

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE I

ENGLISH LITERATURE BEFORE CHAUCER (500 -1340)

Anglo – Saxon Literature / Old English Literature

English literature before Chaucer could be studied under two heads. i) Literature before the Norman Conquest and ii) Literature from the Conquest to the Period of Chaucer. Generally, the period before the Conquest is called Anglo –Saxon or Old English Period (500 – 1066 AD).

The most outstanding work produced during the Old English period is *Beowulf* (anonymous). It is the oldest epic in the English language. The epic deals with the adventures of the hero, Beowulf, in fighting against the ferocious monster, Grendel, who has been wasting his country for twelve years. After killing the monster, Beowulf has to fight against Grendel's Mother, who is more ferocious than the son.

Two poets need special mention with regards to the Old English poetry. They are Caedmon and Cynewulf. Caedmon was a monk who wrote Biblical and religious poetry. Cynewulf's "*Dream of the Rood*" and "*Christ*" were popular. The Anglo –Saxon poetry is characterized by i) Sacred subjects and earnestness in feeling ii) Love of the sea and adventures, and iii) Alliteration (repetition of the initial consonants). King Alfred wrote prose and he can be rightly called the father of English Prose. His *Anglo – Saxon Chronicle* is acclaimed as national history and was continued up to 1154.

Anglo – Norman Period (1066 AD – 1340 AD)

Immediately after the Norman Conquest, Norman French was made the official language of England. English literature, which was making a beginning, ceased to exist. The Revival came during the reign of King John and with Magna Carta, English Language began to assert itself again.

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Layamon's *Brut* (1205) was the first noteworthy product of this revival of the English language. Written in 30,000 lines, the book deals with the legendary history of ancient Britain starting with Aeneas Brutus. Layamon was a priest of Worcestershire. His *Brut* shows three streams of influence – Celtic, French and English, written in alliterative verses. The poet makes use of occasional rimes.

Ormulum by Orm is a series of metrical homilies. The fine imaginative piece of the period is “The Owl and the Nightingale” which is in the form of a dialogue between the two birds about their respective merits.

In the early 14th century, the major productions – Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (*Manual of Sins*) the prose *Ayebite of Inwyt* were translations from the French. The much popular work, *Cursor Mundi* was a versified account of scripture history.

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THE AGE OF CHAUCER

Life and Works of Chaucer (1340 -1400)

Geoffery Chaucer is generally hailed as the Father of English poetry. He was a courtier during the rule of Edward III, Richard II and Henry IV. On several occasions he was sent on diplomatic assignments to France and Italy, which brought him under the literary influence of those countries. During his lifetime England witnessed a terrible plague called the Black Death, bringing poverty and revolt among the peasants. Chaucer's death marks the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern period. He was the first poet to be buried in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Chaucer's works:

It is usual to divide Chaucer's poetry into three periods: the French, the Italian and the English, of which the English is the best. The poems of the French group are modeled upon French Originals. Chaucer wrote two major poems under the French influence – *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *The Boke of the Duchesse*. The former is an incomplete translation of a French allegory, *Roman de la Rose*, describing the pleasures of love, symbolized by Rose. *The Boke of the Duchesse* is an elegy on the death of Duchess Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, Chaucer's patron. It is in the form of a French dream poem.

The second stage, the Italian period, shows an advance upon the earlier stage. *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The House of Fame*, *The Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Cryseyde* belong to this period. *The Parliament of Fowls* commemorates the marriage of Richard II with Anne. It is also a dream poem, written in "Chaucerian Stanza", riming ababbcc. *The House of Fame* is another dream allegory celebrating the wedding of Richard II with Anne. *The Legend of Good Women* tells the stories of the faithful lovers of nine heroines. *Troilus and Cryseyde* narrates how Troilus, the Trojan prince falls in love with a Greek Girl called Cressid.

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The third, English period contains the work of the greatest individual accomplishment. Chaucer's masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales* belongs to this period. It is a series of twenty four tales told by pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury. A *Prologue* tells how twenty nine pilgrims pass the nights before the journey at the Tabard Inn and decide to tell two tales on their way to Canterbury and two on their way back. The pilgrims hail from different places and belong to different professions. The work is remarkable for Chaucer's gift of story telling and skill in characterization.

The poetic achievement of Chaucer

Chaucer is a great poet who relates his story telling to life. In the choice of his subject, scenic background, characterization, language and versification, he is far ahead of his time. He is a modern poet in this sense. Chaucer is a mild critic of the contemporary society. With a fine sense of humour, he attacks the prevailing corruption of the church.

In the matter of poetic technique, English literature owes much to Chaucer. His seven lined stanza is known as the Chaucerian stanza or "rime royal" (ababbcc). He has also introduced the heroic couplet for the first time in *The Legende of Good Women*.

In comparison with the poets of his own time Chaucer is indeed a genius. No doubt, he is the father of English poetry.

The Contemporaries of Chaucer

Fourteenth century England produced four poets, of whom Chaucer is the greatest. The other three are William Langland, John Gower and John Barbour.

William Langland

He is generally identified as the author of *Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*. It is a long poem in which Langland makes a vehement attack on the vices of the corrupt Church. It is also an allegory like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

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John Gower

Gower was a popular writer who wrote in three languages. He is famous for his third work written in English, *Confessio Amantis*. This has the allegorical setting. The story contains many anecdotes that reveal Gower's capacity as a story teller.

John Barbour

Barbour is the first famous Scottish poet. His great work is *The Brus*, a long poem of twenty books and 1300 lines. It is the history of Scotland's struggle for freedom till the death of Bruce.

Prose of Chaucer's Age

During Chaucer's period, the English language was ripe for a good prose style. The language was settling for a standard. In the works of Mandeville and Malory, we have a prose that is both original and individual. Though the existence of Mandeville is denied now, *The Travels*, a compilation from several popular books of voyages, is interesting. The travels are full of incredible descriptions and anecdotes. The style is sweet and clear with colloquial touches.

John Wycliffe, an Oxford scholar, began satirizing the abuses of the church. He is said to have brought out an English translation of the Bible. His style is not polished but it is vigorous and pointed with a homely simplicity. He is known as 'the morning star of Reformation', because of the influence of his satire on the church.

Sir Thomas Malory is famous for his book, *Morte d' Arthur*. It is also a compilation of several romances about King Arthur. It is a skilful blend of dialogue and narrative and is full of colour and life, which makes Malory the first great individual prose stylist. Malory's work came to be published by Caxton in his printing press.

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Short questions

1. What are works Chaucer produced with the influence of Dante and Petrarch?
2. What are the limitations of Chaucer as a poet?
3. What is the poetical achievement of John Gower?
4. What are the contributions of John Wycliff to the development of prose?

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FROM CHAUCER TO TOTTLE'S MISCELLANY (1400 – 1557)

Poetry of the fifteenth century

There was not much of good poetry written during the 15th century. The greater part of the available poetry was imitative. Nearly all of them imitated Chaucer without success. Among the many imitators, a few good ones could be identified.

Among the British poets, Thomas Occleve and John Lydgate were important. Both wrote much. Occleve was a clerk in the privy seal office. He wrote a long poem called *The Governail of Princes* in Chaucer's seven line stanzas riming ababbcc. His minor poem, *Moder of God* was printed along with Chaucer's works.

John Lydgate was a monk. He studied and wrote much and gained a reputation as a scholar and a poet. He was a friend of Chaucer on whom he modeled much of his poetry. "*The Storie of Thebes*", "*The Falles of Princes*" and "*The Temple of Glass*" were his works. He had no ear for metre. Also his work lacked humour and was allegorical.

Some of the best poetry of the 15th century was written in Scotland, where the influence of Chaucer was marked. A long poem, *The King's Quair* (quire = book) was written by King James I of Scotland in which he expressed his love for his lady love Jane Beaufort who became his wife. It was written in the Chaucerian stanza.

William Dunbar, the greatest poet between Chaucer and Spenser, wrote freely on interesting subjects. His graceful allegorical poem "*The Thistle and the Rose*" was composed to commemorate the marriage of James IV of Scotland and Margaret. In much of his later poetry as his "*Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*" one could find vigour, humour and pathos.

Robert Henryson followed Chaucerian model in his "*Testament of Cresseid*". He also produced "*Robin and Makyne*", a story which anticipates Burns' "*Duncan Gray*".

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Gawain Douglas, the Bishop of Dunkeld, wrote the "*Police of Honour*" in Chaucerian model. He also translated Virgil's *Aeneid* into English.

The 15th century was rich in a kind of a particular minor verse, the Ballads. The Ballads became increasingly popular. They were often rude in style, but wonderfully direct and vigorous and full of real feeling. "*The Battle of Otterburn*", "*Nut Brown Maid*" and Robin Hood Ballads were good examples.

Prose of the fifteenth century

The prose of the 15th century was better than the poetry of the period. The form of prose was used for instruction and entertainment. Reginald Peacock took an active part in the religious controversies of the day. But he was too conservative for the Lollards and was too radical for the orthodox. His "*Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy*" and his "*Boke of Faith*" are landmarks in the history of English prose.

The most popular work of the age was *Morte Darthur* of Sir Thomas Malory. He was a knight and completed the work in 1470. It is a compilation of a number of French romances dealing with King Arthur and his Round Table Knights. The work is a good example of medieval chivalry, humanity, love, courtesy and gentleness. The work has inspired many great modern poets, like Arnold, Tennyson and others.

Revival of Learning

The Revival of Learning began with Petrarch and Boccaccio in the 14th century but only in the 15th century we enter the age of the Italian humanism. The English scholars went to study in Italy and brought back inspiration. The New Learning was established in Oxford and Cambridge. It was helped by the introduction of the Printing Press in 1476, by William Caxton. The results of this revival were first shown in the literature of the early Tudor Period.

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Literature of early renaissance

William Tyndale's English New Testament (1525), the complete English Bible of Miles Coverdale (1535), and Cromwell's 'Great Bible' (1539), reflect the steady growth of popular interest in the scriptures during the years immediately preceding the Reformation. *The Utopia* of Sir Thomas More (1478 – 1535) is one of the most thoroughly typical works of this time. Roger Ascham's (1515 – 68) *Toxophilus*, or *Schole of Shooting* (1545) was in the author's own words, written 'in the English tongue for English men'. The *Scholemaster* was published by his widow two years after his death.

Stephen Hawes' *Pastime of Pleasure* followed the old allegorical mode. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey filled the spirit of new culture. They are the chief poets represented in a collection of 'Songs and Sonnets' by various, which is commonly known from the name of its publisher, as *Tottels Miscellany*.

Short questions

1. What are William Dunbar's contribution to English poetry?
2. Write short notes on ballads in the fifteenth century?
3. What are Caxton's contribution to English prose?
4. What are Thomas More's contribution to English prose?
5. Write short notes on the revival of knowledge?

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA

Miracle Plays

The drama was the most popular literary form of the renaissance. It expressed the manifold life of the Elizabethan stage. Its chief glory is Shakespeare. The religious drama in England in England did not reach its height till the fourteenth century. At the festival of Corpus Christi, in early summer, miracle plays were represented in all large towns. Arranged to exhibit the whole history of the fall of man and his redemption, these Corpus Christi plays, or 'collective mysteries' were apportioned among the Trading Guilds of the different towns.

Morality Plays and Interludes

Miracle Plays dealt with the teachings of Church, theological or devotional. To complete this teaching there was needed some exposition of the ethical side of religion. It deals with matters of conduct. By means of personifications the morality plays attempted to represent the conflict between sin and righteousness. One of the most impressive morality play is *Everyman*.

The interlude is a new form of drama of the 16th century. John Heywood was the most popular author in this genre. His *Four P's* is one of the best example.

Comedy and Tragedy

Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* is the first English comedy of the classical school. The first complete tragedy in English is *Gorboduc*. It was written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville.

Short questions

1. What was the religious source of drama?
2. Write short notes on the Mystery plays?
3. Write short notes on historical plays?

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THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

NON – DRAMATIC VERSE

Elizabethan Poetry before Spenser

The publication of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* marks the golden age of Elizabethan literature. Not much of good poetry was produced before Spenser.

The best poetry of the period is to be found in the contribution of Thomas Sackville *A Myrroure for Magistrates*. This originated in a publisher's scheme for a continuation of Lydgate's *Falles of Princes*. It was designed to include a long series of tragical histories of famous Englishmen. Sackville's two poems – "*The Induction*" and "*The Complaint of Buckingham*" are superior to the contributions by the others. "*The Induction*" may be called "the finest single poem written in England between Chaucer and Spenser". George Gascoigne is remembered for his blank verse satire, *The Steele Glass*.

Spenser and his poetry

Edmund Spenser is the greatest non-dramatic poet in the Elizabethan period. He came at a time when the spirit of the Renaissance had merged into the Protestant Revolution. He is, as Milton says, 'our sage and serious Spenser' and one of the greatest Renaissance humanists.

The Faerie Queene is undoubtedly Spenser's masterpiece. The original plan of the poem included twelve books, each of which was to recount the adventure of a Knight, who represented a moral virtue. The work is purely allegorical in its personification of virtues and its representation of life as a struggle between good and evil. Spenser could complete only six books, celebrating Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice and Courtesy. The chief of all the knights is Prince Arthur, who appears at critical moments in the poem. He marries Gloriana, the Queen of the fairy Land.

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Next to his masterpiece, *The Shepherd's Calendar* is the best – known of Spenser's works. It consists of twelve pastoral poems called 'Eclogues', one for each month of the year. The Eclogues deal with the rural life. The speakers are the shepherds. Each Eclogue is written in different style and metre and proclaims Spenser as one practicing him for a great work.

Spenser's minor poems include eighty – eight sonnets, written in a sequence called 'Amoretti'. It celebrates the progress of Spenser's love for his ladylove, Elizabeth Boyle. 'Epithalamion' a magnificent wedding song, was written to celebrate his marriage with his beloved. 'Astrophel' is a pastoral elegy on the death of Sidney. Also, he has written *Four Hymnes* on Love, Beauty, Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty. Spenser's shorter poems illustrate his lyrical ability.

Spenser is often called 'the poetical son of Chaucer' as both the poets are studied together, though nearly two centuries separate them. England had been without a great poet for two hundred years. It is Spenser who filled in the gap. He is the first national poet in two centuries.

Spenser's contribution to English poetry is immense. He is a pioneer in many fields. His *Shepherd's Calendar* is the first pastoral poem in English literature, which exercised a tremendous influence on subsequent literature and marks the beginning of the outbursts of the great Elizabethan poetry. He invented a new verse form for his *Faerie Queene* known as the Spenserian Stanza. It is a stanza of nine lines, eight of five feet each and the last of six feet, riming ababbcbcc. Again, his 'Astrophel' may be taken as the first pastoral elegy in English. His 'Prothalamion' and 'Epithalamion' are best examples of wedding songs, which exhibit the sensuous sweetness and the rapture of Spenser.

Spenser is acknowledged as the 'poets' poet'. During his life – time, he influenced a large

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number of poets. Abraham Cowley and John Dryden, at a later period testified to his inspiring influences as literary artist. Milton paid him a warm tribute. Keats and Tennyson are indebted to him. His influence can be seen even in the Pre – Raphaelites like William Morris.

There are five main qualities of Spenser's poetry – a) perfect melody b) a rare sense of beauty c) splendid imagination, which could gather into a poem d) a lofty moral purity and seriousness and e) a delicate idealism which could make all nature beautiful.

Finally, Spenser is the 'prince of poets'. He claims a fuller sense of sensuous liveliness and a masterly command of the resources of rhythmic music and pictorial phrasing.

Minor poets

The minor poets of the Elizabethan Age were very numerous. Following *Tottel's Miscellany* several collections came to be published under fanciful titles but many were not popular. Sir Philip Sidney wrote a sonnet sequence called "*Astrophel and Stella*". Daniel's "*Delia*" Drayton's *Idea* and the sonnets of Shakespeare are some of the sonnets. William Warner's "*Albion's England*" is a poem of 10,000 lines. It sets forth the history of England from Noah's days to those of Elizabeth. Samuel Daniel produced a versified chronicle in eight books on "*The Civil Wars between the two Houses of Lancaster and York*". Michael Drayton, known for his ballad, "*The Battle of Agincourt*" wrote England's *Heroical Epistles*, "*The Barons Wars*" and "*Polyolbion*", an enormous political description of England in thirty books. The type of poetry written by John Donne is known as "Metaphysical poetry."

Short questions

1. Write a few lines on the sonnets of Shakespeare.
2. Write a few lines on sonnets of Spenser.
3. What are remarkable love poems of Elizabethan poetry?
4. What is a sonnet?
5. Write short notes on Spenser's *Prothlamion*.

DRAMA IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

Elizabethan Romantic Drama

When the first tragedy, *Gorboduc* was produced on the English stage in 1561, there was some confusion in the minds of scholars. Some wanted to follow the classical type of drama as introduced by Seneca and others wanted to cater to the unscholarly public who wanted only amusement. They expected exciting plots and vigorous action and not finer details about art. Hence, gradually, the Elizabethan Romantic drama emerged.

Principles of Classical Drama

To understand the conventions of the Elizabethan Romantic Drama, we have an idea about the principles of the classical drama. i) The Classical drama adhered to unity of subject and tone. Comedy and tragedy were kept separate. There were no humorous episodes of any kind in a tragedy. ii) There was little or no dramatic action. Main events in the play were only reported to the audience by dialogue or narration. iii) The dramatists were expected to follow the three classical unities of time, place and action to control the construction of the plot. By the unity of time, the story must be confined to a single day. By place, the action must take place in single place. According to the unity of action, the story must have only one single plot, without sub – plots or minor episodes. All these principles had been derived from the Greek and Latin scholars like Aristotle and Seneca.

The Romantic Drama

The Elizabethan dramatists opposed these classical principles. i) The Romantic drama makes free use of variety in theme and tone. Often in one play, we can find the blending of the tragic and the comic. ii) The Romantic drama is essentially a drama of action. Much of the action is shown on the stage. iii) It repudiates the three classical unities of time, place and action. The

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stories are allowed to extend over months and years. The stories are allowed to change the scene if necessary, sometimes from one town or country to another. The romantic drama employs subplots and minor episodes in connection with its central subject.

Shakespeare's Predecessors

Taking Shakespeare as the central figure, Elizabethan dramatists are divided into three periods – Pre-Shakespearean drama, Shakespeare and Post-Shakespearean dramatists. The predecessors of Shakespeare are usually known as 'University Wits' as most of them had University education. They developed the drama to the extent that Shakespeare took over them. Shakespeare was influenced by them. The successors of Shakespeare are called Jacobean dramatists as they flourished during the reign of King James I. Shakespeare exercised influence on them.

The 'University Wits' constituted a group and worked together. They are John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nash. Lyly and Marlowe exerted direct influence on Shakespeare.

John Lyly

He is widely known as the author of prose romance entitled *Euphues*. He wrote eight comedies of which *Compaspe*, *Endymion* and *Gallathea* are popular. They were written for court performance. Lyly's interest was not so much on plot – construction or characterization but on language. His wit, ingenuity and grace of dialogue influenced Shakespeare, especially in *Loves Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Indeed John Lyly was Shakespeare's first master in comedy.

Thomas Kyd

Kyd is specialized in revenge tragedies. *The Spanish Tragedy* is his masterpiece.

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Cornelia and the *First part of Jeronimo* are his other plays. Kyd's influence on Shakespeare is seen in *Hamlet*.

George Peele

Peele was a Londoner, educated at Oxford. He tried his hand on different types of drama. His *Arraynement of Paris* is a pastoral play. *The Famous Chronicle of Edward I* is a history play. His best play *The Old Wives' Tale*, is a satire on the drama.

Thomas Lodge

Lodge had his education at London and Oxford. He deserted his legal studies to take up his literary career. Lodge is famous for his prose romances. His romance *Rosalynd* suggested to Shakespeare the plot for his *As You Like It*. His *The Wounds of Civil War* is a chronicle play.

Robert Greene

Greene has produced thirty – five prose works which reveal his wit and imagination. He has written four plays. They are *Alphonsus, King of Aragon, Friar Bacon* and *Friar Bungay*. His best play *Orlando Furioso*, adapted from Ariosto and Scottish History of James IV.

Thomas Nash

Nash was educated at Cambridge. He came to London to make his living by literature. He finished Marlowe's *Dido, the Queen of Carthage*. His only surviving play is *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, a satirical masque. His prose – tale *The Unfortunate Traveller* played a major role in the development of the English novel.

Christopher Marlowe

Marlowe's historical importance is greater. He is the greatest of the Pre – Shakespearean dramatists. He was born at Canterbury and educated at Cambridge. He was a man of fiery imagination and immense power but lived a miserable life and died in a drunken brawl.

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Marlowe is famous for one – man tragedies. *Tamburlaine the Great*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Doctor Faustus*, *Edward II* are his popular tragedies. Marlowe's *Edward II* influenced Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Richard III*. Barabbas in the *Jew of Malta* suggested to Shakespeare Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Also, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* was inspired by Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

Life and works of Shakespeare

Shakespeare is the greatest English dramatist the world has ever produced. Shakespeare was born at Stratford. He had no university education. By the time he was nineteen, he was married to a woman eight years senior to him. He went to London, became an actor and finally established himself as one of the leading dramatists. He spent twenty years in London, became financially sound and was greatly admired for his literary skill. Shakespeare finally retired to his home town, where he died in 1616. In the space of about twenty years he produced plays and poems.

Shakespeare's works

Shakespeare's works are broadly classified under two categories – non-dramatic poetry and plays. His non-dramatic poetry consists of two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*; and a sequence of 154 sonnets. The first 126 addressed to a man and the remaining 28 addressed to a woman, the Dark Lady.

Shakespeare's dramatic work comprises 37 plays. His activity as a writer for the stage extended over 24 years – from 1588 to 1612. These 24 years were divided into four periods.

First Period : 1588 – 1593

It was period of experimental work. The plays of this period were, the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus* and the comedies *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The history play, *Richard III* and the

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youthful tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* belong to this period.

These plays show signs of immaturity. There is no depth of thought and the treatment of life is superficial. There are puns, conceits. There is rhyme in dialogue and the blank verse.

Second Period : 1594 – 1600

This is a period of great comedies and chronicle plays. Shakespeare's Romantic comedies – *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *As You Like it*, *Twelfth Night* and the History plays *Richard II*, *King John*, two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* belong to this period.

These show the development of Shakespeare's mind and art. His understanding of human passions, motives and attitudes is better and stronger than in the early plays. There is depth of thought and powerful characterization.

Third Period : 1601 – 1608

This period is great period of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies and bitter comedies or problem plays. *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* are Shakespeare's tragedies. *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Timon of Athens* are his dark / bitter comedies.

Shakespeare's dramatic powers are at their highest. His power of poetic expression, intellectual power and dramatic vision all had perfection. His understanding of human passions was perfect. His attention is engaged in the darker side of life. His plays proceed from the destructive passions of the human mind. The foundations of the social and moral order are shaken and ruin is brought upon the guilty and the innocent. In the comedies also there is a tone of evil and hence they are called dark comedies.

Fourth Period : 1600 – 1612

This is a period of Shakespeare's last plays of Romances. *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and

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The Winter's Tale belong to this group. *Pericles* and *Henry VIII* may be added, but Shakespeare wrote only parts of these and they were completed by Shakespeare's younger contemporary, Fletcher.

Characteristics of Shakespeare's Plays

Shakespeare's plays constitute the greatest single body of work which any writer has contributed to our literature. The most salient feature is their astonishing variety. None has ever rivaled Shakespeare in the range and versatility of his powers. He was at home in comedy and tragedy. He is supreme not only as a dramatist but also as a great poet.

Shakespeare possesses in a superlative degree the power of digesting thought into phraseology. He is the most often quoted of all writers. He is free from dogmatism of any kind and his tolerance is as comprehensive as his outlook.

There is the vitality of Shakespeare's characterization. No one else has created so many men and women who are completely alive. His characters have become unforgettable by their strong passions, actions or humorous speeches. Shakespeare has a unique command over the resources of language. His vocabulary is the largest to be used by any writer. Milton's vocabulary contains only half the number.

Shakespeare was essentially a man of his time. While his plays are remarkable for their general truth to what is permanent in human nature, still his interpretation is very different. He wrote hurriedly and signs of hasty and ill-considered production were often apparent. His plays were designed for the stage and were restricted by the actual conditions of stage representation. He had to sacrifice consistency of character and finer demands of art to theatrical effect. He had to appeal to the tastes of the 'groundlings'. Sometimes his psychology is crude; his style is vicious; his wit forced and his language bombastic.

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Ben Jonson

Drama declined after Shakespeare. During the Jacobean period, the audience wanted to see more and more action and amusement on the stage. Among the younger contemporaries of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson was the most important. He was the greatest in power and volume of his genius and also the aims and principles of his work were fundamentally different from Shakespeare's.

Jonson produced three different kinds of writings. He produced court masques. His historical tragedies *Sejanus and Catiline* were very learned, laborious and dull. Jonson is better known for his comedies of humours. He became popular as a dramatist with the production of *Every Man in His Humour*. He produced more such comedies later – *The Alchemist*, *Volpone*, *Epicoene* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*.

Ben Jonson is a realist. The world of his comedy is not the world of romance but of contemporary London life, with its manners, types and affectations. He gives a heightened picture of this life. His aim is not only to depict but also to amuse. He seeks to teach and correct his audience. His realism is didactic realism.

Jonson rejects the Elizabethan romantic drama and takes the Latin comedies as his models. His characterization is based on the idea that each man is governed by some one particular quality or passion or humour. His men and women are not complex individuals like Shakespeare's but types. In Jonson's comedies intellect predominates. They are products of learning, skill and conscientious effort than of creative power. Though astonishingly clever and rich, they lack charm and spontaneity. Jonson is a great genius and many rightly be called the real founder of the comedy of manners.

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Other dramatists

John Webster

John Webster was one of the greatest dramatists. He was a man of serious nature and great power. He wrote blood and thunder revenge tragedies. He is best remembered for *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher

Beaumont and Fletcher wrote mostly in collaboration. Their works are so closely interwoven. They are remembered for *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy*.

Philip Massinger

He is known for his comedy *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*.

The Playhouses of Shakespeare's Time

It is always desirable to understand the theatrical conditions under which Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists were writing. During the early years, plays were performed in the inn yards of courts. In 1576, two permanent playhouses were built. They were the Theatre and The Curtain. These were the only playhouses in London when Shakespeare reached the city. But by the end of Elizabeth's reign, there were about eleven theatres. The theatres were situated in the immediate outskirts on the banks of the Thames.

Shakespeare was closely associated with the Globe and the Black – Friars. To avoid being branded as 'rogues', the actors obtained licenses from their influential patrons. There were many drama companies such as Lord Leicester's Servants, to which Shakespeare belonged, Lord Admiral's Servants and the Queen's Players.

The Elizabethan playhouses were very small, round or hexagonal and were mainly made of wood. The stage and the 'boxes' were roofed in with thatch but the rest of the building was open to the sky. The boxes were frequented by the wealthy playgoers. No seats were provided

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for the 'groundlings'. The stage was jutting into the audience. There were outer stage, inner stage and upper stage with balcony. Much of the action took place on the outer stage. The inner stage served as room, cells, etc, and the upper stage was used to represent room upstairs. Placards were used to mean places. This is Athens' etc.

The absence of painted scenery was made up by the beautiful poetry of the dramatists, in which the appeal was made to the imagination of the audience. The absence of an outer screen was another feature that compelled the dramatists to give decent funerals to those who die on the outer stage. There were no actresses on the Shakespearean stage; women's parts were being taken up by young boys trained for the purpose. With such shortcomings and difficulties, Shakespeare and his companion dramatists were able to produce excellent plays.

Short questions

1. Who were the university wits?
2. Describe the structure of Elizabethan playhouse.
3. What are the dramatic romances of Shakespeare?
4. Write a few lines about Shakespeare's plot construction.
5. Write a few lines about Shakespeare's heroines.

ELIZABETHAN PROSE

Though the genius of the Elizabethan age was drama, considerable achievement was made in the field of prose fiction. This prose fiction cannot be called “novel”; it was a fictitious narrative. This kind of fictitious narratives supplied materials to dramatists like Shakespeare. There were many such stories, such as William Painter’s “*Palace of Pleasure*”. John Lyly, Sir Philip Sidney, Lodge, Greene and Nash were very popular writers of the period.

John Lyly

The most important prose romance was the work of John Lyly, called *Euphues*, the Anatomy of Wit. He published a sequel to the work, *Euphues and his England*. The first part tells the story of a young Athenian named Euphues, wealthy, handsome and clever. He sets out on travels, reaches Naples where he becomes an intimate friend of Philautus. They have many long conversations on philosophical topics. Euphues returns to Athens in the end, leaving a message requesting him to avoid the society of women. It is a love-story without action. The narrative is an excuse for moralisings.

In the second part, Euphues visits England and gives a long description of the country, the court and the manners in the country. The description is so good that we may think that the contemporary England was a paradise.

The book was popular and it went through ten editions. Everybody read it and the court ladies used it as moral handbook, a guide to polite behavior and a model of elegance in speech and writing.

The work *Euphues* was known for its style which earned the term “Euphuism” or “Euphuistic style”. The style was characterized by specific rhetorical devices, use of balanced anthithesis, alliteration, similies, word – play and puns. Another main feature of his style is his fondness for “non-natural natural history” or the natural history of myth and fable. For example,

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he talks about a bird named Attagen, a precious gem, Draconites, a mysterious herb, Dictannum, etc.

Sir Philip Sidney

Sidney occupies the second important place in the Elizabethan Romance. His *Arcadia* is a popular work. Unlike *Euphues* by Lyly, *Arcadia* is full of story and action. It continues the traditions of the chivalric romances. The form is modeled on the pastoral *Diana* of the Portuguese Montemayor and the *Arcadia* of the Italian Sannazaro.

The principal interest is provided by the adventures of two friends Pyrocles and Musidorus while seeking to win the two Arcadian Princesses, Philoclea and Pamela. Many other characters are introduced and as a result many episodes arise and the plot becomes very complicated. Sidney's prose is of an extremely ornate and poetical kind, but not simple.

Lodge, Greene and Nash

The three "University Wits" Lodge, Greene and Nash have importance as writers of romance. Lodge and Greene were influenced by the style of Lyly. Lodge's *Rosalynde* furnished raw materials for Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*; Greene's *Pandosto* for *The Winter's tale*.

Nash gave a distinct in the direction of realism. His work, *Unfortunate Traveller* or *The Life of Jack Wilton* is a rambling record of adventure on the continent. It is the earliest example of the picaresque novel.

Bacon and his essays

The age of Shakespeare was not entirely an age of drama; it was an age of prose as well. Prose was used by writers of various fields other than literature. But a few writers claimed a place on record in the history of English prose. Francis Bacon was the principal prose master of the Elizabethan period.

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Francis Bacon was born in an influential family. His father was the Keeper of the Great seal of England. He was educated in Trinity College, Cambridge. After his education he became a lawyer and became Queen's Counsel. During the period of James I he became famous and was made Attorney General and finally the Lord Keeper. Then came a sudden fall. He was charged with official malpractice but finally received a royal pardon. His last years were spent in scholarly pursuits and he died of a cold caught while doing a scientific experiment.

Bacon's major contribution to the general literature is his collection of Essays, or *Counsels Civil and Moral* (1597). The Essays deal with common topics like friendship, studies, revenge, ambition, married life and parents and children. Like Montaigne, he uses the word 'essay' in its etymological sense – a trial or attempt. Bacon defies the essay as “dispersed meditations”. They are thoroughly practical in character; and concern themselves for the most part with the conduct of life in private and public affairs. Extraordinary insight and sagacity are their salient qualities. Bacon's style is marked by ornateness, imagery, love of analogy and metaphor. *Novum Organum* and *The Advancement of Learning* were the other works of Bacon.

Other prose writers

Apart from Bacon, there were many prose writers who represented the varied interest of the period. Those writers come under the category as history writers, travel writers, religious writers and critical writers.

History was cultivated by many writers. Sir Walter Raleigh wrote *History of the World*. Bacon authored his *History of the Reign of Henry VII*. Foxe wrote his thoroughly untrustworthy *Acts and Monuments or Book of Martyrs*. Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* was important in the sense that it influenced Shakespeare to write his famous history plays.

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Elizabethan age was also an age of adventure and naturally the literature of travel flourished. Richard Hakulyte's *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics and Discoveries of the English Nation* were cited as an example.

Religious prose was represented by the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible. This became the most influential book in English Literature. Countless English writers have been influenced by its style and thought. Richard Hooker's masterly work, *Ecclesiastical Polity* was a good example for it. It was well known for its fine rhetorical style. It was written in simple common prose.

Literary criticism has also registered significant growth. The best known of the critical works were Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, William Webb's *Discourse of English Poetrie* and George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*.

Short questions

1. Write short notes on literary criticism.
2. What is an essay according to Dr.Johnson?
3. Write a note on Thomas Nashe's contribution to English prose.

THE AGE OF MILTON

Milton's Age

If Renaissance was the re-birth of learning, Puritanism was the rebirth of moral literature. It was the greatest moral and political reform which ever swept over a nation in the short span of fifty years. Puritanism aimed at its two objects – personal righteousness and civil and religious liberty. Milton, the greatest product of this age, stands for these two ideals.

Puritanism takes its origin from the time of Reformation. When the Church of England was established, there were a few people who were dissatisfied. To them the Church of England was not different from the Church of Rome. They came to be influenced by John Calvin, who advocated strict views concerning life and conduct. They were called Puritans.

The Puritans spread in the time of James I and emerged as a national power deposing even Charles I. During the Civil War, Charles I was beheaded and Oliver Cromwell became the Lord Protector. The Puritan influence upon the tone and temper of English life and thought was profound. The spirit was fine but it was hard and stern. Puritans generally neglected science, art and beauty. They wanted to confine literature to particular interests. Hence, Puritanism was fatal to art and literature. The only poet who could produce real literature during this period was Milton.

Life and works of Milton

Next to Shakespeare, Milton occupies the seat of honour in English Literature. He is the greatest non – dramatic poet in English. Only in him, we see the union of creative power and intellectual power, both at their height. Milton's work falls naturally into four periods: 1) the college period, closing with the end of his Cambridge career in 1632; 2) the Horton period, closing with his departure for the Continent in 1639; 3) the period of his prose writings, from 1640 to 1660; and 4) the late poetic period, or period of his greatest achievement.

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Milton was born in December, 1608 in London. He was educated in Christ's College, Cambridge. After taking his M.A. Degree, he settled in a pleasant village, Horton to prepare for his future career. It is only in this village, he wrote some of his best early poems, "*L'Allegro*", "*II Penseroso*", "*Comus*", "*Arcades*", etc. Then, he started his continental tour, which he could not complete as the Civil War started in England. He took active part in the Civil War and at the success of Puritanism he was appointed Latin Secretary to Oliver Cromwell. When Charles II was restored to the throne, Milton lost his post and had become totally blind. He produced his masterpieces *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* during this period. Milton died in peace at the age of 64 in 1674.

"*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*" approaches the high watermark of lyric poetry. "*L'Allegro*" and "*II Penseroso*", the two companion poems, contain a few best descriptive passages. "*The Masque of Comus*" was the most perfect of Milton's poems. The last of the Horton poems. "*Lycidas*", which Milton wrote to commemorate the death of a friend, Edward King, was one of the best pastoral elegies in English.

Milton has written a few sonnets. Milton has patriotism, duty, music, and politics as its subject matter. Some of his best-known sonnets are "*On His Deceased Wife*", "*On His Blindness*" and "*To the Nightingale*". Milton's prose works are criticized by many for the harsh language used by Milton. *Areopagitica* was a plea for the freedom of the press.

The noblest of Milton's works was his later poetry, when he became blind. *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* are the major works of Milton. Of these, his epic *Paradise Lost* was his masterpiece. This dealt with the fall of man. It was a colossal epic of the whole race of mankind.

After the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Milton wrote *Paradise Regained*, at the suggestion

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of his friend. Christ's temptation at the wilderness was the theme. Milton has based his work on the fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. But it falls below the level of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's aim to present in English a pure tragedy in Greek Fashion is accomplished by his *Samson Agonistes* in which he presents the mighty champion of Israel, Samson. It is autobiographical to a great extent.

In Milton's poetry we notice the grand style, the majesty of thought and diction and an astonishing descriptive power. We can also see his extraordinary insight into motives and character. There was high seriousness in his poetry. Milton was a consummate literary artist and his poetry was certainly the "outpouring of splendours".

The Caroline Poets

It is difficult to group all the poets who wrote between 1625 and 1700 into one comprehensive group and establish any satisfactory order among them. Under the term "Caroline Poets" we can include a number of poets whose work may be assigned to the period of Charles I.

The greatest of all Caroline poets was Robert Herrick. His religious poetry was published under the general title of *Noble Numbers* and his secular poetry under the title, *Hesperides*. They are miscellaneous in character, comprising address to his friends, occasional poems and love poems. They are delightful in their naturalness, imagination and lyrical charm and grace.

Another Cavalier poet known for his lyricism is Thomas Carew. He was much more of a courtier than Herrick, and drew his poetic inspiration from the city and its pleasures. Carew's *He that loves a rosy cheek* was an example of fine lyrical quality. Sir John Suckling was another Cavalier poet known for his work *Why so thin and pale, fond lover?* Richard Lovelace's work was *To Althea from Prison*. In all the above mentioned works amatory verse was at its best.

Andrew Marvell is another poet of this period. He was well known for his odes. Some of

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his poems have amazing images as in *To His Coy Mistress*. A general satirical tone was noticed in his poetry.

George Herbert, whose collection of lyrics entitled *The Temple* breathes the spirit of the purest piety. Richard Crashaw is known for his sacred verse. Henry Vaughan was deeper in thought and much more mystical. *The Religious Emblems* of Francis Quarles was made a record because of immense and long – enduring popularity.

Metaphysical Poets

Abraham Cowley was considered the greatest of English poets. He was usually regarded as the chief representative of the metaphysical school. The name ‘metaphysical’ was first applied by Johnson. The works of metaphysical poets were packed with affectations and conceits, indulge in strained metaphors. As a result they are in general violent, harsh, cold and obscure. The three chief religious poets Crashaw, Herbert and Vaughan were more or less metaphysical. Thomas Traherne published his first volume of poems in 1703. His *Centuries of Meditations* showed that he was a great prose writer.

Caroline Prose Writers

Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Living and Holy Dying* and Richard Baxter’s *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* were purely religious in matter and aim. Thomas Fuller also wrote much on religious subjects. Sir Thomas Browne was the author of a number of books. His main work is *Religio Medici*. Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler or the Contemplative Man’s Recreation* were designed for the instruction of fishermen. *History of the Great Rebellion* by Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon and *The Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes were some of the other prose works.

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Short questions

1. Write short notes Puritan Movement.
2. What are the characteristics of metaphysical poetry?
3. Write short note on Abraham Cowley.
4. Write short note on Milton's sonnets.