



GOVERNMENT ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGE

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STUDY MATERIAL FOR B.A ENGLISH LITERATURE

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

SEMESTER II



ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023

PREPARED BY

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Unit – I

CHAPTER I

Introduction – Meaning of Literature

Literature is the reflection of life. It mirrors the society in which it is generated. The word literature comes from the Latin word ‘litaritura’ meaning “writing organized with letters”. We classify literature according to language, origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter.

Initially, literature was a form of entertainment for the people. Over time, it attained the purpose of reform as well. The writers started highlighting the social issues in their writing. Thus, it became a medium to draw the audience’s attention to certain matters and urge them to think about the reform. From ancient civilizations to the modern era, indeed, all the works of literature have given us insight into the issues and trends prevailing at that time. Literature also provides escape from the ‘grim realities’ of life. While many people read to escape the boredom of their life. Moreover, the higher type of literature helps the reader to escape from trivial reality into significant reality.

English literature, however, emerged with the beginning of the history of English people. It refers to all the literary works (novels, short stories, poems, fiction, nonfiction, and plays) composed in English. The earliest works of English literature mirror the life lived by the people of that region at that specific period. For instance, all the changes undergone by English society from the earliest to the modern time have left their imprints on English literature.

Being the literature of a nation characterized by the spirit of determination, adventure, and diligence, English literature is rich in vitality, diversity, and essence.

A Brief History of English Literature

The introduction and history of English literature go side by side. You can’t get the complete introduction of English literature without going deep down in its history.

The history of English literature initiated with the history of the English race and kept on developing with the social development of the nation. When we analyze the history of English literature, we discover that it consists of eight (8) major periods and several ages. Each period or age of English literature is named after the central literary figure, or the important rulers of England, or certain literary movements. Moreover each period or phase of English literature has its distinct characteristics.



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CHAPTER II

The Anglo Saxon or Old English Period

The Old English language or Anglo-Saxon is the earliest form of English. The period is a long one and it is generally considered that Old English was spoken from about A.D. 600 to about 1100. Many of the poems of the period are pagan, in particular Widsith and Beowulf.

The greatest English poem, Beowulf is the first English epic. The author of Beowulf is anonymous. It is a story of a brave young man Beowulf in 3182 lines. In this epic poem, Beowulf sails to Denmark with a band of warriors to save the King of Denmark, Hrothgar. Beowulf saves Danish King Hrothgar from a terrible monster called Grendel. The mother of Grendel who sought vengeance for the death of her son was also killed by Beowulf. Beowulf was rewarded and became King. After a prosperous reign of some forty years, Beowulf slays a dragon but in the fight he himself receives a mortal wound and dies. The poem concludes with the funeral ceremonies in honour of the dead hero. Though the poem Beowulf is little interesting to contemporary readers, it is a very important poem in the Old English period because it gives an interesting picture of the life and practices of old days.

The difficulty encountered in reading Old English Literature lies in the fact that the language is very different from that of today. There was no rhyme in Old English poems. Instead they used alliteration.

Besides Beowulf, there are many other Old English poems. Widsith, Genesis A, Genesis B, Exodus, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Wife's Lament, Husband's Message, Christ and Satan, Daniel, Andreas, Guthlac, The Dream of the Rood, The Battle of Maldon etc. are some of the examples.

Two important figures in Old English poetry are Cynewulf and Caedmon. Cynewulf wrote religious poems and the four poems, Juliana, The Fates of the Apostles, Christ and Elene are always credited with him. Caedmon is famous for his Hymn.

Alfred enriched old English prose with his translations especially Bede's Ecclesiastical History. Aelfric is another important prose writer during old English period. He is famous for his Grammar, Homilies and Lives of the Saints. Aelfric's prose is natural and easy and is very often alliterative.



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UNIT II

CHAPTER III

THE ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD

In 1066, the Normans led by William the Conqueror defeated the English at the Battle of Hastings in Southern England. It is important to note again that the Normans were originally the “Norsemen” who invaded France sacking and pillaging as they had done so in England. These were similar to the Norsemen who had destroyed Northumbria in the ninth century. When they invaded France, however, there was a difference. The marauders led by Rollo were defeated by the Franks in the Battle of Chartres in 911, and the Frankish King, Charles the III, signed a treaty in which they were given Rouen and the area of present-day Upper Normandy. Here, the once *berserk* warriors intermarried, abandoned their own culture and began to speak French.

Within a century, they had adopted French ideals and customs and had become a very polished and intellectual European people. It is said that the union of Norse and Gallic blood had produced a culture that had the best qualities of both—the strength and energy of one and the curiosity and imagination of the other. So when William came with his Normans, they were hardly the “heathens” who had sacked Northumbria over a century previously. They brought an intellectual curiosity to England and a cosmopolitan vision of the world. The Norman conquest led to social, cultural and political upheavals in England. It signalled the end of the Old English language as it absorbed more French words and idioms. This invasion removed the English ruling class and replaced it with a very foreign monarchy. This brought about a complete change in the English culture and language. Latin remained as the language of the Church and learning while French became the language of the aristocracy (though intermarriage and exchanges with servants meant one had to engage in some bilingualism). There were various dialects of the Celtic language still spoken in areas like Cornwall, Scotland and Wales. Literature during this time concerned itself with mainly three subjects: religion, courtly love, and King Arthur.

The Anglo-Norman aristocracy was especially enamoured with the many Celtic legends that had been passed down for hundreds of years. The 12th century poets, Thomas

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of England, Marie de France and Chretien de Troyes all told that they were influenced by the stories of this ancient oral tradition. It was these three writers who were mainly responsible for the “romance” genre that has become so synonymous with the writing of this time period. They took some inspiration from the court of Henry II and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine (who had been the wife of Louis VII of France and was very well educated and liberal for her time) but mostly, they were inspired by a remarkable tale of a King named Arthur which was included in a work called *The History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey claimed that it had been based on a Welsh book (one that has never been found and perhaps never existed). It is now believed that he based his history on Celtic oral stories, mixed with bits of Roman history but it is more evident now that he wrote out of his own creative imagination.

The majority of the romances out of this Anglo-Norman period rely on the idea of a knight who proves his worth through his noble character and bravery rather than having had an aristocratic birthright. The Anglo Norman era in England also marked a time when many people turned to more personal encounters with God. This led a number of men and women (many of noble birth) to become anchorites or hermits choosing to live alone or in small groups simply to commune with God. But even this movement was compared by the clergy to the same sort of “knightly quest”, only this time it was the anchorite who duelled not with a knight but with temptation and evil. Or, in other texts, it is Christ who comes as a knight to save souls grappling with the darkness of wickedness.



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CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF CHAUCER

Poet Geoffrey Chaucer was born circa 1340 in London, England. In 1357 he became a public servant to Countess Elizabeth of Ulster and continued in that capacity with the British court throughout his lifetime. The Canterbury Tales became his best known and most acclaimed work. He died in 1400 and was the first to be buried in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner.

Chaucer's first major work was 'The Book of the Duchess', an elegy for the first wife of his patron John of Gaunt. Other works include 'Parlement of Foules', 'The Legend of Good Women' and 'Troilus and Criseyde'. In 1387, he began his most famous work, 'The Canterbury Tales', in which a diverse group of people recount stories to pass the time on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

William Langland, (born c. 1330—died c. 1400), presumed author of one of the greatest examples of Middle English alliterative poetry, generally known as Piers Plowman, an allegorical work with a complex variety of religious themes. One of the major achievements of Piers Plowman is that it translates the language and conceptions of the cloister into symbols and images that could be understood by the layman. In general, the language of the poem is simple and colloquial, but some of the author's imagery is powerful and direct.

Morality plays, Miracle plays, and Interlude

- Morality play is an allegorical drama popular in Europe especially during the 15th and 16th centuries, in which the characters personify moral qualities (such as charity or vice) or abstractions (as death or youth) and in which moral lessons are taught. Morality plays typically contain a protagonist who represents either humanity as a whole or a smaller social structure. Supporting characters are personifications of good and evil. This alignment of characters provides the play's audience with moral guidance. Morality plays are the result of the dominant belief of the time period, that humans had a certain amount of control over their post-death fate while they were on



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earth. Example is Everyman.

- Miracle plays & mystery plays were stories taken from the Bible. Each play had four or five different scenes or acts. The priests and monks were the actors. Each scene or act was performed at a different place in town and the people moved from one stage to the next to watch the play. The play usually ended outside the church so that the people would go to church and hear a sermon after watching the play.
- The Interlude (another kind of play) was performed at court or at “great houses” by professional minstrels or amateurs at intervals between some other entertainment, such as a banquet, or preceding or following a play, or between acts. John Heywood, one of the most famous interlude writers, brought the genre to perfection in his “Four Plays”.



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CHAPTER V

UNIT III

The Revival Of Learning

The literary decline that followed the death of Chaucer was due in considerable measure to Political causes. The dispute in regard to the throne, which culminated in the wars of the roses(1455-1485) distracted the country, wasted its energy and finally destroyed in large measure the noble families on whose patronage early Literature and art were dependent. The accession of Henry VII in 1485 brought about a period of quite a recovery. As its power increased, the country resumed its position in the family of European nations and began through them to feel the stimulus of the movement called the Renaissance. Read.

The revival of learning in its broadest sense means the gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the middle ages. The names Renaissance and humanism are applied to the same movement. It is the movement of transition from the middle ages to the modern world. The Renaissance, as a matter of fact was an European phenomenon in the world of art and literature. Literally, the term 'Renaissance' signifies 'rebirth'.

It is an intellectual rebirth and refers to that period in the history of Europe which was post medieval. It's an effort of the individual to free himself from the rigid institution of the middle ages, Feudalism and the church, and to assert himself ought to live, to think and to express himself accordance with a more flexible secular tone. As man gained his freedom they felt less inclined to assent to the medieval view that this life should be sacrificed to the future, they turned more and more to the present world, to the problems of gaining mastery in it through wealth or statecraft or discovering its secrets through exploration and scientific experiment or heightening its enjoyment through art and literature. Read Beowulf as an epic poem.

One force of immense importance in the Renaissance was the new knowledge of the world of antiquity, which was obtained through the recovery of the writings and works of art of the classical period. The period also saw a new approach to the study of history and the Human sciences.



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Renaissance first originated in Italy in the 14th century and it reached England much later. The English Renaissance can scarcely be said to begin until the reign of Henry VIII and it didn't came to fully splendor until the latter day of Elizabeth.

THERE ARE VARIOUS REASONS FOR WHICH RENAISSANCE FIRST STARTED IN ITALY:

Firstly, Italy was the most advanced and sophisticated of the European urban centres in medieval Europe. The Italian aristocrat is participation in business and industry alongside the merchant class made a separation of two people almost impossible. Such an relation between the nobility and the merchants worked well to create the Cosmopolitan climate which was so important feature of the Renaissance.

Secondly, Italy was more close to the classic heritage than any other western European centres. The educators looked to the models provided by the ancient Greek and Latin resources for inspirations and consultations. For the Italians the classical example was not only the most relevant but also most accessible. This was not true of the other centres in western Europe as they could not connect to the classical heritage in the way the Italian did.

Thirdly the prosperity of the Italian made it easier for artist and scholars to remain at home and pursue their interest.



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CHAPTER VI

THE AGE OF ELIZABETH

The Elizabethan Era is a period that took place since 1558 until 1625. England experienced an intense phase of economic and cultural development. It was one of the most interesting periods in the British history because it is characterized by explorations, cultural changes such as in literature or theatre, religion, education and politics. It was considered the English Renaissance. During Elizabeth I's reign, England had a great cultural splendor, with figures like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, also are important people such as Francis Drake and John Hawkins. Next, the most important themes of this period will be explained.

Monarchy

Queen Elizabeth I was the regent queen of England and Ireland between 1558 until 1603. Elizabeth, Henry VIII's daughter, was the fifth and last monarch of the Tudor dynasty. She assumed the throne after the death of her brother Edward VI and her sister Mary I. She is known by several nicknames but one of the most famous is The Virgin Queen because she decided not to get married although there were several petitions from the Parliament.

Elizabeth was crowned after Mary's death. Mary was unpopular and her death was celebrated by the English population. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, her foreign policy was characterized by its cautious relationship with Spain and the troubled relations with Scotland and France. According to religion, the queen took over a country divided by religious issues. One of the first steps that she took was to establish a Protestant church independent of Rome, which later evolved into the present Church of England, which became the highest authority.

Culture

Elizabeth's reign not only sealed the emergence of England as a great power on the European scene, it was characterized by great cultural development, which has gone down in history as "Elizabethan." The heyday of education in all social classes made that culture grew rapidly in this period. This blooming occurred in the literature, mainly in the theater, especially William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, John Lyly and



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others. Development was also in the great music of William Byrd or John Bull and architecture, influenced by Italian Renaissance and flamenco culture.

Literature

It is often noted that this literary flowering occurred between 1578 and 1660, thus extending beyond the death of the queen. It was not until the English Civil War when this aesthetic rupture occurred. The Elizabethan era saw a great flourishing of literature, especially in the field of theater.

Theater

Theater was a growing industry during era and for this reason, many theatres arose around London. Entrepreneurs and actors were lured by money and fame and they started working in this business.

The Italian Renaissance had rediscovered the ancient Greek and Roman theater. The Italians were inspired, in particular, by Seneca, but tragedies did not follow Seneca's principle. The new tragedies showed blood and violence on stage, contrary to the philosopher's ethics. Consequently, this kind of violence was perhaps more cathartic for the Elizabethan spectator. The first Elizabethan plays were Gorboduc by Sackville and Norton and The Spanish Tragedy by Kyd both provided a lot of materials to Hamlet by William Shakespeare.

Shakespeare stands at this time as an English poet and playwright. He was not an intellectual and probably he only had a basic education, but this writer had a tremendous talent and he was incredibly versatile, surpassing other "professionals" such as Greene. As a young man, Shakespeare joined a company of actors, and since 1603 he joined in the "King's Company" with which he was associated and for which he wrote all his works. He was well-paid, and his literary reputation was affirmed. Although most of his works were successful, it is considered that the greatest plays are Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Anthony and Cleopatra and The Tempest.

Other important authors that developed their works during the Elizabethan era were Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont.



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Poetry

At the end of the sixteenth century, English poetry was characterized by the development of language and extensive allusion to classical myths. The three most prominent poets of the time were John Lyly, Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Although Elizabethan poetry has been in the background, there are some people that considered it the best lines ever written.

Depending on the author, each one had a different technique which compound the whole style. “Euphues, the Anatomy of wit” and “Euphues and His England” are John Lyly’s famous works. His linguistic style is culterano and it is known as euphuism. The first and the best poetic work of Edmund Spenser was The Shepherdes Calendar. Particularly, Spenser used the “Spenserian stanza”, a poetic form that he invented. Each stanza has nine lines: eight lines in iambic pentameter followed by a single ‘Alexandrine’ line in iambic hexameter. The rhyme scheme of these lines is “ababbcbcc.” Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard are considered the introducers of the English sonnet. Finally, Shakespeare also wrote some poems and he popularized the sonnet form, but with some changes in Petrarch’s model. Shakespeare’s sonnets are approximately formed by three four-line stanzas and a final couplet composed in iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme “abab cdcd efef gg”.

Conclusion

This period has marked a before and after in England, but also in European history. All European countries were influenced by these changes that were happening and we still enjoy nowadays. England experienced a remarkable cultural and artistic renaissance, whose best examples were the proliferation of popular theater and the high level of dramatic production. The importance of this era is present in our lives and for example, we can attend to a Shakespeare’s performance in many places or we can watch a film based on Elizabeth I. Also, we have to thank this queen her interest for education and the opportunity that it was provided to almost everyone to be taught. If this had not happened, major authors, such as Shakespeare, would never have come to show their talent. Anyway, these are not the only themes that were developed in those days. Music, architecture, sports or even foods were in a brilliant moment or even they had modifications that are still latent.



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UNIT IV

CHAPTER VII

THE PURITAN AGE

After the death of James I in 1625, the new monarch Charles I took religious persecution to a new level. He was asked by the Parliament to sign the petition of rights but he continued to show open disregard to Parliament and people. He also suffered unsuccessful foreign expeditions to France etc. After the Civil War in 1642, there was a division into the Cavaliers or Royalists (*Clergy, nobility etc., those in favour of the King*) and Roundheads or Parliamentarians (*middle class etc., those were in favour of the Parliament*). The Civil War helped the Puritans to set up the Commonwealth. Oliver Cromwell was able to galvanize a military dictatorship during Protectorate up until 1660 when Monarchy was restored.

Puritans came to American land in search of religious freedom from the Anglican Church or the High Church and the persecution of the Puritans under the King and Queen of the time. The first Puritan or Pilgrim settlement is at Plymouth. The Puritans had a huge cultural and political role in crystallizing the American life. There imported notions regarding religion and Enlightenment form the bedrock of new settlement culture.

The prominent writers of the age are William Bradford, John Winthrop, Edward Taylor etc. William Bradford wrote extensively about Puritan life in terms of honest and hard working folks. He celebrated the heroism of the simple or ordinary people. John Winthrop also described the various enterprises of the Puritan life with spirituality being the ultimate objective.

In routine life, there were activities like governance, trading and farming. The most prominent writer of the age in England was John Milton with works like "[Paradise Lost](#)" and "Paradise Regained".

Some other works are John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress", Walton's "Complete Angler" and Sir Thomas Browne's "Religio Medici".

Puritan Age Characteristics

Here are the main characteristics of the literature of the age:

Genres

First person narratives were commonplace in the writing of Puritan age especially in the forms of journals and diaries. There were personal accounts of early American colonists depicting tales of travelling to the new lands, immigration, and everyday struggle. These acted as the bequest to be handed down the generations to come in the future. As many American settlers had left their families



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back in England, the letter also became a popular form of writing. The main genres of writing included religious sermons, historical narrative, personal journals and poetry.

Puritan Age Literature Themes

The common themes include religious and political idealism. There is also an insistence on practicalism and pragmatism of day to day life.

The religious discourse emphasizes the concept of predestination and inevitability of sin and a strong sense of guilt and shame.

There is heavy usage of symbolism, especially, from the religious scripture.

The age is known for the heavy influence of Biblical text, for example, Old Testament and books like the book of Jeremiah.

The genre, known as ‘Jeremiads’, was split into three portions.

The first extolled the faith of the past generations, the second denigrated the sins of the present age and the third make appeals for repentance and contrition.

There was an influence of natural phenomena like earthquakes, fires, floods etc as the people of the age were interested in learning about nature and the signs for God’s design in nature.

Other thematic works included the idea of reformation or regeneration. Unity and free choice and order were also topical manifestations.

The concept of struggle between the World and spirituality was also explored.

As most families visited the Church and attended religious sermons, the writing itself reflects the Biblical style of construction. There was also demonization of the native Indians who were described as followers of Satanism.

Puritan Poetry

Poets of Puritan Age used sonnets especially the likes of Anne Bradstreet (considered to be the first American poet) etc. This was a continuation of the sonnet writing in the Elizabethan age and the works of Shakespeare etc.

“The Author to Her Book” by Anne Bradstreet is an excellent example of such sonnets. Bradstreet used a every European poetic style and avoided getting into squabbles with the criticism of the clergy at the time.

With the beginning of the Restoration period (after the monarchy was re-established in 1660), poets like John Dryden etc., brought some creativity back to Puritan poetry.



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CHAPTER VIII

PERIOD OF THE RESTORATION

The Restoration period covers the reign of Charles II (1660–1685) and the brief reign of his younger brother James II (1685–1688).

The term ‘Restoration’ is not only used to describe the event by which the monarchy was restored to England but also the period from 1660 to 1700 that witnessed an era of new political, socio-cultural and literary movements.

The return of monarchy was marked by a violent reaction against the Puritan manners and morals. There was an intense reaction against the stern morality of the Puritans.

The French influence was predominant during the rule of Charles II because the king had spent a number of years in exile in the French court. Popularly known as the Cavaliers, the courtiers had returned from a period of exile in French court.

One of the most able and popular Stuart kings, Charles II wanted the freedom of Crown from any kind of parliamentary control.

No sooner Charles II ascended the throne of England than he decided to dissolve the union of England, Ireland and Scotland.

The Conventional Parliament was replaced by the Cavalier Parliament in 1661. The Presbyterians, dominant in the Convention, remained a handful of fifty members.

The era witnessed the system of religious repression inspite of the efforts of the king to bring religious toleration.

The Popish plot of 1678 was a conspiracy that was conceived by Titus Oates and Israel Tonge. They spread the rumours that the Jesuits were conspiring to kill Charles II to replace him by his brother James in order to establish Roman Catholicism in England.

Charles II did not have a legitimate heir to descend to the throne of England.

James I succeeded to the throne as James II in 1685. He was committed to Roman Catholicism which did not go well with the Protestant sentiments of Englishmen.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 politically ended the Restoration Period. It ushered in a new era in which the power of Stuart kings was curtailed and the power of the Parliament to make or unmake a king was established.

The country was divided into two political parties-the Tories and the Whigs. In the political field, there were signs of strife between the Whigs and the Tories.

With the coming of Charles II back to England a great change came in the social life of England. The social life and manners underwent a process of transformation.



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London society took shape in the new quarter of St James's. Tea, coffee and chocolate were drunk in places of public recreation.

The Restoration Period was marked by increasing commercial prosperity and wealth. Increased literacy, combined with wealth led the British people to an increasingly public life.

Literature of the Restoration Period too was deeply influenced by revolutionary changes in social, political and religious life of England.

Literature of the Restoration Period was influenced by France- its ideas, tastes and literature. Charles II had spent most of his years of exile in France, and when he returned to England he brought with him a new admiration for French literature.

Dramatic entertainments were made illegal during Cromwell's rule, all theatres were closed in 1642. With the restoration of Stuart succession in 1660 theatres were reopened. Public theatres were back in business and the publishing trade also flourished.

Restoration comedy or the Comedy of Manners, known for its wit, its urbanity, its sophistication, is the most characteristic literary product of Restoration society.

Heroic play or Heroic tragedy was also produced during the Restoration Period. The form was introduced by William Davenant but it was popularized by John Dryden.

The Restoration Period witnessed a growth of prose writers. Prose became a vehicle to give expression to the events of everyday life. Pamphlets were written in abundance on the socio-political life of England.

The Restoration poetry reflected the social, cultural and political concerns of the age. Poetry became the vehicle of argument, controversy, personal and political satire.

The last and greatest works of John Milton and John Bunyan were written in the beginning of the Restoration Period.



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CHAPTER IX

EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY LITERATURE

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 firmly established a Protestant monarchy together with effective rule by Parliament. The new science of the time, Newtonian physics, reinforced the belief that everything, including human conduct, is guided by a rational order. Moderation and common sense became intellectual values as well as standards of behavior.

These values achieved their highest literary expression in the poetry of Alexander Pope. Pope—neoclassicist, wit, and master of the heroic couplet—was critical of human foibles but generally confident that order and happiness in human affairs were attainable if excesses were eschewed and rational dictates heeded. The brilliant prose satirist Jonathan Swift was not so sanguine. His savage indignation resulted in devastating attacks on his age in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and *A Modest Proposal* (1729).

Middle-class tastes were reflected in the growth of periodicals and newspapers, the best of which were the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* produced by Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele. The novels of Daniel Defoe, the first modern novels in English, owe much to the techniques of journalism. They also illustrate the virtues of merchant adventure vital to the rising middle class. Indeed, the novel was to become the literary form most responsive to middle-class needs and interests.

The 18th cent. was the age of town life with its coffeehouses and clubs. One of the most famous of the latter was the Scriblerus Club, whose members included Pope, Swift, and John Gay (author of *The Beggar's Opera*). Its purpose was to defend and uphold high literary standards against the rising tide of middle-class values and tastes. Letters were a popular form of polite literature. Pope, Swift, Horace Walpole, and Thomas Gray were masters of the form, and letters make up the chief literary output of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lord Chesterfield. The novels of Samuel Richardson, including the influential *Clarissa* (1747), were written in epistolary form. With the work of Richardson, Fanny Burney, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Laurence Sterne the English novel flourished.

Probably the most celebrated literary circle in history was the one dominated by Samuel Johnson. It included Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, Edmund Burke,



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Oliver Goldsmith, and James Boswell, whose biography of Johnson is a classic of the genre. Other great master prose writers of the period were the historian Edward Gibbon and the philosopher David Hume. Dr. Johnson, who carried the arts of criticism and conversation to new heights, both typified and helped to form mid-18th-century views of life, literature, and conduct. The drama of the 18th cent. failed to match that of the Restoration. But Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan rose above the prevalent weeping comedy—whose sentimentalism infected every literary genre of the period—to achieve polished comedy in the Restoration tradition.

Among the prominent poets of the 18th cent. were James Thomson, who wrote in *The Seasons* (1726) of nature as it reflected the Newtonian concept of order and beauty, and Edward Young, whose *Night Thoughts* (1742) combined melancholy and Christian apologetics. Anticipations of romanticism can be seen in the odes of William Collins, the poems of Thomas Gray, and the Scots lyrics of Robert Burns. The work of William Blake, the first great romantic poet, began late in the 18th cent. Blake is unique: poet, artist, artisan, revolutionist, and visionary prophet.

In prose fiction, departures from social realism are evident in the Gothic romances of Horace Walpole, Anne Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, Charles Maturin, and others. These works catered to a growing interest in medievalism, northern antiquities, ballads, folklore, chivalry, and romance, also exploited in two masterpieces of forgery—the Ossian poems of James Macpherson and the medieval Rowley poems of Thomas Chatterton.



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Unit V

CHAPTER X

The Age of Romanticism (1798-1837)

The most flourished period in the history of English literature is the *Romantic Period*. It was a revolt against the Classical school of the 18th Century. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Keats, and Byron belonged to this period. The Romantic Age was basically the age of poetry. With the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge introduced a new form of poetry in opposition to the poetry of the Classical school.

The Romantic poets focused on the simplicity of language and chose the language of the common people. They looked back to the Elizabethan masters—Shakespeare, Spenser and others—in order to take inspiration from them. Their poems usually dealt with the events of everyday life. The Romantic poets proved that if the trivial aspects of nature and the common things of life are treated in the right way, they could be as interesting and significant as the grand aspects of nature and life.

The prose writers of the Romantic period also rejected the Augustan style of writing. They reverted to the ponderous, poetical and flowery prose of the Renaissance. Since the Romantic Age was characterized by the excess of emotions, it produced a new type of novel—the Gothic Novel—which soon became popular among the multitude of readers with its Gothic elements such as supernatural, gloomy settings and bizarre situations.

Romanticism was explicitly opposed to Classicism. While the Classical Age was the age of prose, the Romantic Age was the age of poetry. During the Romantic Period, poetry became the proper medium of the expression of thoughts, emotions, and imaginative process of the artist. Classicism laid stress upon the impersonal aspects of life, whereas Romantic literature openly shifted the center of art to the personal aspects of individuals.

Moreover, the heroic couplet was the only form of writing poetry in the Classical Age. While in the Romantic Period, the poets focused on simple and natural diction. The liberty of the poet from the shackles of the literary rules was the watchword of the Romantic Movement. Thus, Romantic literature is a genuinely creative literature focusing on the highest creative faculty of man.



CHAPTER XI

The Victorian Age (1837–1901)

Beginning in the second quarter of the 19th Century, the *Victorian Period* is so long as well as complicated. Moreover, there are numerous great writers who flourished during that period. That's why, for the sake of convenience, the Victorian Period is divided into two further periods—*Early Victorian Period (1837-1870)* and *Later Victorian Period (1870-1901)*.

Early Victorian Period

The **Earlier Victorian Period** was, in fact, dominated by middle class supremacy, the age of 'laissez-fair' or free trade, and of unrestricted competition. The great writers of this period were Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, Thackeray and Ruskin. All these poets, novelists, and prose writers, in spite of their individual differences, exhibited the same approach to contemporary issues. Due to this, they form a certain homogenous group possessing the same social, literary, and moral values.

Later Victorian Period

The **Later Victorian Period** began after 1870. The most prominent writers of that period were Christiana Rossetti, Charles Swinburne, George Eliot, William Morris, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Pater and others. In poetry, Morris, Swinburne and Rossetti were the protagonists of a new literary movement—the *Pre-Raphaelite Movement*. Later on, this movement was followed by the *Aesthetic Movement*. Its protagonists were Oscar Wilde, Earnest Dowson, Arthur Symons and Lionel Pigot Johnson. In the field of novels, however, George Eliot laid the foundation of the '*Modern Psychological Novel*', followed by Thomas Hardy and Meredith.

The Victorian Period exhibits a unique and complex amalgamation of two opposites—Romanticism and Classicism. Basically, its inclination towards Classicism was due its rational approach to the problems of life, deeply moral attitude, and a search for stability and balance. On the other hand, it exhibited close proximity to the Romantic spirit which had not completely exhausted itself but suddenly ended due to the following reasons:

- The premature deaths of Keats, Byron, and Shelley.
- The disillusionment resulted from industrialization and material prosperity.
- The social and economic unrest.



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CHAPTER XII

AN ESSAY ON RECENT LITERATURE

The term contemporary literature is a very broad one. In a general sense, contemporary literature refers to literary work published in the modern world. However, in literature, contemporary literature refers to literature dating from the Second World War to the present. However, this is only a vague definition; it is important to notice that there is no clear-cut explanation for this period. Furthermore, most scholars consider contemporary literature as the literary period that follows modernist period.

Work in contemporary literature mainly includes believable stories with a base in reality. The characters are strong and believable while the setting is modern era. Moreover, stories in contemporary literature are considered to be more character driven than plot driven. Some genres of this period include flash fiction, slam poetry, memoirs, autobiographies, novels, and poetry.

Moreover, studies in contemporary literature typically also include a variety of topics such as African American literature, post-colonial literature, and Latin literature. In other words, one can study contemporary works written by many literary figures in Asia, Middle East, and Africa when learning contemporary literature.

Modern literature or modernist literature refers to a late 19th century and early 20th century movement that broke away from the traditional styles. Contemporary literature is the period that followed modernist literature. Modern literature refers to the literature dating from late nineteenth century to nineteen sixties while the contemporary literature refers to the literature dating from the Second World War to the present. Thus, the main difference between modern and contemporary literature is their time period. Moreover, modernist literature mainly included North American and European literature whereas contemporary literature includes literature all over the world.