. Thomas Beckett situated at?

Answers

1. Archbishop of Canterbury
2. Tabard Inn
3. Harry Bailey
4. 29
5. Southwark, London
6. Canterbury

Assignments

1. Read the complete Prologue to get a deeper insight into the poem.
2. Describe how successful Chaucer has been in presenting a description of Nature.
3. Give a summary and analysis of the lines 1 - 31 of the General Prologue, *The Canterbury Tales*

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Albert, Edward. *A Short History of English Literature*. Oxford UP, 2009.
- ▶ Bowden, Muriel. *A Reader's Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer*. Syracuse UP, 2001.
- ▶ Brewer, D.S. *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature*. BCC, 1967.
- ▶ Coghill, Nevill. *Poet Chaucer*. Oxford UP, 1967.
- ▶ Halliday, F.E. *Chaucer and His World*. House of Stratus, 2001.
- ▶ Long, William J. *English Literature*. Maple, 2021.



Unit 2

Epithalamion

- Edmund Spenser

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general understanding about the genre of the poem
- ▶ appreciate the poem
- ▶ get acquainted with various devices used in the poem
- ▶ locate the poem with the historical background
- ▶ employ the biographical details on the poem

Prerequisites

Dawn breaks on a misty Irish morning in 1594. In a small cottage, a poet sits at his desk, quill in hand. Today is his wedding day, and he's composing a special gift for his bride - a poem to celebrate their union.

As he writes, he weaves together images of nature awakening, mythological figures, and Christian symbolism. The poem follows the course of the wedding day, from early morning preparations to the ceremony to the intimate moments of the wedding night.

This is Edmund Spenser, crafting what will become one of the most famous wedding poems in the English language - a joyous song of love and marriage called "Epithalamion."

Key Themes

Marriage (The marriage between Spenser and Elizabeth Boyle)

Adoration of the Bride (Praising the physical as well as inner beauty of Elizabeth Boyle)

Mythology (Various instances from Christian as well as pagan mythology are used)

Discussion

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)

- ▶ Renaissance poet
- ▶ Introduced Spenserian sonnets, Spenserian odes

Important Works:

- ▶ *The Shepherd's Calendar*
- ▶ *The Fairie Queene*

4.2.1 Summary

It is the wedding day of the poet; the poem begins with an invocation of the Muses to inspire him to create a wedding song. The Muses have always inspired him, they have always made him create great pieces of verses, and so he is asking them to help him sing praises about the love of his life, and help him prepare for his wedding. He requests the Muses to wake up his love after gathering lilies, roses and different kinds of flowers to arrange her room and her path before she wakes up. Then the poet invites the nymphs, who are the caretakers of the beauty of the natural world, to help in preparing his bride, and to sing beautiful songs for her.

Epithalamion is a poem of 433 lines. It has 24 stanzas, corresponding to the 24 hours of the day.

The poet then moves on to speak to the bride directly, requesting her to wake from her deep sleep. He tells her that nature is singing, wishing her on her wedding day. The poet summons various supernatural elements in nature to wake her up, and to get her ready for their wedding. He invokes the father of the Muses, Phoebus Apollo, and asks him to grant his blessings to them that particular day, and promises him that in return, he would praise and sing for him loudly.

The bride has finally woken up. The poet requests “the daughters of delight,” the nymphs, the hours of day and Night, as well as the Seasons to attend to the bride. The poet, then, begins to describe the bridal procession, and the beauty of the bride. He says that the procession is a pompous event, with much singing and dancing. The bride appears, with eyes bright like the sun. She is all dressed in white, looking more of an angel than a woman. She, modestly, avoids the gazing eyes of her admirers, and blushes at praising songs.

The poet enquires the women watching them, whether they have ever seen someone more beautiful than her, and moves on to describe her virtues and her beauty. The beauty of the bride makes the maiden forget their song, and they keep staring at her.

From describing the physical beauty of the bride, the poet moves on to describe her inner beauty. He admires the liveliness in her character, her faithfulness in her love, her chastity, her dedication, her honour and her modest nature. He contends, had the people watching them been able to see her inner beauty, they would have become more stunned than on seeing her physical beauty.

The poet requests to open the doors of the temple, so that his bride may enter and approach the altar. He asks the maidens to make her an example of how piously and respectfully a lady should approach a holy place. The bride stands piously before the altar, as the priest offers his blessings. She blushes, making the angels attending on her forget their duties. Seeing her blush, the poet wonders as to why she should blush on offering her hand to him in marriage. The wedding rituals end there, and the poet asks to bring the bride home, so that the celebrations begin again. The poet calls on for feasting, drinking and merry-making. He turns his attention from the Almighty God to



God Bacchus, the god of wine and pleasure, Hymen, the god of marriage ceremonies, and the Graces.

The poet invites everyone to celebrate the holy day. He delights in the fact that the sun is shining bright, and the day is very beautiful. He suddenly changes his delightful tone on realising that the wedding has taken place on the summer solstice, and he will have to wait for long for the night to appear for his nuptial bliss. He goes on to complain about the length of the day, but at last consoles himself as evening begins. On noticing that evening time is approaching, he requests it to arrive faster, so that they would consummate their marriage.

The poet pleads with the singers and dancers to leave them alone. He is eager to see his bride in the wedding chamber. Apart from making love with his bride, he is eager to have a child with her. The legend says that a child conceived during the summer solstice will grow in the midst of all riches, and would grow into a wise person.

Night arrives at last, and the poet pleads to Night to cover and protect both of them. He moves on to make comparisons of the bride and himself with Alcmene and Zeus, and with Night and himself. He also prays that no evil thoughts or spirits visit them at their wedding night to destroy their nuptial bliss. He enlists those things that might disturb them at night. He also wishes silence to prevail throughout the night. His desire is that sleep should visit them at the apt time. Till then, he cheers the cupids to fly around them so that they would relish the night, and the tiny cupids would enjoy themselves.

He suddenly notices that Cinthia, the moon goddess, is watching them through the window. He prays to her that they be blessed with

all happiness during the night, and that her chaste womb be made fertile that night itself. The poet further adds more gods and goddesses to his list. He asks Juno, the wife of Zeus, who is the goddess of marriage to bless them so that they can form a strong bond, and their marriage be fertile. He also requests Hebe and Hymen for the same. He prays to all the gods and goddesses for the well-being of their married life. He prays that they may have many children together, so that they may have many followers to ascend to Heaven to offer tribute to the gods. He also assures his bride to wait peacefully for their offspring.

In the final stanza, the poet wishes that this song would be a precious ornament for his bride, whom he thinks needs more physical embellishments. He did not have the time to procure all the ornaments for his bride, hence he wishes that the song will serve the purpose.

4.2.2 Literary Devices

Refrain – A short part of a poem that is often repeated throughout the poem. The refrain, “The woods shall to me answer and my Echo ring,” offers a useful point of departure for viewing what the poem makes of its world and subjects.

Allusions – An indirect or passing reference. The poem is rich with mythological and Classical allusions. The prayer to Goddess Cinthia at the end of the poem is an example of Classical allusion.

Metaphors – A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied for an object.

The description of the bride’s beauty is done with metaphors. The eyes and forehead of the bride are described as sapphires and ivory, her lips as cherries, and her neck as an ivory tower.

4.2.3 Analysis

“Epithalamion” is an ode written by Edmund Spenser, celebrating his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle. The meaning of the word ‘epithalamion’ is ‘marriage hymn’ or ‘wedding song’. The poem begins in the Classical tradition with an invocation of the Muses. The bride is asleep at the beginning of the poem. The beginning stanzas anticipate the waking up of the bride in the morning. She is in her dreams. Later on, she wakes up, and gets ready for her wedding. The first half of the poem presents the poet addressing the gods, as well as other supernatural beings, to help his bride to get ready for their wedding.

Later in the poem, he requests the Greek gods and other supernatural beings to lead her to the altar for the wedding ceremonies to take place. Here, Spenser moves on to use Christian allusions, replacing the Greek ones. The Christian wedding ceremony becomes firmly entrenched with the pagan elements when the poet summons the aid of the nymphs. After the wedding ceremony, the gods take her to the house of the groom. A joyous, festive mood

prevails throughout the day. The bride wishes for night to come, so that they might be left alone for their wedding night. Finally, night arrives, and the poet prays for the blessings of the gods for the well-being of their marriage.

The major themes in the poem are the marriage between Edmund Spenser and his bride, Elizabeth Boyle, the glorification of the beauty of the bride, and the use of Christian and pagan mythology.

This poem is an ornamental gift from Spenser for his bride, Elizabeth Boyle. It is written in flowery language. The major literary devices used in the poem are allusions and conventional motifs. The poem is rich in symbols and imagery from Christian and Greek mythology, fashioned upon the Renaissance trend. It has 24 stanzas, and each stanza has a refrain.

The setting of the poem has similarities with the Irish countryside, where Spenser’s wedding ceremony was conducted. His deep love for Ireland is presented in the poem through the rich portrayal of the natural world surrounding the bride and himself.

Recap

- ▶ ‘Epithalamion’ means “wedding hymn”
- ▶ Addresses the poet’s bride, Elizabeth Boyle
- ▶ Describes the happenings on the wedding day
- ▶ The bride is asleep at the beginning of the poem
- ▶ The poet requests the gods to wake her up
- ▶ The gods and supernatural beings lead her to the wedding chamber
- ▶ The wedding ceremony takes place
- ▶ She is led to the groom’s house
- ▶ Wedding celebrations and feasting continue
- ▶ The bride waits eagerly for the wedding night
- ▶ Night arrives
- ▶ The bride prays for the blessings for a happy married life
- ▶ Full of Christian and Greek allusions



Objective Questions

1. To which genre of poetry does “Epithalamion” belong?
2. How many long lines are there in the poem?
3. Who is the groom mentioned in the poem?
4. Who is the bride?
5. When was the marriage held?
6. Where does the marriage take place?

Answers

1. A wedding song
2. 365
3. Spenser
4. Elizabeth Boyle
5. In 1594
6. At the altar

Assignments

1. Write a note on the poem as a wedding song.
2. What are the qualities that you find in the poem that make it an ode?
3. Write a paragraph on the symbols used in the poem.
4. Attempt a discussion on the themes used in the poem.
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Brown, Richard Danson. *‘The New Poet’: Novelty and Tradition in Spenser’s Complaints*. Liverpool UP, 1999.
- ▶ Hattaway, Michael. *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*. Blackwell, 2000

Unit 3

“To be or Not to be”, Scene I Act III, Hamlet - William Shakespeare

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with Shakespearean drama
- ▶ obtain some ideas on tragedy as a dramatic genre
- ▶ become acquainted with the soliloquy of William Shakespeare
- ▶ acquaint themselves with the key features of revenge plays

Prerequisites

The torches flicker in the drafty castle halls. A young prince paces back and forth, his brow furrowed in thought. He's wrestling with the weightiest of questions - whether to live or die, to act or remain passive.

This is Hamlet, Shakespeare's most famous tragic hero. Torn between duty to his murdered father and uncertainty about the right course of action, he's about to deliver one of the most iconic speeches in all of literature.

As he begins to speak, the audience leans in. They know they're witnessing something extraordinary - a raw, honest exploration of the human condition. Hamlet's words will echo through the centuries, captivating readers and theatergoers for generations to come.

In this famous soliloquy, Shakespeare delves deep into the psyche of his troubled protagonist, illuminating universal themes of mortality, action versus inaction, and the nature of human existence.

Key Themes

Theme of Revenge (Coming under the genre of revenge plays, the play deals with the theme of revenge).

Procrastination (Through the projection of the personal traits of Hamlet, the protagonist or the title character, the play sheds light on the procrastination or postponement as an obsessive factor which disturbs his peace of mind).

Bloodshed (As a typical end of all revenge plays, in the concluding scene of *Hamlet*, the stage is filled with blood as the major characters of the play are murdered).



Discussion

In the beginning of the play, there appears a ghost in Elsinore Castle in Denmark. The guards and Horatio, a school friend of Hamlet, happen to witness the appearance of the ghost. Horatio and the guards note that the ghost resembles the father of Hamlet. They plan to inform prince Hamlet about it. The uncle of Hamlet, Claudius, becomes the new King and marries Getrude, the wife of senior Hamlet. Hamlet appears heart-broken by the death of his father and immediate marriage of his mother to his uncle Claudius. When Hamlet listens to the news of the ghost's appearance, he wants to meet the ghost himself. When the ghost appears in front of Hamlet, it informs that he is the spirit of his father Hamlet, and Claudius, his brother is his murderer and it urges him to seek revenge upon Claudius. Though Hamlet determines to take revenge on Claudius, his contemplative and thoughtful nature blocks him from taking revenge on Claudius.

4.3.1 Summary - Act III, Scene I - "To be or Not to be" (Soliloquy)

Claudius speaks on the confused appearance of Hamlet. He expresses his concern over the mad appearance of Hamlet as he spends his good days with the disturbing thoughts. Rosencrantz says that Hamlet himself admits that he feels distracted but he never discloses the reason behind his mental agony. Guildenstern also comments on the aloofness of Hamlet and his unwillingness to confess his true mental dilemma. Getrude inquires how Hamlet received Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and to this query, they answer that they have been received in a quite gentle way. Rosencrantz and Polonius inform Getrude and Claudius that there are some actors who plan to perform a play for Hamlet and he is quite impressed with the idea and invites the king and queen

to attend the programme. Claudius expresses his delight as Hamlet finds some pleasures in entertainments like plays and suggests them to further motivate Hamlet to come back to normality. Claudius plans to verify whether his dilemma is due to his emotional affliction caused by his strong desire/ love for Ophelia. When Hamlet enters the place, everyone gathered there hide themselves to know the mind-set of Hamlet.

Here appears the renowned soliloquy of Hamlet "To be, or not to be — that is the question" which reflects his confused and restless mindscape. The most confusing question that vexes Hamlet is whether to remain a silent sufferer to the tortures or take arms against the dangers and put an end to it. The soliloquy then shows Hamlet's longing for death, the eternal sleep, whereby Hamlet thinks of relieving all the hardships of life. Hamlet seems torn between the burden of time in our daily life where humans suffer from failures of love and anonymity of the hereafter world which is an unknown region.

During this soliloquy, Hamlet watches Ophelia approaching him to express her deep love for him as a response to his first love request. In their conversation, Hamlet's disillusionment with love and life is revealed as he negates his 'love for Ophelia. Hamlet begins a conversation with Ophelia which deals with the question of beauty and honesty. When Hamlet rejects the love request of Ophelia, she feels that she is greatly deceived. Hamlet's sceptical attitude towards human beings is clear in his suggestion to Ophelia to go to a nunnery rather than breeding sinners. Hamlet himself wishes that he had not been born. He confesses his dejected state of being ambitious and revengeful. He awaits each moment for a proper chance to take revenge upon the murder of his father. He advises Ophelia not

to believe in any of the human race, instead go to a nunnery. In his final statement, before the departure, his contempt and hatred towards Claudius is apparent. Requesting her repeatedly to go to a nunnery, he says that there should not be any further marriages as he does believe nothing worthy in the institution of marriage. Ophelia laments the fall of Hamlet from his noble position to a state of madness. From his soliloquy and conversation with Ophelia, Claudius understands that his madness is not formed out of frustrated love but some serious unresolved issues remain unsettled in his mind. Claudius gives an order to send Hamlet to England. As a response to King's request, Polonius says that in his opinion, the origin of Hamlet's madness is the result of the rejected love. So he suggests that a meeting should be arranged between Hamlet and his mother so that he may open up his mind. In Polonius' view, only after this meeting Hamlet should be sent to England. Claudius agrees with this opinion, stating that the madness of the great men should be observed carefully.

4.3.2 Critical Analysis

Hamlet is the longest drama written by William Shakespeare. The exact date of *Hamlet's* publication is unknown but the scholars admit that it was published between 1601 and 1603. *Hamlet* could be considered as the milestone artistic work by William Shakespeare in his progression as a playwright. In this play, Shakespeare fuses together two contradictory and opposing forces such as Hamlet's moral sensitivity and the internal compulsion for taking revenge on his father's murderer.

Hamlet is a revenge play which introduces the character of Hamlet who, being a character with a philosophical bent of mind and reflective in nature, remains an inappropriate character for executing the act of revenge. The context of this revenge is Claudius' killing of

King Hamlet and marrying his wife soon after the murder. So the ghost of the King Hamlet suggests Prince Hamlet to take revenge upon the murderer. But the moral and contemplative nature of Hamlet blocks him from taking revenge. Hamlet even becomes sceptical of the truthfulness of the ghost's version of the story. *Hamlet* follows the conventions of revenge plays such as the depiction of violence and bloodshed on the stage. However, it deviates from the contemporary dramatic conventions through the portrayal of internal crisis and dilemma of *Hamlet*.

The play is structured with dramatic phases like exposition, complication, crisis, climax and falling action. The 'exposition' of the play is formed by the appearance of the ghost, and three guards find the ghost as a figure resembling the former King Hamlet. When Hamlet watches the ghost, he is left with the confusion whether the ghost is a good spirit or bad spirit.

The play moves to the phase of 'complication' when Hamlet appears as a mad man, posing a serious confusion and threat to Claudius and his companions who attempt to find out the causes of his erratic and strange behaviour. Claudius becomes seriously concerned with Hamlet's discovering the truth of his father's murder. In order to avoid the threat from Hamlet and maintain his power, Claudius sends him to England. Hamlet wrongly assumed that the person hiding behind the drapes was Claudius. He kills Polonius by mistake and this act takes the plot to a complex level. The death of Polonius leads to the madness and death of Ophelia.

The 'crisis and climax' phase of the play occurs when the fencing match is held between Hamlet and Laertes, then the audience witnesses a series of violences on the stage. Both Laertes and Hamlet are wounded by the poisoned foil. When Laertes confesses that Clau-



dius is the cause of Getrude's death, Hamlet kills Claudius with the same poisoned foil. The 'falling action' of the play occurs by the death of Hamlet, the title character. The sound of the marching army from Poland could be heard this time. The information on the death of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz is also announced by the ambassador of England. As all major characters die, listening to Horatio's narration of the story, Fortinbras gives orders to conduct a funeral ceremony for Hamlet in a quite befitting manner as for a soldier.

Soliloquy is a dramatic device employed by playwrights to expose the complex inner feelings and thoughts of a character through his self-speech which the audience can listen to but other characters in the play remain unaware of. These soliloquies are long speeches that are articulated by a single character on the stage which provides information on the private thoughts of the character. In *Hamlet*, there are seven soliloquies by Hamlet which unfold the complex psychological state and internal crisis of the title character. The lengthy soliloquies in *Hamlet* shed light on the inner conflicts of the tragic hero of the play. Each soliloquy in *Hamlet* serves to contribute to the progression of the play.

The first soliloquy happens before the ghost's appearance in front of Hamlet. The second soliloquy takes place soon after the ghost's first meeting with him in which the ghost assigns him the responsibility of taking revenge upon his father's murderer. As he has determined to take revenge upon Claudius, in the third soliloquy, Hamlet charges himself for postponing the act of revenge. The fourth soliloquy in *Hamlet* is the most philosophical soliloquy in the play. The fifth soliloquy takes place just

before Hamlet's encounter with his mother. The sixth soliloquy happens when he was on his way to Getrude's chamber. Here the ghost is Hamlet's own conscience to scold and accuse him for the delay of execution of the revenge.

Among these soliloquies, the fourth soliloquy is the most renowned as it is a highly philosophical and contemplative one. The soliloquy 'to be or not to be' consists of 262 words and 33 lines. The Act III, Scene I, the scene of Hamlet telling Ophelia to 'get thee to a nunnery' is referred to as the 'nunnery scene'. This soliloquy raises fundamental questions on human existence which deal with issues like life and death. The most disturbing dilemma of Hamlet is expressed in this soliloquy which foregrounds the dilemma whether to silently suffer the misfortune of life or fight with the fierceness of fate. Here the soliloquy preoccupies with choices of enduring life and putting an end to life. In this soliloquy Hamlet comes to the conclusion that it is the total ignorance of the hereafter life that compels people to endure life even if it is filled with hardships and challenges.

Through the projection of these confusions and dilemmas in this soliloquy, the irresolute nature of Hamlet is shown. Enlisting painful moments, it showcases the problems and anguish of human existence. Though this soliloquy is the manifestation of Hamlet's worries and internal ruminations, it reflects the problems of every individual in the world, thus it has a universal appeal. The function that this soliloquy serves in the play is to present the reason for Hamlet's postponement of taking revenge and consequent mental distress that he suffers.

Glossary

Exposition - Beginning of a plot/story which introduces the audience about the setting, characters, and other background information.

Procrastination - An act of postponing or delaying a task or set of tasks

Rumination - A deep thought about something

Soliloquy - It is a monologue that is expressed when a character is alone

Recap

- ▶ Ghost appears in the castle in Denmark
- ▶ Guards and Horatio witness the ghost
- ▶ It resembles the father Hamlet
- ▶ Claudius becomes the new king-marries Getrude
- ▶ Hamlet - mad and heart-broken
- ▶ The ghost requests to take revenge on Claudius
- ▶ His contemplative nature - blocks him from taking revenge
- ▶ Madness of Hamlet - make Claudius and Getrude disappointed
- ▶ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - assigned to observe Hamlet
- ▶ To identify the reason of madness - the conversation between Ophelia and Hamlet
- ▶ Hamlet suggests Ophelia to go to the nunnery and calls for banning the marriage
- ▶ Travelling troupe of actors - enact the murder of Hamlet
- ▶ To verify Claudius' involvement
- ▶ Claudius appears restless and leaves the room
- ▶ Token of Claudius' crime - Hamlet to take revenge on Claudius
- ▶ Claudius praying - Hamlet reluctant to kill him- may enter heaven
- ▶ Hamlet's madness - frightens Claudius
- ▶ Claudius plans to send Hamlet to England
- ▶ Hamlet's encounter with Getrude in bedchamber
- ▶ Polonius - behind the tapestry
- ▶ Hamlet stabs Polonius - misjudging him as Claudius
- ▶ Ophelia - grief of her father's death - drowns
- ▶ The ghost reappears - request to take revenge on Claudius
- ▶ Hamlet along with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to England
- ▶ Envelope - requesting Hamlet to be killed
- ▶ Realising Claudius' plan of killing him- Hamlet returns home alone
- ▶ Laertes-returns from France

- ▶ Vows to take revenge on Hamlet
- ▶ Fight between Laertes and Hamlet
- ▶ Claudius poisons the blade of Laertes- poisoned goblet
- ▶ Getrude drinks-poisonous goblet-dies
- ▶ Laertes dies as his own sword cuts his body
- ▶ Laertes- Claudius is responsible for the death of Getrude
- ▶ Hamlet also dies
- ▶ The Norwegian prince invades Denmark

Objective Questions

1. Where does the ghost appear in the beginning of the drama?
2. Who is the school friend of Hamlet?
3. Who is the new king of Denmark?
4. Who is the mother of Hamlet?
5. Why does Hamlet appear heart-broken?
6. What does the ghost request from Hamlet?
7. What does prevent Hamlet from taking revenge on Claudius?
8. Who are the two friends assigned to observe the erratic behaviour of Hamlet?
9. What does Hamlet suggest to Ophelia?
10. What do the travelling actors enact?
11. How does Claudius behave when the murder scene is staged?
12. Why does Hamlet appear reluctant to kill Claudius when he was in his prayer?
13. Why does Claudius send Hamlet to England?
14. Who was hiding behind Getrude's bedchamber when Hamlet visited her?
15. How does Hamlet kill Polonius?
16. Why does the ghost reappear?
17. Why does Hamlet return home alone?
18. What is the reason for Ophelia's madness?
19. Who does vow to take revenge on Hamlet for killing his father?
20. What does Claudius do to kill Hamlet in the fight between Hamlet and Laertes?
21. How does Getrude die?
22. How does Claudius die?
23. Who does invade Denmark towards the end of the play?
24. What does the prince of Denmark do to the dead body of Hamlet?

Answers

1. Elsinore Castle in Denmark
2. Horatio
3. Claudius
4. Getrude
5. By the death of his father and the immediate marriage of his mother Getrude to his uncle Claudius
6. To take revenge on Claudius
7. His contemplative and thoughtful nature
8. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
9. Hamlet refuses Ophelia's love and suggests her to leave for nunnery.
10. They enact a story resembling to the event of king Hamlet's murder.
11. Appearing restless and annoyed he leaves the room
12. The fear that it may take Claudius to heaven
13. In order to ensure his safety from the revengeful Hamlet
14. Polonius
15. Misjudging that man behind the curtain is Claudius
16. To inform Hamlet to take revenge without any delay
17. Realising Claudius' plan of killing him
18. Hamlet's killing of her father Polonius
19. Laertes
20. Poisoning the goblet and the blade of Laertes' sword
21. Drinking the poisoned goblet
22. As Hamlet stabbed him with poisonous sword and made him to drink the remaining poisonous goblet
23. The Norwegian prince, the Prince of Fortinbras
24. Hamlet's dead body had been given proper funeral as that of a soldier.

Assignments

1. What is the significance of the ghost in *Hamlet*?
2. Discuss the revenge motif in *Hamlet*.
3. What is the tragic flaw of *Hamlet* ?
4. Comment on Hamlet's madness
5. Why does Claudius send Hamlet to England?
6. What happens to Polonius who remains hidden behind a tapestry?
7. Comment on the tragic end of *Hamlet*
8. Analyse the features of Shakespearean tragedies
9. Consider *Hamlet* as a revenge play
10. Comment on soliloquies in *Hamlet* ?



Suggested Reading

- ▶ Wilson, John Dover. *What Happens in Hamlet*. Cambridge U.P, 1951.
- ▶ Newell, Alex. *The Soliloquies in Hamlet: The Structural Design*. Fairleigh Dickinson U. P, 1991.

BLOCK - 05

Representative Texts - II

Unit 1

Sir Roger at the Assizes

- Joseph Addison

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with the style of Addison
- ▶ acquire familiarity with the thematic concerns of periodical essays
- ▶ get an idea about the thematic concerns of Addison
- ▶ acquaint with major trends of the eighteenth century prose

Prerequisites

A London coffee house in the early 1700s. The air is thick with tobacco smoke and the aroma of fresh coffee. At a corner table, a group of gentlemen are engrossed in animated discussion, their voices rising above the general hubbub. They're debating the latest essay in *The Spectator*, a wildly popular periodical that's taking the city by storm.

The *Spectator*, co-founded by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, has become a daily ritual for many Londoners. It's not just entertainment - it's shaping the way people think and talk about society, manners, and morals. Addison and Steele have created a cast of fictional characters to voice their observations and critiques, chief among them the lovable country squire, Sir Roger de Coverley.

The essay, "Sir Roger at the Assizes," has everyone talking. It's a masterful blend of humor and social commentary, centered around Sir Roger's visit to the county court sessions. Readers chuckle at Sir Roger's eccentricities while also pondering deeper questions about justice, rural life, and human nature.

As the coffee house patrons debate the finer points of the essay, they're participating in something revolutionary - the birth of modern journalism and public discourse. The *Spectator* is creating a shared cultural experience, a daily conversation that spans all levels of society.

Little do these coffee drinkers know, but they're witnessing the dawn of a new era in English literature. Addison's witty, observant prose is helping to shape the emerging art of

the essay. His character sketches and gentle satire will influence generations of writers to come.

In “Sir Roger at the Assizes,” we will explore not just a charming vignette of 18th century English life, but a pivotal moment in the development of English prose and social commentary.

Keywords

Periodical Essay, Gentleman, Irony, Sarcasm

Discussion

5.1.1 Sir Roger at the Assizes -

Summary

At the very outset of the essay, Joseph Addison states that the first requisite of an individual is to have confidence in oneself. This would save oneself from the blames of others. Sir Roger is such a man who is blessed with internal peace as he is respected by himself and others. He receives due respect from his neighbours in return to his benevolence to all.

The narrator describes an incident in which an old Knight takes him and Will Wimble to a court session in the country. During their ride, they come across two gentlemen and Sir Roger starts giving an account of them to the narrator.

While the two gentlemen and Will Wimble move ahead, Sir Roger informs them that one of the two gentlemen is a farmer. The second one is a good neighbour. The only problem with him is that he shoots down partridges in large amounts for his food. Tom Touchy has a bad reputation as he takes legal measures against everyone. He had even sought legal actions against honest persons for silly matters such as destroying hedges while they pass.

These two men, Will Wimble and Tom Touchy, seek Sir Roger’s opinion on a trivial subject like Wimble’s fishing in the river. Though the issue is silly, both the men hold opposite views on the matter. Sir Roger judiciously responds to them that “much might be said on both sides”. This response, without levelling charges against either of them, makes them satisfied. When Sir Roger and his companions reached the court, the session was about to end. Then the Knight stood up and delivered an insignificant lecture to impress the narrator and the assembly.

While they were returning, they stopped at an inn to refresh themselves and their horses. Without informing him, the owner of the inn, being a former servant of Sir Roger, made a portrait of his head as a gesture of respect in the sign board of the inn. Sir Roger compliments the owner of the inn, stating that it is a great honour to one who is under the position of a duke. Then, he suggests altering the image by adding some whiskers to make it appear like Saracen’s head. Even in this monstrous face, after the alteration, the narrator could identify some resemblances with Sir Roger. Noticing his laugh, Sir Roger asks him whether he can be identified even in his disguise. As a response to this question, the narrator comments that “much might be said on both sides”.



5.1.2 Critical Analysis

“Sir Roger at the Assizes” is a satirical essay by Joseph Addison. The tone and approach of the narrative convey the sense of the essay. The mismatch in content and form is very clear in the portrayal of Sir Roger’s character. Though Sir Roger is respected by everyone in the society, Addison depicts him with a sense of humour and mild satire.

As in all anecdotes on Sir Roger, “Sir Roger at the Assizes” also presents the imaginary character of Sir Roger as an eccentric knight. The narrator is a friend of Sir Roger who deliberates on various events in the life of Sir Roger with a tinge of humour.

There are a multitude of characters in the essay with contradictory traits. A comparison of characters like Sir Roger, Tom Touchy and Yeoman will reveal the genius of the writer. The dictum in the very beginning of the essay, “A man’s first care should be to avoid the reproaches of his own heart; his next to escape the censures of the world”, foreshadows the character of Sir Roger. The statement that a man enjoys peace of mind only if he is endearing to himself and gets approval from others is typical of Sir Roger. The humorous and satirical approach of Addison is distinctive in his depiction of characters like Will Wimble and Yeoman.

The representation of Yeoman begins with a humorous introduction of the character. He could have been a good individual if he had not killed birds in large numbers. The farmer is a real representative of an ordinary English

man of Addison’s time. Tom Touchy is a notorious character as he takes legal measures against everyone in the country. Two men in his locale are prosecuted for silly reasons. Though he belongs to a rich family, he squandered most of his wealth for these legal actions to the extent of ruining the family wealth.

The humorous shade of Sir Roger’s character is showcased in an event where Tom Touchy and Will Wimble argue over fishing in the river. Their argument as well as the fight constitute a stark criticism against English society of the eighteenth century. It was customary to mess up on trivial matters. In order to please both characters, Sir Roger takes a balanced approach, stating that “much might be said on both sides”. Another brilliance of satire and irony employed in the essay is in connection with the court session. Though Roger and his companions arrive at the court session very late, Sir Roger delivers a short, insignificant speech which makes people gather around him to lavish praise on him. Roger is a character who always tries to conform to social norms and conventions. This leads him to deliver an inappropriate speech only to impress the narrator.

In the final paragraph of the essay, Addison outwits his narrative with satirical and ironical overtones. On their way back home, as they stop at the inn, when Sir Roger comes across his own portrait. His suggestion of altering the portrait is humorously presented. To the query of Sir Roger whether the altered painting resembles him, Addison uses mimicry and irony together in the response of the narrator.

Recap

- ▶ The dictum- peace of mind- endear oneself - approval of the society
- ▶ Sir Roger- Sympathetic to all - well loved
- ▶ Characterizations of Will Wimble and Yeoman
- ▶ Yeoman- honest man - unless kill partridges in great amount
- ▶ Tom Touchy - notorious - legal measures against everyone
- ▶ Family lost most of their wealth
- ▶ Tom Touchy and Will Wimble argue over fishing
- ▶ Sir Roger takes a balanced approach - "much might be said on both sides"
- ▶ Court session-Sir Roger - inappropriate lecture
- ▶ At the inn- Sir Roger's portrait
- ▶ Altering of the painting - still resemblance
- ▶ The narrator's response - satirical - "much might be said on both sides"

Objective Questions

1. Who is considered the father of the periodical essays?
2. When did periodical essays begin to appear?
3. Who wrote collaboratively on the character Sir Roger?
4. When will an individual get peace of mind?
5. What is the negative side of the farmer?
6. Why is Tom Touchy notorious for?
7. Why do Will Wimble and Tom Touchy dispute each other?
8. What was the balanced view of Sir Roger on the disputing issue?
9. Why did Sir Roger deliver a speech at the court session?
10. Where did they stop to rest?
11. How did the owner of the inn respect Sir Roger?
12. What was Sir Roger's response when he had seen his portrait?
13. What was the response of the narrator when he was asked about his resemblance?

Answers

1. Richard Steele
2. April 12, 1709
3. Steele and Addison
4. Endears oneself and get approval of others
5. He shoots down large amount of birds
6. Taking legal actions for silly matters
7. On fishing in the river
8. "Much might be said on both sides"
9. To impress the narrator
10. At an inn
11. Installing a portrait of Sir Roger
12. To alter it with some modifications
13. "Much might be said on both sides"

Assignments

1. Give details on the character of Sir Roger.
2. Why is Tom Touchy notorious?
3. How is the character of Yeoman represented in the story?
4. What is the difference of opinion between Wall Wimble and Tom Touchy?
5. What is the strategic response of Sir Roger to the controversial issues?
6. What is the significance of the Knight's speech in the court session?
7. Discuss the characterization in "Sir Roger at the Assizes"
8. When does a man enjoy peace of mind?
9. Write a short note on the periodical essays of the eighteenth century
10. Compare and contrast the styles and themes of Richard Steele and Joseph Addison.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Addison, Joseph, and Richard Steele. *The Spectator*. LLC, 2019.
- ▶ Dobree, Bonamy. *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century, 1700-1740*. Oxford U.P, 1959.
- ▶ Knight, Charles. *Joseph Addison and Richard Steele: A Reference Guide*. Hall, 1994.

Unit 2

Frankenstein

- Mary Shelley

Learning Outcomes

Upon studying this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with some thematic concerns of novels in the romantic period
- ▶ acquaint themselves with epistolary form of narration employed in the novel
- ▶ describe the relation between science and morality
- ▶ detail major features of gothic horror novels

Prerequisites

On a dark and stormy night in 1816, a group of friends gathered at Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva. Among them were the poets Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, along with Percy's young lover, Mary Godwin. As rain lashed the windows, Byron proposed a challenge: each of them should write a ghost story.

Inspired by discussions of galvanism and the reanimation of dead matter, 18-year-old Mary began to craft a tale that would become one of the most influential novels in English literature. In her waking dream, she envisioned a pale student kneeling beside a hideous creature he had brought to life.

From this spark of imagination, Mary Shelley created *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* - a novel that would captivate and terrify readers for generations to come. More than just a horror story, it grappled with profound questions about scientific ethics, human nature, and the consequences of unchecked ambition.

As we explore Shelley's masterpiece, we will step into a world where the boundaries between life and death, creation and destruction, are blurred - a world that continues to resonate with readers today.

Keywords

Limit of the Knowledge, Ambition, Alienation, Gothic fiction



Discussion

In her novel, *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* published in 1818, Mary Shelley combines genres like scientific and gothic horror fictions. The novel deals with the story of Victor Frankenstein, a natural science student from Geneva, who experiments in order to instil life to human organs gathered from corpses; and the subsequent tragedy it brings forth.

5.3.1 Brief Outline of the Plot

In the beginning of the novel, Robert Walton, an explorer, seeks a new route from Russia to the Pacific Ocean through the Arctic. While on their voyage, Walton's crew accidentally meets an exhausted man named Victor Frankenstein floating on an ice sheet in the sea. The plot of the novel is Frankenstein's anecdote of his tragic life experiences to Walton. Born in Geneva, Switzerland, Frankenstein shows a keen interest in exploring new ideas and mysteries. During his childhood days, Elizabeth was his close friend who had been adopted by his family as she was an orphan.

In his childhood Frankenstein showed interest in science and later joined the University of Ingolstadt to study science. Elizabeth and his mother Caroline are seriously affected by a fever. Though his mother dies, Elizabeth recovers and becomes healthy. M. Krempe and M. Waldman are two important professors he meets at the university. During his study at University around two years he could impress his teachers and colleagues. The major endeavour of Frankenstein is to instil life to a dead body. Though he is successful in his experiment, giving life to the dead body, it becomes an obsessive nightmare throughout his life with its monster-like features. It takes away his peace of mind and he wanders everywhere with a restless mind unable to avoid his feeling of guilt and disgust. This obsessive

thought leads him to lose his mental and physical health.

Henry Clerval takes care of him and helps him recover his health. Soon, he gets a letter from his father asking him to return home as William, his youngest brother, is murdered by an anonymous person. Justine Moritz, their housekeeper, falsely accused of the murder is sentenced to death. Though Frankenstein knows the real killer, he remains incapable of revealing the real killer due to the supernatural feature of the event.

In order to refresh himself from this traumatic situation, Frankenstein moves from Geneva to Mount Montanvert where he meets his creature-monster who informs him of his loneliness and difficulty of existence as he does not belong to the human sect. Even though Frankenstein orders him to keep away from his sight, the monster compels him to listen to his stories. Insulted by the human beings, he seeks revenge not on entire humans but specifically on Frankenstein's family. The monster makes a request to Frankenstein to create one more monster as his mate so that he can save himself from loneliness and exclusion. The monster decides to leave Europe to South America and Frankenstein plans to move from Geneva to England and Scotland. He also plans to marry Elizabeth. Frankenstein disengages himself from the creation of the second monster and disposes its remaining parts in the sea. This leads the monster to vow revenge on Frankenstein.

Frankenstein's boat is destroyed in a storm and he lands in Ireland. He has to undergo a trial for the washed up dead body of Henry Clerval in Ireland. But he is saved as he is proven to be innocent and acquitted from the crime consequently. Though plunged in misery and frustration as he caused the death of many, he appears determined to marry Eliza-

beth. When the plan of his marriage progresses, the thought of the monster and possible dangers he may cause torment Frankenstein. Though he took many precautions to prevent the monster from entering the marriage ceremony, the monster stealthily enters the room of Elizabeth and strangles her.

In order to take revenge upon the monster, Frankenstein chases him throughout Europe and Russia. In the Arctic when Robert Walton meets Frankenstein, he was about to get hold of the monster. It was the time when Frankenstein had been sheltered and nursed by Walton's team.

In the last moments of Frankenstein, the monster visits the place in order to meet his creator for the last time. During this visit, he meets Walton and shares his side of the story. Soon after the death of Frankenstein, the monster disappears and is seen never again.

5.3.2 Major Characters

Victor Frankenstein: Victor is the narrator of the major portion of the novel. He is the protagonist of the novel who was born at Geneva to Alphonse Frankenstein and Caroline. He endows life to a dead body which ruins his peace of mind and ravages his family.

The Monster: The monster is the creation of Victor Frankenstein at the University of Ingolstadt whom Victor plans as a beautiful being but once the creation is completed, he appears as an ugly monster. The monster expresses his loneliness and exclusion from the human social fabric and he requests Victor to create him a female counterpart. When Victor expresses his unwillingness to create it, the monster takes revenge against him by killing his family members and friends.

Robert Walton: Robert Walton is a seafarer who saves the life of Victor Frankenstein from ice. His letters to his sister begin and end the novel *Frankenstein*. His letters function as the frame of the narrative which gives ample space for Victor's tragic story.

Alphonse Frankenstein: Alphonse is a highly sympathetic and supportive father who lavishes his love and affection on his son Victor Frankenstein. He dies soon after Elizabeth was strangled by the monster.

Elizabeth Lavenza: Elizabeth is a beautiful orphan who had been adopted by the Frankenstein family. She is the proposed bride of Victor Frankenstein but is killed by the monster to take revenge upon Victor.

Henry Clerval: Henry is a friend of Victor Frankenstein who was initially denied the opportunity to study at Ingolstadt University by his father. Later he joins the University and takes care of Victor when his health deteriorates. He was murdered by the monster in his trip with Victor Frankenstein.

5.3.3 The Structure of the Novel

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* adopts an epistolary form to narrate the story of the novel. In the entire novel, Mary Shelley juxtaposes narrations of three different characters. In the beginning and end of the novel, the plot is unfolded through the letters of Robert Walton to his sister. Then the story is narrated by Victor Frankenstein. In the middle of the novel, some sections are narrated by the monster. The storyline of the novel is outlined as a story within story format as Shelley begins with the story of Robert Walton and his letters. Within this narrative/letters there happens another story which is recounted by Victor Frankenstein. Within the story of Victor, there occurs



chapters which are narrated by the monster. The novel is thus successful in providing multiple perspectives and in maintaining the quality of a polyphonic text. Each section or narrative is given full autonomy so that each speaker narrates events from their own experiences which are not judged by any other character.

5.3.4 Chapter Summary

Beginning Letters

In the beginning of the novel *Frankenstein*, Shelley provides a series of letters written by Robert Walton to his sister Margaret Saville. The event takes place in the 18th century.

The *first letter* is dated 11 December, which is written from St. Petersburg, Russia. This letter informs that Walton is about to begin a journey to the North Pole via sea. There are two reasons behind his journey; one is to find out the northern route to other regions of the world and the second is to study the origin of magnetism in the North Pole. Walton had aspired to be a poet, but failed and he tries to accomplish his childhood dream of reaching the North Pole as he desires some higher purposes to fulfil in his life.

In the *second letter* written from Archangel Russia, Walton writes of his feeling of loneliness as he is brought up in a comfortable manner which makes him too sensitive to the ferociousness of the sea. Walton confesses his romantic fascination for the beauty of the sea and its dangers which is his reason for loving Coleridge's poem 'The Rime of Ancient Mariner'.

In the *third letter*, Walton writes that so far his journey is successful. Some of the favourable situations are the better climate and the loyal and committed companions except the ice sheets appearing which foreshadows impending danger. The letter comes to an end stating the determina-

tion of the people whatever may happen.

In the *fourth letter*, Walton narrates an incident when their ship comes across a sheet of ice. From there they encounter old Victor Frankenstein who appears very tired and starving. The crew nurses him and it takes two days for his recovery. Soon, Walton and Victor Frankenstein become friends and start sharing their experiences. Concluding the fourth letter, Walton informs that Victor has consented to narrate his tragic story of life the next day itself. Here the frame narrative of Walton comes to an end and begins the narrative of Victor Frankenstein.

Chapter 1-4. Narration of Victor Frankenstein: Childhood and University Days

Different from the initial letters, where the narrator is Walton, from Chapter One onwards the speaker is Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein begins his tale from his childhood; the story even dates back to his parents' affair and subsequent marriage. He was born in a rich and elegant Swiss family. His father Frankenstein journeys to meet his old friend named Beaufort who had fallen into poverty and who was about to die when he reached him. Caroline, the impoverished daughter of Beaufort, expresses her devotion towards Master Frankenstein who takes her to Geneva. When he returns, they get married at home. In the initial years of their marriage, the couple travelled to various countries like Germany, France and Italy. It was in Italy that Victor Frankenstein was born to the couple as their first child. Both the parents and the child had shown an adorable relationship among them.

Caroline, as a woman emerged from penury, made her routine of visiting people of poor background in order to uplift them from their poverty. In one of her travels, she met an or-

phan girl of angelic beauty who was living with a poor family in Italy. The girl, named Elizabeth Lavenza, was brought into their family, and became an intimate companion of Victor Frankenstein. Another close friend of Victor Frankenstein was Henry Clerval who was a highly imaginative character. There was a remarkable difference between the characters of Victor and Clerval. Victor was highly passionate and inquisitive about the mysteries and secrets of the world, whereas Clerval had a taste for virtue, heroism and morality. At the age of thirteen itself Victor had shown his fascination for the famous alchemist Cornelius Agrippa. When he was seventeen years old, his family sent him to the University of Ingolstadt.

The first professor he encountered in the University was Krempe, a renowned professor of natural philosophy. The professor had so strong contempt for Victor for his interest in reading absurd and outdated sciences so that he suggested him to start his reading on science afresh. Enthralled by the lecture of Waldman, another professor in the university, Victor plans to study natural philosophy as his subject of interest.

At the University of Ingolstadt, Victor spends most of his time studying natural philosophy and chemistry. His talent in the subject impresses his professors and classmates alike. As a result of his fascination for finding out the secret of life, Victor engages in tireless work of instilling life to the dead body. In his apartment, disengaging himself from outside ties, Victor secretly experiments to create a beautiful being.

Chapter 5-10. The Monster Comes to Life

On a November night, Victor becomes successful in bringing life to his creation. Soon he

realises the grave error that he has committed. Victor had thought that his creation would be beautiful, but now he realises that it is extremely ugly. As Frankenstein's dream shatters, he is filled with disgust and fear. He becomes restless and his sleep is plagued by horrible dreams. Whenever he enters the room, he is annoyed with the thought of whether the monster is present there. Victor is bed-ridden as his fever intensifies by his frequent obsession with the monster. Though he remains in the bed for several months, under the great care of Henry, Victor recovers from his illness.

Henry requests him to address a letter to his family as there awaits a letter from Elizabeth to be addressed. Elizabeth's letter is indicative of her care for Victor. After his recovery, Henry arranges a new apartment and removes all his scientific instruments as he observes Victor's dislike for his laboratory. Victor finally decides to leave for Geneva. In the company of Clerval, Victor returns to his former life of joy and warmth.

Before they return home, while at the University of Ingolstadt, Victor receives a letter from his father that his youngest brother has been murdered. In his letter, his father requests him to return home as immediately as possible as he believes that his presence would bring solace to the psychologically ravaged family members.

On his journey to Geneva, Victor becomes obsessed with some wild, fearful thoughts. When he reaches Geneva, in the midst of the night, frequented with thunderstorms and lightning, Victor witnesses a figure lurking among trees. Seeing the monster there, Victor understands that the monster is the real murderer. At home, Victor comes to know that their house servant Justine has been accused of the murder. Elizabeth and Victor passionately desire for proving the innocence of Justine.



When the trial begins, it disturbs Victor to the core as he becomes aware that he is responsible for the murder of his youngest brother which consequently leads to the murder of this innocent maid. Though Victor wishes to confess the reality, he remains silent as it will not be considered the truth. During the trial, much evidence has been produced against Justine and the innocent Justine fails to respond to the questions properly and she becomes emotional when the dead body of William is shown. Despite the attempts from the part of Elizabeth, Justine's lie that she has murdered William leads her to be prosecuted. This punishment of Justine emotionally torments both Victor and Elizabeth.

Chapter 11-16. The Tale of the Monster

The monster experiences the world after it moves away from the apartment of Victor; it grasps the nature of light and darkness, and different functions of fire like its cooking and burning capacities. When the monster goes outside, it realises that people/humans are terrified of his appearance which leads him to remain hidden from the public. Finally, he decides to hide near a cottage where an unhappy family lives. Wondering the reason for their unhappiness, he finds out that it is because of their poverty and the blindness of the old man. Gradually the monster learns their language and understands that the name of the young woman is Agatha and the young man is Felix. Whenever the monster watches his own reflection in water, he realises the reason why people run away from him and look terrified.

When a beautiful Arabian girl comes to their family, their melancholic mood changes into great exultation. Felix in particular appears more elated and starts teaching her their language. When the monster knows more about family and society, it realises that as a mon-

ster he has no family and he does not belong to any societal fabric of humans. Then the monster tells about the three books that he got from the forest, among which John Milton's *Paradise Lost* impresses him. The monster identifies himself with the character of Adam in the book but others associate him with the character of Satan as he lacks the love of his creator.

When the family members have gone outside, the monster plans to introduce himself to De Lacey, thinking that he cannot see him as he is a blind one. But unexpectedly Felix, Agatha and Safie reach their cottage. Shocked at the sight of the monster, Felix attacks him, Safie runs away from the place and Agatha faints.

The family's rejection saddens him. But when his mind is calmed by the beautiful day that follows, he goes to the cottage to be on good terms with De Lacey. He could realise that the family had gone out of the cottage to terminate their contract with the landlord and they never returned to the place. By this the monster loses all his connection with society. Enraged, the monster burns the cottage, and heads up to take revenge upon Victor.

Chapter 17-24. Narration of Frankenstein

From Chapter 17 onwards, Frankenstein's narration restarts. The monster, asserting that the sole reason for his violence is his misery out of his loneliness, compels Victor to create a female friend for him. Victor though he thinks of creating the second monster as a friend to his first creation, he is obsessed with the thought that they may pose more threat to humanity. His father suggests Victor to marry Elizabeth soon to alleviate the pains of their family. As the question on the creation of the second monster still hangs on his head, Victor delays the marriage and leaves for England to maintain his peace of mind. In his journey to

England, Clerval also accompanies him.

At London, Clerval appears excited and engaged in learning and social interactions but Victor is immersed in the thought of creating the second monster and starts seeking a lonely place for his work. Both Victor and Clerval move to Scotland and from there, Victor and Clerval part and Victor tries to set up a laboratory at a remote island in Orkney's to work on his secret project.

Victor, on one night at his lab, appears engrossed in the thought whether the monster will keep his word that he would withdraw from Europe to remote, uninhabited areas of South America. When Victor looks outside, he could see the face of the monster grinning at him. Enraged by this, Victor cancels his creation of the female monster. Producing a howling sound as a token of his anger, the monster disappears and later returns threatening to meet him on the day of his marriage.

As Victor receives a letter from Clerval to proceed their journey, he takes all his laboratory materials to his boat to dump it in the ocean. He takes a nap in the boat and when he wakes up the weather has become violent and reaching the shore appears difficult. When he anchors at the shore, a group of angry town men gather around him and take him to Mr. Kirwin for a trial.

At his office, Victor comes to know that Clerval has been killed and they suspect Victor as the murderer. Victor has been bedridden for two months as he is seen completely crestfallen with his deteriorated health. No evidence had been produced against him and he was freed. He heads up to Geneva along with his father who has come to take care of his son.

During their journey back to Geneva they stop at Paris with the intention of energising Victor, but he expresses a reluctance to mingle with people. Victor even confesses that he is responsible for the murder of William, Justine and Clerval. But to no avail, his father does not believe him.

During this stay at Paris, Victor receives a letter from Elizabeth who conveys her interest in marrying him. Victor writes back to Elizabeth that he would immediately marry her but the thought of the monster torments him.

After one week's journey, Victor, along with his father, arrives at Geneva. Marriage being fixed ten days later, Victor and Elizabeth sail to Italy for their honeymoon. The thought of the monster disturbs him frequently which suspends all pleasures of their journey. Once they enter into a cottage, there is a storm. Mindful of Elizabeth's safety, Victor sends her to bed and remains there armed with a pistol. Soon he hears to the screaming sound of Elizabeth and he can see the lifeless body of Elizabeth. Victor gets a glance of the monster near the window. Though he fires at the monster, it misses and the monster escapes.

Victor returns home immediately and the father overwhelmed by the news of the murder dies. Gone mad, Victor is put in a cell and when he comes to his senses, narrates all his stories to the local magistrate. Thinking that most of his stories are illogical, and realising the impossibility of tracking the monster, the magistrate leaves the case without taking further action on it. With much contempt to the magistrate and all humanity, Victor pronounces that though human beings conceive themselves as wise there are plenty of matters they are unaware of.



5.3.5 Walton's Concluding Letters

Towards the end of the novel, Walton restarts his frame narrative to conclude the novel. He says that Victor is a victim of lofty ambition. These concluding letters also inform Margaret about the danger as the ship is surrounded by ice. In response to the demand of the crew, Walton agrees to return to England. The letter also informs the death of great Victor in the ship. Walton's letter writing is interrupted as a sound emerges from the cabin where Victor's dead body lies. Walton witnesses the monster crying over the dead body of Victor. To his astonishment, the monster confesses that he has gone through pity and remorse for Victor. The monster addressed by Walton as a wretch promises that he will put an end to his own life and he disappears.

5.3.6 Critical Analysis

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* is one of the early novels written in the gothic genre. Some of the important gothic features in the novel are its mystery, untold secrecy, horror and psychological impacts on characters. Unlike the ghosts and vampires in gothic literatures, the novel depicts the grotesque feature of the monster, its gigantic size, events taking place in dark and night atmosphere, settings of the novel like old and isolated areas. The relationship between Victor and the monster, which is mainly based on hatred, revenge, and remorse, provides a stark gothic atmosphere for the novel.

In the beginning of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley follows an epistolary narrative style where Robert Walton writes a series of letters to Margaret Saville about his polar explorations. The novel sheds light on the adventures of Robert Walton and his crew. Robert Walton also provides a long story of Victor Frankenstein

which covers most parts of the novel. The major issue which is dealt with in *Frankenstein* is Victor's failure to anticipate the repercussions of his action.

Victor Frankenstein's inquisitive mind takes him away from societal norms and restrictions. Soon after he reaches Ingolstadt University, Victor tries to find out the secret of life and endeavours to instil life to a dead body. Keeping this in mind, he collects body parts, arranges laboratories and uses electricity to instil life to his creation. Before long, Victor realises the grave error that he had committed by the creating of a ghastly monster, in contrast to his dream of creating a beautiful being.

Back in Geneva, Victor realises the intensity of his mistake as he understands that his brother William is killed by the monster, his creation. His anguish is aggravated when Justine, the innocent servant girl, has been executed thinking that she is behind claiming the life of William. Infuriated by Victor's unwillingness to create a female friend for the monster, the monster kills Victor's close friend Clerval and his bride Elizabeth. As his father also dies ravaged by these murders, Victor loses most of his kith and kin.

It is when Victor Frankenstein travels across Russia to the North Pole to get hold of the monster and take revenge upon him, Robert Walton's boat saves him. Narrating all his stories, Victor dies in Walton's boat. Stricken with remorse, the monster approaches Walton and prepares his own funeral pyre. So, both in the case of Victor and the monster, the moments of revenge and remorse occur in different stages of their life.

Recap

- ▶ Robert Walton - the explorer - Russia to Pacific Ocean
- ▶ Walton's crew - tired Victor Frankenstein - floating on an ice sheet
- ▶ Frankenstein's recounting of his life story
- ▶ Born in Geneva - Interest in unfolding secrets of the universe
- ▶ Elizabeth - an orphan girl adopted by Frankenstein family
- ▶ Join at University of Ingolstadt - study natural science
- ▶ Caroline - affected by fever - dies
- ▶ M. Krempe and M. Waldman - two influential teachers of the university
- ▶ Victor's attempt to give life to the organs of the dead body
- ▶ Successful in the experiment - birth of a monster - tragedy in life
- ▶ Victor- restless - disgust and fear
- ▶ Henry Clerval - his friend takes care of him
- ▶ Brother William - murdered- father's letter to return home back
- ▶ Justine Moritz - suspected and prosecuted
- ▶ Refresh himself - trip to Mount Montanvert-meets the monster
- ▶ Tale of the monster - insulted by human being- turns revengeful
- ▶ Request to create a female monster
- ▶ Plan to marry Elizabeth
- ▶ Murder of Clerval - trail at Ireland
- ▶ Honeymoon - revenge of the monster-strangling of Elizabeth
- ▶ Victor - cared by Walton's team
- ▶ Monster - last visit of his master - disappears

Objective Questions

1. Whose letter to his sister is given in the beginning of the novel?
2. Whom does Walton's crew happen to meet in the sea?
3. Which character narrates his tragic experience to Walton?
4. Where was Frankenstein born?
5. Who is Elizabeth?
6. Where does Frankenstein join for his study of science?
7. Who is the mother of Victor Frankenstein?
8. Who were two influential professors of Victor at the University of Ingolstadt?
9. What was the major experiment conducted by Victor?
10. What was Victor's plan of creation?



11. What was the result of his creation?
12. Who takes care of Victor when he falls ill?
13. Which brother of Victor is killed by the monster?
14. Who is prosecuted for William's murder?
15. Why does the monster murder Victor's family and friends?
16. Why does Victor quit his plan of creating a female friend for the monster?
17. Why does Victor undergo a trial in Ireland?
18. Whom does Victor plan to marry?
19. Who kills Elizabeth?
20. Why does the monster visit Victor when he dies?

Answers

1. Robert Walton
2. Victor Frankenstein
3. Victor Frankenstein
4. Geneva, Switzerland
5. She is an orphan adopted by Frankenstein family
6. University of Ingolstadt
7. Caroline
8. M. Krempe and M. Waldman
9. Instil life to the dead body
10. To create a beautiful being
11. An ugly, monstrous being
12. Henry Clerval,
13. William
14. Justine Moritz
15. To take revenge upon Victor
16. He was afraid of their potential threat on human beings.
17. As he was suspected of Clerval's murder
18. Elizabeth
19. Monster
20. To visit his master last time

Assignments

1. Prepare a short note considering *Frankenstein* as an early form of science fiction.
2. Trace the features of fiction during the romantic period.
3. Study the emergence and growth of epistolary novels in English Literature.
4. Consider *Frankenstein* a Gothic horror novel.
5. Give the character sketch of Victor Frankenstein.
6. Write a short note on the structure of *Frankenstein*.
7. Discuss *Frankenstein* as an epistolary novel.
8. What is the narrative style of *Frankenstein*?
9. Comment on the characterization of the monster in *Frankenstein*.
10. Themes of revenge and alienation in *Frankenstein*.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Smith, Johanna M. *Mary Shelly Revisited*. Twayne, 1996.
- ▶ Punter, David. Ed. *A Companion to the Gothic*. Blackwell, 2000.

Unit 3

Dover Beach

- Matthew Arnold

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise with some features of Victorian poetry
- ▶ get acquainted with thematic concerns of Matthew Arnold
- ▶ become aware of Matthew Arnold's poetic styles
- ▶ acquire an idea on the nature of dilemma encountered by the Victorian people

Prerequisites

Imagine standing on the cliffs of Dover on a calm summer evening in the mid-19th century. The air is salt-tinged, and the rhythmic sound of waves lapping against the shore fills your ears. In the distance, you can just make out the faint glimmer of lights on the French coast.

This is the scene that inspired Matthew Arnold's haunting poem "Dover Beach." But beneath the tranquil surface, a storm is brewing - not in the sea, but in the minds and hearts of Victorian England.

The 19th century was a time of unprecedented change. The Industrial Revolution was transforming landscapes and lives. New scientific theories, particularly Darwin's theory of evolution, were challenging long-held religious beliefs. The certainties of the past were crumbling, leaving many feeling adrift in a world suddenly bereft of meaning.

Matthew Arnold, poet and cultural critic, was keenly aware of this crisis of faith. In "Dover Beach," he gives voice to the anxiety and melancholy of his age. The poem begins with a serene description of the Dover coast but quickly turns to deeper, darker reflections on the state of the world.

As we explore "Dover Beach," we'll see how Arnold uses the ebb and flow of the tide as a metaphor for the retreat of faith in Victorian society. We'll examine how he grapples with the loss of certainty and the search for meaning in a world that seems increasingly chaotic and indifferent.

This poem, with its blend of natural beauty and philosophical depth, captures a pivotal moment in English cultural history. It continues to resonate with readers today, speaking to our own struggles with faith, doubt, and the quest for meaning in an uncertain world.

Keywords

Victorian dilemma, Value of love

Discussion

“Dover Beach” is one of the most celebrated lyrical poems of Matthew Arnold. Released in 1867 as a part of the collection *New Poems*, the poem laments on the loss of faith and values in Victorian society and as a resolve to this, the poet longs for an unconditional love and trust from his beloved which may provide them a sense of belonging in a world where things are illusory and imaginary.

5.3.1 Summary of the Poem

Stanza 1

An enchanting night is the temporal setting of the first stanza. Looking outside, in this darkness, the speaker says that the sea is calm that night, the tide is in its fullness and the moon seems attractive. Though the poet is in England, he watches the flickering and fading light of the French coast. Meanwhile, the cliffs of England could be seen spreading around the area with its glimmering light and the bay remains calm. Then, the speaker dramatically invites his beloved to the window in order to draw her attention to this charming night.

Word Meanings:

Gleams	- shine brightly
Cliff	- a high area of rock with a very steep side
Glimmering	- shine faintly
Tranquil	- calm
Blanched	- turn pale or whitened. The poem refers to the land which is whitened by the moonlight.
Grating	- sounding harsh and unpleasant
Tremulous	- shaking or quivering

Cadence - regular rise and fall of sound

Literary Devices

Imagery: The poem employs many images. In the first stanza many striking visual and auditory images are used. Eg:- “Listen! You hear the grating roar/Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling.” In these lines the poet provides the visual image of flinging pebbles in the waves and the auditory image of its grating roar.

Stanza 2

The speaker says that Sophocles, the ancient Greek playwright, also heard the same sound from the shore of the Aegean Sea. This sound of waves evokes in his mind the misery and sorrow of humanity at large. From the sound of the distant sea, the poet is also reminded of another thought.

Word Meanings

Aegean	- The Aegean Sea is an arm of the Mediterranean Sea, located between the Greek peninsula on the west and Asia Minor on the east
Turbid	- obscure or confused
Ebb and flow	- Recurrence of rise and decline

Literary Devices

Allusion: It is the reference to the historical event, person, place, etc. In the poem there is an allusion to Sophocles, the Greek playwright.



Stanza 3

Elaborating on this thought, the speaker says that just like the sea which lies circling around the sea, once faith was also full. As the sea of faith has become smaller, now the poet cannot see the sea of faith in its fullness. Only its melancholic, withdrawing sound could be heard now. As the sea of faith disappears, the edges of the earth become naked.

Word meaning

Girdle	- Belt
Melancholy	- A feeling of sadness
Shingles	- Mass of pebbles on seashore
“Lay like...furl’d”	-When the sea of faith was full, it was like “bright girdle” which rolled around the earth.

Literary Device

Symbolism: Sea of faith in the poem is symbolic of faith in God and religion.

Stanza 4

In a world order where no faith and value prevail, the speaker addresses his beloved to be true to each other. As the speaker informs his beloved that though the world in front of them appears dreamy, beautiful, new and diverse, it has actually no joy, love, light, certainty and peace. The speaker then says that their situation is like that of someone who has landed in a dark place where anonymous armies fight each other for unknown reasons.

Word Meanings

Darkling	- Characterised by darkness
Land of dreams	- Signifies the illusory nature of people’s lives
Ignorant armies clash by night	- It is a battle fought in the darkness where men fight unaware of what they were fighting for and who their enemies were.

Literary Device

Enjambment: It is a poetic feature where poems will have running lines. It could be seen in the last stanza of the poem.

Eg:- Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight

5.3.2 Critical Analysis

“Dover Beach”, written in 1851, is often referred to as a dramatic monologue where the voice of the speaker alone is provided and the presence of the silent listener may be clued in. Reminiscent of romantic poetry, some critics consider it as a ‘honeymoon’ poem, ‘Dover Beach’ begins with a natural setting. Structurally, in a similar fashion to the sonnet, the poem consists of three stanzas of fourteen, six and eight lines respectively.

As Arnold presents his thesis of poetry as it “is at bottom a criticism of life under conditions fixed for poetic truth and poetic beauty”, “Dover Beach” brings forth the most important critique of Victorian society in well-composed poetic lines. Compared to his influential poems like “The Scholar Gipsy” and “Thyrsis,” “Dover Beach” is a shorter poem but it is noted for its poetic and intellectual depths.

In the beginning, the poem features Dover Beach with a soothing description. The romantic streak of the poem is what makes the poem more endearing. In order to ensure this warmth, the poet employs words like ‘calm’, ‘full’, ‘moon’, ‘fair’, ‘tranquil’, and ‘sweet’. In contrast to the initial mood and tone of the poem, the poet provides a sad and bleak description towards the end of the first stanza with words like ‘tremulous’, ‘cease’, ‘sadness’ and ‘grating roar’. Addressing his beloved, Arnold says ‘Listen, you hear the grating roar’. In this line, the speaker adopts a more emotional approach, which naturally conveys the anxieties and the inner turbulences of the poet.

Dover Beach is located between England and France. The poet, being at the side of England, watches the coastal area of France. The night is the temporal setting of the poem. There is a gradual progression in the poem, beginning from a calm and serene ambience and developing into a complex, disturbing state of the world. The poet's description of landscape and address to the bridegroom are juxtaposed in a balanced way. There is a complete synergy between the background and foreground in the poem.

In this poem, Matthew Arnold, projecting an instance in the life of a couple, introduces a profound truth. The poem is structured in four stanzas of variable lengths. There is no strict and apparent rhyme scheme followed in the poem. The thematic and structural development of the stanza is closely connected with the image of tide and its movement. The mood of the poem is mainly melancholic. Arnold maintains a bleak mood and atmosphere in the major portions of the poem.

Even from the very first statement "the sea is calm tonight," the vital importance of the sea in the poem could be understood. Throughout the poem, the image of the sea plays a central role. In the last stanza, the poet revives the idea stating that, though the sea seems calm and serene, the situation is not as it appears, as the ignorant armies fight each other anonymously.

When the light from France is extinguished, the poet changes his attention to the English side. Doing so, he concentrates more on the movement of the sea which leads him to realise the sad note of the sea. Alluding to Sophocles, the poet compares his experience with that of Sophocles on the shore of the Aegean Sea. Through this vivid capturing of the image, the poet states that just like the sea was full of waters, faith was once full in the soci-

ety, but now just like the tide withdrew from the shore, religious values and faith faded from the society. The metaphor of the sea of faith introduced in the third stanza of the poem is the central image of the poem.

In the third stanza, where the metaphor of 'sea of faith' is extended, the poet provides bleak and dark images to convey the great dilemma of the poet in particular and that of the Victorian society in general. Visualising the withdrawing sea, the poet brings the image of the shore in the absence of water which appears bereft of its former beauty. Through visual and auditory images like the retreating sea of faith and its melancholic withdrawing roar, the poet showcases the desolation and perplexity of his generation who lose their faith in any belief system.

As Arnold captures the Victorian dilemma in "Dover Beach," the poet sets the tone of Victorian compromise towards the end of the poem. Providing a reconciliatory end to the poem, the poet requests his beloved to be truthful in their relationship. It is in this fourth and final stanza of the poem, disillusioned with the present condition, the poet demands his lady love to be truthful in their relationship as he believes that it can only give meaning to their life, in a world order where no human values are maintained properly. The poet suggests that though the world seems so charming, and dream-like in its appearance, it is really deceptive as it cannot offer any help, certitude, and love. In this confused situation where ignorant armies fight each other, the poet suggests his beloved to make their life meaningful by strengthening their love and truthfulness.



Recap

- ▶ Night -temporal setting of the poem
- ▶ The speaker of the poem - to his beloved - sea is calm this night
- ▶ Fading light of the French Coast
- ▶ Speaker invites - beloved -window - charming night
- ▶ Sophocles - Greek playwright-sound - the Aegean Sea
- ▶ Sound of waves-misery and sorrow of humanity
- ▶ Like the sea - circling around the sea - once faith was also full
- ▶ Now -it's melancholic, withdrawing sound
- ▶ Sea of faith disappears- earth becomes naked
- ▶ When no faith and value prevail - the speaker - beloved to be true
- ▶ World appears dreamy, illusionary - actually no joy and peace
- ▶ Their condition-someone landed in confused place - fighting each other

Objective Questions

1. How does the sea appear when the poet meets his beloved?
2. From where is the light gleaming and disappearing?
3. Whom does the poet invite to the window?
4. What mood is evoked in the poet when he listens to the movement of the sea?
5. Who had listened to such a sound from the Aegean?
6. What was the sound of waves brought to Sophocles?
7. How was the sea of faith in the past?
8. What has happened to the sea of faith now?
9. What does the poet expect from his beloved?
10. How does the world appear to the poet?

Answers

1. Calm
2. French Coast
3. Beloved
4. Sad
5. Sophocles
6. Human misery
7. It was full
8. Now it is withdrawing and only melancholic sound is heard
9. To be true to one another
10. Dreamy and beautiful

Assignments

1. Write a note on the features of Victorian Poetry.
2. Trace the context of Victorian Dilemma and Victorian Compromise.
3. Write a short note on love as an alternative value.
4. How is the theme of the Victorian dilemma expressed in “Dover Beach?”
5. Comment on the setting of the poem.
6. Discuss “Dover Beach” as a love poem.
7. Comment on the structure of “Dover Beach.”
8. What are the major literary devices employed in the poem?
9. Elaborate on sea as a central image in the poem.
10. Discuss the nature of allusions in “Dover Beach.”

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Arnold, Matthew. “Dover Beach.” *Poems*. Macmillan, 1985.
- ▶ Culler, Dwight. *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold*. Yale U.P, 1966.
- ▶ Pratt, Linda Ray. *Matthew Arnold Revisited*. Twayne, 2000.

BLOCK - 06

Representative Texts - III

Unit 1

Arms and the Man

- Bernard Shaw

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ have a general understanding of Bernard Shaw as a dramatist
- ▶ identify some of the key features of Shaw's dramas
- ▶ detail key themes and stylistic elements in the selected text
- ▶ explore characterisation and dramatic techniques in the selected text

Prerequisites

The lights dim in a packed London theatre in 1894. As the curtain rises, the audience leans forward, expecting another predictable romantic comedy. Instead, they're about to witness a revolution in British drama.

George Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man" explodes onto the stage, skewering romantic notions of love and war with razor-sharp wit. This Irish playwright delights in shocking his Victorian viewers, using humor to deliver biting social commentary.

As the story unfolds, dashing soldiers prove cowardly, heroic ideals crumble, and true love triumphs in unexpected ways. Shaw's unconventional characters and irreverent dialogue mark him as a bold new voice in theatre.

Let's explore how "Arms and the Man" challenged audiences and paved the way for modern drama.

Keywords

New Drama, Twentieth-Century Drama, Shavian Play, Problem Plays, Social realism



Discussion

The opening scene of the three-act play is set in the bed chamber of Raina Petkoff. Raina is portrayed as an immature young lady with romantic notions of grandeur and love. She is settling into bed when an fugitive soldier climbs in through an unlocked window. After an initial hesitation, Raina hides the intruder from a military search party. She feeds the man chocolates and lets him sleep. Later, she and her mother, Catherine, help the soldier out of the house to safety.

As the Second Act begins, the war is already over. The two parties have signed a peace treaty. The Petkoffs' servants, Louka and Nicola, are discussing their marriage and aspirations for social success. Major Paul Petkoff, Raina's father, returns from the war. After a reunion, the family is joined by Sergius who is Raina's fiancé. He is a soldier who is held to be the perfect romantic hero by Raina and Catherine.

Despite possessing high notions about romantic love, Sergius seems to be attracted to Louka. He makes several advances at her and she toys with him. Meanwhile, Raina is growing apart from her fiancé as well. They are surprised when the soldier, whom they helped to escape, returns to hand over a coat they loaned him. It turns out that Paul and Sergius have met him during the battle. His name is revealed to be Bluntschli. He has very practical views about life.

In the final Act, Bluntschli confronts Raina about her pretence and hypocrisy. Her feelings for the soldier are revealed, as is Sergius's pursuit of Louka. Paul comes to know of this state of affairs. The tensions of the first two acts are resolved through discussion and dialogue. The play ends with both pairs of lovers acknowledging their relationships, free to live together ever after.

6.1.1 Act-wise Summary

Act 1

Opens in a lady's bedchamber in Bulgaria. Raina Petkoff, a woman from a wealthy Bulgarian family, is standing out on her balcony and appreciating the romantic beauty of the night sky. She is wearing an expensive coat over her nightgown. Her mother, Catherine Petkoff, comes in to announce that the Bulgarian cavalry has won an important battle against the Serbs.

It is Raina's fiancé, Sergius, who led the charge to victory. Catherine declares that Sergius is every bit as heroic as he appears in the portrait that Raina keeps in her bedroom. Raina, on the other hand, confesses that all of Sergius's heroic qualities and soldiership are her imagination. She appears now to feel ashamed of having doubted him.

Louka, one of the Petkoffs' servants, enters. She warns Catherine and Raina that Serbians fleeing the battlefield might seek refuge in the houses of Bulgarian families. Despite this, Raina keeps her window unlocked. She tells her mother that if she hears gunshots, she will immediately blow out her candle and go to bed. As everyone else returns to their own rooms for the night, she takes out Sergius's portrait and adores it. Then, she picks out a novel and begins to read it. Suddenly, she hears the sound of gunshots approaching closer. She blows out her candle and pretends to be asleep.

However, a man enters the room through the unlocked window. He threatens to kill Raina with his revolver if she makes a sound. He orders her to light a candle, and she is finally able to see him. The man is an escaped soldier dressed in a Serbian military outfit. Unlike Raina, he does not glorify war and is, instead, content to stay alive through any means pos-

sible. He keeps Raina's coat with him so that she would be hesitant to let Bulgarian soldiers into her room. He reasons that it would be embarrassing for a woman of her stature to receive men dressed only in her nightgown.

The man listens intently to footsteps outside the door. Louka starts to knock urgently. He realises that it is all over for him, and throws Raina her coat. He asks her to cover up and protect her dignity, since they would come in by force. However, she decides to keep the man safe and hides him behind her curtains. Catherine, Louka, and a military officer enter to search the room as some of her neighbours saw a Serbian climbing onto her balcony. Raina manages to convince them that there is no one there, and they leave. Louka appears to be suspicious of the scene, and laughs to herself as she leaves.

As soon as the danger is over, the man steps out from behind the curtains. He thanks Raina for saving his life. He reveals that he is not a native Serbian but a Swiss mercenary, a soldier for hire. He hopes to escape to safety once the Bulgarian soldiers have moved away from the area. All of a sudden, Raina realises that the man's revolver had been lying around on her ottoman in plain sight. He confesses that his gun is not loaded and that he does not carry any ammunition with him. Instead he carries chocolates in his pockets. Since he is hungry, Raina gives him some chocolate creams that she keeps in a box in her room. She dubs him 'the chocolate cream soldier'.

Raina claims that Bulgarian soldiers are not like the man, implying that they are more courageous than him. However, the man claims that there are only two types of soldiers, young and old. He argues that the charge of the Bulgarian soldiers against the Serbs was foolish. They succeeded only through sheer

luck. The Serbs had been given the wrong cartridges for their machine guns and could not fight off the Bulgarians. He claimed, not knowing about Raina's relationship to Sergius, that the man who led the charge ought to be 'court-martialled'. Raina reveals her love for Sergius and rebukes the man for mocking him. But she agrees to help him escape later.

Raina claims that she is bound to help him as her family is a noble and civilised one. The man, however, is worn out by the events of the night. As Raina goes to ask Catherine for help, he falls asleep out of exhaustion. Though Catherine is shocked and dismayed at her daughter, she allows the man to take rest.

Act 2

The Second Act opens in the garden of the Petkoffs' house in March 1886. Louka is arguing with a male servant who seems to be lecturing her. He appears to value his role in servility, and seems to be of a calculating nature. His name is Nicola. Nicola warns Louka of the dangers of defying the family members. He advises her to make them feel that she is loyal. Louka claims to know secrets that would destroy the family's reputation. Nicola tells her that no good will come of challenging those who have power over their lives.

Louka and Nicola hear knocking on the door. It is Major Paul Petkoff, Raina's father, who has returned from the war. He conveys the news that a peace treaty had been signed a few days ago. He claims that he would have continued the war until his enemies were annexed, but it would have kept him away from Catherine for too long.

Sergius knocks on the gates. Paul orders Nicola to escort him inside. Before Sergius joins them, Paul reveals that Sergius will never receive the military promotion that he desires.



This is because it has become apparent that Sergius has no command of military strategy. But when Sergius enters, the family greets him warmly. Sergius says that he has resigned his position in the army out of anger that he was not given a promotion. He feels that his superiors are simply upset that he has single-handedly won the war with his heroics. Paul and Catherine are upset. Raina soon joins them.

Paul and Sergius begin talking about a Swiss soldier who cheated them out of fifty able-bodied men in exchange for two hundred worn out horses. They retell a story about him escaping the battlefield after being hidden by two Bulgarian women in their bedchamber. They claim that the man escaped in the morning, disguised as a servant in an old coat belonging to the master of the house. Catherine and Raina realize the story is about them, but do not react. They pretend to be indignant about the story.

Raina and Sergius are left to speak in private. They declare their feelings for each other in highly romantic and flowery language. They claim that they have discovered a “higher love.” They decide to go out until lunch time. However, when Raina goes inside to get ready, Sergius flirts with Louka. He takes her hand and attempts to kiss her. Louka reveals to Sergius that Raina might have another suitor. Sergius is taken aback by this.

Although Raina comes down, ready to go out, Catherine asks Sergius to help Paul with a military matter in the library. When they are both alone, Catherine and Raina discuss their encounter with the Swiss soldier. Catherine is worried that Sergius would find out and end his engagement with Raina. But Raina does not seem to be worried and walks away.

Just then, a Serbian officer comes asking to see

Catherine. It is the Swiss soldier and his name is revealed to be Captain Bluntschli. He has come back to return the coat. Since Paul and Sergius are in the library, Catherine asks Louka to bring the man to her. She orders Nicola to bring the Captain’s luggage which contains the coat. She greets Bluntschli and tries to send him away. However, both the men come down and see Bluntschli. They assume that he is there to see them.

At that moment, Raina comes back into the room. She is surprised at seeing Bluntschli and blurts out her nickname for him: ‘the chocolate cream soldier’. To cover up the accident, she claims that Nicola had destroyed the chocolate cream soldiers she had made to decorate the pudding.

Suddenly, Nicola arrives with the captain’s luggage. Catherine pretends that she never ordered him to bring the luggage to her. Paul scolds Nicola. Even though he is confused, Nicola owns the mistakes. In order to be polite, the family invites Bluntschli for lunch, which he accepts.

Act 3

The third and final act of the play takes place in the Petkoffs’ library. Bluntschli writes out detailed orders to help Paul while Sergius signs them. Raina sits in a divan with a novel on her lap, daydreaming. Paul complains to Catherine about his missing coat (the same one that Bluntschli has returned). She cleverly tells him that he simply hasn’t looked properly in his wardrobe.

Paul claims that he has searched everywhere. He makes a bet with Catherine that he would buy her jewellery from Sophia (capital city) if the coat is in the blue wardrobe. Sergius joins the bet and makes the condition that Paul should buy Raina an Arabian horse if the coat

is there. Bluntschli refuses to take part and says that Catherine is sure to be right.

Nicola comes back with the coat. Paul is convinced that he missed it because of his old age. Bluntschli finishes writing up the military orders. Paul, Sergius and Catherine go out to make sure that the soldiers follow the instructions perfectly.

Raina and Bluntschli discuss their earlier meeting. She tells him that his father and Sergius know the story of how he escaped the battlefield. But, they haven't figured out that the women in the story are Raina and Catherine. She warns him that Sergius would challenge Bluntschli to a duel and kill him if he ever finds out the truth.

Raina claims that it caused her great pain to lie to Sergius. But Bluntschli makes fun of her, and confesses that he adores her. Raina is truthful about the fact that she has always put on a noble attitude and idealism. She wonders if Bluntschli considers her to be a liar and a cheat now. However, he finds it to be an endearing part of her personality. He seems to be infatuated with her.

Raina asks him if he enjoyed the portrait of hers that she slipped into the coat pocket. To her shock, Bluntschli never realised that it was there. To make matters worse, she has written a personal note for him in the picture. Raina is angry with this and she turns away to the window side.

Louka comes in with a message for Bluntschli. He receives the word that his father has passed away in Switzerland. There are financial arrangements to be settled. He leaves the room. Louka notes that he does not seem to express grief upon his father's death. Raina says that it is because he is a soldier. But Louka tells her that Saranoff still has plenty of emotions,

though he is a soldier. Raina leaves.

Nicola enters with an armful of logs. He tries to be affectionate with Louka. She rejects him, and he tries to win her over by offering some of the money that Sergius has just given him. She says that she does not want money, and that she was not born to be a servant. Nicola says that he is the one who taught her manners and made her a woman. Louka accuses him of wanting to be her servant rather than her husband. Sergius comes in and interrupts the conversation. Nicola leaves.

Louka wonders if Sergius could truly be a brave man. She defines courage as a queen marrying for love, not for status. She says that Sergius is not brave because he would be too afraid to marry her, because of her lowly social status. Sergius says that if he did love her, he would do everything in his power to be with her. However, it is Raina that he loves. He accuses Louka of being jealous of her.

Louka laughs at this. She reveals that Raina will marry the Swiss soldier. Sergius reacts strongly to this and claims that he will kill Bluntschli. Then, he declares that he will do as he pleases with Louka. She leaves.

Bluntschli enters with a few papers. Sergius declares that Bluntschli has deceived him, and challenges him to a duel at the drilling-ground at 6 am, the next day. He says that he will carry his sabre (sword). Bluntschli is quite calm and accepts the challenge. He declares that he will carry a machine gun with the correct cartridges.

Raina comes in and understands that they are about to fight each other. Bluntschli says that this duel will ensure that he and Raina do not meet each other, hereafter. He has no intention of killing Sergius, and he doubts that Sergius has the skill to harm him. However, Raina



says that this is not her wish. Sergius sees this as a confession of her love for Bluntschli.

Raina realises that Louka is the one who told Sergius about Bluntschli. She further understands that Sergius has had an affair with Louka. She has already seen them together earlier, but had not realised the significance of their being together. The 'noble' romance between Raina and Sergius has now been shattered. Sergius refuses to fight Bluntschli as he seems to be more of a machine than an idealistic man.

Raina tells Sergius that since Louka and Nicola are engaged, the duel must be between him and Nicola. Aside, Raina asks Bluntschli if he thinks she and Sergius are "a couple of grown up babies." Bluntschli asks where Louka is, and Raina tells him she is probably listening at the door. Sergius hears this and angrily pulls Louka inside the room.

Bluntschli says that he has eavesdropped too, but that was because his life was at stake. Louka says that her love was at stake. Sergius pretends not to be ashamed at her confirmation of their affair. Paul enters, and everyone acts as though everything is normal. He is holding the coat in his hands. Raina helps him put it on, and as she does, she removes the portrait from the pocket. However, Paul has already seen it. He reaches into the pocket and finds it missing.

Raina eventually explains that the portrait was meant for Bluntschli, and Bluntschli admits that he was the Swiss fugitive in the story. The rest of the details are slowly revealed. Nicola arrives and admits that Louka does not want him. Bluntschli says that he wishes to hire Nicola to run his departed father's hotels for he seems to be a very efficient man. Louka demands an apology from Sergius which she

receives. He confirms her to be his fiancé. Catherine enters and sees the new couple together. Sergius says that he will marry Louka, and Catherine is aghast. Louka, referring to Raina by her first name, says that Raina has her own prospects in Bluntschli. However, Bluntschli says that he is too old to marry a seventeen year old girl. However, he admits to being an incurable romantic.

Raina says she agrees that Bluntschli is a romantic idiot. She corrects him and clarifies that she is not seventeen but twenty-three. Bluntschli asks Paul permission to court his daughter. He says that the inheritance of hotels from his father has made him rich. Raina, on the other hand, says that she will not be bought. She is not interested in his wealth.

She says that she did not give candy to the "Emperor of Switzerland". Bluntschli gets on a knee and asks her to whom she gave the sweets. She responds: "My chocolate cream soldier." Bluntschli laughs and gets up. He makes a military bow and exits. The play ends with Sergius saying of the Swiss soldier: "What a man!"

6.1.2 Critical Review

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), one of the most significant playwrights in the London theatre scene. Though he began writing in the late Victorian age (late 19th century), the content and form of his drama heralded the arrival of literary modernism. They used modernist techniques and effects to break the expectations of the audience.

Shaw's dramas constituted a radical change from the sentimental and romantic plays that were popular till the late nineteenth century. Plays were thought to be a form of entertainment for the public, and not a serious genre of

literature. In fact, Shaw has raised the complaint that the art of literature is left “ashamed” amidst “the triumphs of the arts of the painter and actor” (qtd. in Watt 240). He is, of course, referring to the inferior quality of the play as opposed to the beauty of the stage and the proficiency of the actor.

Shaw attempted to do away with the idea that art existed for art’s sake. Rather, the fundamental problems of life and society were to be the central themes of his art. In his opinion, the function of drama was to provoke thought and to teach. They had to provide substantial opportunity for the audience to reflect and to learn.

His plays thus became dubbed ‘problem plays’. They focused on the dominant issues of the age, developing and establishing a point of view through the contrast of conflicting ideas. Humour, wit, imagination, and sparkling dialogues kept the audience engaged with the various ideas that are discussed in the plays. In doing so, Shaw hoped to persuade the audience to adopt his personal opinions on public matters.

We could say that Bernard Shaw’s views on many social problems of the age were ‘revolutionary.’ He was a well-known member of the Fabian society, and propounded socialist beliefs in his speeches and writings. Along with this, he voiced his strong opposition to organised religion and conventional marriage. Through his different writings, he calls for the revaluation of old ideologies in politics, society and culture.

In particular, Shaw reacted against what he saw as a slavery to idealism and notions of ‘goodness.’ Both of these, according to his theories, stood as an obstacle in the quest for truth. It prevented people from developing as individuals with their own aesthetic judge-

ments. So, he stood against censorship in the theatre.

Shaw was a prominent champion for Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright, who revolutionised twentieth century drama. Ibsen’s plays put forward several innovations that were used by Shaw:

- ▶ Provoking audiences into thinking about themselves and their societies
- ▶ Incorporating ideas into the format of the ‘well made’ play
- ▶ Realistic depictions of characters and events

Indeed, Shaw wrote *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), providing a defence of the theatre and philosophy of Ibsen. In it, he exposed the imperfections of British society as being rooted in idealism and anti-individualism.

Shaw’s plays belong to the ‘New Drama’, a movement which erased the lines between popular and experimental theatre. The playwrights of this group included, alongside Shaw, John Galsworthy, Elizabeth Robins, and Susan Glaspell. Their works centred on social reform and aesthetic innovation. Do you see this aspect in the current play?

In the context of the age, the Shavian play had certain unique features. They were meant primarily for reading rather than for staging. Shaw wrote detailed prefaces to introduce the plays to the reading public. To give his readers a good idea of the settings of the play, he wrote elaborate stage-directions.

Shaw rejected the classical convention of following the unities of time, action and place.



Classical tragedies covered a central action in a single physical location over a period of twenty four hours. He considered these to be artificial restrictions. Rather, he presented events and characters in a realistic manner.

There is an absence of dramatic action and physical conflict in Shaw's plays. Instead, the play revolves around mental conflict, a contest between competing ideals and values. Discussion becomes the mode of conflict – Shaw's characters discuss and argue out various facets of the tension between them. There is a flow of ideas bolstered by intellectualism and amusing wit which keep his audiences engrossed in the play. Thus, they are also known as the 'Play of Ideas.'

Shaw opposed the approach of the 'well-made play' of the earlier eras, which contained typical plot structure and artificial dramatic features. Rather, he introduced unresolved and surprise endings to his plays. Further, he did not advocate for an aesthetic or entertainment purpose for the dramatic arts. His stagecraft was infused with propaganda, forcefully presenting his own views on social issues (Switzky 144).

The early phase of Shaw's literary career contained musical and theatre criticisms, and novels such as *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, and *An Unsocial Socialist*. His attempts at fiction were not successful, even though they put forward many of the later themes of his drama.

In a prolific career spanning over sixty years, Shaw has written over fifty plays. The most significant of these are *Widower's Houses* (1892), *Arms and the Man* (1898), *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1907), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1908), *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Heartbreak House* (1919),

Back to Methuselah (1921), *Saint Joan* (1929), and *The Apple Cart* (1929).

He has also made prose contributions including *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), *Common Sense About the War* (1914), and *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

6.1.3 Context of the Play

Arms and the Man was first published in Shaw's 1898 collection titled *Plays Pleasant*. It takes its name from a line in Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Of arms and the man I sing." Shaw used the phrase to critique war and the romantic myths that surround it. The characters in the play represent various perspectives on marriage, warfare, social class, and heroism. Their discussions and interactions make visible different conflicts within the dramatic narrative.

The play is set in 1885, in the background of the Serbo-Bulgarian War. It uses accurate historical context, battle names, and locations to arrive at Shaw's primary focus, which is the manner in which love and war reframe relations between different groups. Specifically, it targets the idealism and 'noble' sentiments that allow men and women to glorify war, while social inequalities such as class division are left unchallenged.

6.1.4 Characterisation

Raina

The heroine of the play is revealed to be more complex than her outward behaviour or appearance. It has been presented that she wishes to retain a highly romantic image of herself and her relationship with Sergius. But this proves to be just a pretence.

In reality, she has doubts and imperfections just as any other human being. Her ideas of

‘goodness’, ‘heroism’, or ‘truth’ have been reversed and challenged by the end of the play. We could say that Raina represents the idealistic self-image that people have of themselves; her actions and thoughts reveal the hypocrisy and pretence that is often put on to maintain that image.

Bluntschli

Bluntschli is the character who brings conflict into the idealised world that Raina has built for herself. He is a rationalist who reacts to events based on fact. He is unmoved by questions of morality or honour. We can see this in his interactions with Raina and Sergius, both of whom are motivated by high notions of ‘goodness’.

He depicts a great deal of self-control or restraint. This does not mean that he is detached from passion, but that he accounts for such emotions practically. He shows the ability to cleverly handle different social interactions, through which he is able to achieve his ends.

Sergius

Sergius, like Raina, is a character who reveals himself to be different from his appearance. Though he claims to be a valiant hero, his actions on the battlefield are revealed to be ill-advised and militaristically unsound. Rather, he is controlled by his vanity.

Even though he declares “higher” love for Raina, he cannot control his attraction for Louka. He is revealed to be impulsive, quick in becoming angry and easy to manipulate. Even though he flirts with someone outside of his relationship, he is upset with Raina for having feelings for Bluntschli.

Louka

Louka is another character who is practical and deeply aware of the realities of the world.

She is willing to use what she knows to get ahead in life. For instance, she admits to Nicola that she knows a dangerous secret about the Petkoff family. She appears to be ready to trade in the secret to get power over the Petkoffs.

She does not want to remain a servant or tied to a lower social position in life. She manipulates Sergius to a great extent in order to secure her own position. She is rewarded for her realistic approach as she moves up in the social hierarchy at the end of the play.

6.1.5 Other Characters

The other characters in the play present different perspectives about society and life. Catherine and Paul initially appear to advocate grandiose ideas about patriotism, courage, and love. However, as the drama progresses, they are revealed to be more worried about status and wealth. Paul and Catherine frequently break their principles for practical reasons.

This is seen in their acceptance of Bluntschli, once they discover the truth about his inheritance. Nicola, on the other hand, represents a person who is completely conditioned to be submissive to power. He succeeds by serving those who are in higher positions in fulfilling their desires and interests.

6.1.6 Themes and Literary Devices

Written in 1893-94, *Arms and the Man* presents an early attempt on the part of George Bernard Shaw in producing problem plays. Unlike ‘well-made plays’ or conventional Victorian plays, this dramatic narrative uses ideas as a powerful aspect of the plot. The development of the characters are not charted through action but through their changing perspectives on life.



Raina, the central heroine, transforms her notion of romantic love to accommodate her feelings for Bluntschli. Sergius changes his views on class order to make Louka his fiancé. Bluntschli overcomes his self-restraint to confess his feelings for Raina. Even Catherine and Paul do away with their ideas about social propriety once they learn of Bluntschli's inheritance. Only Nicola, who is born with the "soul of a servant," remains stationary. Thus, the play captures their internal evolution as opposed to external developments.

True to the format of the Shawian play, the events occur in several physical locations (the bedchamber, the library) over a period of months. The play does not contain a central action, but rather focuses on different actions across three acts. It takes up realistic depictions of events and characters. Indeed, in form and content, the play rejects extreme idealisations and romantic notions.

The following themes are projected in *Arms and the Man*:

1. Disillusionment with War: War is an important theme in the play. The characters Sergius and Bluntschli represent two differing attitudes to the violence, bloodshed and chaos of warfare. One considers it a matter of honour and bravery while the latter views it with cynicism.

2. Differing Views on Romantic Love: Apart from war, romantic love is constantly mentioned in the play. All of the central figures – Raina, Bluntschli, Sergius, and Louka – are driven by love or seek to be in love. There is a contrast between the superficial "higher love" that Sergius and Raina seem to believe in, and the practical romantic feelings that Bluntschli and Louka stand for.

3. The Influence of Social Divisions: Social class and wealth drive some of the most interesting interactions in the play. The Petkoffs and Sergius belong to the elite class where grandiose ideas about life and goodness can be sustained. Their social position and wealth seem to insulate them from some of the harsher realities of war and social hierarchies. Bluntschli and Louka, on the other hand, are marginalised figures here. Their relationships allow them to move upwards in the social ladder.

4. Social Hypocrisy and the Individual: The play exposes moral conventions and social customs as hypocritical rules that force the individual to act. Most of the characters who appeared to be 'good' in the traditional sense are revealed to be pretending in one way or another. It is the fear of social disapproval that makes them follow certain rules or manners. Their hypocrisy becomes visible when their interests or self-images are at stake.

These themes are thoroughly explored through the sharp, witty dialogues and humorous interactions between various characters. The audiences and readers get a sense of different points of view about war, love and class through the retorts, repartees and puns in the play. Shaw is, thus, able to keep the play hilarious, comic and serious, at the same time. Further, this exposition of ideas is central to his conception of drama as a tool of public enlightenment.

Apart from thematic elements, the play uses the following symbols as well:

1. Chocolate Creams: The sweet which appears in several scenes in the text represents the naïve and innocent worldview that Raina and certain other characters have.

2. Novels: Like the chocolate creams, the novels that Raina reads represent her love for idealisation and imagination.

3. Portraits: Portraits stand for the social image that the characters deeply care for.

Arms and the Man is shaped by G.B. Shaw's social and political philosophies. It examines the ways in which social structure moulds our

beliefs and values. By exposing the hypocrisies and dangers of conformity, Shaw aims to provoke his readers into critical thought about the realities of their own existence. It encourages us to reflect deeply on ourselves and those notions that we hold to be universally cherished.

Recap

- ▶ G.B. Shaw is significant figure in the twentieth century drama
- ▶ Wrote in both Victorian and Modernist periods
- ▶ Influenced by Ibsen
- ▶ Shaw's dramas opposed established dramatic tradition of 'well-made' plays
- ▶ Against classical unities, plot development through action, and unrealistic depiction
- ▶ Focus on social issues
- ▶ Play moves through discussion, dialogue, and conflict of ideas – Problem plays
- ▶ Play set in 1885, backdrop of Serbo-Bulgarian war
- ▶ Three Acts without division into scenes
- ▶ In the First Act, Raina helps Bluntschli escape from Bulgarian army
- ▶ In the Second Act, Sergius and Raina declare "higher love"
- ▶ Proven to be superficial when Sergius develops feelings for Louka
- ▶ Bluntschli comes back to Petkoffs' house to return the coat – invited to stay for lunch
- ▶ In the Third Act, Raina revealed to be in love with Bluntschli
- ▶ Sergius's feelings for Louka are also accepted
- ▶ Play ends with the various tensions having been discussed and contrasted
- ▶ Themes of war, romantic love, class divisions and social hypocrisy
- ▶ Symbols used to convey abstract ideas

Objective Questions

1. Which collection of Shaw's plays contain *Arms and the Man* in?
2. What is the name given to Shaw's plays as they contain a flow of ideas?
3. Why did Shaw turn towards realistic depiction of characters, events and narration?
4. When was G.B. Shaw awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature?
5. Where is the opening scene of the play set?
6. From which work by Virgil was the title of the play adopted?
7. What does Raina give the Swiss soldier?
8. Who helps Raina to get the soldier out of the house safely?
9. Whose portrait does Raina hold in her bedchamber?
10. Why was Sergius's charge able to defeat the Serbian army?
11. Who is Louka engaged to?
12. What does Bluntschli return to Catherine and Raina?
13. Why does Sergius challenge Bluntschli to a duel?
14. What is conveyed in the letter that Bluntschli receives?
15. Who says the phrase: "What a Man!?" About whom is it said?

Answers

1. *Plays Pleasant*
2. Play of Ideas
3. He was influenced by Henrik Ibsen
4. 1925
5. In Raina's bedchamber
6. *Aeneid*
7. Chocolate creams
8. Catherine, her mother
9. Sergius
10. Because the Serbians have the wrong ammunition for their machine guns
11. Nicola
12. Paul Petkoff's coat
13. Because he finds out about Raina's feelings for Bluntschli
14. The news that his father has passed away
15. Sergius, about Bluntschli

Assignments

1. What is the nickname given to Bluntschli by Raina?
2. Which countries are at war in the play?
3. Which Norwegian playwright influenced Bernard Shaw?
4. How does Louka challenge the authority of her masters in the play?
5. Explore the portrayal of romanticism with special reference to the characters of Raina and Sergius.
6. Briefly discuss the characterisation of Bluntschli in the play.
7. Examine the role of Nicola with special reference to class.
8. Compare and contrast the different female characters in the play.
9. What are the major themes discussed in the play?
10. Write a note on the features of Shavian dramas, with special reference to *Arms and the Man*.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ McNabb, Jim. "Arms and the Man by Bernard Shaw: Study Guide." National Arts Centre English Theatre. http://artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/arms_guide.pdf
- ▶ Shaw, Bernard. *Arms and the Man*. Penguin Group, 2006.
- ▶ Mendelsohn, Michael J. "Bernard Shaw's Soldiers" *The Shaw Review* 13.1 (1970): 29-34.

Unit 2

Easter 1916

- W.B. Yeats

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ comprehend and analyse the given text
- ▶ understand the influence of Ireland in the writings of Yeats
- ▶ scrutinise the text and state critical opinions

Prerequisites

Dublin, Easter Monday, 1916. The city awakens to gunfire and explosions as Irish republicans launch a daring rebellion against British rule. For centuries, Ireland had chafed under English control, with tensions mounting in recent decades. The rebels, a mix of idealists, revolutionaries, and poets, seize key buildings across the capital, proclaiming an independent Irish Republic.

The uprising catches everyone by surprise - including the poet W.B. Yeats. Though a passionate Irish nationalist, Yeats had long opposed violent rebellion. He knew many of the rebel leaders personally, having clashed with them over tactics. Now, as British forces brutally crush the insurrection, Yeats finds himself deeply conflicted. The aftermath is swift and harsh. British authorities execute 16 rebel leaders, shocking the Irish public. Among the dead are several of Yeats' acquaintances - including his one-time romantic rival, John MacBride. The poet retreats to his country home, grappling with a whirlwind of emotions.

For years, Yeats had celebrated Ireland's mythic past in dreamy, romantic verse. Now he's forced to confront the blood-soaked realities of modern politics. How can he reconcile his love for Ireland with his distaste for violence? What does this sacrifice mean for the nation's future?

Out of this inner turmoil, Yeats crafts "Easter, 1916" - a poem that would become one of his most famous and debated works. Published five years after the uprising, it captures the poet's complex, ambivalent response to the event that reshaped Irish history.

The poem's lilting rhythms and haunting refrain - "A terrible beauty is born" - would etch themselves into Ireland's national consciousness. Yeats weaves together personal memories, political commentary, and mystical symbolism to create a nuanced meditation

on rebellion and sacrifice.

“Easter, 1916” marks a turning point in Yeats’ career. Gone are the misty Celtic twilights of his earlier work. Instead, we see a more clear-eyed, modernist style emerging - one capable of tackling contemporary events head-on.

Yet for all its historical significance, the poem remains deeply personal. Yeats knew many of the executed leaders intimately. Their deaths forced him to reassess his own role in Ireland’s struggle. Was he a bystander? A critic? A reluctant supporter?

As we analyze the poem, we’ll see how Yeats uses subtle techniques to convey his ambivalence. The mixture of colloquial and elevated language, the shifting rhythms, the juxtaposition of the mundane and the mythic - all serve to create a sense of unresolved tension.

“Easter, 1916” continues to resonate over a century later, not just in Ireland but wherever people grapple with political violence and national identity. It reminds us that there are rarely simple answers to the great questions of history.

By exploring this rich, complex work, we gain insight into one of the 20th century’s greatest poets - and perhaps into our own conflicted hearts as well. We’ll see how Yeats used poetry to wrestle with the turbulent events reshaping his homeland, creating a work that still speaks to us today.

Keywords

Revolution, Freedom, Martyrdom, Immortality, Sacrifice, Political Elegy

6.2.1 Stanza-wise Summary

Stanza 1

The poem opens with the poet’s reminiscences of the people who were killed in the uprising. The poet met some of them usually at the end of the day. After work, they used to come out with bright-eyed faces from behind a counter or a desk. It is not surprising that these people were quite happy at the end of the day. Yeats says that whenever he crossed paths with them, he acknowledged them with a slight nod of the head or some informal conversation. Sometimes, he exchanged small talks with them. These trivial chats were mere courtesy talks.

During these interactions, he cooked up a funny story or some taunts to tell his friends later at the club. Here, the poet admits that he used to make fun of these common folks along with his elite companions. He openly admits that he was not an admirer of these revolutionaries before their martyrdom. But now, after the horrible executions, the poet feels as if all of these light-hearted conversations happened in an alternate world or time, a place where ‘motley is worn.’

“Motley” refers to vibrant clothes worn by clowns and jesters. Here, a figure of speech called metonymy is in play. The poet uses it to describe the light-heartedness of the time before the Easter Rebellion by referring to



‘motley’ clothes which embody the quality of cheerfulness and gaiety. Metonymy is a figure of speech where a thing or an idea is referred to by something closely associated with it. Clown costumes are associated with fun and triviality. Hence, he used the term “motley” to refer to the happy spirit of the time before the revolutionaries were killed.

[Let us come back to the narrative of our poem. The poet says, “those people lived in a place where motley is worn, where nothing serious ever happened but everything changed entirely.” I think you can guess what happened, right? As the title indicates, ‘Easter 1916’ happened. The title alludes to the crucifixion, sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus. In the poem, Yeats uses the allusion to recall the martyrdom of the revolutionaries on that date and how it bestows them with immortality. Ireland became alive to fight for its independence.]

A tragic dignity returned to Ireland on Easter 1916. “A terrible beauty” was born again. The rebels achieved greatness, heroism and beauty with their martyrdom. Terrible beauty is the sacrifice made by the rebels and their martyrdom resulted in awakening Ireland to fight for its independence with greater vigour. The expression “Terrible beauty” is repeated three times in the poem. ‘Terrible’ refers to the execution of the rebels and suggests emotions of pity, sadness and fear. ‘Beauty’ evokes feelings of honour, pride, romantic imagination, devotion and patriotism.

It seems strange that the poet is describing beauty as terrible, doesn’t it? Also, isn’t it bizarre that the poet is even using the word beauty in association with bloodshed? ‘Terrible beauty’ is an instance of oxymoron. It combines two words that have opposite meanings to highlight the paradox or to create a dramatic effect. Here, the incident of Easter 1916 possesses both the qualities of being terrible

and beautiful. Even though the loss of lives is terrible, the fact that these revolutionaries were fighting for freedom makes it beautiful. Remember how gory events like the Wagon tragedy and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre fuelled India’s independence movement? Easter 1916 is an event akin to that. There is something beautiful about the events involving people’s self-sacrifice, even though they almost always unfold terribly.

Poetic Devices

Metonymy: Metonymy is a figure of speech where a thing or an idea is referred to by something closely associated with it. E.g., “Being certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn.”

Oxymoron: An oxymoron is a figure of speech containing words that seem to contradict each other. It is often referred to as a contradiction in terms. E.g.: “A terrible beauty is born.”

Stanza 2

In the second stanza of the poem, the poet talks about a few revolutionaries that he knew on a personal level. The first person that he talks about is a woman, Constance Markievicz. She fought for strong political causes without enough knowledge about it. In other words, she was misled by wrong notions and her strong political opinions were born out of goodwill rather than facts. She was so intense in her opinions that her voice grew shrill in her arguments. She used to be a sweet young lady who found delight in hobbies like hunting small animals. It is hard to believe that such a privileged person turned out to be a revolutionary, isn’t it? Perhaps that’s why the poet assumed that she was ignorant.

The second revolutionary Yeats mentions is Patrick Pearse. He was a teacher and rode the “winged horse”. Probably, it is an indica-

tion of his poetic talents. In Greek mythology, the winged horse named Pegasus is seen as a symbol of poetic inspiration. The next rebel who was killed in the uprising was Thomas MacDonagh, a friend and helper of Patrick Pearse. MacDonagh also had a knack for writing and was just gaining a reputation as a poet. He was a charming personality with courage of convictions.

It is quite obvious that Yeats is not fond of the last revolutionary. He is referred to as “A drunken, vainglorious lout.” It turns out that this man has wronged some people who are close to the poet’s heart. It was no secret to the readers of that time that the “uncouth drunk” in this poem is none other than Major John MacBride. MacBride was the estranged husband of Yeats’s true love Maud Gonne. But the poet sets aside his bitterness to commemorate the death of his rival. MacBride also lost his life in the revolution which Yeats refers to as “the casual comedy”. The poet still can’t embrace the logic of revolting for freedom and creating anarchy in society. This uprising has even transformed MacBride. It doesn’t matter what kind of life he led before the rebellion, now he has been transformed into a hero and a martyr.

Once again, the stanza is tied together with the oxymoron “A terrible beauty is born.” Since the poet repeatedly uses this line throughout the poem at the end of stanzas, we can call it a refrain. A refrain is a line, a group of lines or even a phrase that appears repeatedly in poems usually at the end of the stanzas to tether the poem together. It is a popular literary device and appears at regular intervals in certain poems. This particular refrain “A terrible beauty is born” is an iconic line from W.B. Yeats which is quoted quite often.

Poetic Devices

Refrain: A repeated line or number of lines in a poem or song, typically at the end of each verse. E.g.: “A terrible beauty is born.”

Stanza 3

The third stanza of the poem is dedicated to depicting the unwavering will and determination of the revolutionaries. Their hearts have only one purpose and that is the freedom of their country. Their hearts are compared to a stone which suggests immovability and rigidity. It symbolises the tenacious determination of the insurgents through the imagery of a naturally formed stone in a flowing stream. Nature is constantly changing around the stone.

Seasons like summer and winter come and go. The riders and the horses passing along the side of the stream change. The birds and clouds above are in a state of mutation. Everything in nature changes minute by minute. Have you ever noticed the reflection of clouds in water? Even those reflections are moving and get transformed every minute. Yet the stone remains unchanged. Sometimes, a horse’s hooves slip into this stream and other times, the moor-hens and moor-cocks mate in the stream as well. Life goes on as usual but the stone remains unshaken and unchanged amidst everything. The stone is a symbol of single mindedness and the fervour of the rebels.

Stanza 4

In the last stanza of the poem, Yeats’s scepticism regarding the uprising raises its head. When people dedicate their entire life to a single cause, their hearts can turn rigid. Using the image of the stone which he formerly employed to embody the strong will of the rebels, Yeats conveys a new meaning that prolonged commitments to political causes and constant sacrifices can turn people’s hearts hard like a stone.



The poet wonders whether these sacrifices are ever enough to fulfil the aim of the revolutionaries. Their aim is Irish Independence. But he answers his own thought by saying that it is the job of the almighty to decide whether these sacrifices are worthy or not. Our responsibility is to murmur the names of these martyrs like a mother. She names her children when her children fall asleep. Naming thus keeps them alive in the memories forever. Ireland must immortalize them and remember them.

In the last section, we can see the poet once again contemplating death and the sacrifice of the people that he used to know. He thinks aloud and remarks that 'it' must be like nightfall. Suddenly he clarifies that he is not literally talking about night but death. Even though he is in awe of these brave insurgents, he wonders whether the sacrifice of these revolutionaries is futile. Yeats's authoritarian sympathies get the better of him. He is sure that the Irish would never have revolted if England had kept the word.

Next, he makes a cynical comment about the dream of the revolutionaries. Though they dreamt of an independent Ireland, they could not live to see an independent nation. The poet cannot understand the reason behind their sacrifice. He wonders whether their excess love for Ireland confused them. He also expresses his thoughts regarding the uprising and mentions some of the revolutionaries by their names. While some are mentioned by their names, some are indirectly referred to. Yeats says that these people have transformed everything. Whenever green is worn, these people will be remembered. The colour green represents Ireland and its culture. He concludes the poem with the same refrain used earlier providing uniformity to the structure of the poem.

6.2.2 Critical Review

W. B. Yeats was an ardent nationalist but he was always a moderate person when it came to politics. He was never a proponent of violence. But the sheer audacity and cruelty of the English shocked him into reconsidering certain views. The ideological disparity between Yeats and the revolutionaries killed in the uprising is quite obvious in the beginning. We can see how superficial was his relationship with some of these people. He never showed his disapproval of their political views to their faces which again reinforces the diplomatic nature of the poet.

Throughout the poem, we can see Yeats trying to come to terms with the realisation that there are certain people who prioritise public good over personal safety. He acknowledges everyone who lost their life including his rival John MacBride. This reveals how the bloodshed deeply shocked him. Yeats oscillates between praise for the rebels and disapproval regarding their cause. A close reading reveals certain ambivalence in the poetic voice. He makes disillusioned comments about the revolutionaries right after praising them.

Again, and again we see a man who is struggling to understand the sacrificial action of his friends that he himself would never do. Maybe that is what is pushing him to question too much. He was standing on the sidelines when his peers were being part of history. He repeatedly emphasises the fact that all these people have been transformed. It implies the heroic stature that they have achieved and the way they have altered the political landscape. It seems as if the poet slightly regrets his misgivings regarding the rebels' readiness to achieve martyrdom. Maud Gonne severely criticised Yeats for his view of the heroes who embraced martyrdom. She claimed that these

men were not 'sterile fixed minds' but served Ireland with varied faculties and vivid energy. To her, they were men of genius with large, comprehensive, speculative and active minds.

Recap

- ▶ Easter 1916 rebellion
- ▶ Revolutionaries executed
- ▶ Poet's reminiscences
- ▶ Polite meaningless words
- ▶ Poet's elitism and disagreements
- ▶ Motley
- ▶ Metonymy, Oxymoron
- ▶ Terrible beauty
- ▶ Personal connections
- ▶ Constance Markievicz
- ▶ Ignorant goodwill
- ▶ Patrick Pearse and Thomas MacDonagh
- ▶ Winged horse
- ▶ John MacBride
- ▶ A drunken, vainglorious lout.
- ▶ Casual comedy
- ▶ Refrain
- ▶ Naturally formed stone
- ▶ Symbol of staunch determination
- ▶ Seasons change, stone remains unaltered
- ▶ Single mindedness and fanatical fervour
- ▶ Prolonged commitment to political causes
- ▶ Hearts stiff and cold like a stone
- ▶ The worthiness of sacrifice
- ▶ Symbolism, mother and child
- ▶ Death, nightfall
- ▶ The futility of deaths
- ▶ Poet's cynicism
- ▶ MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly and Pearse
- ▶ Green colour

Objective Questions

1. Who used to come out with vivid faces from behind a counter or a desk at the end of the day?
2. What was the nature of the conversation the poet had with the people he met at the end of the day on the streets?
3. What did the poet think of to entertain a companion at the club?
4. Describe the nature of the poet's friendship with the revolutionaries before Easter 1916 in one word.
5. When was "Easter 1916" published?
6. Name the collection in which "Easter 1916" was included?
7. Whom does the poet compare himself with?
8. What are the names referred in the poem?
9. Which is the refrain used in the poem?

Answers

1. People killed in the uprising
2. Trivial
3. A mocking tale or a jibe
4. Superficial
5. 1916
6. *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*
7. Mother
8. MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly and Pearse
9. "All changed, changed utterly/A terrible beauty is born" As he is also a part of the uprising

Assignments

1. Prepare a write-up on W.B. Yeats' ambivalent attitude in "Easter 1916."
2. Write a critical appreciation of the political poems of W.B. Yeats.
3. Consider W.B. Yeats as a modern poet.
4. Which is the poetic device employed in "terrible beauty"?
5. What is W.B. Yeats' attitude towards Irish revolution?
6. Why does the poet employ first person narrative?
7. How do revolutionaries appear at the close of the day?
8. How does the revolutionary woman spend her nights?
9. What was special about her voice when she was a young lady?
10. What does the 'stone' symbolise in the poem?
11. How do horses, riders and clouds exist each moment?
12. What is the responsibility of the poet towards the revolutionaries?
13. Why does the poet bring the analogy of naughty children who run wild?
14. Why does the poet ask if it is an unnecessary death?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Bloom, Harold. *Yeats*. Oxford UP, 1970.
- ▶ Holdeman, David. *The Cambridge Introduction to*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- ▶ Jeffares, Norman A. *W. B. Yeats: Man and* Palgrave Macmillan, 1996. Print.
- ▶ Rajan, Balachandra. *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2018.
- ▶ Smith, Stan. *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction*. Macmillan, 1990.

Unit 3

A Hanging

- George Orwell

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with the colonial attitude towards the natives
- ▶ get an acquaintance with George Orwell's thematic engagements
- ▶ obtain an idea on the literary styles of Orwell
- ▶ become conscious of the problems in punishments like hanging

Prerequisites

Burma, 1920s. A young George Orwell serves as a British police officer in this far-flung corner of the Empire. One misty morning, he's ordered to attend the execution of a prisoner - an event that will haunt him for years.

As Orwell watches the condemned man walk to the gallows, he's struck by an overwhelming realization. This man, moments from death, is vibrantly alive - avoiding a puddle, scratching an itch. The casual brutality of the colonial system suddenly becomes unbearable.

Years later, Orwell transforms this experience into the powerful essay "A Hanging." With stark, unflinching prose, he forces readers to confront the realities of capital punishment and the dehumanizing effects of imperialism.

Let's examine how this pivotal moment shaped one of the 20th century's most influential writers.

Key Themes

Colonialism (The story projects the presence of the British colonial authority in Burma, and their attitude and approach towards the natives.)

Hanging (In the story, hanging is employed as the central metaphor.)

Inhuman Gesture (Inhuman acts of the British and jail authorities towards the jail inmates are the spotlights of the story.)

Discussion

“A Hanging” by George Orwell was published in *Adelphi* magazine in 1931 based on his experience in Burma as a policeman in the 1920s. When the essay was first published, it was released in his real name Eric Blair instead of his renowned pen name George Orwell. As Orwell himself admitted, the essay is a story, in the sense it is a fictitious account, rather than being a real incident.

6.4.1 Summary - “A Hanging”

The narrative begins with the description of a jail in Burma on a rainy day. People gathered outside can see the inmates of the jail in their cells remaining silent and covering their body with blankets. These prisoners in their iron cells are like the caged birds. Ridiculing the authorities, the narrator says that these prisoners are “condemned men” who are going to be hanged within one or two weeks.

Orwell dramatically presents the bringing of the prison-inmates out of the cells for hanging them. The person who was brought out of the jail was a Hindu with a shaved head and vague eyes. His big, sprouting moustache, appears incongruous with his short body, which gives the audience an impression of a comic film character. There were six, tall Indian warders to escort him to the gallows. Two of the warders remain there with rifles and the rest of them prepare him to be hanged by handcuffing, chaining and tying his arms. They take a close position with him, keeping him in their arms’ distance as if to avoid any attempt of escape. He has been treated like a living fish which may anytime turn back to the water. But the man in the chain keeps his composure as if nothing special is happening.

At 8 o’clock, the superintendent of the jail emerges and raises his voice, saying that it is high time that the man was hanged and he enquires if everything is ready for the prosecution.

The head jailor, Francis, a Dravidian from India, in his white dress and gold spectacles, responds that everything is satisfactorily prepared and the hangman is waiting and it can be done comfortably now. It is said that he should be executed immediately unless the breakfast of the jailors will be delayed. On either side of the prisoner, there are two warders and the important officials follow them as a procession. But there is an unexpected halt for the procession without any warning. It is due to the unexpected entering of a dog in the procession. As it is unexpected, it is unmanageable for the crowd to control the dog due to its huge size, barking sound and body movements. The response of the superintendent is: “Who let that bloody brute in here? Catch it, someone!”.

The narrator observes how this energetic and healthy prisoner has been taken to the gallows for hanging. He observes his brown body, strong arms, steady walk and lock of hair. Now, the narrator thinks of the meaning of killing a healthy man who is vibrant with the pulse of life. He says that all his body organs seem working quite brilliantly as his bowels digest the food items, skin is capable of renewing itself, and nails still growing. And he can feel, see and hear properly the people gathered around him. But within minutes all his perceptions and capacities will come to a sudden end.

The meticulous description of the gallows is provided in the story. The gallows is built in a small yard separated from the main ground. The story provides the pictures of weeds in the structure, ropes dangling and the grey-haired hangman in white dress awaiting for the order. As they get word from Francis, the warders bring the prisoner tightly, pushing him to the ladder and the hangman fixes the rope around the convict’s neck.



People gather five yards away from the gallows and the warders circle round the gallows. The man starts chanting “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!”. It never appears like a fearful or urgent expression, but it seems very composed and rhythmic in articulation. The head of the man is covered with a cotton bag-like material, hence only a muffled voice of “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!” persists.

The hangman, climbing down from the gallows, remains under it, holding the lever. When the superintendent comes to the ground with his stick, some seriousness grapples the people and they become grey. When he shouts ‘chalo’ fiercely, the atmosphere is left with dead silence. Now, it is the time of hanging so that each moment the man produces different sounds. Finally, there emerges a clanking sound and the man is no more. When the people gather around the place in order to inspect the dead body, they realise that he has become just like a stone, dangling with his toe. The superintendent inspecting the dead body with his stick says: ‘he is all right’. Blowing out a deep breath and glancing at his watch, the superintendent says: “Eight minutes past eight. Well, that’s all for this morning, thank God.”

Unfixing their bayonets, the warders march back and the breakfast is served for the prisoners. The prisoners sit in a row and food items are served and all of them appear cheerful and delighted. As they appear relieved, they start chatting loudly. Though the Eurasian boy reminds them of the hanged man, none appears serious, instead they end in laughing aloud without any certainty on why they laugh.

The conversation between superintendent and Francis suggests that this hanging process has been conducted with “utmost satisfactory” in contrast to the cases in which the procedures do not come to an end smoothly. They discuss such an incident of hanging. As

they fail in their attempt, they remind the convict to “think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!”. They discuss now that the man referred was an unyielding type and he continuously made troubles to others.

Now the narrator realises that he also laughs in a loud voice and soon the superintendent invites all to accompany him outside in order to share his whisky in the car. All join him and share whisky with him, producing loud voices and enjoying the moment. When these extraordinarily funny incidents take place, the dead body of the prisoner remains within a hundred yards’ distance.

6.4.2 Critical Analysis

The story “A Hanging” by George Orwell unravels the story of a man being ritualistically hanged without any emotional involvement. There are debates on whether the story is fictitious or based on his real experience. George Orwell’s statement that it is a fictitious account and his own statement in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) “I watched a man hanged once; it seemed to me worse than a thousand murders” evoked some controversy over the realistic and fictitious nature of the story.

The central thematic concern of the story is the preparation and arrangement for hanging. The vivid and meticulous descriptions in the story provide a realistic exposure to the readers. The narrator’s description of the climate like the rainy day in Burma makes the readers emotionally bonded with the story. Along with the detailed descriptions on the characters in the story, the minute detailing on the setting offers a complete exposure to the readers. Orwell’s use of “condemned men,” in order to refer to the prisoners, showcases the attitude of the jail authorities towards the jailers. The disturbing bit of information and the existential question that Orwell provides is that these prison inmates are to be hanged within weeks.

Orwell provides a full character sketch of the man who will be hanged soon. He is a Hindu with a shaved head and vague eyes. The character, instead of showing restlessness, keeps his composure. The patience of the man, during the process of his hanging, impresses the narrator as he goes on chanting “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!”. He is a Hindu native who has been punished by the British authorities without any reason provided in the story. The explicit incongruity that the readers may notice is that the character’s patience and composure and the approach of the British authorities to the convict, escorting him with six tall guards as if the man tries to escape at any moment.

It is by 8 o’clock due to the insistence of the superintendent, the process of hanging has been quickened. The head jailer, a fat Dravidian, who speeds up the hanging process as he gets the ultimatum from the superintendent. The entering of the dog creates some unexpected problems and delay in the process and it also provides some comic relief to the grave and tensed moments of the hanging.

The narrator observes the grand procession of the convict, along with guards and jail authorities, who never appears dejected and crestfallen. The narrator also draws the attention of the readers to the healthy physique and appearance of the prisoner to be hanged. Citing the brown body, strong arms and strong lock of hair, the narrator implies that the man deserves to live long and shows the incongruousness of this hanging. Dealing with the anatomical strength of the convict, the narrator says that his organs function quite efficiently, his bowels digest food items properly and his skin and nail are in good condition. But all these well-functioning body organs are forced to put an end. It suggests that this man is not dying but murdered for taking the law into practice.

Orwell employs numerous literary devices to express his emotional involvement in the issue. He employs techniques like sarcasm, fun, irony and contrast to express his ideas properly. As a part of visualising the hanging process, the narrator provides a detailed account of the gallows. The story also provides a meticulous and dramatic portrayal of each phase of the hanging. The awful description of the last moments of the hanging is rendered with the convict’s chanting of “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!” and the Indians who witness it, out of their shock, turn as black as coffee. Once the process is completed, the superintendent checks the body in order to verify the death.

The story employs the technique of contrast in order to show the incongruity in the image of the hanged dead body and the jolly attitude of the crowd who witnessed the hanging. While the dead body is lying on the ground, within yards’ distance, the prison inmates and jail authorities serve their breakfast and share whisky, cracking jokes and laughing aloud without any reason.

Orwell’s story portrays the plights of natives during the British colonial period. The authorities consider the hanging as their duty, a burden: once it is completed, they feel as if the ritual is performed and they celebrate it with whisky. The short story showcases the British insensitivity and disregard of natives’ lives and their emotions. Orwell’s concerns on British imperialism and their mistreatment of the native people are reflected in ‘A Hanging’ and other works. The story presents its ideas in a sarcastic tone and the contradiction involved in the story is that the narrator is part of all these procedures but he feels guilty of this inhuman act of imperialism.



Recap

- ▶ Jail in Burma - Prisoners - iron cells like the caged birds
- ▶ Prisoners - “condemned men”- hanged within one or two weeks
- ▶ One person - brought out of the jail was a Hindu
- ▶ Shaved head and vague eyes
- ▶ Six, tall Indian warders to escort him to the gallows
- ▶ Two of the warders remain there with rifles
- ▶ To be hanged by handcuffing, chaining, and tying arms
- ▶ Treated like a living fish - may turn back to the water
- ▶ Composed- as if nothing special was happening
- ▶ Everything is satisfactorily prepared - the hangman is waiting
- ▶ Executed immediately - unless the breakfast will be delayed
- ▶ The unexpected entering of a dog in to the procession
- ▶ The response of the superintendent - “Who let that bloody brute in here?”
- ▶ The narrator observes - the healthy prisoner - taken to the gallows
- ▶ All his body organs seem working quite brilliantly
- ▶ Within minutes all his perceptions - come to a sudden end
- ▶ Meticulous description of the gallows is provided
- ▶ The warders bring the prisoner tightly, pushing him to the ladder
- ▶ The hangman fixes the rope around the convict’s neck
- ▶ The man starts chanting “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!”
- ▶ Time of hanging - each moment the man produces different sounds
- ▶ The man is no more - people inspect the dead body
- ▶ The superintendent says ‘he is all right’ - “Well, that’s all for this morning, thank God.”
- ▶ The breakfast is served for the prisoners
- ▶ Prisoners sit in a row - food items are served - they appear jolly
- ▶ People laugh aloud without any certainty - why they laugh
- ▶ Superintendent and Francis-hanging - conducted with “utmost satisfactoriness”
- ▶ They refer to an incident of hanging before - attempts failed many times
- ▶ They remind the convict - “think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!
- ▶ They discuss- the man was unyielding - make troubles to others
- ▶ Superintendent invites all - share whisky in the car
- ▶ All of them join- produce loud voices - enjoy the moment
- ▶ The narration of Francis - extraordinarily funny - the dead body of the prisoner within a hundred yards’ distance.

Objective Questions

1. Which is the jail referred to in the story?
2. How do the prisoners appear in the jail?
3. Who are referred to as the “condemned men”?
4. How many warders were there to accompany the prisoner?
5. Who is the head jailor?
6. How does Francis appear?
7. Why shouldn't the hanging be delayed?
8. Why did an unexpected halt occur to the procession?
9. Why did the crowd struggle to manage the dog?
10. What was the response of the superintendent seeing the dog in the procession?
11. What does the narrator observe of the man to be hanged?
12. What was the prisoner chanting when he was about to be hanged?
13. How was the prisoner's chanting?
14. Who does say 'chalo' to start the hanging of the prisoner?
15. What does the superintendent say after inspecting the dead body of the prisoner?
16. What do they do after completing the process of hanging?
17. How do the prisoners appear after the hanging?
18. Why do they laugh and shout loudly?
19. How do the Superintendent and Francis consider the hanging?
20. How did they respond to the prisoner when they repeatedly failed in their attempts to hang the prisoner?
21. Why does the superintendent invite all to his car?

Answers

1. Jail in Burma
2. Like the caged birds
3. Prisoners
4. Six
5. Francis
6. In white dress and gold spectacles
7. Unless the breakfast of the prisoners will be delayed
8. As a dog unexpectedly enters in the procession
9. Due to its huge size, barking sound, and body movements
10. “Who let that bloody brute in here?... Catch it, someone!”
11. He observes his brown body, strong arms, steady walk and lock of hair

12. “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!”
13. He never appeared fearful or urgent in his expression, but he remained highly composed and rhythmic in his articulation
14. Superintendent
15. ‘He is all right’
16. They serve breakfast for the prisoners
17. Jolly and homely
18. Without any reason
19. Conducted it with “utmost satisfactoriness”
20. They remind him to “think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!”
21. To share his whisky

Assignments

1. Prepare a paper on Orwell’s approach towards British colonialism in his short story “A Hanging”?
2. Write a note on irony as a technique employed in “A Hanging.”
3. What is the central thematic concern of “A Hanging”?
4. What is the attitude of the jail authority towards the prisoners in the story?
5. Detail on the character of the man to be hanged.
6. Description of hanging scene in the story.
7. How does the crowd celebrate soon after the hanging?
8. Delineate the colonial attitude towards the natives in the story.
9. Elaborate on the thematic concerns of George Orwell.
10. Comment on the style and structure of “A Hanging.”

Suggested Reading

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- ▶ Orwell, George. *Burmese Days*. Harper & Brothers, 1934.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യായാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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