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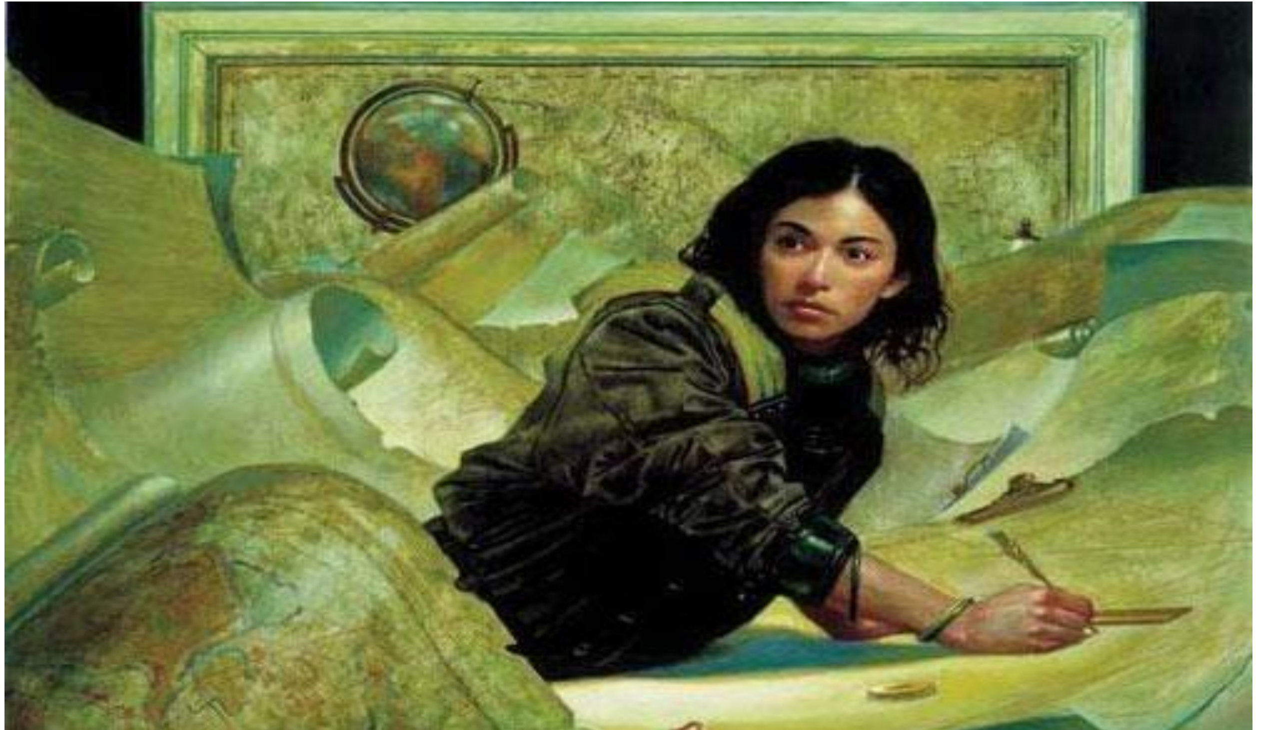

PRODI SASTRA INGGRIS UBG

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH LITERATURE

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UNIVERSITAS BUMIGORA
THE FACULTIES OF SSOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANIORA
ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM

Mata Kuliah	KODE	Rumpun MK:	BOBOT (sks):	SEMESTER	Tgl Penyusunan
		Mata Kuliah Wajib	2	III	5 September 2021
OTORISASI	**Dosen Pengembang RPS**		**Koordinator RMK**		**Kaprodi**
	Diah Supatmiwati Tanda Tangan		Diah Supatmiwati Tanda Tangan		Tanda Tangan

Capaian Pembelajaran (CP)	**CPL-PRODI**	
	S9	Mampu mengelaborasi dan mengembangkan konsep-konsep teoritis dalam ilmu bahasa dan Sastra.
	P3	Mampu mengaplikasikan bidang keahliannya dan memanfaatkan IPTEKS pada bidangnya dalam penyelesaian masalah serta mampu beradaptasi terhadap situasi yang dihadapi.
	KU1	Mampu menerapkan konsep-konsep filosofi paradigmatis,teoritis, dan metodologis ilmu bahasa dan sastra dalam meningkatkan kinerja professional sehingga dihasilkan karya yang kreatif, orisinil, dan teruji
	KU2	Mampumenerapkanilmudanketerampilanberbahasadalambidangpariwisatadanbudayadalammendukung NTB sebagaidaerahtujuanwisata.
	KU9	Memiliki wawasan kewirausahaan yang baik sesuai dengan karakter daerah.
	KK4	Mampu mengaplikasikan konsep-konsep yang ada dalam teori komunikasi dengan menelaah fenomena social yang terjadi dan menerapkannya dalam penelitian yang berhubungan dengan ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra.
	CP-MK	
	M1	Get deep understanding about different kinds literature works
	M2	Have knowledge about structural elements of a literary work
	M3	After joining this course students are able to gain some basic knowledge of literature, for example the definition of literature, literary genres, the elements of novels and plays, etc.
	M4	Get basic concepts of appreciating and analyzing a literary work.
	M5	Able to use this knowledge for joining the next courses such as English Poetry, Prose, and Drama.
Deskripsi Singkat MK	This is a compulsory course, which is a prerequisite for English Poetry, Prose, and Drama. It provide students with the opportunity to explore the basic concepts of, the nature of, the function of, and the basic approaches to literature with emphasis laid on English literary works. The objective of this course focuses on analysis on the kinds of writing- literary and non-literary or serious and pop- are given attention. Based on the topics to be covered in the whole semester, students are expected to produce individual text analysis of the texts provided. Students' learning is assessed through mid-term and final test, assignments, and class participation. The syllabus and the course orientation are given in the first session. This subject will be taught through a combination of lecture and class discussion.	
Materi Pembelajaran/Pokok Bahasan	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	The Function of Studying Literature, Definitions of Literature, and Kind of Literature The History of English Literature: A Brief overviews Basic Approaches to Literary Interpretation Critical theory of literature Literary Genres (Prose/Fiction) Literary Genres (Drama)

	Literary Genres (Poetry)
Pustaka	**Utama**
	1. Barnet, Sylvan, Morton Berman, and William Burto. 2008. *Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, Drama (15th ed.)*. US: Longman Pearson *2.* Bennett, Andrew and Royle, Nicholas.2004 *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (3rd ed.)*. UK: Longman Pearson
	Pendukung
	1.
Media Pembelajaran	**Perangkat Lunak:**
Team Teaching	Dr. DiahSupatmiwati, SS., M.Hum
Mata Kuliah Syarat	-

RENCANA PEMBELAJARAN SEMESTER

Mg Ke-	Sub-CP-MK	Indikator	Kriteria & Bentuk Penilaian	Metode Pembelajaran (Estimasi Waktu)	Materi Pembelajaran (Pustaka)	Bobot Penilaian
(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**	**(7)**
1	Students are aware of the subject's guide, references, materials, and expected learning outcomes.	1.Students are aware of the subject's guide, references, materials, and expected learning outcomes 2. Students are familiar with basic knowledge of the subject and divisions of group presentation and Class regulations		Lecture & Discussion [TM:1x(1x50')]	Courses outline RPS	0
2	Students are able to identify and explain the purposes of learning literature and Understand definition, benefit and approach in learning literature	Students' accuracy to explain the concept of purposes of learning literature	- iscussion	Collaborative Learning [TM:2x(2x50')]	• Definition of literature • Kinds of literature • Purpose's of Learning literature	
3-4	Students are able to identify and elaborate the history of literature	1. Students' appropriateness to identify and elaborate the history of literature	1. tudents' engagement 2. ndividual task	Lecturing, discussion, and presentation	History of Literature	
5	Student are able to identify the types and deep narrative	1. Identifying types and narrative form in Literature: Fiction, drama, and poetry	Students' engagement Individual task	Lecturing discussion, and presentation	Literature genres.	
6	Students are able to analyze critical theories of literature	1. tudents explore the history of English literature with the characteristics in each era 2. S tudents' accuracy to conduct analysis of literature pieces.	Paper writing discussion and Individual task	(Problem Based Learning/FGD, Project Based Learning)	critical theories of literature	
7		1.	Paper writing	Lecturing,	Review topic 1	

	Students are able to review material from topic 1-6	tudents explain the concept of theoretical approaches to literature and other topics they have learnt	discussion and Individual task	discussion, and presentation	to topic 6	
8	**Midterm Test: Conduct validation and evaluation 20%**					
9-10	Students are able to analyze the theory of narrative story and elements of fiction	Students outline the theory of narrative and elements of fiction story part 2 Students' accuracy to analyze the elements of fiction	Students' engagement Individual task	(Problem Based Learning/FGD, Project Based Learning)	elements of fiction: - plot - character - setting - point of view - theme - narrative language	
11-12	Students are able to recognize and elaborate the theory of drama and its elements	Students identify and elaborate the theory of drama and its elements Students' comprehension to recognize and explain about drama and its elements	Students' engagement Individual task	(Problem Based Learning/FGD, Project Based Learning)	Basic elements of drama: - dialogue - plot - setting - character - various theme of drama	
13-14	Students are able to identify and elaborate the theory of poetry and its elements	Students identify and elaborate the theory of poetry and its elements Students' competency to identify and elaborate the theory of poetry and its elements	Students' engagement Individual task	(Problem Based Learning/FGD, Project Based Learning)	Basic elements of poetry - speaker tone - audience - structure and form - diction - sound effect -explication - various theme of poetry	
15	Students are able to review material from topic 9-14	Students explain the concept of poetry, drama and fiction they have learnt Students' competency to re explain they have learnt from topic 9-14	Students' engagement Individual task	(Problem Based Learning/FGD, Project Based Learning)	review	
16	**Final Exam: Conduct validation and evaluation 30%**					

ASSESSMENT SCHEME AND CRITERIA

This course follows the university standard for grading:

A	=	81 - 100
B+	=	71 - 80
B	=	66 - 70
C+	=	61 - 65
C	=	50 - 60
D	=	40 - 49
E	=	0 - 39

Assignments the weight of which is 10% of the final score; maximum score (A: 80-100) is given when the assignments are due and meet at least 80% of the expected features.

- Presentations the weight of which is 10% of the final score; maximum score (A: 80-100) is given when the presenters are well prepared and manage to present the materials clearly with at least 80% mastery.
- Mid-term test the weight of which is 25% of the final score; maximum score (A: 80-100) is given when at least 80% of the test items are correctly answered.
- Written end-of-term test the weight of which is 40% of the final score; maximum score (A: 80-100) is given when at least 80% of the test items are correctly answered.
- End-of-term academic paper the weight of which is 15% of the final score; maximum score (A: 80-100) is given when the assignments are due and meet at least 80% of the expected features.

- Attendance, in-class behavior, participation in discussions 5 %
- Quizzes 10 %
- Midterm 25 %
- Final exam 40 %
- Project : 20 %

Approved by,

Head of Study Program
Lecturer

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1 Introduction

For more than a thousand years, people have been writing things down in some version of a language called “English”; the result of all this writing is “English Literature.” Over the centuries the language itself has changed a great deal, and so has the sort of writing we’re willing to consider “literature.” Not much of anything in English survives from the year 1150, so if we found a grocery list from that murky era some modern scholar would eagerly edit it and provide much learned commentary about linguistic features and cultural clues. On the other hand, no one could read all the English words published in a single day in the year 2000, so we’re much pickier about what we regard as worth reading, preserving, and studying. But the choices we make today aren’t going to be the last word; it seems likely that readers a thousand years from no will see a different twentieth century from the one we see.

This history of English literature is designed to be a kind of skeleton on which you, the reader, can place the flesh and skin of the actual literary works. It is designed for people—undergraduate, particularly—who have read some Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope, Keats, and Austen, but who don’t have a very clear sense of when these writers wrote how they relate to each other. Apart from novels, you’ll find most of what we’re talking about in one of the standard anthologies of English literature, and we assume that you’ll read what’s there. That is, reading this history isn’t in any way a substitute for reading *The Canterbury Tales or Emma*. The best it can do is to suggest why it is that Chaucer and Austen, writing when they did it, wrote what they did, and how these works might fit into the collection of other works that make up our current standard “canon” of English literature.

Along the way, we’ll provide more intense analyses of certain brief texts—short poems, or passages from longer works. The goal of these is twofold: to provide a model of literary analysis generally, and to indicate particular ways that seem particularly appropriate for particular texts (and writers, and periods). We’ll also consider some of the main developments of the English language.

1.1 Old English (450-1100)

About the year 450 A.D., a millennium and a half ago, a group of barbarian warriors crossed the English Channel and invaded Roman Britain. These invaders were members of various tribes—Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians - from around the mouth of the Rhine river; since the Angles and the Saxons were the two most prominent of these tribes, historians now know this as the Anglo-Saxon invasion.

At this time Britain had been a small and marginal part of the Roman Empire for nearly four hundred years. The Roman Empire was Christian, and its universal language was Latin—the spoken Latin which in the next five centuries would develop into French, Italian, Spanish, and other “Romance” languages. In Roman Britain, as far as we can tell, people spoke both Latin and Briton—the “Celtic” language (related to modern Welsh, Breton, and Irish and Scots Gaelic) which the Britons had been speaking before being conquered by Rome.

The Anglo-Saxons (we’ll forget about those Jutes and Frisians) were pagan: they worshipped a collection of gods that included the war god Tiu; Woden, the clever one-eyed leader of the gods; thunder-hammering Thor; and Freya, the seductive love-goddess. (Four of the modern days of our week are named after these gods: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday). Their language was part of a group

we now call “Germanic,” related to modern Germans, Dutch, and Danish. For several centuries, Germanic tribes like the Angles and the Saxons had been pushing into the Roman empire from the east. Now Rome itself was falling apart. Goths of various sorts were pouring into Italy and Spain; Franks and Burgundians were pushing into France. Without knowing it the Anglo-Saxons were part of a larger historical pattern.

The Germanic tribes tended to be fond of warfare. They thought it was noble for a warrior to fight fiercely and die in battle. They liked complicated feuds. If someone from another tribe killed your kinsman, you were morally obligated to get revenge on someone from the killer’s tribe; they were then obligated to get revenge on you; and so forth. When they weren’t out fighting and killing each other, they liked to sit around in “mead balls,” drinking beer and honey wine and listening to poets sing stories of famous heroes fighting and killing each other. The men would usually do the fighting and singing. The women would pass put the booze. They would also often urge their men folks on to be more fierce and vengeful. At times they may have encouraged peacefulness as well, when they saw their supply of children and kinsmen dwindling.

One of the reasons the warriors fought fiercely was to gain fame. The poets were necessary for this: it wasn’t much good to do heroic deeds if no one was available to make up songs and stories about you. The poets “sang” these stories in poetry because the Anglo-Saxons (we’ll focus on them) were for all practical purposes illiterate. Poetry is easier to remember than prose. It also has a kind of attractive rhythm. The poets would apparently accompany their recitations by strumming on a harp, though whether they were chanting rhythmically or actually singing (in a modern sense) is hard to say.

So these were the people who started taking over Britain in about 450. It took then about a hundred years to gain control of what we now call “England” (“England is “Angle-land,” named after the Angles, and “English” is “Anglish --the language the Angle spoke). In the west of Britain they seem to have been stymied for about fifty years by a British resistance led by some anonymous general who later became famous as King Arthur. If “King Arthur” really lived, he did so about the year 500, but he is never mentioned at the time, and his extraordinary literary popularity begins more than six hundred years later. By a weird coincidence, Beowulf – the imaginary hero of the most famous surviving Old English poem – would have lived at exactly the same as King Arthur, but in a slightly different part of Europe.

The various invading tribes shared a similar language, culture, and religion, but they formed separate kingdoms in England: Wessex, Essex, Sussex, Kent, East, Anglia, Mercia, Northumbia. The mountainous and forbidding west – Wales and Cornwall – remained Celtic and unconquered, as did Scotland, which had never been part of Roman Britain, either (Neither the Romans nor the Anglo-Saxons conquered Ireland, the large island to the west).

The Germanic tribes who took over the areas we now call Spain and France and Italy were ultimately absorbed by the Roman civilization they conquered. Within a few generations after those conquests we find few traces of the Gothic or Burgundian languages: everyone speaks some variety of Latin, everyone is some variety of Christian.

The opposite happened in England. In the areas conquered by the Anglo-Saxons, Christianity disappeared, as did any trace of the Latin or British languages. We won’t ask why this happened, though it’s an interesting question. It just did. The Anglo-Saxons lived their Germanic lifestyle; sat in meadhalls, fought fiercely, feuded, and listened to poets singing about ancient legendary heroes, mythic gods, and more recent heroic figures (They also, of course, built houses, tilled fields, gathered harvests, and so forth. But these activities weren’t heroic enough to get sung about). Society was, roughly, divided between “earls” (or nobles) and “churis” (free workers), but these groups mingled much more than was possible in the later feudal system.

This was the situation, then in 597, when Pope Gregory decided to send a group of missionaries to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. The missionaries began by converting King Ethelbert of Kent, in the southeast part of England. The capital of Kent – "Kenwearabyrig," or Canterbury – thus became the center of Christianity in England, as it still is. They then moved on, from kingdom to kingdom. If they persuaded the king to convert, the king announced to the people that they were now Christian. The missionaries tried to make the conversion as painless as possible. They turned the old pagan temples into Christian-churches, and they turned the old pagan seasonal festivals like "Easter" and "Yule" into Christian holidays. Within about a century all England had become, at least nominally, Christian.

Christianity seems to have appealed to the Anglo-Saxons in part because it was more hopeful than the old pagan religion: life itself may have been bleak, but Christianity said that this life was only a preparation for eternity, where God's justice would see to it that the souls of virtuous people were forever deliriously happy. The Woden- Thor crowd held out no such promise. According to them, when you died, you died; at best, the greatest heroes were gathered from the battlefields by Valkyries, carried to the great hall of the gods, and kept alive until the final showdown battle between the gods and the evil Frost Giants. In the battle (called "Ragnarok" in Icelandic myth) the gods and the heroes ended up getting totally wiped out. The pagan story of the world did not have a happy ending.

The conversion had other important consequences as well. In most of western Europe "Christianity" meant Catholicism; now England had new and important links to the continent and, especially, to Rome. When monks from Italy would come to England they would often bring with them new plants, and the fields and gardens of English monasteries became agricultural experiment stations, to see what would grow in this new climate. The monks also brought books and ideas, and started monastic schools to teach the Anglo-Saxons to read and write. Now, for the first time, it was possible to begin writing down some of the traditional songs and stories.

But very few people during this period ever did learn to read and write, and most of those who did were monks and priests – members of clergy, religious people. To them the main function of books was to give religious guidance-and stories of old heroes hacking each other up didn't seem to do this. Moreover, it was expensive to make a book. Paper had not yet reached Europe; the pages of books were made from the carefully-prepared skins of cows or sheep, and everything, of course, had to be written by hand. So it seems that relatively few manuscripts, or hand-written books, were ever produced in Anglo-Saxon England; of those that were, most were primarily religious rather than "literary" in purpose, and were written in Latin (the language of the church) rather than in Anglo-Saxon, or "Old English," as we more commonly call the spoken language of the time. And since many bad things can happen to an old, unreadable book in the course of a thousand years – it can burn up, get eaten by worms, decay to sludge, get thrown away, have its writing scraped off to make way for something new – relatively few of those that were written have survived to the present.

1.2 Old English Poetry

So: few books were written; most of those were written in Latin, for religious purposes; most of those that got written have disappeared. What remains? Four books of Old English poetry exist today. All seem to have been written about the year 1000. One (the so-called Junius Manuscript) contains stories from the Old Testament turned into Old English poetry: Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel. One (the Vercelli Book,

which turned up, rather mysteriously, in a small town in northern Italy) contains Christian poems based on themes from the New Testament or lives of saints; the best known of these is the "Dream of the Rood," spoken by the cross on which Jesus was crucified. One (the Exeter Book) is a kind of anthology of different short poems; it contains "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and "The Wife's Lament." The fourth (known as the Cotton Manuscript, or, more formally, MS Cotton Vitellius A. *xv*), contains *Beowulf.* This manuscript was badly burned in 1731; today it is carefully preserved in the British Museum, in London, but its edges keep flaking off, making it harder and harder to read.

Our ignorance about *Beowulf* typifies our ignorance about Old English poetry in general. We don't know who wrote it, or when, or why, or for whom, or how. Scholars can't agree on what it means or was meant to mean. Was it a traditional heroic story, written down by a monk (who may have been listening to an oral performance), and then recopied by other monks who added a thin veneer of Christian moralizing to a basically pagan tale? Was it composed by a deeply religious Christian in order to make a deeply religious point? Was it written by a scholar trying to create something like the Latin epic, *the Aeneid*? Is it an artistic mess or an artistic triumph? Is it a typical example of Old English heroic poetry, or was it as unique in its own time as it is now? These and many other questions have been argued at great length in the last century and a half – that is, since people became aware of *Beowulf* and learned how to read it.

Even the title is modern, but it seems reasonable: the poem centers on two episodes in the life of the central hero, Beowulf. In the first he is a young man who saves the court of the Danish king, Hrothgar, from the powerful monster named Grendel and from Grendel's grieving mother. In the second he is an old man who has ruled his own tribe, the Geats, for fifty years, and who dies fighting (and killing) a dragon who has been terrorizing his land. At the end of the poem Beowulf's body is burned, together with all the dragon's treasure, and Wiglaf (the only one of Beowulf's men who has come to his aid) rebukes the other Geats for their cowardice. The Geats, we gather, will be wiped out once their enemies learn that Beowulf is no longer there to protect them.

Beowulf shares its gloomy (or "elegiac") mood with a good many other Old English poems. In this poetry the season seems always to be winter (hail, snow, icicles), the central figure often a displaced person comparing his or her present misery with some past (or hypothetical) state of joy. "The Wanderer" is the lament of a frost-covered exile brooding about the way everything in the world gets worse and worse. In the "Wife's Lament" an abandoned woman huddles under the roots of a tree, brooding on the contrast between the good old days and her present misery. In "The Ruin," the poet broods about the contrast between the crumbling (probably Roman) ruin he sees and the happy, life-filled city it must have been. Where has it all gone? "The Fates of Men" traces the various unhappy fates that lie in store for a little child whom hopeful parents have loved and cared for it might get eaten by a wolf, be killed or maimed in battle, fall to its death form a tree, get sent into miserable exile, swing lifeless on a gallows with ravens picking out its eyes, or get hacked to death in a drunken brawl. A few people, we're told, survive all this suffering to live to a respected old age. But the odds aren't good.

Beowulf is full of such contrasts and gloomy prefigurations. When the poet introduces Hrothgar's great mead hall, Heorot, he mentions that it hasn't yet been burned down as a result of a hateful feud. It never does get burned down in the poem, but at least we know that it will: even after Beowulf gets rid of Grendel the good time won't last. The deaths of Hygelac's brothers, and of Hygelac, and of Hygelac's sons are described in the same bleak way, as is the origin of the treasure that the dragon is guarding. And, of course, the death of Beowulf promises the complete destruction of the Geats.

The only hope can come from God—the Christian God. The end of the "Wanderers" makes this point explicitly: if all the world is transitory we can only find stability with "the Father in heaven." Elsewhere this moral is less obvious, though some critics are determined to find it, since they assume that everything written during this period must be a Christian allegory. Some see Beowulf as a Christ figure, dying for his people; some see him as a doomed pagan, victim of his own pride when he decides to take on the dragon single-handed. The poet has given little assistance to these readings. He (or she?) treats Beowulf sympathetically, but Beowulf's behavior generally fits the values of a Germanic warrior better than the values of Christ, and his self-sacrificing death leads not to the salvation but to the destruction of his people.

In fact, Old English poets seem less interested in confronting their heroes with moral choices (one right, one wrong) than in putting them in situations where any choice loses. Old Beowulf, for example, can fight the dragon (result: his own death, and destruction of his people by their enemies) or refuse to fight (result: destruction of his people by the dragon). In the Old Testament account, Adam and Eve clearly make a moral mistake but succumbing to the wily serpent and eating the Forbidden Fruit. But in the Old English poem about this fateful event (*Genesis B*) the devilish messenger disguises himself as an Angel and tells Adam (and then Eve) that he has a new command from God: eat the (previously forbidden) fruit! Eve does so in belief that she is obeying God and helping Adam—and then, of course, they both get booted from Paradise. In later literature, characters must often make real moral choices. Gawain (in *Gawain and the Green Knight*) clearly errs in choosing to save his own life rather than to keep his word to his host; Malory's Lancelot likewise makes the wrong choice when he chooses to continue his sinful affair with Guinevere. In contrast, the Old English heroes do what they think is right, but lose anyway. This may have something to do with the importance of fate (or *wyrd*) in the Old English worldview.

Explicitly Christian poetry in Old English begins with a lowly cowherd named Caedmon, who (according to the historian Bede, writing in about 700) would sneak away and hide among the cows when it was his turn to perform in the evening gathering of farm workers. One night an angel told him to go back, take the harp, and sing; Caedmon did; the result was a short "hymn" in praise of the Christian God that amazed everyone. The monks of Whitby, for whom Caedmon worked, began to read him stories from the Bible, which Caedmon would then turn into Old English poetry. Monks would write down his words as he sang them. As a result, much of the survicing probably isn't the original stuff written (or, rather, recited) by Caedmon.

Caedmon's Hymn illustrates well the basic principles of Old English verse:

Nu sculan herigean heofonrices weard,
Meotodes meahte and his modgethanc,
Weorc Wuldor-Faeder swa he wundra gehwaes,
Ece Drihten, or onstealde…

Now shall [we] praise heaven kingdom's guardian,
[the] Measurer's might and his moodthought,
Work [of the] Glory-Father as he each [of] wonders,
Eternal Lord first set up…

Each line is divided into two "half-lines," with a pause between them. Each half-line has two stressed syllables. At least one stressed syllable in the first half-line alliterates with at least one stressed syllable in the first half-line alliterates with at least one in the second (note the "h" sounds in the first line, and the "m" sounds in the second, the "w" sounds in the third). Any stressed syllables in the beginning with

a vowel can alliterate with each other (thus “ece” and “or”). This sort of verse is known as “alliterative-accentual,” or simply “alliterative.” All Old English poetry was written in this style.

It is also clear, even from this tiny passage, that Old English as a language scarcely looks like the language we now speak One of the many differences is that we need a lot more little “function words” (the , of, a, in, etc.) than Old English did. As a result Old English tends to be a terser language, with fewer unstressed syllables. This affects the sound of the poetry.

Moreover, this tiny passage shows how inefficient (in a sense) much Old English poetry is: it tends to repeat the same idea over and over again in different words (a device known as “variation”). In the four lines quoted here, for instance, there are four different “variations” to refer to God. This slows down the movement of the poetry; it also contributes to the sense of stylistic elevation we get in a poem like *Beowulf.* Descriptions are elaborate and slow moving; when people speak to each other, they always make formal speeches. Old English poetry never gives us much of a sense of how ordinary people actually spoke in the course of their ordinary lives.

Religious poetry, combining entertainment and instruction, was an important way to spread Christian ideas to the largely illiterate populace. We are told that Bishop Aldhelm, about the year 700, would stand on a bridge, reciting exciting traditional poems. Once he had attracted a crowd, he would start to preach. The best-known surviving Christian poem, “The Dream of the Rood,” shows how the religious message could be blended with the traditional heroic motifs. Most of the poem tells of a dream in which the “Rood” (the cross on which Jesus was crucified) tells of the crucifixion. But instead of showing Jesus as a passively suffering victim, the poem depicts him as a conquering hero, eagerly embracing the cross. Old English heroes were supposed to fight fiercely, not turn the other cheek.

1.3 Old English Prose

Historians sometimes say that Western Europe, in centuries after the fall of Rome, entered a period known as the “Dark Ages.” But by 700 (sometimes called the “Age of Bede,” after the famous scholar who wrote that history) England seemed to be a little gleam of light in this darkness. In the new monasteries, monks were busy copying manuscripts and producing new books (most, of course, religious tracts in Latin). But this happy state of affairs came to an end in the eighth century, when the Vikings, in their frightening dragon-ships, began looting and burning everything they could find. Soon England had joined the general darkness.

King Alfred, who ruled England from 871-900, changed this. He pushed then “Danes” (as the Vikings were called) into an area of northeast England that became known as the “Dane law”; he established peace; he then turned his attention to books and learning. By that time there wasn’t much either; very few people could read Latin, but almost all the important books were written in Latin. What to do? Alfred decided to make sure the most important of these books were translated into English, so at least the information (mainly historical and religious) would be available to more people. He seems to have translated some of these books personally, adding useful bits from his know knowledge when he wanted to. He also encouraged a group of scholars to do additional translations. Moreover, in his reign people started writing down a year-by-year account of important events in England: this came to be known as the “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.” For all this, King Alfred is known as the “father of Old English prose.”

Most of this prose was what we would mow call “non-fiction,” and almost all of it was translated from Latin. If people wanted to invent stories for entertainment, they

still used poetry to do so. But the assortment of religious texts, saints' lives, histories, school books, and works of philosophy that we find from Alfred's reign to the end of the Old English period helps us a great deal in understanding what was going on at the time.

After about 950, though, things began to fall apart again. The Vikings resumed their raids. King Ethelred the Unready was (as his name suggest) a loser. By 1016 a Danish king, Cnut, ruled England. The end of the Old English period was near.

1.4 The Old English Language

Scholars who study the history of languages like to group "related" languages into "families." They can then produce "family trees" to show *how* these languages are related. This is all similar to the family trees you can produce for human beings, or dogs: there are parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins, and the like. The idea is that a group of people might begin by speaking one single language, but then as the group breaks up, and different subgroups move to distant places, and thousands of years pass, the versions of this original language will change until the various speakers can no longer understand each other. Thus new languages are born. But the new languages still show signs of their common origin, in vocabulary and grammar.

English belonged to the Indo- European family of languages. Maybe 6,000 years ago a group of people were speaking the original version of this language (known as pronto-Indo-European) somewhere in northeastern Europe or Western Asia. For various reasons, members of this original group ended up going to India, Persia, Greece, Italy, and various other parts of Europe, bringing their language with them. And, over a long time, the languages of these different subgroups changed, so we speak of the Germanic, Italic, Hellenic, Celtic, Balto-Slavic, and Indo-Iranian "families" of languages-all descendants of that ancestral Indo-European family. Since there was no writing at this distant time, we have to work out what the original proto-Indo-European family would have been like by working backwards from its descendants. But this can be done. For example, let's look at the following "native" English words (words that we find in Old English, from the beginning of the language): *father, fool, fish, and fire.* We can now look at some "related" words that we have borrowed into English at some later time: the Latin *pater* (paternal, patriot), *ped* (pedestrian, pedal), *pisces*; the Greek *pater* (patriarch), *pod* (podiatrist, arthropod), *pyr* (pyre, pyromaniac). It doesn't take too much ingenuity to see that the words that mean the same thing resemble each other in certain significant ways, and that the differences follow a pattern: thus the "p"sound in Latin and Greek corresponds to an "f" sound in English. Scholars about 1800 figured out the general pattern of these sound changes, from Proto-Indo-European to Germanic, the "parent" language of Old English. The codification of these sound changes is known as Grimm's Law, after Jacob Grimm, one of these folk-tale-collecting brothers.

So the Germanic languages have the same ancestor as the Italic (Latin) and the Hellenic (Greek) and so on, but by the year 500 nobody knew that: they all seemed like completely separate languages. And as the groups speaking Germanic went their separate ways, they too developed separate languages: Icelandic, Danish, Dutch, German, and English. And, as we've seen, English itself has continued to change, so that we now have to learn Old English, the version of our language spoken a thousand years ago, as if too were a completely foreign tongue.

Old English differed from Modern English in a number of ways. In vocabulary, Old English tended to have very few borrowed words. If you look at the etymologies

of each word on a couple of pages of a normal dictionary of modern English, you'll notice that the majority of the words come from French, Latin, or Greek. Almost all of these have come into English since the end of the Old English period. When it needed a new word, Old English made one up from native elements, by compounding (putting two words together) of derivation (adding a prefix or a suffix). Thus instead of the Latin word "vocabulary," they used the word "wordboard": a hoard of words. In this *sentence*, we'll *italicize* the words that have been borrowed from *different languages*. Notice that this gives us words in a dictionary may be borrowed, but most of the words we actually use over and over in normal speech or writing remain native.

In **grammar**, Old English was a lot more complicated than modern English. **Nouns** had three **genders** (masculine, feminine, and neuter) and separate inflectional forms for different **cases** (depending on how they were used in the sentence). Adjectives had to agree with the nouns they modified in number, case, and gender, so a single adjective could have many different forms. Verbs, too, had a great many more grammatical forms than they have in modern English. Yet the grammar of Old English is a good deal simpler than the grammar of Proto-Indo-European (whose nouns, for example, had eight cases!) No one knows why that ancestral language was so grammatically complicated, but all of its descendants have grown simpler and simpler.

The basic moral is: living languages, the languages that groups of people actually speak, are always changing.

1.5 Analysis: Beowulf, lines 559-573

Here Beowulf, newly arrived at the Danish court, is defending himself from an accusation by Unferth, one of King Hrothgar's advisors, that he once lost a swimming race with a character called Breca. Unferth implies that a loser like that doesn't stand much chance against Grendel.

In this heroic tradition, a hero was expected to boast: a boast was a kind of commitment to do something. So notice the difference between Beowulf's rather arrogant words here and the self-deprecating humility we find from Sir Gawain later, in *Gawain and the Green Knight*: expectations have changed. It was not, Beowulf says, a race. It was more an endurance contest. The fact that Beowulf had no problems swimming around in the North Sea, in full armor, for five nights establishes that he is well-suited to fight water monsters.

In this passage he speaks of killing these monsters. In a way very characteristic of Old English poetry, he uses negation to oppose what the monsters themselves hoped for and what they actually got:

There would be no monsters gnawing and gloating
Over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.
Instead, in the morning, mangled ad sleeping
The sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated
Like the ocean's leaving.

In this translation, Seamus Heaney has captured some of the qualities of the original verse. Notice how each line tends to have four stressed syllables and a shifting arrangement of unstressed syllables: "Over their BANquet at the BOTtom of the SEA." And notice the alliteration: banquet/bottom; morning/mangled; sleep/slopped. These were the ways of the Old English poets held their lines together.

Then the sun rises: "bright guarantee of God." This is a kenning-a kind of roundabout metaphorical way of identifying something. It also injects "God" into the account. Since Beowulf is generally depicted as a pagan, critics have had a lot of fun trying to figure out how the Christian ideas of the poet fit into the poem itself. Beowulf himself immediately follows with a reference to the concept of fate: "Often, for undaunted courage, fate spares the man it has not already marked." The world seems to be governed by "fate," but it someone is brave enough fate can apparently be deferred. This, too, is a difficult idea to make complete sense of.

The scene itself allows Beowulf to establish his heroic credentials-to us, and to the Danes. He also goes on to insult Unferth, but this also seems part of the game. And the whole passage is written in the elevated manner standard for *Beowulf*: there is no attempt, in this poem, to distinguish the speech of individual characters, or to make them speak in a lifelike way.

2 Middle English (1100-1500)

2.1 The Norman Conquest and its Aftermath

1066 is the most famous date in the English history. In that year, William, Duke of Normandy, whose claim to the English throne had been rejected by the English, decided to invade England and seize the kingship by force. At the Battle of Hastings he defeated the English nobles (and his English rival, Harold) and took over England.

The Normans were French, at least culturally and linguistically. Few of William's followers could speak English, nor did they feel any need to learn it. They-the French-were, after all, in charge. William doled out chunks of England to this Norman followers, who held their lands (as dukes, lords, and the like) as feudal "vassals" of the king. The result was a two-tiered society. On the top was a thin layer of French-speaking nobles. On the bottom were the great majority of the population, English-speaking but powerless. This state of affairs lasted, more or less, for two centuries.

Literacy was still rare, even among the upper classes, and the books were still very expensive to make. So it is not surprising that very few books were written in English during the two centuries after the Norman Conquest: people who spoke English couldn't read, or write, or afford books. So English literature, and the English language, largely go underground during this period.

Of course, books were written and read in England; it's just that these books were written, for the most part, in Latin or French. Latin was still the universal language of learning in western Europe. French (once a collection of dialects of spoken Latin) by this time had developed into a separate language. So if you wanted to write a book that the scholars all over Europe might read, you wrote it in Latin; if you wanted to write something to entertain the non-scholarly aristocracy you wrote it in the "vernacular," French. Writings of this last sort came to be called *romans*, later translated into English as **romances**-that is, stories told in the spoken rather than the learned language.

In about 1140 a self-promoting Welsh priest names Geoffrey of Monmouth completed a Latin book called *The History of the Kings of Britain*, which would become one of the most influential books of the Middle Ages. Drawing on chronicles, Welsh legend, and his own imagination, Geoffrey traced the Britons back to the Trojan war, thus following the trend begun mush earlier by Virgil, in the *Aeneid*. Among the kings whose stories about King Arthur were two general kinds. One kind kept Geoffrey's historical framework, and kept King Arthur as the heroic central

figure. That is, they made Arthur a leader of the Britons against the Anglo-Saxons—a particular place, a particular time, a particular mission. We find this pattern in a long French poem adapted (by a poet named Wace) from Geoffrey's history, and in a long, weird English version of this poem, written, about the year 1200, by a mysterious monk called Layamon. Layamon's *brut*, as it is known, is written in the alliterative style of Old English poetry, with a few differences. One difference is that he often makes his first and second half-lines rhyme:

Leir the king wende forth to is dohter wunede north.
Ful thre nihtes heo haerabarewude hin and is cnihtes.
Heo swor a thane ferth daei bi al hevenliche main,
That ne sculde he habben mare bute enne knicte there.

(Lear the king went forth to his daughter [who] lived [in the] north).
Full three nights she harbored him and his knights.
She swore on the fourth day by all heavenly might,
That he should have no more but one knight there…)

Rhyme was used only as an occasional ornament by Old English poets, but by the twelfth century. In these Arthur himself becomes a kind of background figure (in French, a *roi fainéant*, or do-nothing king), holding down the fort in Camelot while his knights go forth and have bizarre adventures. The world of these Arthurian romances is magical and unreal, unrelated to any actual historical time or geographical place. Moreover, the knights seem to embody a new conception of heroism. Unlike Beowulf, for example, they have no more than human strength, have the moral weaknesses of ordinary mortals, and do their noble deeds in order to win the love of a fair damsel. Love—what is often called **courtly love**—becomes the driving force behind the adventures of these knights. They are the servants of their ladies and are obligated to do everything in their power to please those ladies. Thus is born the code of what is still called "chivalry" (named for the French word for "horse," which helped define these knights, or "chivalry"). This new centrality of love is most clearly seen in the romances of the best-known French poet of the later twelfth century, Chretien de Troyes, who invented the love story of Lancelot and Guinevere as well as the story of Perceval and the Holy Grail.

But in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these Arthurian tales were mainly addressed to French-speaking aristocrats, whether in France or in England. One appeal of the Arthur legend, in fact, was precisely that it made the Anglo-Saxons the bad guys. The Normons, having just taken the kingdom from those same Anglo-Saxons, liked the idea that they might be carrying on the work of Arthur, that noble if largely imaginary Roman-Briton. In England, a poem like Layamon's *brut* in an aberration. No one is quite sure who was expected to read it or why it got written down (though it survives in two manuscripts).

But it is not entirely alone. From about the same period (about 1200) we find "The Owl and the Nightingale," a rather charming dialogue of about 1800 lines between (surprise!) an owl and a nightingale. Essentially, the two birds quarrel over which is the more evil. The owl (according to the nightingale) is scary, ugly, and has gross habits; **the nightingale** (according to the owl) uses its beautiful song to seduce lovers into illicit erotic behavior. The poem is **written** (like the French poems of the period) in shortest (eight-syllable) lines and rhyming couplets. The argument is left unresolved.

Likewise, from about 1200, we find a number of interesting pieces of religious prose: some saints' lives and a work called "The Rule of Anchoresses" which offers sensible advice to some young women who were planning to "leave the world" to devote themselves to prayer and meditation. But for the rest of the thirteenth century, English literature has little to offer beyond a few "popular romances" – fast-moving,

crudely-written tales which seem designed to be recited by minstrels to an audience of drunken peasants. The best-known of these are *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*; written in clunky and inept rhyming couplets, they seem roughly equivalent to an action comic book or Steven Seagal movie today.

Yet important changes were taking places in society. The English upper-classes, for a variety of reasons, were more and more thinking of themselves as "English," as distinct from "French," and increasingly they were growing up with English rather than French as their first language. This meant that for the first time since the Normon conquest a rich and powerful audience for English literature was coming into being. And from about 1350 we find English poets providing a new kind of English literature for that audience.

2.2 The Alliterative Revival

For reasons that no modern scholars can really understand, the first blossoming of this new literature took an old, long-outmoded form: alliterative poetry. Perhaps this was an assertion of Englishness, perhaps a reaction against the clunky rhyming verse of the popular romances. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that most of this verse seems to have been composed for the courts of powerful nobles far from London: it was seen as a non-London verse form. Whatever, poems like *William of Palerne*, the alliterative *Morte Aarthur*, and the *Gest Historical of the Destruccioun of Troye* seem clearly intended to appeal to a courtly, sophisticated, educated audience.

Though the form was old, it was transfigured by the changes that had taken place in the language. Between the end of the Old English period and the middle of the fourteenth century, English has been transformed. It had lost most of the complex grammatical inflections of Old English; it relied far more heavily on a fixed word order and on those little function words(of, a , the, in, etc.). It had also absorbed large numbers of French words, so its vocabulary was very different from that of *Beowulf*. It is also much easier for a modern reader to make sense of. Linguistic historians call this stage of the language—between the Norman Conquest and about 1500—"Middle English."

Today, the best-known of these fourteenth century alliterative poems are *Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pier Plowman*. If we took at the first lines of *Piers Plowman* we can see some of the effects of these linguistic changes:

> *In a somer sesoun, whan softe was the sonne,*
> *I shope me into shroudes, as I a shep were,*
> *In abite as an heremite, unholy of werkes,*
> *Wente forth in the world wonders to here,*
> *And saw many selles and selcouthe thynges.*

The lines tend to be longer and more rigid than those nof the Old English alliterative poetry; there are more unstressed syllables(those little words!); the alliteration is more insistent and hammer-like.

Pier Plowman is a religious poem which seems to have been written in three rather distinct versions between about 1360 and 1400. It consists for the most part of a series of "dream visions" told by someone called William Langland, who is generally thought to be the poet. It is very strange and confusing, blending abstract allegory and realistic description in startling ways. It seems to involve the dreamer's search for truth, or for the right way to live, but whatever we think he's about to find his answer, the answer itself becomes elusive, or disappears, and we're again left

groping. Some critics think it is one pinnacles of world literature; others think that reading it is rather like walking through a gigantic garbage dump in the hope of finding an occasional interesting thing. But it was clearly very popular during its own time: nearly fifty manuscripts survive, and social reformers often revoked it for its attacks on social injustice.

Gawain and the Green Knight, on the other hand, survives in only one manuscript and is never mentioned during its own time. It seems to have been written about 1375, and most scholars think that the same poet also wrote the other three poems found in its manuscript, of which the most famous is called *Pearl*. The anonymous poet is thus known either as the *Gawain*-poet of the *Pearl*-poet.

Soon after these poems were discovered (or rediscovered) in the mid-nineteenth century, critics began to acclaim them as masterpieces. *Gawain* is an Arthurian romance with an unusual degree of moral and psychological depth. The story combines two folk-tale motifs: an exchange of blows (in which Gawain, King Arthur's famous nephew, accepts the challenge of a giant Green Knight to chop off his head and then get his own head chopped off in a year) and a series of temptations (in which Gawain must fend off the seductive advances of his host's beautiful wife, just before he goes to get his head chopped off). Gawain, a model of courtesy and false modesty, resists the obvious seduction, but (giving in to an understandable desire to save his own life) accepts from the woman a magic, life-preserving "green-girdle" on condition that he not let her husband know she has given it to him. This violates an agreement Gawain has made with his host, and the Green Knight (who turns out to be the host in disguise) duly punishes Gawain by giving him a little nick in the neck: you're a good knight, he says, but not perfect. Though happy to be alive, Gawain has a fit, curses himself and the duplicity of women, and goes back to Arthur's court determined to wear the green girdle as a badge of imperfection—whereupon the rest of the court decide that this is a great fashion statement and all do the same thing.

The poem contrasts the childlike artifice of Arthur's court with the "natural" world of Gawain's journey and of the Green Chapel, as it shows Gawain moving from his fake humility ("I'm the most worthless person around," he keeps claiming) to the horrible discovery that he really *is* imperfect. In a somewhat analogous way, *Pearl* shows how the speaker (a man grieving about the death of his two-year-old daughter, who falls asleep and dreams that he sees his daughter in Paradise) moves from a shallow intellectual understanding of Christian doctrine to an emotional understanding, as a result of the dream-conversation he has with his dead daughter: he keeps asking her naïve questions, while she points out (rather snippily) that he doesn't really know what he's talking about. Both poems are artfully constructed, mix rhyme and alliteration in interesting and inventive ways, and display a level of intellectual and artistic sophistication new to English poetry.

But after its burgeoning in the late fourteenth century, alliterative poetry largely disappears. It no longer serves as an option for subsequent English poets. Geoffrey Chaucer probably deserves much of the credit (or blame?) for redirecting the main channel of English poetry for the next five hundred years.

2.3 Chaucer

To writers of the sixteenth century, Chaucer (1342-1400) was the "father of English poetry." In one sense they were obviously wrong: as we've seen, centuries of English poetry came before Chaucer. But in a couple of ways they were right. Chaucer was a Londoner, and he wrote in the London dialect of English that later

became the “literary standard.” Two centuries later his language may have seemed old-fashioned and weird, but at least it was recognizably English. Poems like *Gawain* and *Piers Plowman* were written in provincial dialects that seemed almost like foreign languages to sixteenth-century (as to twentieth-century) readers. More importantly, Chaucer essentially set the course for subsequent English poets. He grew up steeped in classical Latin literature (Virgil, Ovid, etc.) and the graceful if somewhat sterile contemporary French poetry; in his thirties he became familiar with the great fourteenth century Italian poets (Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio); he aspired to write an English poetry that could hold its own on this world stage, and he succeeded.

His earliest poetry is in the octosyllabic couplets still popular in French verse, but his most famous poems (*Troilus and Criseyde,* the *Canterbury Tales*) rely on longer lines, progenitors of the iambic pentameter that later become the English standard. His style manages to be almost simultaneously ornate (note the complicated first sentence that begins the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* – Chaucer’s most familiar lines today) and conversational:

For th’orisonte hath reft the sonne his light—
This is as muche to saye as it was night.

He is really the first English writer to show us what his characters are like through the *way* they speak, and his interest in character—a delight, it seems, in the sometimes perverse quirks of human nature—is a major source of his lasting appeal (though recent critics, reacting against what they see as a Victorian overemphasis on character and psychological realism, like to downplay this element). Long before the novel becomes a literary possibility he has an almost novelistic ability to give us vivid pictures of distinct people—Criseyde, Pandarus, the Miller, the Prioress, the Wife of Bath—who seem to take on a life of their own.

Another source of appeal is his narrative tone. Chaucer is the first English writer about whom we actually know more than his name: he had a busy career as civil servant, diplomat, Member of Parliament; the son of a wine merchant (respectable, but not nearly aristocratic), he mingled with some of the most powerful nobles of the realm. Chaucer, in short, was no fool. But from his earliest poems it is as a fool—a naïve, simpleminded outsider—that he presents himself, and this is the source of much of the ironic effect we find in his poetry. That is, he can show us the self-serving hypocrisy of his Monk or Friar, while at last claiming to be taken in by it all, and (ostensibly) admiring what “worthy” people they are. Chaucer was a highly respected and popular poet during his lifetime. More than eighty manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* have survived—an amazingly large number. His younger contemporaries praise him in an almost worshipful way. But in the century following his death his imitators were almost always inept: they tried to imitate his poetic eloquence, but without his wit and intelligence they kept falling on their faces. Only in Scotland, in the later fifteenth century, did the so-called “Scottish Chaucerian” succeed in using the Chaucer influence to achieve really worthwhile poetry. If we think of the history of English poetry as a kind of contour map, with peaks, plateaus, and valleys, we are likely to be struck by the way the lofty ranges of the late fourteenth century give way to the barren lowlands of the fifteenth. Little poetic interest happens between 1400 (the death of Chaucer) and the efflorescence of the Renaissance in the sixteenth century. Literary historians have tried to explain this in various ways: the War of the Roses, for example, that outgoing civil war that occupied much of the fifteenth century. But poetry has often flourished in times of civil unrest. More significant may be Chaucer’s own influence. He was so successful that he tended to intimidate his followers (those flat-footed imitators). By the sixteenth century the language had changed enough that Chaucer could be seen as a benevolent ancestor rather than a threatening competitor.

2.4 Religious Prose

Throughout the fourteenth century, poetry remained the primary medium for what we would call “creative writing.” But prose had already begun its career of chipping away at the domain of poetry. As more people learn to read and write, personal letters grow in importance, and a few collections (most notably that of the Paston family) have survived. We also find occasional histories, recipe books, and books of etiquette. But the most interesting prose works from the period are religious.

The Church was pervasively important in the Middle Ages. Each village had its church; great monasteries were among the largest landowners in England; people were constantly being urged to prepare their souls for the afterlife. Since it was often inconvenient to avoid sin, and since sin was likely to lead to an afterlife burning in hell or (with luck) a long and unpleasant sojourn in purgatory, people were eager to figure out ways to have their cake and eat it too—that is, sin and yet saved. This they could do by making pilgrimages, buying papal indulgences, leaving their land to the monasteries, and generally helping the cash flow of the church itself. Reformers (Chaucer and Langland among them) pointed out the hypocrisy and greed of many members of the church. But in the end the church always had the upper hand. No one wanted the door to heaven to be shut and locked in their face.

But “the church” was not a monolithic institution. There were philosophical and theological controversies, and there were always those (like the charismatic St. Francis in the thirteenth century) who urged the institutional church to become more like the original, humble followers of Christ. In fourteenth century England, we find a number of contemplative and “mystical” works by Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and Julian of Norwich, an anchorite (and contemporary of Chaucer’s) who writes eloquently about a series of visions, or “showings,” that she experiences.

Julian is clearly an educated woman. Margery Kempe, who dedicated her spiritual autobiography to a priest, is not. She, too, claimed to have had some direct communication with God, as a result of which she refused to have sex with her husband, went on a pilgrimage, and roared and screamed until the other pilgrims wished her drowned:

For some said it was a wicked spirit vexed her; some said it was a sickness; some said she had drunken too much wine; some banned her, some wished she had been in the haven; some wished she had been in the sea in a bottomless boat…

Her “book” shows vividly the problems she had tying to convince the skeptical church hierarchy that her visions really were religious (rather than signs of lunacy).

A larger problem for the church hierarchy of the time was posed by John Wyclif and his followers (termed “Lollards” by their foes). Wyclif was a serious reformer who had the powerful protection of John of Gaunt. One of his more radical enterprises was to translate the Bible (or parts of the Bible) into English. The church thought that the Bible was a very dangerous and misleading book for the unlearned people (that is, people who didn’t know Latin) to read. In the sixteenth century one of the first activities of the various Protestants was to translate the Bible into the vernacular.

2.5 Drama

In the pre-Christian Rome, popular entertainment tended to be violent and pornographic (gladiatorial combats, live on-stage sex, etc.) so it’s not surprising that the Christian church took a dim view of any sort of drama. Drama, moreover, seemed to involve lies--one person impersonating someone else—and it was hard to argue that lies were pleasing to God.

But in the Middle Ages, the Church itself began to use dramatic performances for religious purposes. By the fourteenth century, in England, we find two main sorts of religious drama: the so-called **mystery plays**, dramatizing biblical stories, and the **morality plays**, dramatizing the conflict between the forces of good and evil for control of the human soul.

The mystery plays were institutionalized, early in the fourteenth century, as part of the celebrations of Corpus Christi day. This fell eight weeks after Easter, when the days are long and the weather is as close to good as English weather gets. Towns would hold "cycles" of "pageants"—each pageant a separate, rather short play about an episode in the Old or New Testament (Cain and Abel, Noah's Flood, various events surrounding the birth of Jesus, etc.) These pageants were often presented on "pageant wagons": small movable stages, in effect, that were drawn through the town so that they could present their little plays, one after another, at certain places where an audience could gather to watch.

Each pageant was sponsored by a different "craft guild"—the professional groups of the time. When possible, these guilds would try to sponsor pageants related to their areas of expertise: the shipbuilders would take Noah and his ark, the bakers would often do the Last Judgment, since they were good at fiery ovens. The guilds competed with each other for the most splendid or interesting pageant: they invested in wagons, hired the actors, and kept tinkering with the plays themselves. As a result of the four complete "cycles" that have survived are a mixed bag—they grew and changed over the years, and clearly represent varying styles, dates, and authors. Yet occasionally the styles of certain plays are distinctive enough that modern scholars can identify, with come confidence, the works that so-called "Wakefield Master" of the "York Realist" (both of whom, to judge by their language, seem to have been working in the fifteenth century).

A successful drama tends to need some kind of central dramatic conflict. Sometimes such a conflict was built into the stories themselves: Cain and Abel, for example. Sometimes it wasn't. In the Bible, God tells Noah to build an ark; he spends a hundred years building it; he fills it with his family and a lot of animals; and then he floats around during the forty-day rainstorm and its aftermath. Giant floods and hundred –year intervals could scarcely be dramatized successfully on a smallish pageant wagon being pulled though town by a team of horses of oxen. So the dramatists invented their own central conflict, a fight between Noah and his wife, who is reluctant to get on the ark. (Clever Nicholas makes use of this story in his successful attempt to dupe the old carpenter in Chaucer Miller's Tale) A similar problem faced the writers trying to dramatize the inherently static scenes of Christ's nativity: look! A baby! Let's worship it! One of the most ingenious solutions is found in what, today, is the best –known of all the mystery plays, the so-called *Second Shepherds Play* of the Wakefield Master. Most of this play shows us three obviously English Shepherds, on a miserable stormy night, encountering a notorious sheep stealer named Mak, discovering that one of their sheep has been stolen, and finding (while they search Mak's house) that Mak and his wily wife have disguised the stolen sheep as a new-born baby. Only at the end of the play do these same shepherds, guided by an angel, visit the "real" new-born baby, Jesus, the (symbolic) Lamb of God. The play is remarkably ingenious in its style (a complicated verse form); the way it links the familiar biblical story (far away and long ago) with an even-more-familiar sense of contemporary reality (English shepherds, English weather, a litany of complaints about "contemporary" social problems); and the way it merges realistic farce with lofty Christian truth.

Morality plays dramatized Christian messages in a different way. What did, essentially, was to externalize, and dramatize, the struggles within the individual human soul. The central figures of these plays represent any ordinary person – Every man, Mankind, Humanum Genus—caught between the temptation to sin (the World, the Flesh, and the Devil) and the various personified virtues that try to bring them

back to the right path. The most famous of these plays, *Every man*, was written at the very end of the Middle English period, and focuses on the attempts of its naïve central character to find someone to accompany him on the journey to Death. Rejected by his friends, kinsmen, and "Goods," he discovers that only his Good Deeds, and at the end of the play he is saved. Like all morality plays, *Every man* is fundamentally allegorical: its characters are **personified abstractions** (Friendship, Cousin, Good, Good Deeds, Knowledge, etc.) rather than actual individual people.

Both mystery plays and morality plays lasted into the sixteenth century. The mystery plays died in part because they were **associated** with the Catholic Church, and anything associated with Catholicism was suppressed after the Protestant Reformation. Morality plays adapted themselves to secular concerns (there are morality plays about education, and personified abstractions mingle with actual historical figures in some early sixteenth-century history plays), and the morality structure has a clear influence on the drama of the Elizabethan period.

2.6 Lyric Poetry

When we move from Old English to Middle English poetry, we often feel that we're moving from winter to spring. Bleak snowstorms give way to sunshine, chirping birds, and blossoming trees. The first words of *Piers Plowman* are about summer, the first words of the *Canterbury Tales* about April. But nowhere is springtime more pervasive than in the lyric poetry of the middle Ages.

Why the change? Historians of climate tell us that English weather was, if anything, a little better in the eight century than in the fourteenth. But (as we've seen) the mood of most Old English poetry was bleak, and winter suited, or symbolized, that mood. The poets of the fourteenth century were drawing on models from sunnier Mediterranean climes (the Provencal love poetry from southern France, for instance), and love (an emotion largely missing from Old English poetry) had become their central preoccupation. Spring, that season of rebirth and new life, mirrored the surge of love in the poet's heart. So spring (with its gentle showers, birds, flower, etc.) becomes the almost formulaic setting for many of the Middle English love lyrics.

Some of the lyric poetry of this period is clearly "literacy"—designed to be read, modeled on such complicated French forms as the villanelle, rondeau, or ballade. Chaucer's lyrics exemplify this sort of poetry, though even in his lyrics Chaucer can't keep himself from ironically undermining the standard pose of the love-stricken poet:

Nas never pyk walwed in galauntyne
As I in love am walwed and ywounde…

One can scarcely take too seriously this comparison between the lover wallowing in love and a fish marinated in spicy sauce. (It's interesting that no medieval English poet writes a sonnet, though Dante and Petrarch had made sonnets popular in Italy and Chaucer actually translates one of Petrarch's sonnets, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, without retaining the sonnet form. Everyone knows that Wyatt and Surrey introduce the sonnet to English in the sixteenth century. No one really explains why sonnets weren't imported long before.)

But the best-known examples of medieval lyric are anonymous song lyrics, what we might call popular or folk songs, designed to be sung. Sometimes the music has survived. "Sumer is ycumen in," one of the earliest and most famous looks (on the page) about as artless as a poem can look: "Cuckou, cuckoo/Wel singest thou

cuckoo." But it turns out that those artless words are designed, very ingeniously, to fit a complex six-part polyphonic structure. So you never know.

The Church feared that all these love songs were bad influences on people, but instead of banning the songs they tried to substitute religious words for the same tune. In any case a good many religious lyrics have survived, often designed to make their readers (or listeners) visualize more vividly the sufferings of crucified Christ or the grief of Mary. Poets also like to apply the language of love to religious devotion: speakers can long for Christ as for a lover. We find this mix of the religious and the erotic reappearing in the religious poetry of Donne.

Many of these lyrics, though seemingly simple and artless, puzzle modern readers, in part because they **juxtapose** different images without making an explicit connection between them. In "Western Wind" what, exactly, links the poet's desire for the "western wind" (and its "small rain") with his desire to be back in bed with his love? In "Fowls in the Frith," what links the birds and the fishes with the speaker's incipient lunacy? In "Sunset on Calvary," again, we need to make the link between the sunset and the crucifixion—the poet doesn't do the linking for us. In some ways we can find a similar pattern in other medieval works: one thinks of the jumps between the hunting scenes and temptation scenes in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, the seeming lack of connection between the sheep-stealing and nativity episodes in the *Second Shepard's Play*, the seeming jumble of different tales in the *Canterbury Tales.* Some scholars like to relate this tendency to the sort of medieval aesthetic principles we also find exemplified in the Gothic cathedrals. Who knows?

Another kind of song, the **ballad**, seems to leap into popularity in the fourteenth century, though most of the traditional ballads familiar today were written down from oral performance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (In the Romantic period, "ballad gatherer" seems to have been an occupational category, like "leech gatherer.") Lyric poetry tends to center on an "I" who writes (or sings) of his or her own feelings. Ballads tend to be impersonal: narratives or narrative highlights, in which the speaker simply reports what happened or (most often) gives us the words of the characters. But ballads, like other lyrics, like to juxtapose different scenes or situations without explaining the links between them. Often they force the reader to become a kind of detective, to fill in what isn't said. Why has Edward killed his father, and why is he now cursing his mother for her (apparently evil) counsels? Why had Lord Randal's girlfriend poisoned him? Why does Sir Patrick Spens laugh and then cry when he gets the king's message? We aren't told.

The ballad form—with its distinctive stanza, its use of **refrain** and **incremental repetition**—appealed to the later Romantic poets as a model for the seemingly simple, seemingly artless poetry. Here is Sir Patrick Spens, getting his letter:

The first line that Sir Patrick red,
A loud lauch lauched he:
The next line that Sir Patrick red
The teir blinded his eye.

And here is a stanza from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798:

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

Coleridge in this poem is clearly trying to achieve some of the effect of a folk ballad.

Most of the ballads focus on rather grim events: murder, betrayal, death. But some of the longer ballads are less elliptical, more like normal narratives. Into this category fall many of the ballads about Robin Hood. Though the career of this legendary outlaw is usually set in the late twelfth century (the reign of Richard I and his evil brother and successor John), the social conditions mirror those of the fourteenth century. The ballad is a "popular" form—that is, appealing to and created by ordinary people—and Robin Hood is a quintessential popular hero, stealing from the rich (including the fat abbots stupidly transporting their treasure through the Sherwood Forest) to give to the poor. Robin Hood remains a ballad hero. No "serious" writer tries to give us a version of the Robin Hood story.

2.7 Malory

In the middle of the fifteenth century a "knight prisoner" named Sir Thomas Malory composed (while in prison) a long prose account of the life and death of King Arthur. This work (or collection of works) was one of the first books printed by William Caxton (in 1485), who gave its title: *Le Morte Darther*. This has been the main basis for most subsequent accounts of the King Arthur story in English.

Malory's tale is the first really successful example of "prose fiction" in English. He draws heavily from French sources, especially a long prose cycle compiled in th4e thirteenth century (which he calls his "French book"). But he adapts the story in his own way, and in the process—whether deliberately or accidentally—gives the central characters a new life and depth. This is particularly evident in the last part of his story. Lancelot, having failed in his quest for the Holy Grail because of his sinful affair with Queen Guinevere, is trying to distance himself from the Queen; Guinevere, sensing his emotional estrangement, grows more and more jealous and hysterical; Arthur, who admires Lancelot more than any other human being, turns a deliberately blind eye to his wife's infidelity: and the whole kingdom slides inexorably into disaster against everyone's will. Much of Malory's effect comes from his laconic, unstudied style. Where his "French book" reveals the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters (so that, for example, we see how distressed Guinevere is when she learns that Lancelot has been wearing the favor of Elaine of Astolat and is now wounded), Malory relies almost wholly on what his characters *say*:

"Ah Sir Bors, have ye heard say how falsely Sir Lancelot hath betrayed me?"
"Alas madam," said Sir Bors, "I am afeard he hath betrayed himself and us all."
"No force," said the queen, "though he be destroyed, for he falsely traitor knight."
"Madam," said Sir Bors, "I pray you say ye not so, for wit you well I may not hear such language of him."

What is really going on here? Bors (Lancelot's cousin) disapproves of Lancelot's affair and generally dislikes the Queen: the Queen loves Lancelot (in some sense) yet finds love constantly overwhelmed by jealousy. We sense in this (completely typical) little interchange a lot of unspoken tension, yet Malory never steps in to explain what the characters are "really" feeling—and this, paradoxically, makes them all the more realistic and interesting.

In this way Malory, like Chaucer, may be said to prefigure the novel. But it takes two and a half centuries, and a good many further developments, for anything like a "real novel" to appear in English.

2.8 The Language: Middle English

As we've noted, during the two and a half centuries following the Norman Conquest, the rich and powerful members of society tended to speak (and write, and read) French. During this period the English language continued to be spoken by the majority of people, but it had no prestige value, and it changed more rapidly than at any other time in its history.

The big change in the early Middle English period (1100-1300) was the simplication of grammar. Most of those Old English noun and adjective cases vanished. In fact adjectives lost all their inflectional markers and became (to use the technical word) **indeclinable**. Notice that in modern English, the adjective "small" remains the same however it is used: "The small dog is cute"; "She took her small dogs for a ride"; "I gave some food to the small dog"; "Small dogs frighten me." Verbs, too, grew simpler. Since you could no longer tell the grammatical function of a word by its form, **word order** became more important than it was in Old English. "The goose chased the fox" now meant—and means—something different from "the fox chased the goose."

The other big change, as those upper-class people switched from French to English, was the hug numbers of French words came into the vocabulary. (Examples from the last sentence would be the words *change*, *class*, *people*, *huge*, *numbers*) For the most part these words came into the spoken language. This makes them different—more common, ordinary, non-fancy—from the later borrowings from Greek and Latin, most of which entered the language through learned writings.

And then, toward the end of the Middle English period, we find the beginning of something of something known as the **great vowel shift**, in which people in England (for some reason) changed the way they pronounced the "long" vowels from the way the other European languages pronounced them (as in "garage," "suite," "rouge," or "peso") to the qualities they have today: "page," "wine," "mouth," "eat," etc.

During this whole period, people in different parts of England spoke (and wrote) quite different **regional dialects**. Through the fourteenth century these were just different: no one thought that one was somehow "better" than the others. But as London got bigger and more important, the dialect of London becomes a kind of standard for the country as a whole. After the coming of the printing press to England, London English became even more standard. Printers wanted to sell as many books as possible, and the market for books in London English was bigger than that for the other dialects. So, increasingly, non-London English was looked down on, as the language of hicks.

2.9 Analysis: The General Prologue to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, lines 165-207

IN many ways, Chaucer's portrait of his Monk is characteristic of the portraits he gives us of his other pilgrims. Even when he slips in the name of the character (Huberd, Alison, Madame Eglantine) he presents the character in terms of his of her occupational category: Friar, Wife, and Prioress. Accordingly, we see each character as simultaneously "typical" and individuated, and we need to understand something about the "type" to figure out what Chaucer is more specifically up to.

Monks, like nuns, were members of religious communities whose original goal was to withdraw from "the world" (of business, politics, ordinary domestic life, and so forth) and live lives of prayer and contemplation. These monastic communities could serve as models of perfection for the inevitably imperfect human world outside their cloisters.

Even so, Chaucer's Monk seems remarkably un-monk like. He has a lot of horses, keeps greyhounds, likes to hunt, and has fur-lined sleeves— all signs of a prosperous aristocrat. (In the fourteenth century, "sumptuary laws" regulated the sort of clothes you could wear according to your social class, and you social class also determined what breed of dog you could own. Furry sleeves and greyhounds were definitely upper-class.) Moreover, the Monk doesn't give "a pulled hen" for the traditional monastic rules: they are old-fashioned and inhibiting. (Of course, that was their function: to curb freedom and maintain tradition).

But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oyster.
And I saide his opinion was good:
What sholde he studye and make himselven wood
Upon a book in cloister always to poure,
Or swinke with his handes and laboure
As Austin bit? How shal thw world be serve?
Lat Austin have his swink to him served!

To "give a plucked hen," to think something "not worth an oyster" – this is an informal, colloquial way of writing that is far from the stately cadences of *Beowulf*. Chaucer's verse is far more like real speech than anything we find in Old English. And even though he is here writing in **iambic pentameter couplets** (each pair of lines rhymes; each line has a basic pattern of DAH dah DAH dah DAH dah DAH dah DAH), the lines themselves flow much more colloquially then they do in the later heroic couplets of the Pope. Notice the **enjambment**—lines that end with no pause, no punctuation, after "wood" and "laboure." This makes us less conscious of the verse form, more attuned to the seemingly-artless flow of the verse.

And who is this "I"? Well, it's Chaucer, who decides to join these pilgrims on their trip to Canterbury. But as the *Canterbury Tales* goes along we find that Chaucer the pilgrim is not exactly the same as Chaucer the Poet. For one thing, he's a complete failure at telling a tale: soon after he starts the only jog-trot rhyme he can think of, the Host stops him, saying that his "drasty rhyming is not worth a turd." Harsh words for the guy who's writing the whole thing! But clearly Chaucer intends us to think of his fat, dim, "Chaucer" the narrator as a bit different from the actual Chaucer who is creating all these characters.

Critics like to make us aware of this distinction; they often refer to the poet in the poem as the poet's **persona.** The persona may or may not coincide with the "real" poet. In Chaucer's case, there's an obvious gap. And Chaucer exploits this gap to achieve some of his **ironic** effect. "I said his opinion was good"—this is the dim, naïve, easily-impressed persona speaking. The real Chaucer almost certainly intends us to conclude just the opposite: this is a lousy monk. He might be a decent human being; he might have made a fine wine merchant (Chaucer's father's job). But he goes against everything monks were supposed to stand for.

Notice that in the eighteenth century Swift uses this same distinction between writer and speaker to achieve much of his irony: there too we can see the gap between the words that are spoken and the way we are meant to understand those words. But even with lyric poets we need to be alert to the subtle gap between the voice speaking in the poem and the behind-the-scenes poet.

But Chaucer's irony here is subtle. His only overt judgments are positive, and he relies on his building up of precise details to suggest that this monk may relish "the world" too much: the fancy gold pin, the fat gleaming face with its bulging eyes, the supple boots and fine horse. And notice as you read this and the other portraits, that many of the details would not be evident to even the sharpest observer after one evening in an inn: their general habits, their opinions, their favorite foods. Chaucer is distilling the essence of his characters, not giving us a snapshot-like image of the way they appear to a particular person at a particular time.

3 The Renaissance (1500-1660)

3.1 Changing Times

In 1476 an entrepreneur named William Caxton introduced the newly-invented printing press to England. In 1485 Henry Tudor defeated King Richard III at the battle of Bosworth Field and became King Henry VII, founder of the Tudor line of English monarchs. In 1492 Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic and opened up the New World—America, as it came to be called—to the European exploitation and settlement. In 1512 the astronomer Copernicus defied ancient wisdom and announced that the earth and other planets revolve around the sun. In 1517 Martin Luther began the split with Rome that led to the Protestant Reformation; in 1534 King Henry VIII, vexed by the Pope's refusal to let him divorce his first wife (Catherine of Aragon), declared himself Supreme Head of the English church. Meanwhile and intellectual and artistic movement known as the "Renaissance" had been spreading north from Italy and, early in the sixteenth century, reached England.

Though nothing so abrupt as the Norman Conquest marks the end of the medieval period in England, all of the above factors contributed in various ways to a marked change. But it is hard to say what, exactly, marks this change. The word "renaissance" means "rebirth," and in some sense the thinkers and writers of this period thought of themselves as retrieving the lost wisdom of the ancient Greece and Rome from the centuries of neglect and ignorance of the "Middle Ages". True, writers like Dante and Chaucer were steeped in classical Latin literature, and bits of Plato and Aristotle trickled into medieval philosophy. But now scholars were producing new and more accurate texts of the classic writers and Greek was joining Latin as an essential component of education. Moreover, the "ancients" were being seen in a new way: though pagans, and without the aid of the divine revelation, they had been able to attain insight and wisdom through their reason. The idea that the moderns could do the same –could find the truth on their own, without the guidance of church of Bible—was known as "humanism." Humanists were still Christians, of course, it was believed that human reason and divine revelation should both lead to the same ultimate truth.

Both the printing press and the Protestant Reformation encouraged literacy. Printed books were cheaper and more widely available than scribe-written manuscripts. Since printers made more money the more copies of a book they sold (a new concept, they found it was to their advantage to print books that would appeal to the largest public—that is, in England, books in English rather than Latin, French, or Greek. This encouraged translation. The Reformation also encouraged translation. While the Catholic church had tried to keep the Bible from the hands of the laity, most Protestant groups thought that the Bible (rather than the hierarchy of the church) was the essential source of what Christians needed to know. So people

were encouraged to learn to read, and various translators turned the Bible into English. This process of translation culminated in the so-called King James Bible of 1611.

But the Reformation also led to new and often violent schisms in society. When Henry VIII 's chancellor, Sir Thomas More, refused to recognize the King's supremacy over the Church, Henry had More's head chopped off.

Other Catholics also suffered death for their faith. In 1553 Queen Mary—daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, wife of King Philip of Spain, and an ardent Catholic—came to the throne and began to slaughter Protestants. After her death in 1558, she was succeeded by her half-sister, Elizabeth, who went back to killing Catholics. Similar bloodshed was taking place all over Europe. And, free of the supreme authority of a single church, the Protestants themselves began to fall into factional disputes. Some thought that the Church of England (the "established church") was far too close to Catholicism, and urged a more grass-roots, egalitarian church organization. Calvinists and Lutherans disputed theological points. Various sects of "Puritans" arose in England; these were seen (by those in power) as dangerous left-wing radicals. In the early seventeenth century groups of Puritans began to settle colonies in North America. But enough remained in England to start a religious civil war in 1642.

Yet things were not all grim. Under Elizabeth (who ruled from 1558-1603), England began to think of itself as something of a world power. Not only did the Spanish Armada, sent to crush England, end in disaster for Spain in 1588, but the English were successfully competing with Spanish ships on the high seas and in the New World. And, after four hundred years of rapid change, the English language began to stabilize. Linguistic historians call the period after 1500 "Modern English," and anyone comparing the language of Chaucer and the language of Shakespeare can see why.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, many English writers began to think that English literature could compete with even the great writers of antiquity. They were right. The years between about 1580 and 1620 mark an amazing efflorescence, or golden age, of English literature.

3.2 Sonnet

It seems odd that the first real sign of the Renaissance in English literature should come in the guise of the **sonnet**, a short (14-line) form of a lyric verse which had been developed in Italy in the thirteenth century and popularized by the Italian poet Petrarch a century later. Joint credit for introducing the sonnet into English is usually given to Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and his younger friend, the Earl of Surrey (1517-1547). Both were aristocrats who led rather wild, dangerous and brief lives. One of Wyatt's girlfriends seems to have been Anne Boleyn, whom Henry VIII plucked for his second wife and later beheaded; Surrey's cousin, Catherine Howard, was Henry VIII's fifth wife, and Surrey himself lost his head after being accused of treason.

These two not only introduced the sonnet as a form. They set the **Petrarchan** tone that most subsequent English sonnets would take: a lovesick man seeking to win the affection of a cold-hearted woman and describing in verse the complicated mixture of bliss and misery caused by this passionate and unrequited love. They also established the sonnet as an aristocratic genre. According to the doctrines of courtly love inherited from medieval literature, only members of the upper classes were capable of true love (it required leisure, refinement, etc.); the sort of exquisite anguish probed by the sonnets was a luxury available only to the aristocracy. Conversely, the ability to write sonnets came to be one of the accomplishments that

Renaissance courtiers (the upper-class types who hung around the courts) were increasingly expected to master (along with such things as dancing, singing, playing the lute, reading Greek, conversing elegantly, and using a fork). The ideal courtier was supposed to gaze into the eyes of a beautiful woman, let her inner beauty penetrate her soul, grab a piece of paper, and dash off a sonnet. Those courtiers who had no talent for this kind of thing were advised to fake it: work out a sonnet in advance, memorize it, and then pretend to dash it off on the spur of the moment.

Since the aristocrats weren't supposed to take their writing too seriously, the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey were "circulated among friends," as it is said, during their lifetimes, and were only printed in 1557, in an anthology of lyric poetry known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. But it was Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella,* published (five years after his death) in 1591, that really set off the boom in sonnet sequences. Sidney (1554-1586) was regarded as the ideal Elizabethan courtier. He also, unlike most aristocrats, took literature more seriously; his *Defence of Poesy* is the first important critical treatise in English, and his long prose romance, *Arcadia,* was a model of pastoral fiction. Though the focus of Sidney's sonnets is Astrophil's attempt (unsuccessful, apart from the occasional kiss) to win the love of Stella (beautiful, dark-eyed, married to someone else), Sidney also writes sonnets about writing sonnets and considers the moral implications of spending so much time and ingenuity trying to win the heart of someone else's wife.

Sidney is a very interesting poet. His abrupt dramatic openings ("Your words, my friend, right healthful caustics, prove/My young mind marred…") often prefigure Donne ("For God's sake, hold your tongue, and let me love…") he is adept at creating the illusion of sincerity: other writers, he says, may rely on ornate images and farfetched metaphors, but he need only "look in my heart" and bring forth, "with a trembling voice," that "I do Stella love." But of course it doesn't take 108 sonnets to say "I love Stella," whether the voice trembles or not. Like the other writers of sonnet sequences (Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Fulke Greville, etc.), Sidney faces the challenge of writing large numbers of sonnets, each saying essentially the same thing, yet each saying it in a new way. This requires and ingenious use of what came to be known as **conceits**—governing metaphors of images—even as the brevity of the single sonnet encouraged a metaphorical compression of imagery. The result was a habit of using language with great metaphorical intensity—a habit whose most amazing fruit was the poetic language of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare wrote the most famous sonnet sequence in English, but by the time his collection was published (1609) love sonnets had largely gone out of style; people generally assume that Shakespeare actually wrote most of his in the early 1590s, during the boom years. Shakespeare was a hick from the sticks, certainly no aristocrat; among other things his sonnets may have been a gesture to raise his poetic-social status. Critics have long bickered about how much biographical content we can find in the events and characters hinted at in the sonnets—the Fair Young Man, the Rival Poet, the notorious Dark Lady with her reeking breath and two-timing ways. But even taken out of context (as they usually are) they contain some of the most resonant poetry in the English language.

The later career of the sonnet is worth considering. In the earlier seventeenth century, Ben Jonson, the great proponent of "neoclassicism," scornfully rejects the sonnet form entirely, while Donne, the great "metaphysical," rejects the traditional love sonnet and addresses his "Holy Sonnets" to God. Herbert, who tried all forms, likewise included some sonnets to God (again, indebted to Sidney). In 1621 Lady Mary Worth, Sidney's niece, published the only sonnet sequence of the period written by (and from the prospective of) a woman—a refreshing change from all those whining men. Milton, the giant peak marking the end of the Renaissance, writes occasional sonnets on assorted themes, none remotely Petrarchan. After Milton the sonnet disappears for a century and a half, to be resurrected by the Romantic poets in the early nineteenth century.

3.3 Spenser

One of the main challenges for English poets in the sixteenth century was to find a verse form that captured the majesty and resonance of the dactylic hexameter lines which Virgil used for his great Latin **epic**, the *Aeneid*. For 1500 years Virgil had been the epitome of the Great Poet, and his epic epitome of Great Poetry. If modern England was to match ancient Rome, it needed a similar poet, and a similar epic.

Dactylic hexameter in English doesn't work: the lines drag on and tend to fall apart. Latin verse is "quantitative," English verse accentual; experiments (by Sidney, Campion and others) to create a quantitative verse in English never quite succeeded either. Surrey, the famous sonneteer, invented **blank verse** (unrhymed iambic pentameter) in his translation of part of the *Aeneid*, and this later proved to be the winner of the Epic Meter Contest in the hands of dramatists like Marlowe and Shakespeare and, still later, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But Surrey's own pioneer effort sounds a bit strangled.

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) was born two years before Sydney. No aristocrat, he took degrees at Cambridge and then a series of jobs as a personal secretary to important men. But his real ambition was to become a great poet, and his two primary models seem to have been Chaucer and Virgil.

Virgil had begun his career writing a set of **pastoral** poems, the *Eclogues*. Pastoral literature (named for the Latin word for "Shepherd") gained popularity in the big cities of antiquity: it dealt with shepherds and shepherdesses living an uncluttered, innocent life in the countryside, tending their sheep, falling in love, piping little songs on reed flutes, and fighting off the occasional lion. It seems to have represented the nostalgia of the urbanite for a simpler mode of life. The popularity of this literature revived in the Renaissance, partly for some of the same reasons, partly because a poet who aspired to be like Virgil should probably follow Virgil's career (and write pastorals). In any case, Spenser, in his *Shepheardes Calendar*, goes in for a weird mix of archaic pseudo- Chaucerian language, pseudo-rustic English names (Hobbinol, Colin Clout), allusions to classical mythology, and praise of Queen Elizabeth. The poems were something of a hit (Sydney praises them) though a number of readers weren't too thrilled about the fake Chaucerian language ("In affecting the ancients, Spenser writ no language," said Ben Jonson).

But Spenser's big work was the *Faerie Queene*, his attempt to win the Match Virgil contest with a massive English epic and at the same time gain the favor of Queen Elizabeth, the allegorical, offstage heroine of the work. Spenser never finished this poem, but he finished enough for most people: six completed "books," each containing twelve "cantos," each canto containing fifty or so stanzas containing nine lines—the **Spenserian stanza**, which a good many subsequent poets imitated. Each book focuses on the adventures of a different knight, the allegorical embodiment of a particular virtue: Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, Courtesy. His style is lush, leisurely, pictorial, full of poetic sound effects; again he uses archaic words, though less oppressively than in his pastorals. Some readers fine his diffuse, boring, confusing; some love him. Other poets have been among his biggest fans (he drove Keats wild with excitement, for example), and he had thus been called the "poet's poet."

It's hard to know what sort of thing, exactly, the *Faerie Queene* is. It has epic ambitions and, to some extent, a double epic structure. The *Aeneid* was divided into twelve books and began the action **in media res**, in the middle of things. Spenser's poem was likewise going to have twelve books; each book would be divided into twelve cantos; he too (as he explains in a prefatory letter) was beginning his action *in media res.* (Renaissance poets took seriously the "rules" they thought were set down by Aristotle, Horace, and other classical authorities.) But the work is also in the

tradition of medieval romance, as modified by the Italian poets Arisoto and Tasso. And, it is also, of course, a moral **allegory**.

3.4 The Drama

Mystery plays and morality plays continued to be written (and performed) at least through the middle of the sixteenth century, though the morality plays, in particular, were growing more secular and merging with other sorts of drama. In the meantime the old Roman comedians Plautus and Terence were being studied in the schools (an effect of that Renaissance); since their plays were still amusing, people began to write modernized English versions of these classic **comedies**. Seneca, the main example or Latin **tragedy**, seemed to have less dramatic vitality, but his plays were held up by university scholars as the example of what tragedies ought to be: a lot of high-flown rhetoric, a unity of time and place, little on-stage action, with gory events being reported by various messengers.

The first permanent professional theater was built, just outside London, in 1576. London was by far the largest city in England, and its population seems to have been eager for the sort of entertainment the drama could provide. But what sort of drama was that to be? Academic pendants insisted that the only "proper" drama had to be based on classical models and follow classical "rules." That meant that tragedy (dealing with big important events and characters) and comedy (dealing more realistically with "ordinary" people and their lives) had to be kept completely separate, and that the **unities** had to be strictly observed: everything had to happen in one place and occupy the span of no more than a day. Tragedy could be Senecan: not much happening, but a lot of long bombastic speeches.

But market forces took over. To make money the theaters (there were soon more than one) had to sell tickets; they couldn't limit their audience to fastidious scholars. The audience expanded to include all the classes of society: the rich people in the expensive boxes, the poor people standing on the ground ("groundlings) eating nuts. These people didn't much care about classical unities: they wanted to be entertained. Moreover, the heritage of medieval drama worked against the classical standards. Something like the *Second Shepherds Play* was a mix of high and low, comic realism and the loftiest religious truth. The Noah plays covered over a hundred years. Who needed those pendantic unities?

So all sorts of plays began to get produced. There were "history plays," glorifying English heroes (King Henry V, for example), showing the ways of evil kings (John, Richard III), and often serving as veiled political advice for the Queen and her advisers. There were tragedies of various sorts, based on episodes from antiquity to the present. There were realistic comedies, scenes of domestic life, pseudo-Roman comedies. It seems clear that by the late 1580s, the theaters needed more and more new plays to satisfy the gluttonous appetite for dramatic entertainment they had awakened—and, of course, to make money.

This created job opportunities. Clever young men, many with university degrees, took to churning out plays. Part of the appeal was financial, part creative, part the allure of the somewhat wild and Bohemian lifestyle that so often grows up around theaters. While the writers of the epics, and even sonnets, could see themselves as, primarily, artists, Poets, creating timeless monuments, the Elizabethan playwrights of the 1580s were likely to have thought of themselves more as writers of a TV series today do: working as fast as they could to dash off something entertaining.

But, certain plays, and playwrights, stood out. *The Spanish Tragedy*, written by Thomas Kyd and first produced about 1586, was one of the most popular Elizabethan plays. Written in florid blank verse, it deals with a lurid tale of bloody

revenge—a Senecan theme, perhaps, but with a decidedly un-Senecan dramatic liveliness. For most modern readers, though, the real Golden Age of Elizabethan drama begins with the first part of *Tamburlaine the Great*, written by Christopher Marlowe and produced in 1587-8.

Marlowe (1564-1593) was an amazing person. He fascinated his contemporaries, who accused him of atheism, treason, homosexuality, and a fondness for tobacco. Modern scholarly detectives claim that his death, at 29, in a tavern brawl was in fact linked to his undercover career as a spy. He had an M.A. from Cambridge, one of those "university wits" lured to the somewhat disreputable world of the London theater.

Marlowe comes across as a remarkably bold and self-confident poet and playwright. He wrote the most popular lyric poem of his age ("The Passionate Shepherd") and the most successful mythological-erotic poem (*Hero and Leander*) *Tamburlaine* begins with a prologue that sweeps away his dramatic predecessors.

From jigging veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms…

The emphasis is on the rhetoric—the *sound* of the mighty Tamburlaine's speeches. And Marlowe delivers. The play follows the career of a humble Scythian shepherd who conquers ruler after ruler in his ambition to the rule the world. It seems to be a tragedy without a tragic conclusion: at the end of Part I Tamburlaine is completely successful.(Marlowe did write the second part, in which he killed Tamburlaine off.) In *The Jew of Malta* and *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe follows the same pattern, focusing on a central figure with some vaster-than-normal ambition. (His historical play, *Edward II*, focuses instead on the most overtly homosexual of English Monarchs.)

As with other extravagantly talented people who die young (Mozart, Schubert, Keats), people wonder what Marlowe would have done if her had lived another twenty of thirty (or sixty) years. He was born two months before Shakespeare, who had scarcely begun his theatrical career by the time Marlowe was dead. But Marlowe is a very different sort of poet from Shakespeare. His rhetoric, though amazingly lush, is far stiffer: good for the great bombastic speeches of his heroic central characters, less suited to characterizing a range of different individuals (as Shakespeare does so well). Shakespeare draws his imagery from nature, Marlowe draws from his books, especially books from mythology. And Marlowe seems to have a weaker grasp of dramatic structure than Shakespeare. None of this, of course, answers the question of what Marlowe would have become, except to suggest that he wouldn't have become Shakespeare (as has sometimes been claimed).

Shakespeare's other great rival, Ben Jonson (1572-1637), burst on the scene in 1598 with *Every Man in His Humor*, a play in which Shakespeare himself acted. Jonson (also a lyric poet and critic) prided himself on his classical learning and on his fidelity to classical models. His most famous plays (*Volpone, The Alchemist*) are comedies in which he is particularly good at dramatizing and ridiculing certain general character types. Thus the **comedy of humors**, based on characters who keep obsessively repeating almost-maniac patterns of behavior.

Jonson was a huge influence on writers of the later seventeenth century. He also served critics as a kind of foil to Shakespeare: the poet of art vs. the poet of nature, the classical "rules" vs. the wild abundance of native genius, etc. But he had great respect for Shakespeare, and he was one of the first to try to make people think that the plays of the time could be regarded as works of art. (His own friends

mocked some of his seriousness. When, in 1616, he published *The Works of Ben Jonson*, one wrote “And Jonson calls works what others call plays.”)

By 1613, when Shakespeare retired from the scene, the London Theater seems to have lost some of its vitality. In his later years Jonson turned to writing **court masques**—elaborate aristocratic spectacles. One of the paradoxical strengths of the earlier drama was the relative simplicity of stage settings and effects: the scenery was spare, it was possible to move rapidly from scene to scene, and primary emphasis fell on language, plot and character. As the staging became more elaborate and special effects more complex, the centrality of the drama itself (words, plot, character) tended to diminish. (Some people see the same pattern in Hollywood movies today.) In 1642 the Puritans closed the theaters. When they reopened, after the Restoration, a great deal had changed.

Such a brief survey leaves out a great many figures who are still very much worth reading (or seeing): Webster, Beaumont, Fletcher, Chapman, Dekker, Greene, Tourner. This is a sign of how rich the drama of this period was.

3.5 Shakespeare

If Shakespeare (1564-1616) had been born a hundred years earlier, we can imagine him following a career a bit like that of Absolon in Chaucer’s Miller’s Tale—a clever, restless small-town lad, styling hair, writing out legal documents, chasing women (or men), dressing like a fop, acting in the local mystery plays and perhaps (anonymously) improving some of the scripts. As it is he came of age just as the London theater was luring talented actors and playwrights; having some dramatic talent and interest he went to London; as a result he became the consensus Greatest Poet in human History (his only real rivals: Homer, Sophocles, Dante). His contemporaries saw him as an extraordinary example of natural genius; subsequent centuries have elevated him to almost divine status, and worshipful pilgrims flock to his birthplace, the once-sleepy town of Stratford o n Avon.

Shakespeare apparently began writing plays in the early 1590s. In 1610 he retired to Stratford, prosperous enough to buy the biggest house in town. Here he seems to have written his final plays. In general he took his stories from histories, chronicles, and other plays, adapting them to fit his own dramatic conceptions. He seems to have been a very fluent writer (thus the “natural genius” label) who combined a number of useful qualities: an extraordinary command of language; an extraordinary ability to think metaphorically; an extraordinary ability to imagine what it would be like to be a lot of different people, and to make them talk the way they would talk if they had his own power over language and metaphor; and a strong (if not extraordinary) sense of dramatic structure. Since he takes his stories more or less as he finds them, he doesn’t worry too much about how plausible the premises of those stories might be. Why does King Lear suddenly decide to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, and why does he impose that stupid test of asking which one loves him more, and why hasn’t he ever noticed that his older daughters are a couple of lying villains? It’s useless to ask such questions: that’s just the way the story begins. Leo Tolstoy, the great nineteenth century Russian novelist, asked questions like this and concluded that Shakespeare was a kind of no-good bum, an artistic fraud. This is true only if you assume that Shakespeare was really trying to be a nineteenth-century psychological novelist, and failing.

Perhaps more destructive than Tolstoy’s damnation is the great chorus that has defied Shakespeare. This provokes a predictable popular reaction: he must be a fusty classic, a dead white male perpetrating the dead white male hegemony, boring and unreadable. It’s useful to remember that his own great success, during his own lifetime, lay in entertaining the remarkably diverse audience of the London theater.

His plays weren't collected and printed in a single volume until 1623, seven years after his death, in the First Folio.

But are the claims for Shakespeare's importance always ridiculous? A recent book on Shakespeare by the critic Harold Bloom is subtitled "The invention of the Human." Bloom doesn't mean that Shakespeare, in a literally godlike way, invented human beings from a blob of mud. Instead he means that in such characters as Hamlet, Falstaff, and Cleopatra, Shakespeare gives the world a new idea of what it is to be human, and that the psychological depth and unpredictable autonomy we sense in these characters becomes a later model for real human beings (as well as novelists) to aspire to. Bloom is not the first to make such a claim, and it is interesting to note how, for example, Coleridge sees himself as Hamlet, and Freud draws on Shakespeare to frame his psychoanalytic theories, and so forth.

3.6 Metaphysical Poetry

Queen Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558 and ruled until her death in 1603. The period of her reign is known as the **Elizabethan** age. She was followed by King James I, who ruled until 1625. His reign is sometimes known as **Jacobean**. The death of Elizabeth is also used to mark the break between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, because it's conveniently close to 1600, and it seems like a nice ending point.

Spenser was born in 1552, Sidney in 1554, Shakespeare and Marlowe in 1564, Ben Jonson and John Donne in 1572. These crowds (these six are just symptomatic—others were also born during this time) are often, today, seen as three separate and distinct literary waves. Spenser and Sidney were the Elizabethan pioneers; Shakespeare and Marlowe built on what they had done and mark the lofty pinnacle of Elizabethan literature; Jonson and Donne were early seventh-century poets who, in different ways, led a reaction against outworn Elizabethan conventions.

Reality is much messier. Twenty years (between 1552 and 1572) is not such a long time. It's actually possible to be friends with someone twenty years old—or younger—than you are. Marlowe died six years before Spenser. According to Jonson, Donne "writ all his best poems ere he was twenty-five." That would be 1597, the year before Shakespeare acted in Jonson's first big play. Jonson is probably wrong—he tended to shoot off his mouth in weird ways when he was drunk, and he was usually drunk—but he knew Donne, and we don't, and certainly Donne was a remarkably clever young man. Shakespeare wrote sonnets, but he also wrote "The Phoenix and the Turtle," about as "metaphysical" (and obscure) poem as one could wish for. Donne, Jonson, Shakespeare, and Spenser could have all attended some of Marlowe's plays before Marlowe's death. It seems likely that some of them, at least, did.

Nonetheless, Donne does strike us (and probably struck his contemporaries) as something of a new direction in poetry. He seems to have had a great fondness for taking accepted truths, subjecting them to ingenious rational scrutiny, and coming up with a reason for thinking that the opposite is true. A lover says, "you have all my love." Donne says, "what does that mean? Does it mean I have no more love to give? And if I do have more love to give, it isn't strictly true, is it, that you have *all* my love, because in that case…" In the familiar "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" Donne takes the obvious "truth" that the more strongly two people love each other the stronger will be their grief when they must be separated. Ha! Says Donne: I'll show just the opposite. And he demonstrates through a series of complicated analogies that two lovers united by a "true" spiritual love should not exhibit any grief at all on parting from each other.

This isn't the stuff from which conventional Valentine's day verse is made, and it's the streak that caused later critics (like Samuel Johnson, in the eighteenth century) to question whether Donne' love poetry could possibly be effective except as an intellectual exercise. Its main appeal indeed seems to be to the intellect: thus the term **metaphysical** that fairly got attached to it. For the poets of the eighteenth century Donne was intellectually perverse: truth, for them, ought to be obvious, while for Donne the "obvious" truth was always to be questioned. And for the Romantics, Donne was deficient in feeling. They might approve some of his more lofty, neoplatonic love poems (the ones where souls mysteriously unite), but not mind-games like "The Flea," where Donne tries to seduce his girlfriend by pointing to a flea in whose "living walls of jet" both their bloods mingled and noting that he is really asking for little more.

In the early twentieth century, Donne's reputation zoomed upward, helped partly by the modernist poet T.S. Eliot (who used Donne as an ally in his own poetic campaign against a variety of precursors, from Milton to Tennyson) and partly by the fact that many Donne's poems seem made to order for the close intellectual analysis called for by the so-called "New Critics," who were trying to change the way literature was studied in universities. Here, after all, are complicated, puzzle-like poems which can actually be "solved" by the application of thought and learning. Donne seemed to give job security to countless English professors: they now had a reason for being.

Born a catholic, Donne converted to Anglicanism and eventually, as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, became the star preacher of London. His sermons are still dazzling. But when it came to religion, he sensed that his restless cleverness was a drawback. After all, Christianity seemed to offer a simple, straightforward truth—a truth available to everyone, clever or simpleminded, learned or ignorant—and here was Donne, unable to accept such truths without skeptically turning them inside out. His Holy Sonnets (in a sense anguished love poems to God, using the old Petrarchan **paradoxes** in new ways) express his fear that by doubting God's power (or willingness) to forgive him he is somehow damning himself, and that this very fear just makes things worse. It gets very convoluted:

Reason, thy viceroy in me, me should defend,
Captivated, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy…

Donne seems to want God to step in an treat him as a puppet, since his own free will keeps leading him astray.

Technically, Donne tends to avoid the "mellifluousness" we so often find in Shakespeare, or Marlowe, or Spenser. He throws strong, jagged pauses into the middle of lines; he plays the conversational rhythms of his lines against the metrical rhythm in a kind of counterpoint; sometimes it takes real work to figure out how the meter is supposed to go. His fondness for sudden, dramatic openings recalls Sidney, and in a number of other ways his verse seems more indebted to Sidney than to any of his other Elizabethan precursors. But in the mixture of the religious and the erotic (in both his love poetry and his religious poetry) he recalls the medieval lyrics).

Though no one formed a Metaphysical Poet's Club and issued membership cards, Donne had considerable influence until the change of poetic fashion around 1660. His best known followers are George Herbert (1593-1633), Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678).

Herbert, whose mother was one of Donne's friends and patrons, gave up a worldly career to become an obscure parish priest in the southwest of England. All his verse is religious. It is much more tranquil, on the whole, than Donne's (compare Herbert's "Love(3) and Donne's "Batter my heart"), though ha can effectively dramatize religious struggle ("The Collar"). But it shares some of Donne's fondness for ingenious analogies, unusual comparisons, and varied and intricate stanza forms.

Vaughan was a great admirer of Herbert's, and many of his poems seem direct imitations of Herbert. He too was an exclusively religious poet, longing for union with God. But where Donne seems to think of God as a fierce, unrelenting parent, and Herbert seems to think of God as a kind and forgiving parent, Vaughan thinks of God as a bright light. He is a kind of mystic, longing to get free from the dark and shadowy world in which we live to the forever shines, earth's shadows flee," etc.), while in "The retreat" he strangely prefigures Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode."

In fact, Marvell's career nicely illustrates this shift in poetic fashion. After the Restoration, in 1660, he continued to serve as a Member of Parliament (an effective if unremarkable politician) and turn to writing the sort of satiric verse on political issues that had come into vogue. But few, today, find these poems of much interest. What the Marvell Fan Club cherishes are the earlier poems—"To His Coy Mistress," "The Garden," and the like. Some of these (The "Definition of Love," for example) put quasi-Donnean demands on the reader with their complicated reasoning and unusual analogies (one can imagine Donne relishing the notion of cramping the world into a planisphere). But in "To His Coy Mistress" the images seem so inevitable and resonant that we tend not to think of their ingenuity:

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near,
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity…

In the smooth flow of his verse, and his fondness for rhyming couplets rather than complicated stanza forms, Marvell may be said to merge a metaphysical ingenuity with a neoclassical elegance.

3.7 Neoclassical Poetry

Neoclassical is probably a misnomer: nearly all writers in the Renaissance looked back to classical antiquity for inspiration, subject matter, and literary models. But some tag is convenient to distinguish the kind of poetry written by Ben Jonson and his followers from the "metaphysical" poetry of Donne and *his* followers, since most of the poets of the earlier seventeenth century fit into one or the other of these groups: the Donne Way of the Jonson Way.

Where the metaphysical poets tended to go in for far-fetched analogies to illustrate complicated and decidedly non-obvious versions of "the truth," the neoclassical poets tended to emphasize the simple, elegant, restrained statement of more general truths. Jonson prided himself on his craftsmanship, his dependence on "art" rather than the wilder flights of inspiration or imagination. A poem like "To Penshurst," about a country estate, becomes an aesthetic statement: Jonson praises the house for its lack of pretentiousness, flashiness, ostentation. The house, then, typifies the sort of poetry that Jonson himself valued.

Jonson drew heavily on Latin models for his lyric poetry. He avoided not only the pervasive sonnets of the Elizabethan period, but the varied and complicated stanzas we find in Donne and his followers: his favorite form in the rhymed couplet,

and in this, as in many other ways, he strongly influenced the mainstream of post-Restoration poetry (Dryden, Pope, etc.). Interested as he was in the artistry of verse, he also begins the fashion of "literary critical poetry"—most memorably in his poem about Shakespeare. In this, too, he served as a model for the Restoration poets.

Jonson seems to have attracted a crowd of followers (the "Sons of Ben") who liked to sit around with bibulous Ben, drinking in taverns and talking about literature. Of these the most notable is Robert Herrick (1591-1674), one off the most elegant and charming lyric poets in the language. Like Herbert, Herrick spent most of his career as a country clergyman (often feeling exiled from London, which he thought of as classical Rome); unlike Herbert, Herrick tended to write his poems about seemingly- rival subjects (rather than the obviously important Quest for Salvation). But he can give unexpected depth to these lyrics. Note, in "Corinna's Going a-Maying," how the poet's attempt to convince his girlfriend that she should get up and join him in the Mayday ritual of gathering greenery ends with one of the more moving articulations of the **carpe diem** ("seize the day") argument:

Come, let us go, while we in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time.
We shall grow old apace, and die
Before we know our liberty.
Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun;
And, as a vapor, or a drop of rain
Once lost, can ne'er be found again,
So, when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless night.
Then while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna, come, andlet's go a-maying.

The argument is usually the basis for a move overt seduction poem (as in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"). Here, though, the "harmless folly" of maying takes on overtones of a kind of religious obligation to Nature—"Rise, and put on you foliage," he tells Corinna—which it would be almost sinful to pass by. It may be our last chance!

3.8 Prose

How to characterize, briefly, the teeming profusion of prose works from this period?

At each end of the era stands a giant whose Latin works appealed to a European audience of intellectuals. Thomas More (1478-1535) is best known for his *Utopia*, a vision of an "ideal" (if somewhat repressive and static) state. His best-known English work is his history of King Richard III, in which he set the party line of demonizing this monarch in order to justify the Tudor takeover. More was, of course, beheaded for refusing to renounce his Catholic allegiance to the Pope.

John Milton (1608-1535) was another immensely learned humanist, but on the other side of the religious tracks from More. As "Latin Secretary" to the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, he was essentially the chief propagandist trying to justify the beheading of King Charles I to a European audience. Probably his best-known English work is *Areopagitica*, an eloquent argument censorship (except, of course, for those evil Catholics).

A similar figure looms in the middle of the period. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) achieved European fame for his Latin works, particularly his attempt to restructure human learning in the *Novum Organum*, where (essentially) he set out the course taken by modern empirical science. In English, he is noteworthy for introducing the essay (a genre "invented" somewhat earlier by the French writer Montaigne). Bacon's essays are aphoristic, brief, and impersonal: nuggets of wisdom which the reader accepts largely because of Bacon's own intellectual authority.

Apart from these, one finds masses of histories, biographies, theological worked, "courtesy books," romances, fast-moving tales of low-life adventure, and endless translations of all sorts. Writers were experimenting with style. The so-called "Cieronian" rhetoric (based on the idea that since Cicero was the best Latin writer of prose he should be the only model for modern writers of English) was characterized by long, elaborate, **periodic** sentences; this engendered an "anti-Cieronian" reaction which, in writers like Bacon and Ben Jonson, led to a fondness for rather brief sentences without many Latin and Greek words as possible (to "augment" the language and drown out the disgusting native monosyllables), and those who thought a pure, simple, native vocabulary should be maintained. It is worth noting that the King James Bible, easily the most famous and influential prose work of the period, is written in a very un-Latinate style and vocabulary.

What we do not yet find in the prose of this period is the genre that would later come to dominate the field: the novel. The high-flown prose romances (*Arcadia, Euphues*) make no pretense of anything like "realism"; the realistic tales of adventurous rogues (Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveler,* for example) show little interest in anything like plot or character development. In Spain, Cervantes published the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605. But its real influence would not be felt in England until later.

3.9 Milton

Although Milton did not complete *Paradise Lost*, his great **epic**, until 1667, he is generally regarded as the last of the great Renaissance writers, lingering on after the collapse of the Puritan theocracy he had done so much to support. He is also the last (and most successful) of those who aspired to be the English Virgil. Like Spenser, he began his career with a pastoral; poem ("Lycidas," a pastoral elegy), but he always seems to have had in mind that God had called him to write some great epic work. But about what? During his political years he sketched out various possibilities—the King Arthur story? Finally he settled (with characteristic ambition) on the Fall of Man, the rebellion of Satan, the expulsion from Eden: he would "justify the ways of God to man."

He did this following the approved epic model: twelve books, plunging into the story *in medias res*, in lofty verse. His idiosyncratic blank verse had a huge influence on subsequent poets, with its long sentences, deviations from normal English syntax, and Latinate language. T.S. Elliot called that verse a "Chinese Wall" from which subsequent blank verse could never recover, and, indeed, nineteenth century poets like Wordsworth, Shelley, and Tennyson never escaped, in their own blank verse, that note of elevated Miltonic artifice. Milton's subject, of course, had little to do with ordinary human life. As Samuel Jonson said, it was deficient inhuman interest: its only human characters were Adam and Eve, the rest being the God, the Messiah, and assorted angels (fallen or otherwise). It would have violated decorum to have any of these talks in a "normal" human way. But when later poets turned to more human themes, they still couldn't seem to bring the language of their poetry back down to "human" earth. The normal poetic language of poets like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Sidney, Jonson, and Donne seems recognizably based on :real"

human speech. Post-Miltonic poets find it very difficult to avoid a “poeticized” language remote from real speech—even when, as with Wordsworth, they seem deliberately trying to do so.

3.10 The English Language: Early Modern English

If we jump from trying to read Chaucer (in Chaucer’s original Middle English) to read almost anything from the sixteenth century, we are likely to be struck by how much easier the sixteenth century language itself is to understand. Here, more or less at random, are a couple of sentences from Sideny’s “Defense of Poesy”:

Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as is to affirm that to be true which is false. So, as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies.

The words are our words (though we would not usually use “artists” for historians and scientists). The grammar is our grammar, except for Sidney’s occasional use of –th instead of –s to show the third person present of verbs: “lieth” rather than our “lies.” But we can see that this too was changing: he says “affirms” rather than “affirmeth.” Usually during a change like this there is a period during which people can choose which form to use. Or which pronunciation: consider our varying pronunciations of “root” or “roof.” Sidney’s any case, was also likely to be close to ours.

In short, we have now reached the period of Modern English. The first part of this period—from about 1500-1650—we call “early modern,” but what matters is that in most fundamental respects it is our language.

What has changed since Chaucer? The pronunciation has become more like ours (that Great Vowel Shift) and the grammar has continued to grow simpler. And what changes *during* this period is, first of all, that more and more big words come into the language from Latin and Greek. As scholars turn from the learned languages: that’s why in studying literature we’re stuck with words like “simile,” “metaphor,” “iambic pentameter,” “lyric,” “tragedy”—these words already existed in the critical writings in Greek and Latin, and it seemed easier to import them than to come up with new words in English.

The second big change involves **spelling.** The passage from Sidney looks modern in part because the modern editor has “modernized” the spelling. Up through the sixteenth century there was no fixed, right way to spell a word: the same person might spell the same word “clowdie,” “cloudie,” “clowdy,” “cloudye,” etc. There were limits to the chaos (you won’t find “kludi,” or “chlaothyy”). But writers were increasingly bothered by the weird way that the printers mangled the words they’d written, and during the sixteenth century they kept agitating for some system of orthography. Some wanted a phonetic system, in which the spelling would indicate the pronunciation. They lost. The group that won were more interested in preserving etymology: having the spelling suggest the origins of the word (thus “chaos,” rather than, say, “kayos”). The result was a spelling system full of letters that were no longer pronounced (“knight,” for example): a delight for historians of the language, a lasting source of misery for children trying to learn how to spell English. But by 1700 the system was pretty much in place. After that, people were expected to spell their words in the single “right” way.

How were you to know the right way? That would require something like a dictionary, and there were no dictionaries in this Early Modern period. Nor were there any books of English grammar. School children still learned Latin, and were expected to apply the rules of Latin to English, if necessary. Usually this worked fine.

The result is that throughout this whole period, people felt as if they controlled the language. If they needed a word, they made one up, or borrowed one, or changed the meaning of an existing word. There was no one to tell them that they were doing something wrong. No one exploited this freedom more than Shakespeare.

The eighteenth century, as we'll see, introduced dictionaries and grammar rules to curb this freedom. Notice the result. When you're writing, how free do you feel to make up any new word if you don't think any of the old words quite do the job? Aren't you likely instead to check in the dictionary and docilely restrict yourself to what the dictionary approves?

3.11 Analysis A: Shakespeare's Sonnet 97

Many students, when they read a poem, imagine that the language of poetry is mysterious gibberish whose mysterious and hidden meaning can only be guessed by a blind stab. Blind stabs usually don't work, and the result, too often, is resentment, frustration, and hatred of poetry.

Your best idea is to assume that poets are writing English. That is, they're using ordinary words, that have predictable meanings, and they're putting them together in sentences designed to communicate something, in the same way as prose does. The sentences may get a bit tangled, but in general you can make sense of them, and come up with some literal version of what the poem is trying to say. This literal version won't be the whole story, but it will be a useful base camp for further explorations.

So let's begin by working out some literal version of Shakespeare's Sonnet 97 (we could do the same thing for any of the others except 94, which the writers of this treatise find too obscure.) We can do this in bite-sized chunks—or, if you wish, syntactic units.

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!

We can tell by the exclamation point that this is an exclamation, and the "like" indicates we're dealing with a **simile**: "my absence from you" (= "thee"; notice the **enjambment**—the syntax keeps flowing from the first line to the second) has (= "hath"; we saw this with Sidney) been like winter. OK? Not bad, so far?

We can now pause and ask what "winter" might suggest. Fun? Jollity? Yuletide spirit? Possibly. But in general, Shakespeare (who is immensely fond of seasonal **imagery**; we need to remember that English seasons are much more varied than the seasons in most parts of California) tends to use winter as a time of lifeless desolation: cold, snowy, no leaves on the trees, etc. So as we read we pose as a temporary hypothesis the idea that he hasn't enjoyed this "absence."

What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere!

More exclamations. But now we can be more confident that we're supposed to see "winter" as a time of bleakness: the words in these lines emphasize the negative ("freezings," "dark," "old," "bareness"). His absence has been bad news indeed.

And yet this time removed was summer's time,
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,

Bearing the Wonton burden of the prime,
Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease.

Summer, we know, is not autumn, yet Shakespeare seems to link the two together as if they're the same. Why? Maybe here we do have to guess. But we have some guidance. "And yet" suggests that although the absence has been *like* a winter, in *reality* it's been a different season—a much more positive season, as "teeming," "bug," "rich" suggest. Lots of life (as opposed to the bleak winter). So let's think of the real season as summer-shading-into-autumn: the grain is ripening, plump fruit droop from the boughs of the trees. But a sudden dark note is struck. All this fruit and grain, like little children, suddenly become, through a **metaphor**, "the wanton" sexual activity, it seems. And then another simile, building on this image: all these offspring come from the "widowed womb" of autumn; but now her husband, the spring, is dead, and she's left a widow. How sad!

See what Shakespeare has done? It's very characteristic. He starts with a straightforward comparison: my absence was *like* winter. Then he tells that it was *really* summer-fall. Then—and this is the typical Shakespeare touch—he uses some more images to *show* you how this teeming, rich, abundant harvest time strikes him: yes, lots of life, but pathetic life, orphans of the widow. And we now have a new way to think about the seasons: spring is gone, gone, gone, leaving only the traces that it engendered.

Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
But hope of orphans and unfathered fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute.

Here he continues tracking the implications of his previous comparison. "Yet" once again indicates a contrast between the way things are and the way things seem. But here the contrast is a little misleading: he's already struck the dark note, with the "widowed wombs" and the dead husband. But "seemed" emphasizes the *seeming* of all this (not the way it really is): the harvest consists of orphans, "unfathered fruit," without much to look forward to. Why? Why, that is, should Shakespeare find this "abundant issue" such a source of gloom? Because you (="thou") were away, and without you summer gives no pleasure and even the birds don't sing.

This is **hyperbole**, or exaggeration: we can't take literally the idea that an individual's absence causes all the birds to be mute. It just *seems* that way to the speaker—without you there is no joy in the world. What does this suggest? Certainly some intense level of emotional attachment. Scholars are generally agreed that this is one of the sonnets that Shakespeare addresses to the "fair young man," though they disagree about who the fair young man might be or what, exactly, Shakespeare's relationship to this youth was. But readers have always felt free to apply Shakespeare's sonnets to any generalized love affair—in this case, expressing the misery of absence.

So far we've had three **quatrains**: units of four lines, each rhyming abab (thee, fruit, me, mute). This is known as the **Shakespearean sonnet**, and you'll notice that each four-line verse unit is also marked off as a unit of meaning (by the "and yet" of line five and the "yet" of line nine). But a sonnet needs fourteen lines, so Shakespeare needs to add a **couplet** to all this.

Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

OK, Shakespeare seems to be saying, maybe the birds really did sing, and that stuff about their being mute was an exaggeration. But if they did sing, they did so drearily, as if they were afraid of the winter.

Does this add much to what he's already given us? Sometimes one senses that Shakespeare has pretty much tied up everything by the end of the twelfth line, and then tacks on the couplet mainly because his sonnet needs a couplet. At other times the couplet really does add a significant new slant (note the end of number 73, for instance). On this one, different readers will probably have different responses.

So much for the meaning of the words. We also need to pay some attention to the way those words sound. He makes more subtle use of alliteration than what we find back in Old English: freezing-felt; dark ages; widowed wombs; unfathered fruit. He likes to interweave long vowel sounds: notice, for example, all those "ee" sounds. (We call such use of similar vowel sounds **assonance**). And he likes to use similarities of sound to hint at connections of sense: note how "bareness" might just bring to mind "barrenness" (inability to have children), and is picked up by its seeming opposite "bearing" (having children). And notice how those three-in-a-row stressed syllables in the last line ("leaves look pale") seem to limp along. All this operates more or less beneath our conscious to help produce the emotional effect of the poetry.

3.12 Analysis B: Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning"

Donne's poem is also about the effect of absence on two lovers. But where Shakespeare takes a rather conventional attitude (your absence made me miserable), Donne, characteristically, seeks a **paradox**: the stronger and purer the love, the less it ought to be affected by absence. The result is a quintessential **metaphysical** poem.

Once again, we should begin by trying to figure out, literally, what Donne is talking about. Here we should probably begin with the title. A valediction is a saying goodbye; "forbidding mourning" suggests that the saying goodbye shouldn't involve manifestations of grief. This is pretty much the theme of Donne's poem, so it helps if we get the title more or less straight.

Shakespeare began "How like"; Donne begins "As"—implying another simile. In fact, "as" is likely to introduce a more complex simile, and we can peek down to the second stanza and see the "so" that will complete the comparison. The second stanza, then, is likely to give us the reality; the first stanza will give us something to which that reality is being compared.

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their should to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
The breath goes now, and some say "No."

What is this a picture of? Good men dying., Why "virtuous"? Why "mildly"? With Donne, especially, we have to assume that he's chosen every word for a reason. In this case, what is he emphasizing? How imperceptible the transition is from life to death: the "whisper"; those "sad friends" clustered around the death bed are uncertain whether he's still breathing or not. A "virtuous" man will not fear death. Notice that if Donne had written "As wicked men pass screamingly away" the effect would be very, very different.

So le us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, no sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity of our love.

In the first stanza, then, he's linked virtue with an imperceptible transition. We noe see the other term of the comparison: in the same way, "let us melt"—silently, with no big fuss. "Melt" suggests a wonderfully gradual transition: think of an ice cube melting. When does it stop being an ice cube? If you take an ice cube and hit it with a hammer, the result is much more obvious. The floods and tempests are the standard hyperbole of love poetry (even Shakespeare's), as if the more you weep and howl the stronger you love. Not so, says Donne, introducing some religious images: we would *profane* our love (drag it through the dirt, make it less holy) if we revealed it to the *laity* (ordinary people, as opposed to the clergy).

So there's his paradox. He now needs to make his case—using the usual metaphysical arsenal of logic and learning. Notice already that his comparison has a different effect from Shakespeare's. In Shakespeare, the emphasis is on conveying how the "abundant issue" seemed, or *felt*, to the grieving lover. Donne tends to use comparisons as analogies, to support an intellectual argument.

Moving of th' earth brings harm and fears,
Men reckon what it did or meant,
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

We think that an earthquake is a big deal: everyone worries and seeks its significance. But a "trepidation of the spheres"—something huge that happens far off in outer space: for us we could imagine substituting a supernova—though intrinsically far greater than a terrestrial earthquake, does not worry us much. There's the analogy: great big things (our love, and our parting) as "innocent" (harmless, fuss-free); intrinsically smaller things (earthquakes) cause a giant fuss.

Not convinced? (He was evidently addressing this to his very clever wife, before he went off on a business trip for a few weeks.) Let's try another analogy!

Dull sublunary lovers' love,
Whose soul is sense, cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

Here the first "it" evidently refers to "absence," the second "it" to the love experienced by those "dull sublunary lovers." Who are they? The word "dull" does not sound too flattering, and "sublunary" in the old Ptolemaic cosmology refers to everything beneath the sphere of the moon: the only part of the universe subject to change. So those "dull" changeable lovers have a love whose "soul is sense": that is, it depends on the senses. And such a love "cannot admit absence" (notice that you have to keep going from the second to the third line to make "sense" of this) because absence takes away the only thing the love was based on: physical proximity.

Are you catching on? says Donne. We're not like that.
But we, by a love so much refined
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

So: those dull sublunary lovers have a fit when they have to separate, because being physically together is the only thing their love consists of. “But we” (note the opposition) have a “refined” love based on some weird linkage of minds; thus we don’t depend so much on physical things like eyes, lips and hands.

Donne’s analogies may be strong enough, now, to serve as logical premises. So he can begin to draw a conclusion:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

Note the “therefore,” a word the metaphysical poets like to use to suggest a logical (or pseudo-logical) progression. Here, then, his departure will not produce a “breach” (a breaking) but a spreading out, like gold foil. Gold was simultaneously pure and malleable: pound a blob of gold instead of shattering it will spread and spread and spread, getting thinner and thinner. Notice the **paradox** in the first line: our two souls, which are one. Well, which are they? For Donne, the paradox is part of the point: in a union of true (pure, gold-like, refined, mental) love two individuals fuse into a new kind of unity.

Yet in some sense they remain tow individuals, so Donne needs another analogy to fit this two-in- oneness. He finds this in the final three stanzas: our tow souls are like a compass, the kind you use in geometry to draw a circle. You’re the fixed foot, marking the center of the circle. I’m the other foot, roaming far, but eventually returning:

Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

A circle (like gold) was an image of perfection; the two feet of the compass are united; the perfect circle will lead me back to where I began. Thus (as Donne had now elaborately and cleverly demonstrated) you shouldn’t make a big fuss when I leave.

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter quatrains (dah DAH dah DAH dah DAH dah DAH) with alternating rhymes (abab). But some of the lines are almost impossible to fit into this form—the first line, for example, which certainly seems to have five beats instead of four. Donne’s own contemporaries found this confusing; according to Ben Jonson, “Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserving hanging.” Perhaps too harsh a penalty, but you can see (or hear) the problem. Since Donne’s synactic units (clauses, sentences) often don’t coincide with his metrical units (lines), we sense a constant tension between the two. Notice “endure not yet/A breach,” or “cannot admit/Absence.” In each of these cases we can’t even draw a breath between the verb (in the first line) and the direct object (in the second): extreme examples of enjambment.

Jonson also said that Donne: “for not being understood, would perish.” His poetry has been resurrected in the last century in part because it is ideal for rational, intellectual, academic analysis, in part because some of the qualities that make Donne seem so challenging are qualities that have appealed to many modern poets. According to T.S. Eliot (one of Donne’s great twentieth century champions), after Donne and the metaphysicals English poetry suffered a **dissociation of sensibility**—a rather obscure phrase that seems to mean that thought and feeling separated. The modernists tried to bring the two back together.

3.13 Analysis C: Milton's Paradise Lost, Book IX, lines 322-341

Here Eve makes her final plea to Adam: don't fence me in! What's the point of being in Paradise if we're always going to be scared to separate? Aren't we giving our foe too much credit by cowering in fear? Isn't that an insult to God?

This is a crucial point in Milton's epic. Everyone knows what will happen. Eve will get her way, go off on her own, meet the snake, be persuaded to eat the fruit—and the rest, of course, is human history. But how does the innocent pre-sin Eve persuade the innocent pre-sin Adam to go against God's directive and let her go in the first place? Milton needs to make the scene psychologically and theologically plausible.

Again, we need to pay attention to the syntax of Milton's sentences, particularly since so many of his sentences are long and complex. It helps if you can reduce the sentences to a kind of grammatical frame. Thus, we can see Eve's first sentences, here, as, in essence, "If this be our condition…how are we happy?" The rest elaborates what sort of condition "this" involves:

If this be our condition, thus to dwell
In narrow circuit straitened by a foe,
Subtle or violent, we not endued
Single with like defense, wherever met,
How are we happy, still in fear of harm?

Here the words "narrow" and "straitened" give a negative slant to their situation. They still aren't sure what exactly to fear from this "foe," so Eve gives two alternative adjectives: "subtle or violent." As Milton so often does, he places these adjectives after the noun; then and now it would be far more common to put them in front of the noun ("a subtle or violent foe"). In the last line here, alliteration links "happy" and "harm," calling out attention to the balanced way they are opposed. And the verse is Miltonic **blank verse**—unrhymed iambic pentameter, with a great deal of **enjambment**, so we get the sense of line after line rushing past us without giving us much chance to pause.

We need to pay attention to the logic of Eve's argument, as it continues:

But harm precedes not sin: only our foe
Tempting affronts us with his foul esteem
Of our integrity: his foul esteem
Sticks no dishonor on our front, but turns
Foul on himself; then wherefore shunned or feared
By us? Who rather double honor gain
From his surmise proved false, find peace within,
Favor from Heav'n, our witness from th' event.

So: we can't be happy if we're forced to cower in fear all the time; our "foe" can only disgrace *himself* by trying to tempt us; by resisting temptation we can gain the "double honor" of pleasing Heaven and knowing that we've done the right thing.

And what is faith, love, virtue unassayed
Alone, without exterior help sustained?

In a famous passage of his prose treatise *Areopagitica*, Milton says something similar about humanity in its fallen state: to show true virtue one must confront and

overcome evil. In that treatise, Milton is making an argument against censorship. But Eve's situation is different.

Let us not then suspect our happy state
Left so imperfect by the Maker wise,
As not secure to single or combined.
Frail is our happiness, if this be so,
And Eden was no Eden thus exposed.

Notice the logical connectives: "then," "if," "thus." And Eve has completed her argument. God meant them to be happy in Eden; they cannot be happy if they're always worried about this "foe"; therefore, if this foe is a real danger, Eden is not Eden—that is, not a happy place—in which case (by extension) God would not be God ("the Maker wise"). Milton has to give Eve a good argument, since it works: Adam does, grudgingly, let her do as she wishes. But the argument also has to be flawed, since it leads to disaster. Where are the flaws? Eve overrates herself (part of her premise is that it would be insulting to imagine that she could be swayed by this foe of theirs), underrates their foe, and finesses the idea that the potential unhappiness results from her own headstrong refusal to accept Adam's authority (a refusal which the subtle Serpent plays on somewhat later).

In a passage like this we also need to recognize the sheer elevation of style. In Chaucer, and often in Shakespeare (and Donne, and Sidney) the poetry seems close to the way real people would actually speak. Not here. Both his ambitious subject, and the fact that he is very self-consciously writing an **epic**, make Milton give his characters a lofty eloquence far beyond what we can imagine actual people ever speaking. And the style is consistent: Satan, God, Adam, Eve, Milton all use the same complex language and booming, onrushing verse.

4 The Restoration and Eighteenth Century (1660-1800)

4.1 More Changing Times

The Puritan forces of Parliament won the English Civil War. In 1649 they beheaded King Charles I and established Oliver Cromwell as "Protector" of a theocratic, king-free state. The people of England could now devote themselves to the serious business of trying to save their eternal souls.

In our days, "Puritanism" suggests a rather dour and joyless way of life—grim-looking people dressed in black, reading nothing but the Bible, singing nothing but hymns, and regarding anything remotely fun as the work of the Devil. This is doubtless an exaggerated picture. Even a staunch Puritan might occasionally laugh at something more frivolous than the burning of a nefarious Catholic or a witch. But one gathers that the English people, after a decade of relentless Godliness, had had enough of it. After the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 the Protectorate collapsed and a new king, Charles II (the oldest son of the executed Charles I) came to the throne. Charles II was a fun-loving thirty-year-old, a nominal Catholic whose main interest seems to have been sex.

The term "Restoration," then, refers to the restoration of the monarchy. One of its immediate consequences was a new, institutionalized religious tolerance. Religious dissidents were no longer persecuted, though they were still denied certain **privileges**. When James II succeeded his older brother in 1685 and threatened to turn England back into a Catholic state, he was run out of the country in the "glorious

revolution" of 1688. Thereafter, through the eighteenth century, real political power came to lie increasingly with Parliament. This meant that discussion of public issues took on a new importance: such debate could actually influence what happened. "Public" themes loom much larger in the literature of this period than they did (at least explicitly) in the Renaissance.

We find an assortment of descriptive names applied to this period, or parts of this period: the **Enlightenment**, the Age of Reason, the Augustan Age. These suggest different, if overlapping, characteristics. This was no the first period to think well of human reason, but in the Renaissance the early stirrings of empirical science could still be contained, to a degree, by appeals to ancient "authority": thus the house arrest of Galileo. Newton, born the year of Galileo's death (1642), became a kind of hero of the Power of the Human Mind:

Nature, and Nature's laws, lay hid in the night;
God said," Let Newton be!" and all was light.

Thus wrote Pope—a Catholic who in fact seems to have held the belief that "religious" truth is available to any rational individual anywhere, without the need of revelation or special Church traditions. This sort of **Deism** fit the more general view that nay important truth was general, rational, open to any inquirer. This would apply not only to religion, but to morality, political structure, personal behavior. In various ways this view downplayed the importance of individual differences, the uniqueness of one person's (or one culture's) experience, etc.: what can't be generally felt, experienced and seen is probably not worth feeling, experiencing or seeing. (This view probably helped destroy lyric poetry.)

Augustan, on the other hand, refers to the perceived parallels between England (especially in the early eighteenth century) and the Rome of the Emperor Augustas—a time of peace, prosperity, and artistic efflorescence, after a period of civil turmoil. While such a view may flatter both historical periods, it shows how the writers of time are constantly looking back to ancient Rome for parallels, models, and guidance, both literary and political. A form of "neoclassicism" flourishes, as writers debate (endlessly) the comparative merits of the Ancients and the Moderns.

4.2 Poetry

To move from the poetry of the Renaissance to that of the Restoration is like moving between two neighboring ecosystems that have almost nothing in common. The kind of personal, metaphorically-complex lyric poetry—amorous or religious—with which the earlier period is so rich almost entirely disappears, as do the ambitious narrative poems. In their place we find a thick growth of verse satire, mingled with the sort of landscape poetry and verse-criticism that we find in Ben Jonson. As poet and playwright, Jonson becomes the acknowledged English precursor of much of this later neoclassical verse—in form as well as subject, since the characteristic verse form of the age becomes the **heroic couplet**.

The two great poets of the age are John Dryden (1631-1700) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Dryden dominated the Restoration as dramatist, poet, and critic, and in fact poetry shows a good deal of diversity; the "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" and "Alexander's Feast" are lyrics, in a sense, though not terribly personal ones. But he is best known for his political (*Absalom and Achitophel*) and literary (*Macflecknoe*) satires.

Satire had been cultivated in ancient Rome, especially by Horace and Juvenal, whose different approaches were often contrasted by English critics. The general idea of satire is to make fun of people you disapprove of, though the satirists themselves liked to point out that they more generally mocked such things as foolishness and pretentiousness rather than attacking individuals for things they couldn't help. But while the satirists claimed to have a moral purpose, they recognized that ridicule might not be entirely appropriate for certain moral transgressions (mass murder, for instance). As a result they tended (in poetry, drama, prose) to focus on breaches of good taste, or good sense, or good judgment. In this way the satirists became, in a sense, enforcers of a code of conformity.

But ridicule is a powerful weapon, and Pope, in spite of many advantages (he sickly, stunted, deformed, and as a Catholic could not attend the universities or gain a government pension), became perhaps the most feared writer in English literature:

Yes, I am proud—who'd not be proud, to see
Men, not afraid of God, afraid of me…

Having gained a substantial income through his translation of Homer, he was free to skewer the assortment of rogues, fools, and frauds with which English public and literary life conveniently swarmed.

Pope's friend and ally Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) is far more famous, today, for his prose, but he too was effective satirists in verse. Where Pope went after particular deviations from right reason, good taste, and so forth, Swift often seems to be going after the whole human race—and not only in the last book of *Gulliver's Travels*. He seems simultaneously fascinated and disgusted by the loathsome of shallow self-interest, hypocrisy, faddish jargon, and even the human body (a lover discovers with horror that his girlfriend has a chamber pot and uses it).

Toward the end of the eighteenth century a new spirit seems to be stirring. The interest in ancient poetry shifts from the polished and familiar verse of Augustan Rome to the more mysterious poetry of preliterate bards—Homer, of course, but also old Celtic and Germanic literature. Ballad gatherers go off to gather ballads from the primitive folk of the English-Scottish border. A poetic fraud like James MacPherson gains European fame for his fake-antique Ossian poems. Robert Burns (1759-1796) was a beneficiary of this new spirit, hailed as an example of natural, untutored genius; it helped that he wrote in a Scots dialect that, to English ears, combined exoticism and a marginal intelligibility. And his poems remain popular.

And then there is William Blake (1757-1827), whom modern critics promoted into one of the greatest of the Romantic poets. What he has in common with the other (later) Romantics was a fierce rejection of reason, moderation, prudence—the great eighteenth-century virtues—a fondness for the French Revolution, and a belief that Milton was the great English model of a revolutionary poet struggling against tyranny. Like Shelley later, Blake saw this tyranny exemplified in the God of Milton's *Paradise Lost*; unlike Shelley, an idiosyncratic atheist, Blake was intensely if idiosyncratically religious (his wife said she had little of Mr. Blake's company: "he is always in Paradise"). But he was part of no conscious Romantic "movement," and his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* were published some years before any such (conscious) movement came into existence. Because Burns and Blake so obviously do not fit the standard model of eighteenth-century poetry, literary historians often move them into the next century anyway.

Few other poets from our period are likely to have too many ardent admirers today—perhaps the deft short poems of Matthew Prior (1664-1721) or the frequently pornographic poetry of that notable Restoration debauchee, the Earl of Rochester (1647-1680). James Thomson (1700-1748), Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) and William Cowper (1731-1800) have largely outlived the popularity they once had; Cowper's poetry, particularly, tends now to be seen mainly as a somewhat pale

prefiguration of Romanticism. The "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," by Thomas Gray (1716-1771), remains a favorite; through a lyric, it too seems mainly a compendium of general truths and feelings, rather than a personal articulation of individual experience or outlook. The one poet of mid-century who may be more honored today than in his lifetime is Christopher Smart (1722-1771). In one of his episodes of insanity he wrote the long and weird *Jubilate Agno*, which scarcely looked like poetry then ("Let Ross House of Ross rejoice with the great flabber-dabber flat clapping fish with hands") but now seems a refreshing change from all those heroic couplets.

4.3 Drama

Puritans disapproved of plays. Then the theaters were reopened after the Restoration, they were very different from what they had been during Shakespeare's career—indoors, with artificial lightning, much more sophisticated stage sets and special effects, a much less diverse audience (drawn largely from the affluent classes). Since actual live female actresses now played female roles could be expanded beyond what Shakespeare could entrust to his cross-dressing boys—and the gentlemen in the audience could drool over the actresses themselves.

What sort of plays did these audiences go to see? There seem to be two general kinds. One, the dramas of what was called "heroic love," involved elaborate, implausible, melodramatic plots and characters suicidal driven by out-of-control passion (an odd counterbalance to the glorification of Reason). Of these plays nothing remains but their heritage in operas (where music could provide some compensation for the absurdities of plot and character), unless it be Dryden's *All for love*—an adaptations of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in which Dryden "improves" Shakespeare's original by making it fit the classical "rules" (time, place, etc.) and improving the **decorum**.

The other kind of play was comedy. The best comedies of the period tend to involve a good deal of satire, mocking pretentious fools, vain fops, people who pretend to be richer or cleverer than they really are. The plots tend to involve a successful courtship (in which the sole decent rational man ends up with the sole decent rational women), but love is strongly tempered with worldly prudence: the one thing clearly necessary for a successful marriage is lots of money. William Congreve (1670-1729) is the great master of this sort of comedy, but the plays of George Etherege (1635-1691), William Wycherley (1640-1716) and Aphra Behn (1640-1689) still have appeal. The appeal generally lies in the sparkling wit of the dialogue and the ridiculousness of the assorted rogues and fools.

The theater continued to be important through the eighteenth century. Almost every major writer tried his hands at a play or two. Sentimental comedy (and sentimental tragedy) came into fashion: the idea was to leave the audience weeping. But apart from Oliver Goldsmith's *She stoops to Conquer* (1773), all these plays have sunk into oblivion. The same, in fact, is true through much of the nineteenth century. People kept going to plays, the theater was an important social force. But there was no lasting artistic value to the plays themselves.

4.4 Nonfiction Prose

The eighteenth century has been called an "age of prose." It is interesting that while poetry (such as it was) tended to veer farther and farther from the language of ordinary speech (producing the kind of artificial **poetic diction** that the Romantic poets condemned), the language of prose moved in the opposite direction—that is,

in the direction of casual if genteel conversation. We find these qualities in the prose of Dryden (who again leads the way) as well as Swift and, most notably, in the periodical essays of Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729). We also find it in the scientific and philosophical writing of the period; some scholars connect this stylistic tendency (simple, direct, unadorned statement) with the growing importance of empirical science and the corresponding diminution in the importance of rhetoric (which, traditionally, depended on the manipulation of language rather than the presentation of evidence to persuade).

The center of the eighteenth century is often called the "Age of Johnson," because of the looming figure of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). Johnson was an essayist, critic, dictionary writer, literary historian, poet and playwright. In 1755 he published the first English dictionary that was accepted as a real authority over the English language—a monumental achievement for one human being. But today Johnson may be best known as a conversationalist, thanks to the vast biography of him compiled by his younger and indefatigable friend James Boswell (1740-1795). Johnson's own prose is considerably more ornate and Latinate than the Addison-Steel-Dryden model (but his conversation, too, has a kind of studied weight). Likewise known for his orotund, Latinate style is Edward Gibbon (1737-94), whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is probably the best-known historical work in the English language.

4.5 The Novel and its Kin

Most writers, most of the time, have a pretty good idea of the sort of thing they are trying to write when they begin scrawling words on a piece of paper (or poking the key of a word processor). The Wakefield Master knew that he was dramatizing biblical stories for a cycle of pageants; Sidney intended to write a sonnet or a pastoral romance; Shakespeare, beginning a play, had in mind the conventions of the Elizabethan or Jacobean Theater. It would be unusual, today, for someone to sit down to write a TV situation comedy and suddenly discover, with surprise, that she or he had actually come up with a country and western song.

These literary types are known as **genres**. They are not (as is sometimes thought) prisons with unbreakable and inflexible walls. But they do not serve as guides for both writers and readers, and the vogue for neoclassicism in the period following the Restorations led "serious" writers to think that the writers of ancient Greece and Rome had pretty much set the pattern that they, the "moderns," should follow: clearly-defined genres like epic, tragedy, comedy, satire, each with its own "rules."

The **novel** emerged during this period almost by accident. It lacked classical precedent: it was a new kind of thing, tracing its ancestry no farther back than *Don Quixote* in the early seventeenth century. The first novels were not, in fact, thought of as novels: there was no such category for them to fit into. By the end of the eighteenth century the novel was a recognized and popular form, but even then fastidious critics tended to sneer at novels as scruffy, disreputable poor relations gate-crashing the fancy literary tea party.

Prose fiction of various sorts had, of course, been written for centuries. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), one of the most successful books of its age, is a spiritual allegory, akin to the old morality plays: it makes no pretense at depicting the literal surface of reality. Aphra Behn's *Oronooko* (1688) is a prose romance, with an exotic setting and larger-than-life characters suffering larger-than-life passions. Today it is interesting in part because Behn herself (also a successful playwright and poet) was the first women in England to make her living by writing. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is a prose satire in the form of a series of imaginary journeys. Swift

does not intend us to believe that the lands his hero visits (full of tiny people, giants, flying islands, and talking horses) represent any plausible part of the real world, nor does he show anything like a novelistic interest in plot or character.

But Daniel Defoe's *Mole Flanders* (1722), published four years before Swift's great satire, seems much more novel-like, and much harder to classify in terms of earlier genres. It takes the form of a fake autobiography of a contemporary woman, a servant who manages (after a long life filled with sex, violence, crime, and assorted adventures) to emerge relatively well-to-do and socially respectable. The ostensible moral (avoid sex, violence, crime, etc.) seems weirdly out of keeping with the more obvious lesson: do anything you can to get ahead. (If Moll had remained virtuous, she would have got nowhere.) And Defoe gives his narrator a plausible voice: we can believe that the "real" Moll would "really" speak as she does in this story. A realistic style, a realistic story, a realistic character (and an interest in how that character came to be the way she is); these, at last, seem close to what would later define the novel.

Defoe was more interested in making money than in making "literature," and he was tapping into a new kind of audience for books. Literacy was spreading, and middle-class women, particularly, found themselves with the money to buy books and the leisure to read them. What would appeal to this new audience? In a sense, Defoe and the other pioneers of the novel were conducting experiments to find the answer to this question.

Defoe's chief competitor for title of "first English novelist" is Samuel Richardson, who published *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* in 1740. *Moll Flanders* is short, fast-moving, and full of exciting incident. *Pamela* is extremely long, and consists of a series of letters written by the heroine (another servant) describing her (ultimately successful) efforts to fend off the sexual advances of her aristocratic employer, Lord B_. This "virtue" is rewarded, in the end, when Lord B_, unable to get what he wants by any other means, marries her. *Pamela* shares with *Moll Flanders* is focus on a central female heroine, its surface realism, its mix of titillation and mercenary morality. *Pamela* was a great success, and Richardson followed the same formula in his even more massive **epistolary** (written in letters) novel, *Clarissa* **(1748)**.

But not everyone was impressed by Richardson's version of morality as self-serving prudence. Henry Fielding followed his parody, *Shamela*, with a more fully-developed spoof, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), in which the hero turns out to be the brother of Pamela (now lady Booby). *Tom Jones* (1749) presents itself as a kind of **mock-epic—**perhaps a sign, among other things, that the novel itself was still fishing for identity as a genre. Both Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews are "virtuous" in a rather different way from Richardson's heroines: fundamentally good-hearted, but not terribly prudent or unrestrained in their behavior.

By 1750, though, the novel seems at last to have emerged as a recognizable sort of literature, though a sort already including some rather diverse examples. The diversity increased with the publication of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* in 1760—in some ways a poet-modernist novel two centuries before its time, playing coy games with the reader, inserting blank pages, chapters in French, weird type faces, and strange squiggles into the middle of the text, and disarranging the narrative about as much as a narrative can be disarranged. And in 1765, Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* introduced what would soon become a highly popular subgenre: the **Gothic novel** set in some exotic place like Italy and involving a heroine (or, less often, hero) in a struggle with the mysteriously evil and seemingly supernatural.

Many of these early novels centered on female heroines and were aimed at a largely female audience. But the writers themselves were men. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century this began to change. Fanny Burney published *Evelina* in 1778; in the last year of the century Ann Radcliff and Maria Edgeworth were writing

hugely popular Gothic novels. And although Jane Austen (1775-1817) did not publish her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, until 1811, she is probably best thought of as the final flowering of the eighteenth-century novel—and in some ways, of an eighteenth-century view of the world.

Austen's novels unite a kind of fairy-tale **plot** (young woman overcomes assorted obstacles and ends up marrying Mr. Right) with a vividly realistic depiction of her characters and their social milieu that seems largely populated by a ridiculous assortment of fools, snobs, hypocrites, and rascals. Yet Austen never joins in the Romantic rejection of society and its values. She is in some ways a moralists who distrusts the impulsiveness of inner feeling as a guide to action and insists on the importance of duty and the individual's need to accept the standards of society, however ludicrous the actual members of that society may be.

4.6 The English Language

Children today can probably read Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as easily as they can read a science fiction novel by H.G. Wells or a Sherlock Holmes story: the language, by 1700, is very like the language today. The big difference is that we keep adding words, and extending the meaning of words. Swift or Defoe could have made little sense of a recent sentence like the following: "A computer application that a bored undergraduate wrote about a year ago, Napster allows you to download digital music files from the hard drives of other uses." Computer? Undergraduate? Download? Digital? Hard drives? Huh?

But we should note three interesting developments in the language during this period. One is the invention of prescriptive grammar rules. A **prescriptive rule** tells you what you ought to do (like the Law of Gravity). The eighteenth century wanted to bring order and regulation to language. So people began importing "rules" from Latin or logic: don't use double negatives, don't end sentences with prepositions, don't split infinitives, and so forth. Which is **correct**: "it is me" or "it is I"? According to Latin, the "I" has it: a copula requires the nominative case. Children rich enough to go to school were taught these "rules"; others weren't So the "rules" became a useful marker of social class.

Early in the **eighteenth** century a number of writers, like Swift, hoped that England would follow the lead of France and set up an official Academy to regulate the language. This never happened. It's important to recognize that all these rules are purely the result of private enterprise. There's nothing "official" about them.

Another development is the first real English **dictionary**—Samuel Johnson's, in 1755. Everyone agreed that this was a splendid dictionary. So, for the first time, English had a kind of authority to guide the way the language was used. Writers, especially, could now check their words in "the dictionary" to make sure of the word existed and to find out how to spell it or use it. What a relief! No more anarchic freedom!

The third development is the spread of English beyond the British Isles. In the early seventeenth century English speakers were already settling parts of North America. By the end of the eighteenth century –in addition to the newly-independent United States of North America—English was becoming the dominant language in much of Canada. The English convicts being shipped to the newly-discovered Australia took with them a predominantly rulers were spreading the language to an Indian administrative class. In the long run all this obviously has important effects for the development of literature in English.

4.7 Analysis A: Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," lines 193-214

In this poem—in the form of an **epistle**, or letter, to one of his friends—Pope is writing a kind justification of his own poetic career. "Atticus," in these lines, stands for the well-known essayist and critic Joseph Addison. In politics, Addison was a Whig and Pope of Tory. But in Pope's world it is hard to disentangle personal from political animosities. Addison's followers had tried to sabotage Pope's translation of Homer; Pope here gets his revenge.

Peace to all such! But were there one whose fire
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires;
Blessed with each talent and each art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease;
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne;
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserved to blame, or to commend,
A timorous foe, and a suspicious friend;
Dreading even fools; by flatters besieged,
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged…

Begin by reading this aloud, pausing briefly at each comma and less briefly at each semicolon (and noting that Pope would have pronounced "even" as one syllable, "e'en," and have given the second vowel of "obliged" its French pronunciation, "obleeged"). You can scarcely avoid noticing that there is a semicolon at the end of each couplet, and almost always a briefer pause at the end of the first line of the couplet. That is, we find little enjambment; unlike Donne or Milton, Pope makes his metrical and syntactic units coincide. You'll also notice that each line tends to break into halves, separated by a pause (and you're likely to pause even when there's no punctuation: "Blessed with each talent [Brief pause] and each art to please"; "And hate for arts [brief pause] that caused himself to rise." We call a pause of this sort, somewhere inside a line of verse, a **caesura**. Notice that Pope's caesuras almost always fall after the fourth, fifth, or sixth syllable of his ten-syllable lines.

We call these **heroic couplets**: "closed" iambic pentameter couplets generally marked by **balance** within the lines. As you read aloud you can hear the balance in the way the line divides into two parts. These two parts tend to be grammatically similar ("true Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires") or linked by some common element: "View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes," for example, in which the adjectives "scornful" and "jealous" both modify the same noun, "eyes." This last line also represents **antithesis**: the two adjectives contrast with each other, since we normally aren't jealous of people we scorn. The "yet" marks this antithesis, as it does in "Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike." Pope is suggesting that this Atticus combines some seemingly –contradictory qualities.

What is the effect of this relentless pattern? One effect is that we are much more aware of the form—the couplets, the rhymes—than we are likely to be with Donne, or with Chaucer (who also uses iambic pentameter couplets, as you'll recall). This in turn emphasizes Pope's artifice, his cleverness—his wit, as the eighteenth century critics called it. It also means that each of the Pope's couplets can stand on

its own. This makes Pope a very easy poet to quote, and if you look through a collection of famous quotations you'll find that Pope is second only to Shakespeare as a source of memorable lines ("Damn with faint praise," for example).

One could go on and on about the formal qualities of these lines, but what about the meaning? Here again you might compare Pope with Chaucer, who also produces a series of portraits. Remember Chaucer's Monk? Chaucer tells us what he looks like, what he wears, what his favorite food is, and seems to agree with the Monk's won contempt for the rules designed to govern the behavior of monks. If we decide that there's something wrong with this monk, it's because we take some of Chaucer's praise as ironic. But Chaucer himself says nothing directly bad about this bug-eyed, gleaming-faced, fur-sleeved fellow.

But Pope is giving us a series of considered judgments about Atticus, and we have no reason to think that the Pope persona is not to be trusted. What Pope is writing here—what Pope and his contemporaries so often write—is **satire**. In theory, as we've seen, the goal of satire was moral improvement: by ridiculing folly, pretension, and vice, the satirist (ostensibly) hoped to make people behave in good and sensible ways.

This goal implies that the satirist understands what is good and sensible. The balanced form of Pope's verse mirrors the balanced weighing of Pope's judgments. And almost everything in this passage is a considered judgment, wittily expressed. We don't know what Atticus looks like, or wears, or likes to eat—the raw materials that would lead to these judgments are missing. Chaucer, too, is sometimes called a satirist. But, Chaucer, even when we allow for his irony, seems far less judgmental than Pope. Chaucer's Cook may have a running sore, but he makes a great *blancmange*; the Shipman may have an unhappy tendency to steal cargoes and act like a pirate, but he's a wonderful navigator; the Physician may be a little to fond of money, but no one can babble medical terms so impressively. Chaucer always seems delighted by the vitality even of his rogues. Pope grants Atticus his good qualities only to show how they have been perverted.

In closing, we might note that when he names his character "Atticus," and when he alludes to Cato ("Like Cato, give his little senate laws"), Pope takes for granted that his readers will be familiar with Roman history. During this ("Augustan") period, writers were particularly fond of finding historical and literary parallels between their own time and that of classical Rome.

4.8 Analysis B: Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare," the first paragraph

In the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1765), Samuel Johnson begins by considering what makes writers of the past worth reading, and then moves to a more particular consideration of Shakespeare's own strengths and weaknesses. The first paragraph consists of a single sentence.

That praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honors due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those who, being ale to add nothing to the truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox, or those who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy will be at last bestowed by time.

In the early eighteenth century, writers like Defoe, Swift and (yes) Addison had developed clear, direct, conversational style of English prose. Johnson's style, in this sentence, is unlikely to strike us as clear, direct, or conversational. So what exactly is he doing, and why is he doing it?

The style of Johnson's prose, here, is called **periodic**. Its ultimate model is the rhetoric of the Roman orator Cicero: sentences which work their way through a number of subordinate clauses, delivering a kind of punch line at the end. That is, we don't know what the whole point of the sentence is until we reach the end. These do not strike us as "conversational," because when we speak we normally can't calculate in advance how we're going to conclude a long, complex sentence. But what a sentence of this sort *can* do is to make clear how its elements relate to each other, and thus to convey a well-ordered understanding of those elements. Johnson's style contributes to our sense of him as someone judiciously looking down on his material and sorting it out for us.

In its periodicity, Johnson's style is similar to Milton's in *Paradise Lost*. But in its reliance on balance and antithesis it recalls Pope. (The moral here: be alert to sentence structure in both poetry and prose.)

Johnson begins with a pair of noun clauses: "that…that." The second of these balances "to excellence" and "to antiquity": an antithesis. We could translate: "some people complain that old things are valued simply because they're old." But this leaves out why they might make this complaint. Johnson tells us—again, giving us two options: "those who…or those who." Each of these is further subdivided. In the first ("those who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox") the antithetical balance is between "truth" (to which these whiners can add nothing) and "paradox" (from whose heresies they hope to gain eminence). The second group, "forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients" (that is, trying to find some way to console themselves for their own failure), "flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy will be at last bestowed by time." Note, again, the antithetical balance: "is yet denied by envy" versus "will be at last bestowed by time." In the future, "posterity" may at last recognize their merits.

The style contributes to Johnson's tone of judicious authority. It would take a bold person to disagree with him. And this in turn lets him frame out attitude toward this "complaint." As Johnson delimits the matter, it seems that we should take neither group of complainers too seriously: their attitude toward "antiquity" comes across as simply a symptom of their own inadequacy and disappointment. That is, Johnson's way of presenting the case makes it very difficult for us to jump in and say- "but wait! There may be other, more valid reasons for such a complaint!"

Johnson's style is sometimes called "Latinate" not simply because of its well-ordered Ciceronian structure, but also because of its rather grandiose and Latin-derived vocabulary, as in a phrase like "consolatory expedients." Meeting such words, we need to remember that most of Johnson's readers knew Latin: they would have had a more concrete sense than we are likely to of the etymologies of these words. And Johnson himself had a very precise sense of language—he was, after all, the author of the first real English dictionary. So reading Johnson, we need to avoid the temptation to treat his writing as a sea of big, vague words. The words may be big, but they aren't vague.

So what is he saying, here? He's laying the foundation stone for an argument that writers who continue to interest us more than a century after their death must have some real literary merit. We are not in a good position to evaluate the intrinsic virtues of our contemporaries. Their immediate appeal may owe too much to local or historical accident. But if (as he later says) "nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature," then the passage of time is necessary to separate the enduring (and intrinsically meritorious) from the ephemeral. **After** a century and a half, Shakespeare still please. Therefore Shakespeare has passed this test.

Note the implications of this. Johnson believes that it is possible to make absolute judgments: some writers (and writings) are better than others. He believes that it is possible to set forth the basis for absolute aesthetic judgments. He believes that we can only judge soundly the writers of the past.

Until recently, most writers and critics would have agreed with all these beliefs, though they might have disagreed about the actual standards by which we make these judgments. (The Romantics questioned the importance of "general nature," as Johnson conceived it.) Recently, though, all these premises have come under attack. Is our standard **canon** of English literature, for example, a meritocracy, recognizing that over time the real cream (Chaucer, Shakespeare, etc.) has risen to the top? Or does it result from the desire of those in power (white males of the privileged classes) to perpetuate themselves? Does it make any sense at all to speak of absolute merit, absolute aesthetic judgments? Or are all such judgments entirely determined by arbitrary and culturally-defined values? This issue has been debated in a lively way through the last decades of the twentieth century. And yet, oddly, those relativists for whom it is heresy to say that Shakespeare is in some absolute way a "better" writer than (say) Anthony Munday continue to write book after book on Shakespeare and ignore Munday. Isn't this somewhat odd?

5 The nineteenth Century (1798-1901)

5.1 The Romantic Movement

Eighteenth century thinkers (to oversimplify a good deal) valued reason. They thought that human beings, using their reason properly, could solve the mysteries of the natural world (look at Newton!), establish a rational social and political system (the same everywhere, since Truth was always the same), and provide a firm basis for human morality. They also valued order. The universe was orderly (the intricate clock set in motion by the divine clockmaker); society should also be orderly, and people should contribute to social order by acting in a civilized, restrained, sensible way. Literary critics (Dryden, Pope, Johnson, etc.) praised a literature of wit, good taste, restraint, and impersonal general truth.

By the middle of the century dissenting voices were making themselves heard. Rousseau, in France (or Switzerland, or Savoie, or whenever) was extolling the virtues of feeling and denouncing the evils of repressive society. As the century moved on the reaction against rationalism grew, particularly in France and Germany. Philosophers, poets, and novelists were increasingly drawn to the irrational, the mysterious, the primitive. This involved, to some extent, a rebellion against the fixed and ordered perfection of classical antiquity—at least the version of classical antiquity propounded by eighteenth century neoclassicism. Gothic cathedrals were preferred to children and lunatics were seen as possessors of some mysterious insight into "truth"—but not the rationalist version of Truth. Nature—the wilder the better, preferably in the form of tempestuous seas or rugged mountains—became a source of mystical inspiration.

All this, and a lot more, makes up what is called the Romantic Movement.

5.2 Romantic Poetry

In 1798, two young English poets—William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) published a book of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*. In 1800 an expanded edition was published, with a preface—a kind of poetic manifesto—by Wordsworth. This is generally regarded as the official beginning of **Romanticism** in England.

In his preface, Wordsworth says that poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"—not a very eighteenth-century idea. In fact, he sees the poems that he Coleridge are writing as somewhat revolutionary (revolution is in the air—there had been a revolution by the English colonies in North America, and then a bloody revolution in France): personal, emotional, dealing with rustic subjects in simple, direct, passionate language. In theory, the Romantics were very fond of simple, uneducated rural folk, whose simple pure language and simple passionate feeling were uncontaminated by the artifices of civilization. But most of us are likely to see more Milton than simple peasant talk in Wordsworth's most famous poems. A random example, from "Tintern Abbey":

Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay…

Yet the poems, in their own way, *were* revolutionary. Wordsworth dealt with the intense feelings that nature inspired in him, with rural life, with the simple pleasures of ordinary experiences (seeing a rainbow or a field of daffodils). Coleridge, his partner in this enterprise, gave voice to the Romantic fondness for mystery, the supernatural, the Gothic—most famously in *The Rime of the Ancient* Mariner, a long, literary version of the ancient ballads that those ballad-gatherers were busy gathering. Coleridge also drew on his vast reading (of German philosophers, among others) to write a great deal of important but often unintelligible literary criticism.

Coleridge thought of himself as Hamlet—sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, unable to complete his ambitious projects. Wordsworth lived long enough to change from youthful rebel into pillar of the establishment: he spent his last twenty years as Poet Laureate, writing hideously boring sonnets about the history of the English church. But in his earlier lyrics—and in his long autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*—Wordsworth really did create a new model for understanding and representing experience. *The Prelude* has nothing like a conventional plot, or a chronological narrative, or a depiction of social reality. Instead, it focuses on certain "spots of time" in which outwardly trivial experiences (seeing a flock of sheep in the fog, for example) take on a magical significance for the young Wordsworth. Keats speaks of Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime," and indeed it takes certain egotism to focus so relentlessly on one's own inner experiences. But we can see traces of Wordsworth's approach in some of the twentieth century fiction by Virginia Woolf and D.H Lawrence, both of whom, in their very different ways, discard traditionally plot and seek (as Wordsworth sought) to probe what most deeply matters to the inner being.

What most deeply matters, to Wordsworth, is the individual's encounter with Nature. The "world" of society and business and ordinary human affairs interfered with this; in Wordsworth (as in Blake, writing of the "dark Satanic mills") we find the beginning of a discontent with the modern world that becomes ever more pervasive in later writers. We have come too late; the world had lost is innocence; science, technology, and business are ruining things. In his Sonnet "The world is too much with us" this leads Wordsworth to nostalgia for a kind of Greek pantheism:

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

For the typical eighteenth century poet, allusions to classical myth had been a stock form of poetic decoration. For Wordsworth this myth has a deeper appeal—it embodies a kind of divinity of Nature, a way to counterbalance the deadening forces of modern life. In the twentieth century, we'll see analogous uses of **myth** to provide some framework of meaning for a world that has apparently lost its bearings.

The next generation of Romantic poets had no chance to grow old and boring: they all died young. George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) became a celebrity with the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* (1812), which gave the world its first taste of the "Bryonic hero"—a gloomy, self-absorbed, passionate non-conformist, who views ordinary people with contempt. But Bryon's scandalous behavior got him into real trouble. Exiled from England, he kept working on his long satirical poem *Don Juan*, and dies, at 36, while helping to lead a rather quixotic venture to gain the independence of Greece from the Turks. Byron is in some ways hard to categorize. Viewed in his own time as a quintessentially Romantic figure, he professed contempt for Wordsworth and Coleridge and claimed that his own poetic allegiance was to eighteenth century satirists like Pope.

Byron's friend—and companion in exile—Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) died even younger, drowned in Italy at the age of thirty. Shelley was another eccentric and rebellious aristocrat, hating any kind of conventional authority. Like Blake, he thought Satan was the real hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (bravely fighting God the Tyrant); his quasi-Greek tragedy, *Prometheus Unbound*, shows Prometheus as another doomed foe of divine tyranny, in this case the tyranny of Zeus. His *Defense of Poetry*, in which he claims that poets "are the unacknowledged fluent poet—perhaps too fluent; Keats, in a brave letter, advises him to "load every rift with ore" and not get quite so carried away with his own onrushing eloquence. There is some evidence that in his later poetry, possibly helped by the model of Dante (from whom he borrowed the **terza ria** form: three line stanzas linked by recurring rhymes), he was trying to achieve a new intensity and density in his verse. But then his boat sank, and he had never bothered to learn how to swim.

By the John Keats (1795-1821) began writing poetry, Wordsworth and Coleridge were already established figures, and Byron and Shelley were bursting on the scene. Keats had no need to be a path-breaking poetic rebel like the older Romantics, and he lacked the self-dramatizing egoism of Byron or the ideological program of Shelley. Devoted to the Elizabethan poets (Spenser, and, especially, Shakespeare), he worked to develop a poetry that would not be propaganda (like much of Shelley's) or self-display (like much of Wordsworth's and Byron's), but would embody the **negative capability** that he found in Shakespeare. His great **odes** (the "Nightingale" and the "Grecian Urn") probably come closest to realizing this goal, but—as everyone knows—his death at 26 from tuberculosis came before his poetic development was in any sense complete. Of all the writers who have died young (Marlowe, Sidney, Shelley, Emily Bronte) Keats seems to have the most *unfulfilled* promise. In the twentieth century, many readers have found that his letters (casual, personal letters, not meant as "literature") at least rival his poems for interesting ideas memorably worded.

These five poets (now joined by Blake) make up the traditional Romantic **canon**. Canons are odd things: as we've noted, no one can quite agree why certain writers are included and others left out. The most popular writer (both as poet and

novelist) of the Romantic period was unquestionably Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), who receives little academic
Attention these days. Blake, once regarded as an eighteenth-century weirdo, has been elevated to full membership in the Romantic Movement. John Clare (1793-1864)—a real rural poet embodies some of Wordsworth's ideals better than Wordsworth's own poetry does—is on the canonical bubble. Will he make it into the club? Tune in fifty years from now.

5.3 Victorian Poetry

Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 and ruled England0—and the British Empire—until her death in 1901. People usually (and sometimes unjustly) think of her as embodying the qualities we usually associate with the "Victorian Age": a stuffy concern with respectability, extreme moral squeamishness, a devotion to duty, and a particular belief that the duty of the English—superior to other members of the human race—was to go forth and spread respectable English civilization to the rest of the world.

Many Victorian seem to have an optimistic faith in endless progress. The industrial Revolution relied on a constant stream of new inventions and technologies; during the nineteenth century we find the rise of steamships and railroads, the inventions of photography, the first harassing of electricity. Things were clearly getting better and better, as human beings endlessly improved their world.

But there was also a streak of pessimism. The Romantics had not been too thrilled about the way smoke-spewing factories were taking over England's green and pleasant land, and Karl Marx (whose *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848) provided an influential critique of the way capitalism was mangling the lives of the workers in those factories. A good many people were further depressed by the picture of "nature red in tooth and claw" that underlies Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). What was the point of human existence?

Of the major Victorian poets, the most quintessentially Victorian was Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)—Queen Victoria's own favorite, Poet Laureate from 1850 until his death, the official (and hugely popular) Poetic Voice of England. Remember how all those Renaissance writers wanted to be the English Virgil? In some ways Tennyson comes closest. Not because of his epic ambitions (though King Arthur, in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, has a lot in common with Virgil's Aeneas: both are burdened with a sense that their duty is to lift the rest of humanity from barbarism to civilization), but because of his love for the sound of words and his ability to weave words into sonorous verse:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapors weep their burden to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.

The languid and rather melancholy sounds wash over the reader.

The *Idylls of the King*, his series of narrative poems about King Arthur, are also melancholy: Arthur does his best to raise humanity from its bestial state, but in the end the sinful love between Lancelot and Guinevere infects the whole kingdom. *In memoriam*, an **elegy** on the death of his best friend, follows the normal elegy pattern (moving from initial grief to a final understanding that it's all for the best—we find the same pattern in Milton's "Lycidas" and Shelley's "Adonais," which blames the evil critics for the early death of Keats), but the gloomy parts tend to be more

memorable. We end up sensing that it's not a lot of fun to be a decent, moral, dutiful Victorian.

Robert Browning (1812-1889) is best known, today, for his **dramatic monologues**—poems in which the speaker is like a character in a play, speaking to other (unheard) characters in a specific dramatic context. A good many of the speakers are Renaissance Italians: the period (and its vivid characters) fascinated Browning. The speaker of "My Last Duchess" is an arrogant Italian duke who has apparently killed his most recent wife because she wasn't snobbish enough; in other poems we find a worldly and sensual artist, a scholar with a passion for Greek grammar, and an insanely envious Spanish monk. They all speak in rather rapid, lifelike verse:

Nephews—sons mine...ah God, I know not! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandalf envied me, so fair she was!

This certainly lacks Tennyson's measured sonority, but it has the disconnected movement of actual speech.

The third of the triumvirate of Major Victorian Poets is Mathew Arnold (1822-1888). Today Arnold is probably better known as a critic than as a poet. He was a stern critic, seeking The Best That Has Been Thought And Said, finding it in a few **touchstones** (memorable passages from Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare), but condemning much modern trash and the "Philistine" English taste that welcomed second-rate garbage. It's odd that a person so contemptuous of standard Victorian respectability should now be thought of as an embodiment of the respectability.

Arnold seemed to think the Literature could somehow take the place of Religion as a guide for humanity. "Dover Beach," one of the gloomiest of English poems, laments "the melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the Sea of Faith. With none of the old certitudes to turn to,

We are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Where, in this mess, can we turn? To the verses of Sophocles!

There were a great many other Victorian poets, of course. Probably the most popular was Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61)—Robert's wife, and author of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a book you can still find in ordinary bookstores: "How do I love thee" Let me count the ways…" Then there is Christina Rossetti (1830-94), sister of the pre-Raphaelite poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti; her poems; especially "Goblin Market," have long appealed to children as well as adults. Algeron Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) gained notoriety for poems that seemed to celebrate pagan sensuality: not the most basic of Victorian values. And we still read poems by Emily Bronte, George Meredith, Oscar Wilde, who are more famous for other things.

One of the hardest of the poets to categorize is Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)—a Catholic poet whose verse, in a dense and difficult **sprung rhythm**, celebrated religious ecstasy. Essentially unread in his own lifetime, his poems were not published until 1918, at which time he came to be seem as an early beacon of modernism. Consider the following non-Tennysonian lines form his quirky sonnet, "God's Grandeur":

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

Here we have a kind of fireworks display of sound: **internal rhyme** (seared, bleared, smeared; wears, shares), **consonance** (trod, trade), **assonance** (shares, bare), alliteration. The picture of the modern world is somewhat bleak (as we've seen it in Wordsworth and Arnold, as well). For Hopkins, though, the answer is God—a vivid and exciting version of the Christian god, not the gloomy enforcer of rules and conventions that we more often meet during this period.

5.4 The Nineteenth-Century Novel

In the nineteenth century, poetry still mattered to ordinary people. Members of a normal, middles-class English household (Arnold's Philistines) would probably buy and read the latest collection of poems by Scott or Tennyson or one of the Brownings, and find in these consolation or reassurance or entertainment. But the poets themselves felt increasingly burdened by the weight of poetic tradition. There was Shakespeare, and Milton, and Pope, and now Wordsworth and Shelley and Keats, not to speak of all those distant touchstones like Homer and Virgil and Dante. How was a poor modern poet to do something really new and fresh? It remained for a later generation of modern poets, in the next century, to find an answer.

But the writers of prose fiction suffered under no such burden. The novel itself was still comparatively new. Novelists did not have to live up to some lofty classical ideal. The nineteenth century was, in many ways, the Golden Age of the English novel.

Prose fiction could serve many purposes. It could provide escapist entertainment (at the beginning of the century Scott's historical romances; at the end of the century the adventurous tales of Robert Louis Stevenson or Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories), or melodramatic moralizing, or satire (Thomas Love Peacock), or weird philosophical nonsense (Lewis Carroll—an oddball mathematician whose real name was Charles Dodgson—published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865). The "major" novelists of the period give us some of the these things, as well: the often melodramatic Dickens invents a character who spontaneously combusts; Emily Bronte includes a ghost. But what they do above all is to give us a sense of social and psychological reality—to create a fictional world that feels like the world we actually live in.

Who are these "major" novelists? Again, the list is somewhat arbitrary, and many readers would lament the absence of Thackeray (1811-63) and Trollope (1815-82) and possibly George Meredith (1828-1909). But we have to draw the line somewhere. So for us, the in-group consists of Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy.

Jane Austen, the first great nineteenth-century novelist, was, as we've seen, in some sense the last great eighteenth-century novelist: ironic, comic, promoting the values of reason and restraint. 1818, a year after Austen's death, saw the (anonymous) publication of *Frankenstein*, quite a different sort of novel. *Frankenstein* was written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851)—daughter of two famous reforming philosophers, and wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, with whom she ran off to Europe when she was sixteen. Mary Shelley was twenty when *Frankenstein* was published, twenty-four when her husband drowned; although she wrote a good many other things, her fame clearly rests on her archetypal tale of the monster and his creator. Subtitled "The New Prometheus," is also exemplifies the Romantic tendency to draw on the symbolic potential of myth.

Charles Dickens (1812-70) was a hugely popular writer. He tended to publish his novels in serial form—section after section appearing in magazines—and they proved to be as addictive as soap operas: people would riot to get the latest

installment. His first big success was *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), a rather formless, zany comic masterpiece; he went on to make readers' laugh, weep, despise hardhearted skinflints like Scrooge or unimaginable pedants like Gradgrind (in *Hard Times*) or corrupters of youthful innocence like Fagin (in *Oliver Twist*), or slimy hypocrites like Uriah Heep (in *David Copperfield*). While sophisticated readers have always been uneasy at his melodrama and sentimentality, no one has ever denied his extraordinary ability to create vivid worlds populated by vivid characters. And think of those memorable names—Scrooge, Uriah Heep, Gradgrind, Mumblechook, Smallweed, Smike…

As children, growing up among the bleak moors (as they're always called) of Yorkshire, the three Bronte sisters—Charlotte (1816-55), Emily (1818-48), and Anne (1820-49)—lived in a kind of fantasy world of their own inventing. As they reached adulthood, Charlotte decided that they should put their imaginations to work writing novels, and in 1847 the results were published under the ambiguous pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* combines realism (the heroine's need to cope with grim economic necessity) and romance (madwoman in the attic, the burning house, blind Mr. Rochester) in a story that readers still love to read. In Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, a dim, conventional narrator (Mr. Lockwood) stumbles into a strange tale of primitive passion, whose heroic (Catherine Earnshaw) is already dead, and whose hero (Heathcliff) is a sadistic villain. Many Victorian readers found the story far too troubling "pagan" for their own sensibilities, but it continues to exert a kind of unique power. Emily did the year after its publication—but what would she have done for an encore?

One might say a word about Emily Bronte's narrative technique in this novel. In a way it's like a series of nesting boxes, so that we get much of the story at second or third hand: thus Mr. Lockwood repeats the long story that Nelly Dean tells him (as he convalesces from his illness), while Nelly Dean's account embodies long segments told her by Catherine Earnshaw (or one of the other characters). What is the effect of this? For one thing, the very conventionality of Mr. Lockwood sets off more strikingly the nonconventionality of the Wuthering Heights crowd—we see them through his stuffy eyes. And this distancing also contributes to our sense of Heathcliff as broodingly unknowable (critics often see him as a perversion of the Byronic hero) and the love affair itself as having some gigantic mythic dimension. Notice that we get a similar effect in the Sherlock Holmes stories (whose dim narrator, Dr. Watson, stands between us and the amazing detective) or Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* (where the banal narrator points up the "greatness" of the title character by keeping us from ever experiencing him directly). And as narrators proliferate, we run into the question of the **unreliable narrator**. How fully can we trust Nelly Dean's accounts of what happens, when the slant she puts on the events serves to exonerate her from any possible blame?

And what is the real source of the passion that suffuses this very strange novel? What is the attachment between Catherine and Heathcliff? It does not seem like conventional erotic or romantic love. The reader might be tempted to think of the magical fantasy world of the Bronte children, and the way that world necessarily fell apart as they grew up—brother Branwell turning into a drunken lout, Charlotte having to go off to her hateful job as a governess. The inseparable childhood bond between Heathcliff and Catherine is broken when Catherine decides to marry the rather conventional Edgar Linton. The rest of the novel consists, on some level, of doomed attempts to recapture that lost childhood. Perhaps the novel's closest affiliations are with Wordworth (that *Prelude*) and Proust.

George Elliot (a pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans, 1819-80) was an intellectual who wrote about German philosophy, worried about deep theological issues, and published her first novel (*Adam Bede*) at the age of forty. Her fiction combines intelligence, imagination, and human sympathy in a way that even the best English fiction rarely does; Virginia Woolf found *Middle march* (1872) "one of the few English

novels written for grown-up people." (*Silas Marner*, on the other hand, is still often inflicted on school children).

The last of our canonical figures is Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Hardy's novels tend to set forth a rather grim view of human life—people are doomed by bitter **cosmic ironies**, thing keep turning out as bad as possible. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* we sympathize with the heroine, who is driven to murder and ends up hanged; in *Jude the Obscure* a whole doomed family of children hang themselves "because we are too many." All this gloom got ton people's nerves, and after the hostility that greeted *Jude* (1896) Hardy gave up novel writing for good and—the turn of the century being at hand—turned himself into a twentieth century poet.

It will be noted that of these seven canonical figures, five are women. This is not the result of some late-twentieth-century **feminist** plot (in fact, some recent feminists have scornfully classified Austen as an honorary man, given what they see as her complicity with repressive **patriarchal** values). Women continued to make up a large component of the readers—and obviously, the writers—of fiction. And, inevitably, their fiction came to explore (and often to question) the roles available to women in society.

5.5 Other Literary Forms

In the nineteenth century, many types of nonfiction prose were still regarded as "literature." But today's readers rarely have much patience for the mannered style of those writers whose literary ambitions are most evident—Macauley's histories, De Quincey's opium memoirs, Ruskin's influential praise of medieval architecture, Carlyle's historico-philosophical musings, Pater's musings on the Renaissance. "To such a tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down." Thus Pater. A little of this sort of thing goes a long way.

On the other hand, Keat's letters—just letters to siblings and friends, not intended for publication—are wonderful, and Hazlitt wears well, as does Darwin (who has something important to say and doesn't need to show off while saying it).

What of drama? People continued to go to plays, but apparently most nineteenth century drama was a kind of vast wasteland. About all that remain are the operettas of William S. Gilbert (written in collaboration with the composer Sir Arthur Sullivan) and—in the last decade of the century—the plays of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950).

Wilde was famous as a wit and an aesthete. *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) is one of the cleverest and most artificial plays in the language. But Wilde was also the preeminent victim of Victorian morality, imprisoned for two years for homosexuality and in effect banished in disgrace for the last three years of his life.

Shaw is hard to pigeonhole, partly because his immensely ling life extends from the Victorian era to the Truman era. Like Wilde, he was extremely witty; like Wilde, he was Irish. Unlike Wilde (art for art's stake) he was happy to make his plays the vehicle for his ideas—he had a lot of ideas—he was also an ardent reformer of politics, society, domestic relations, English spelling, music, and so forth. He was also an ardent reformer of the theater, and aimed (among other things) at the kind of social realism he found in the plays of Henrik Ibsen. It is strange, in any case, that one doesn't have to be too ancient in the year 2000 to have memories of this white-bearded old man (still trying to reform the world) and to think that he was already at midlife (thirty-five) when Queen Victoria died.

5.6 The Language: Extending the Vocabulary

As we've already noted, the most striking change in the English language over the last two or three centuries has been the massive increase in the vocabulary. Where do these new words come from? When we need a new word, we can get it in one of three general ways. We can **borrow** a word from another language: *ski, spaghetti, moose, woodchuck, arroyo.* English continues to be an eager borrower (or thief) from any language it comes in contact with. Or we create a new word from already-existing words. The most common ways of doing this (as we've seen) involve **compounding** (putting two free-standing words together: "gearshift), **derivation** (adding a prefix or a suffix to a word: "unimpressive"), and **conversion**, or a functional shift (changing a word's part of speech without changing the form: from "he drives the ball" to "he hits a long drive). We can also **shorten** or clip words (from "omnibus" to "bus"; from "fanatic" to "fan"), or **blend** words (telescoping two words together, as in "smog" from "smoke" + "fog"), or turn a proper name into a general word ("sandwich," "volt," "boycott"), or put together the beginning letters and sounds of several words to form an **acronym** ("scuba," from "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus"). (There are other things we can do, as well).

Or we can change the meaning of an existing word. Sometimes this general process, known as **semantic shift**, is subdivided. Labels for the usual subdivisions vary: **extension** (or generalization, or radiation); **specialization** (or narrowing); **elevation** (or melioration); **degradation** (or pejoration). These can be useful guideposts, but they aren't the whole story.

The most common of these by far is some form of extension. Think of the word "run," which extends from a verb for human or animal motion to a verb for, say water ("the water runs from the tap"), and then keeps shifting ("we have run out of water"; "we have run out of time"). Usually people see some underlying similarity between the existing meaning(s) of an existing word and a new thing that needs a word: note how "web" has moved to stand for a lot of electronic interconnections.

The opposite is less common. "Deer" once meant any kind of wild animal; "meat" once meant any kind of food. Both have narrowed in meaning.

Degradation and elevation apply less to changes in meaning that to changes in perceived value. A "pioneer" was once a lowly foot-soldier, slogging ahead of the main army to blaze a trail (and closely related to such words as "pawn" and "peon," all from the Latin word for "foot"). But the word has gone up in the world—an example of elevation. Now we usually think of a pioneer as some brave adventurous soul who is the first to do something worth doing. "Hussy" has gone in the opposite direction. It was once a respectable variant of "housewife"; now it means a kind of slut: an example of degradation.

But often words don't fit neatly into any of these categories. Sometimes shifts of meaning depend on weird historical accidents. "Canary" is a color named after a bird named after a bunch of islands that were called the Canary Islands because the Romans found a large dogs roaming on them: *insulae canariae*, meaning "dog islands," from the Latin *canis*, meaning "dog". "Cardinal" is a color named after a bird named after the red hat of the leaders of the Catholic church who were called "cardinals" because everything "hinged" on their decisions—the word coming ultimately from the Latin word for hinge. And often a lot of different processes get involved. Consider "broadcast." It starts out, long ago, as a compound verb meaning "to throw seeds here and there." As nineteenth century machines took over the seed-throwing, the word lost its original usefulness, but was then picked up to refer to the metaphorical throwing-here-and-there of radio waves (and note how "waves" had its meaning extended for this, as well). Then came the invention of "television",

a “hybrid” word formed from a Greek element (*tele*-, meaning “far”) and a Latin element (from the Latin word for “see”). (Earlier words like “telegraph” and “telephone” are all Greek, but they didn’t exist in Greek. That’s why people say more Greek and Latin words in modern English than there ever were in classical Greek and Latin.) So it seemed convenient to devise a new word for broadcasting television signals: “telecast” (taking the first part of “television” and the second part of “broadcast”)—which can be either a noun or a verb. And so it goes.

5.7 Analysis A: Keat’s “Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art”

In the eighteenth century, English poets generally stopped writing sonnets. For Wordsworth and the other Romantics, then, writing sonnets became one way of distancing themselves from the eighteenth century. And Keats, who had a special devotion to Shakespeare, seemed to see writing sonnets as a way to become in some ways a more Shakespearean poet—a challenge and a technical exercise, as well as a form within which he could work out his Keatsian themes.

The sonnet begins with an **apostrophe**—a direct address to the star: “Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art.” Such a direct address also implies some degree of **personification** of the star—that is, treating the star as if it has some human attributes. But what attributes? Keats immediately begins to tell us what it is about the star that he *doesn’t* envy:

Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature’s patent, sleepless eremite,
The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors…

So: he wishes that he were as steadfast as the star, but not “in lone splendor hung aloft the night” forever looking down on the earth. At this point Keats seems to switch to what the isolated, hermit-like star is watching: oceans and snow. Again, though, this brief summary leaves out the way Keats presents these things. We don’t see impersonal expanses of ocean. Instead we (and the star) see “the moving waters at their priest-like task/ Of pure absolution round earth’s human shores.” A priest grants absolution for human sin; the waters, analogously, seem to be cleansing (“ablution”) those “human shores.” Again, then, Keats has personified and moralized nature: the sea seems to be washing the shores free of some human-related taint. And what of the snow? We usually think of snow as cold, and white; here it also forms a “mask.” The sea cleanses; the snow hides and disguises. What?

Before moving on we might also note that by Keat’s time people no longer used “thou” (or “thee,” or “thy”) in ordinary speech. Like us, they said “you.” So when Keats says “thou,” he’s being deliberately **archaic**—trying to make his language, perhaps, more “poetic” and Elizabethan.

In his ninth line, Keats provide what in traditional Italian sonnets was called a “turn”—in this case from what he doesn’t envy to what he does:

No-yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its sweet swells and fall,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

The "no" sums up what he's rejecting; the "yet" introduces what he desires. We might note than in these six lines we find several repeated words: "still" (four times), "ever" (three times), "sweet" (twice). The repetition of "still" and "ever" seems particularly to underscore Keat's central theme: the desire to achieve a timeless, changeless state, like that of the star.

But in some ways the language keeps undermining this theme. "Unchangeable" is a word that inevitably reminds us of its opposite, "change." The breast is "ripening"—in a state of development. Why not "ripe," already developed? Couldn't Keats find a less changeable word? The "swell and fall" of the breast may recall the moving waters: the world that star sees is an ever-moving, restless world. And what about the "unrest"? This would usually suggest restlessness, perhaps worried discontent. But here, coupled with "sweet," Keats seems to mean it to repeat "awake forever"—a nice, tranquil state. Again, though, the language seems to be sabotaging the explicit message.

The rough picture, though, is clear enough. If Keats were as steadfast as the star, he could lie awake forever, his head pillowed on the breast of his fair love, while the fair love (apparently) sleeps forever, her breast forever swelling and falling. But what about that last line? The first half reiterates what he's already said, but the second part seems to contradict it. What could be a less steadfast, more wrenching changes than dying? "Swoon to death" may suggest a happy and gradual transition, but—going back to his original analogy—wouldn't it be akin to that bright star suddenly shutting off its light forever?

Whatever ambivalence we sense in this poem is an ambivalence we find elsewhere in Keats. On some level, we can make sense of the earlier poems we've looked at without worrying too much about the other poems that Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, or Pope have written. But here there are some puzzling inconsistencies that make us scurry off to look at other poems by Keats. In his Nightingale ode, for instance, the nightingale is also a symbol of changelessness: "thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!" Yet the bird's song makes the poet "half in love with easeful death," and the attraction of permanence—some dreamy state of dropping out from the cares of this changing world—are countered (in stanza 5, for example) by incessant reminders of change: "seasonable," "fast-fading," "coming." In his other famous ode, the Grecian Urn is, again, a symbol of the permanence of art in a real world of change: but the art itself embodies change, and the scenes on the urn suggest a kind of restless incompleteness.

Keat's poetry, then, seems personal in a new kind of way: that is, we sense that an essential key to understanding it lies in Keats himself (rather than in the way Keats is manipulating certain conventional motifs). In Donne's "Valediction," we can work our way through the poem and congratulate ourselves, at the end, for understanding what Donne is up to. Reading Pope, we are rarely in any doubt about what Pope u=is saying or what we are supposed to think about it. But this sonnet of Keat's might well leave us somewhat bewildered. He seems to be yearning for two mutually irreconcilable things: the changeless, steadfast permanence of the star, and an attachment to human life (his fair love) that is by its nature inseparable from change. Death might provide permanence, but it would seem incompatible with that vision of life. But instead of intellectualizing the paradox, as Donne (or possibly

Pope) might have done, Keats embodies it in poem which, by consequence, seems to defy real resolution.

5.8 Analysis B: From Austen's Emma, Volume II, Chapter XIV

In case you haven't read the novel, here's how it begins: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." In the next 160 pages or so, Jane Austen introduces a few small vexations into Emma's life. Most notably, when Emma tries to make a match between her pretty protégée, Harriet Smith, and the local clergyman, Mr. Elton, she discovers to her horror that Mr. Elton wants to marry *her*, Emma! Of all the nerve! Emma rejects him firmly, and he, miffed, goes off and marries someone else. In the scene we're looking at, Emma and Harriet have just paid their first visit to the newly married couple.

As for Mr. Elton, his manners did not appear—but no, she would not permit a hasty or witty word from herself about his manners. It was an awkward ceremony at any time to be receiving wedding visits, and a man had need be all grace to quit himself well through it. The woman was better off; she might have the assistance of fine clothes, and privilege of bashfulness, but the man had only his own good sense to depend on; and when she considered how peculiarly unlucky poor Mr. Elton was in being in the same room at once with the woman he had just married, the woman he had wanted to marry, and the woman he had been expected to marry, she must allow him to have the right to look as little wise, and to be as much affectedly, and as little really easy as could be.

We'll pause here for a moment. In most of the novel we are given Emma's **point of view** on what is happening—a useful limitation, since that allows us (the readers) to be surprised when Emma is. In this scene, Austen seems to be giving us Emma's thoughts, but she does so through a rather interesting use of **indirect discourse** which makes it hard to distinguish between Emma's perceptions and Austen's own.

That the opening represents Emma's own thoughts is clear when she suddenly breaks off with that "but no." Yet these *are* thoughts: the "hasty or witty word" that Emma won't permit herself would be an unspoken word. That is, we see Emma's thinking as a form of unspoken speech (a model of the mind that the modernists, later, will call into question). Austen, in any case, has made clear that Emma is extremely clever—too clever, indeed, for her own good—and thus she is perfectly capable of the kind of mocking analysis that follows. Linking the "fine clothes" with "the privilege of bashfulness," of course, suggests that whatever bashfulness this new Mrs. Elton might be displaying (not much, it seems) is likely to be as artificial as the clothing: an act of social hypocrisy. And that hint of artifice continues at the end of this passage: "as much affectedly, and as little really easy as could be." Here we find the sort of antithetical balance we associate with the eighteenth century (remember Pope and Johnson): "affectedly" (= put on) is contrasted with "really," Mr., Elton tries to be suave, but he's really squirming.

You'll notice that this is not a compassionate depiction. Emma (like Austen) seems to take a certain cool pleasure in the awkwardness of the whole scene. "Poor Mr. Elton" receives no real pity.

> *"Well, Miss Woodhouse," said Harriet, when they had quitted the house, and after waiting in vain for her friend to begin; "Well, Miss Woodhouse, (with a gentle sign,) what do you think of her?—Is she not very charming?"*

There's was a little hesitation in Emma's answer.
"Oh! Yes—very—a very pleasing young woman..."
"I think her beautiful, quite beautiful."
"Very nice dressed, indeed; a remarkably elegant gown."
"I am not at all surprised that he should have fallen in love."
"Oh! No—there is nothing to surprise one at all.—A pretty fortune; and she came in his way."
"I dare say," returned Harriet, signing again, "I dare say she was very much attached to him."

We'll stop here. Notice that in this segment we've moved from Emma's own thoughts to a **dialogue** between her and Harriet. Austen includes a few stage directions (Harriet's sighs, Emma's hesitation), but does not tell us what is going on in the mind of either character. By **dramatizing** the scene she is counting on us to figure out what is going on beneath the surface.

What is going on? We might begin with the differences between the two speakers. Emma (we see elsewhere) always calls Harriet "Harriet"; Harriet always calls Emma "Miss Woodhouse." Why? Emma is older, richer, more sophisticated; Harriet is a girl of unknown parentage who is finishing her studies at a local school. The way they address each other reflects their differences in age and social class.

Harriet is in love with Mr. Elton. She is devastated that he has rejected her and married another. But she finds the new Mr. Elton "charming" and "beautiful." This seems to suggest a real generosity of spirit. And that final sighing speech implies that she attribute the same warm love to the happy bride that she would have felt herself.

What of Emma responses? After some hesitation she modifies "charming" to the more superficial "pleasing." Apparently she's reluctant to disagree openly with Harriet's assessment, but lacks Harriet's own enthusiasm. In the same way she revises Harriet's "beautiful" to "very nicely dressed"—a rather different form of praise. And she provides a cynical, mercenary twist to Harriet's "I am not at all surprised" to Emma's less personal—and more sophisticated—"there is nothing to surprise one at all.")

In this brief conversation, then, we're learning a good deal: about Mrs. Elton herself, about Harriet (simple, generous, naïve, and a lot more clever), about the relationship between Harriet and Emma. And behind it all is the complex view of human relationships we always find in Austen: those material considerations ("a pretty fortune") can never be disregarded as an element in the warmest of human attachments.

It is these nuances of character, psychology, and the social matrix, that the novel could depict (and dissect) in a way that earlier forms of literature could not.

6 The Twentieth Century

6.1 Modernism

The nineteenth century may have ended with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, or it may have lingered until the outbreak of World War I—the "Great War"—in 1914. But by the time the war had ended, in 1918, the world had clearly changed.

Many of these changes seem to be linked together, in some mysterious way. Artists like Picasso and Braque were suddenly painting weird paintings that didn't *represent* anything—they broke "reality" into weird little "cubist" shapes. Composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky's *sacred u Printemps* caused a riot in Paris in 1913. Physics was being transformed by Einstein's relativity theories and the development of quantum mechanics: it seemed that on some level you couldn't be sure of anything. There was an interesting new art form: movies.

Just as the Romantic writers of the early nineteenth century reacted against what they saw a the dry artifice and sterile rationalism of their century predecessors, the writers of the early twentieth century found themselves reacting against—well, against whatever Romanticism had become by 1900. In poetry the standard was Tennyson: smooth, mellifluous, sonorous verse. A misty, romantic sound-for-sound's sake dominated even more in the poetry of Swinburne, and the early verse of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). In fiction, the standard was social and psychological realism, brought to its peak with the French novelist Flaubert and the Russian Tolstoy. These were daunting figures. After *War and Peace or Anna Karenina*, what more could be done in this realistic vein?

A good many aspiring writers, born near the end of the nineteenth century, decided (in various ways, and for various reasons) that literature needed new directions and new models. Many of these writers came to England from elsewhere. In poetry, the young Americans Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot drew inspiration from the French Symbolists and the seventh-century English metaphysical. The American Henry James and the Polish Joseph Conrad helped blaze a new path for fiction. Among the results, for the first time in English literature, was a widening split between "serious" and "popular" literature. Many writers continued to write traditional fiction and poetry: Rudyard Kipling, H.G Wells, Arnold Bennett. But the literary sophisticates were coming to view with contempt the sort of story or poem that ordinary readers could read with untroubled pleasure. The world was too complex; the reassuring nineteenth century truths were being called into question; Freud was giving us a new model of the human psyche, in which we were driven by a seething, libidinous unconscious; the senseless slaughter of millions in the First World War called into question the smug European claims to have reached a new plane of turned out to be less noble and altruistic than their supporters claimed. A new literature that took this new reality into account could scarcely remain simple, bland, and easily accessible. The masses of humanity wanted simple, comforting lies; the job of the writers was to remind them of the difficult truth. Few, of course, wanted to be reminded, or to make the effort to figure out what these new writers were up to.

6.2 Poetry

When the St. Louis-born and Harvard-educated T.S Eliot moved (more or less permanently) to England in 1914, his fellow American Ezra Pound was already serving as a kind of John the Baptist for a new kind of poetry: "make it new!" Eliot—steeped in Greek literature, Dante, Elizabethan and Jacobean English literature, and

the difficult French symbolist poets of the late nineteenth century—had similar aspirations, and became the dominant figure in English literature in the first half of the twentieth century. The opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prutfrock" (1915) set this new tone, and in *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot seemed (to sophisticated readers) to sum up the new century's sense of exhaustion and disillusionment. "April is the cruelest month" because it provides delusive hope; in reality, the wasteland (an allusion to a mythic study of the Holy Grail legend) continues dry and bleak. The poem is full of quotations and echoes, in a bewildering assortment of languages: Greek, Sanskrit, Italian, French, and German. Here, for example, are the final lines:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
La Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronumo's mad againe.
Data. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

The ten separate footnotes that these lines receive in the *Norton Anthology of English literature* provide about five times as many words of commentary as Eliot provides in the actual poem. But who could make any sense of it otherwise? Indeed, even with this helping hand, how are we to figure out how "these fragments" are in fact to be fitted together? Apparently the ideal reader must have read and remembered most of world literature. This is not the sort of poem that the average bourgeois family would read aloud with delight as they sat around their cozy hearth.

In his later poems (notably the *Four Quartets*) and in his plays Eliot seeks refuge in an "Anglo-Catholic" version of Christianity, but the poems remain difficult. And throughout his career Eliot wrote brilliant critical essays which helped rehabilitate the seventeenth century English metaphysical poets (especially Donne and Marvell), gave the language a number of obscure but resonant phrases (we've mentioned "objective correlative" and "dissociation of sensibility"), and in the process supported the sort of thing that Eliot and his modernist allies were trying to do with poetry.

Eliot was not alone in signaling a new direction. As we noted, Thomas Hardy greeted the new century by turning from fiction to poetry: though his poetry is unlike Eliot's, it has a quality of rough, bleak, truth telling that sets it apart from the misty romantic stuff then in vogue. But the most remarkable transformation took place in the poetry of W.B. Yeats. His early verse was a mellifluous evocation of a romanticized world of Irish myth and legend. As he grew older—partly because of the influence of Pound and Eliot—his verse grew tougher, more in touch with reality, more resonant. And he managed to embody his fairly weird personal mythology (involving spirit advisors, phases of the moon, gyres, two-thousand-year cycles of human history) in language and situations increasingly unadorned and specific:

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher and to sing,
To study reading-books and history
In the best modern way…

Yeats is unusual: he keeps writing better poetry as he grows older (unlike, for instance, Wordsworth, who should probably have retired from poetry writing at the age of 35).

Compared with their anarchic American contemporaries, the English poets who dominated the first half of the century tended to keep writing in traditional forms, even if they put new wine in the old bottles: the rigorously classical Robert Graves (18995-1985), the wild Welshman Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), the astonishing clever W.H. Auden (1907-1973), who reversed Eliot's transatlantic transplantation by moving to New York City shortly before World War II. More widely popular (if less academically respectable) were the grim but lilting poems of A.E. Housman (1859-1936), the sea ballads of long-time Poet Laureate John Masefield (1878-1967), and, above all, the bouncing and memorable verse of Rudyard Kipling, the first English writer to receive a Nobel Prize (in 1907).

A note on those Nobel Prizes. The first awards were made in 1901. While prizes in physic tend to go to physicists who we still strike us as the most deserving, the prizes in literature seem much more random. Yeats (1923), Shaw (1925), and Eliot (1948) were eventually honored, but no prizes were ever given to Hardy, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence—or (to move beyond Britain) to Tolstoy, Twain, Proust, Kafka, Rilke…Instead we have Verner von Heidenstam, Karl Gjellerup, Carl Spitteler, Giosue CXarducci, Grazia Deledda—names that few of us are likely to recognize at all. Are judgments about writers less reliable than judgments about physicists? Perhaps Samuel Johnson was right, about the difficulty of making clear judgments about one's contemporaries?

6.3 Fiction

Henry James (1843-1916) and Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) have already been mentioned—two great English novelists, one from America and one from Poland, who chatted with each other in French. Not much actually happens in a typical James novel, but a great deal is perceived, or sensed, in a complicated nuanced way: James became the great theorist of the importance of "point of view" in fiction, and in the process helped move the status of fiction from popular entertainment to Art. Conrad's tales, often set on the sea or in remote parts of the globe, are much more full of incident, but readers sometimes find the result confusing—a language heavy with significance, draped over the events themselves, and an often "impressionistic" narrative, in which we are given appearances, without learning what the appearances add up to.

But James and Conrad were simplicity itself compared to James Joyce (1882-1941), the major modernist of English fiction. Stephen Dedalus, the hero of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is modeled (in some obvious ways) on Joyce himself—a young man born and educated in Ireland, arrogantly convinced of his own genius, stomping off to the continent to realize his artistic ambitions. Joyce himself went abroad in 1904 and stayed here (Paris, Zurich, Trieste) most of the rest of his life—writing all the time about Ireland. *Portrait of the Artist* tries to capture in appropriate words the shifting consciousness of the hero (from the beginning baby talk to the self-indulgent rhetoric of the conclusion). *Ulysses*, published in its entirety in 1922, is far more ambitious: a day in the life of a modern Jew in Dublin, Leopold Bloom, following (in some mysterious way) the structure of Homer's *Odyssey*, and written in a dizzying assortment of styles. Stephen Dedalus reappears here as Telemachus to Bloom's unheroic Ulysses; the novel concludes with a 45-page unpunctuated flow designed to capture the associative consciousness (or semi consciousness) of Bloom's wife, Molly (the Penelope figure):

Not too many ordinary readers could make it this far (page 754 in the Modern Library Giant edition), but the American courts decided that those few needed to be protected from lewd passages like this. So the book was banned from the United States, and made the subject of a celebrated court case, and this helped assure Joyce's fame.

Ulysses has proved tremendously influential, opening the way to similar **experimental** and **stream of consciousness** approaches even in popular fiction. In his final book, *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce creates a kind of new, multilayered language, loosely based on English but punning in a great many other tongues, which seems designed to suggest the multileveled, preverbal nature of the unconscious itself: in this case, the sleeping (?) mythic (?) figure Finn (?): "Orara por Orbe and poor Las Anima! Ussa, Ulla, we're umbras all! Mezha, didn't you hear it a deluge of times, ufer and ufer, respond to spond?" The book took Joyce fourteen years to write; he wanted it to take a lifetime to read. Few readers have made that commitment; few writers could take the experiment farther without cutting entirely adrift from any known language.

Joyce and Eliot are doing some similar things: using myth to try to integrate the fragmented modern world; dragging in all of the world's literatures and languages to the project; expecting that only a few highly refined readers will be able to meet the stringent requirements for making some sort of sense of the work.

Like Joyce, D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) kept finding his books banned and censored for indecency. But while sex, for Joyce, seems to have been mainly a component in his religion of art, art, for Lawrence, seems to have been mainly a vehicle for his religion of sex. From the brilliant (and largely autobiographical) *Sons and Lovers* (1913) on, Lawrence investigates the tension between aestheicized, intellectualized gentleness and dark, passionate, savage instinct. He prefers the later, and a weird peachiness can mar his extraordinary talent for capturing characters and scenes—a talent that also manifests itself in his poems and travel writings. Lawrence tended to see himself as a kind of rebellious outsider in the increasingly genteel world of English literature: the son of a coal miner, a vociferous objector (with a German wife) to the first World War, and, of course, a prophet of dark, passionate sex. He went to Italy, Australia, Mexico, New Mexico, and finally died of tuberculosis in France.

Far more genteel are the writers (and artists, philosophers, economists, and so forth) clustered under the general name "Bloomsbury." "Bloomsbury" in fact is a neighborhood in London, near the British Museum, where many of these people lived. (A nearly hotel coffee shop now advertises the Virginia Woolfburger.) "These people" include the philosopher Bertrand Russell (who won a Nobel Prize in literature in 1950), the economist J.M. Keynes, the eccentric historian Lytton Strachey, and an assortment of cutting-edge artists and art critics (Roger Fry, Clive and Vanessa Bell, Augustus John). A great deal has been written about their complicated interrelationships, their love affairs with each other—a kind of intellectual "Bloomsbury 90210." But at least two of the novelists from this is best known for *A passage to India*, which examines (among other things) the psychological implications of British colonialism; his fiction is, at least on the surface, a great deal more traditional than of Joyce. Woolf, in novels like *To the Lighthouse*, probes inner consciousness rather than representing outward incident, and her fiction (like Joyce's) makes considerable demands on the alertness of the reader. Woolf's essays have also made her a major voice of twentieth-century feminism.

There were many other strands of fiction. H.G. Wells was to some extent inventing science fiction; Dorothy Sayers and others wrote murder mysteries which are highly literate and hugely popular; J.C. and Llewellyn Powys wrote rather weird mixtures of realism and fantasy; George Orwell (1903-1950) wrote a number of influential essays and two famous novels of political commentary: *Animal Farm* and

1984. And Evelyn Waugh (1903-66), author of a series of darkly hilarious satirical novels (*A handful of Dust*) seems to be rising in the literary stock market. Not to speak of the Nobel-Prize-winning John Galsworthy (1867-1933), whose resolutely traditional *Forstye Saga* gained new popularity some years ago when it was translated for television.

6.4 Other Writing

Shaw kept writing plays, but did anyone else—apart from light, well-crafted, ephemeral entertainments? Not until after World War II, with writers like John Osborne and Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard, did English theater get interesting again. The highly literate Bloomsbury people wrote all kind of stuff; we are likely to find their private letters and journals more fun than their more "serious" essays, histories, art criticism, and the like. But by now the field of "literature" has shrunk—in part as serious academic professionals take over the writing of history and philosophy and science from the clever amateurs of earlier centuries. Serious academic professionals rarely write (or try to write!) anything that might get called "literature." (An exception to all this might be made for the cigar-chomping politician Winston Churchill, who, rather perplexingly, won the Nobel Prize for literature, ostensibly for his history writing.)

6.5 The Last Fifty Years

If you've ever walked around in the middle of a range of mountains, you'll have noticed that it's very hard to tell the difference between lofty peaks and nearby ridges. Most of the time you can't even see the lofty peaks: there are too many nearby ridges in the way. Move fifty miles away, across some open plains, and you have no such problem: the lofty peaks raise high above their neighbors, and all those ridges have become invisible.

In a way, this is how it is with literature. If you'd asked a savvy Londoner in the year 1600 that the important writers were, the savvy Londoner might have mentioned Shakespeare, but would probably have included people like Munday and Chettle and Greene and Nashe and Drayton and Daniel and maybe even John Taylor the Water Poet. Three hundred years later Shakespeare loomed above the rest of this crowd, and Drayton and Daniel were respectable lesser peaks, and Chettle and Munday had disappeared. Time doesn't always tell, but it helps. Samuel Johnson, as we've already seen, made this point earlier. And we're still too close to the last fifty years to know what—of who—will strike readers two centuries from now as significant, or still interesting, or characteristic of their period. We don't even know what to call the period. Postwar? Postmodern? Late twentieth century? Post literate?

A few trends, or tendencies, seem clear. A central ambition of the modernist pioneers (Joyce, Eliot, Woolf) had been to break free from the traditional, worn-out literary forms and create a new way to understand reality. No more coherent narrative, no more mellifluous rhyming verse, no more faithful depiction of social surface! Literature would develop a new way of using language to suggest the movement of consciousness itself; would draw o n all the resources of the literary past to create a new kind of literary future; would educate readers to a new way of reading.

By 1950 Joyce and Woolf (and a lot of other people) were dead, and Eliot had become a kind of institution, a voice of literary and cultural conservation. Modernism had lost its leaders and was losing stream. Only Samuel Beckett, an Irish exile living

in France (and writing for the most part in French), seemed to be doing anything really new and vital in the modernist vein. Readers apparently didn't want to be reeducated: they continued, perversely, to want coherent stories, familiar-sounding verse. And maybe Joyce had too much faith in the power of language itself. Maybe the modernist ambitions were, in a sense, too ambitious.

Meanwhile England itself was losing its empire and its sense of identity. India and English-speaking countries of Africa gained independence. Australia and Canada seemed to be drifting from the control of the parent country. For the second time in a century the United States had crossed the ocean to rescue the British from a European conflict, and America seemed increasingly the cultural as well as the economic and military center of the English-speaking world. Had England reverted to a little island off the coast of Europe? What was its role in the world?

Whatever the answer to that question, it was clear that "English literature" was becoming increasingly global. English-literature writers from Australia, Nigeria, South Africa, and the Caribbean won Nobel prizes. There was an efflorescence of "Anglophone" literature in India and Canada. Writers with Japanese names won big English literary awards. National boundaries seemed less and less meaningful. And if many of these writers were writing in a kind of nineteenth-century manner (coherent stories, plausible characters), the manner gained freshness by being transplanted into a new cultural soil.

Critics kept looking for a pattern. The post war generation of Kingsley Amis and John Osborne was, for a time, called "the angry young men"—they were men, they were young, they seemed to be angry. But the name proved misleading. It suggested a kind of social-political-aesthetic radicalism. But Amis, who continued to write extremely funny novels, turned out to be a conservative crank on most of these issues. Other trends foundered as well. The major English poets reverted to traditional forms: Robert Graves, continuing his rigorous classicism; Philip Larkin, whose view of the world was rather bleak; Ted Hughes, who wrote about savage birds and animals, drove women to suicide (e.g. first wife Sylvia Plath), and ended up Poet Laureate. Drama staged resurgence.

It was an age of rapid technological advance. In 1960, most people who crossed the ocean still did so in ships. A few decades later swift jet airplanes whisked them around the globe in hours. Television became omnipresent. Computers burst on the scene. Devices designed to save time and labor proliferated/ Strangely enough, as time and labor were saved, people seemed to have increasingly less leisure to read books. What was happening? Was literature in its traditional form dying? Would movies, television, or computer games take over?

In 1900, no one could guess what the twentieth century would be like. In 1800, Romanticism was still a blip on the horizon. Once more, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the future is a mystery.

6.6 Analysis A: Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," lines 1-36

First we have that title, with the rather fussily unromantic name of Eliot's invented hero, and then six lines of Italian poetry, an **epigraph**, which most modern anthologies conveniently translate and identify: a character in Dante's *Inferno* tells Dante that he will speak to him only because he knows that no one ever returns from Hell to the land of the living. But Eliot's original readers, lacking such assistance, might have felt that they were being subjected to rather a severe test: abandon hope, all ye who enter here! Then the poem itself begins:

Let us go then, you an I,
While the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table.

The title tells us that this is a love song, but already something seems not quite right. What do we make of that "then" in the first line? It sounds more like a resigned shrug than a romantic overture. And while the first line is seven syllables long, with four beats, the second line sprawls on for eleven syllables: an ungainly line for normal English poetry. And the image seems uncomfortable: how, exactly, can the evening be "spread out against" the sky—is it a kind of stage set? And what about the simile in line three? In Donne, you can always work out the analogies (virtuous men die mildly=true lovers part without grief), but how exactly is the evening supposed to resemble a patient "etherized upon a table?" "Etherized," moreover, is the sort of word previous poets would almost certainly have rejected as hideous and unpoetic. Why is Eliot rubbing our faces?

But ether is an anaesthetic; the patient is anaesthetized; the evening, by extension, is anaesthetized. We are warned that this love song is likely to offer us no traditional passion or feeling.

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question…

The metrical irregularities continue. And the words continue to suggest joylessness: "half-deserted," "muttering," "restless," "cheap," "tedious," "insidious." Those one-night cheap hotels are like hourly-rate motels: love at its most sordid. J. Alfred doesn't seem to be promising "you" a totally fun night on the town. And the streets lead to another odd simile: they are like "a tedious argument/ of insidious intent." Somehow the literal act of walking through these dreary streets turns into a kind of philosophical exercise of following a dreary argument, that suddenly leads you—where? To an "overwhelming question" that our speaker keeps evading through the poem.

And who is "you"? When Shakespeare says his absence from "thee" has been like a winter, only the most egocentric readers can imagine that Shakespeare intends to address them directly. We assume that the poem is addressed to some other character (the fair young man, for example). The same is true with Donne, and with most other traditional love lyrics: we imagine that the poet has a particular human being in mind, though often the poem can be readdressed to some other particular human being. But here Eliot's "you" may begin to trouble us. Can he mean—*me*? After all, there's that epigraph from Dante. Maybe this "you" represents some free-floating reader who is caught in the same metaphysical hell as J. Alfred?

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

"Let us go" picks up the opening words of the poem, but now the object is "our visit." What visit? We aren't told. Instead, we're given a couplet about women in a room,

talking Michelangelo. Eliot provides no explicit connection; instead he **juxtaposes** this scene next to its predecessor, and leaves it to us to figure out how the two are related. This approach leads (needless to say) to lively critical disagreements. But it also leads to some of the mysterious power of the poem. (It also stems from the model of nineteenth century. French **symbolist** poetry, which strongly influenced the young Eliot: a poetry that suggests such mysterious correspondences between things without articulating the exact links in those correspondences.)

Ina n essay on *Hamlet*, Eliot says that writers must find an **objective correlative** for an emotion. That is (roughly), instead of saying "I am happy" or "expressing" happiness ("Whoopes!") they need to find some "objective" image, or story, that will awaken a corresponding emotion in the reader. Perhaps we can see these women as such an objective correlative: they stand for something, symbolize something. If so, what? The best we can do is to frame a hypothesis and test it out through the rest of the poem. Here is one possible hypothesis. Michelangelo is a famous sixteenth century artist who plays no other role in the poem. He is also a cultural icon. The sorts of women who come and go in a room, talking of Michelangelo, are like to be well-educated, sophisticated women—not low class sluts. But "talking of" suggests superficiality: the sort of thing you talk about to show that you're well-educated and sophisticated, not because you have anything interesting to say about it (in which case, if it mattered, we'd be told what interesting things they have to sat). So these are somewhat intellectual society women, playing their parts. This does, to a degree, fit some of the other segments of the poem. Prufrock seems strangled by civilized inhibitions. "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons"—not, for example, gin bottles or crack pipes. So possibly this visit he is making with such a weary sense of obligation ("then") is a social visit to a bunch of oppressively civilized women who wander about, talk endlessly of High Art, and sip coffee.

And maybe not. Construct your own alternative argument!

Anyway, like a **refrain**, this couplet about the women frames a pair of stanzas that introduces the yellow smoke (or fog) and adds to the mood. In the first stanza, the "yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes" is pretty clearly being turned into a metaphorical cat. (Eliot was fond of cats, and his light verse about cats was much later turned into a hit musical: *Cats.*) This yellow cat-fog "Curled once about the house, and fell asleep"—the house, one assumes, where the civilized women are chatting about Michelangelo. By the second of these stanzas, we become aware of another pattern in the poem, an almost musical pattern. Eliot gives us a line, like a musical theme, and then repeats it, with modifications:

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back upon the window panes.
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
Those lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred revisions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

And the next section, after a repeat of the Michelangelo women, begins "And indeed there will be time."

A footnote in the Norton Anthology calls out attention to the opening lines of Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress": "Had we but world enough and time." Marvell's is a *carpe diem* seduction poem: if I had time I would praise you in the leisurely way you deserve, but we don't have time, we're going to die soon, so we need to take advantage of the time remaining. Eliot expects his readers to pick up these **allusions** to other literature. But what are we to do with them? In this case (as often, later, in *The Waste Land*) Eliot seems to suggest a contrast between an earlier sense of possibility and a modern sense that those possibilities are exhausted. If Marvell's speaker had time, he would spend it in all kind of wonderful ways. *We* have time, says Prufrock—to fill with weary repletion. "Murder and create" **sounds** promising—significant stuff!—but then it's undercut by those hands "that lift and drop a question on your plate." "A hundred visions" sounds grandiose, but then it too is undercut by "and revisions" (prefiguring and later ironic reference to John the Baptist). And all of this leads to—what? "The taking of a toast and tea." "No great matter," as the non-prophet Prufrock later says. "There will be time, there will be time"—but empty time, it seems, time within which nothing, finally, may be "worth while."

6.7 Analysis B: Woolf's To The Lighthouse, first two paragraphs

We'll look at the very beginning of Virginia Woolf's novel, and see what Woolf is doing with the novel form.

> *"Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow," said Ramsay. "But you'll have to be up with the lark," she added.*

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled, the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch. Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which can not keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such people even in early childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallize and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests, James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy. The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the sound of popular trees, leaves whitening before rain, rocks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling—all these were so colored and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language, though he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity, with his high forehead and his fierce blue eyes, impeccably candid and pure, frowning slightly at the sight of human frailty, so that his mother, watching him guide his scissors round the refrigerator, imagined him all red and ermine on the bench or directing a stern and momentous enterprise in some crisis of public affairs.

With that opening "Yes," Mrs. Ramsay seems to be responding to something, but we don't yet know what: we have to piece that together in the following pages. In fact it turns out that she is agreeing that they can take a boat trip across to a lighthouse. But it further turns out that the weather next day is bad and they can't in fact go—that they don't go on this little trip for another ten years, by which time James is sixteen, and Mrs. Ramsay is dead, and World War I has disrupted a good deal of normal life, and all the surviving characters have changed in various subtle

ways. Only at the end of the book, three hundred pages later, do they actually reach this lighthouse.

The second paragraph starts by showing us the mind of six-year-old James, then it moves to the mind of his mother. We clearly have an omniscient narrator: not only can she enter the minds of her characters at will, but she distills what she finds there into her won words. We do not, that is (as we do sometimes in Austen and often in Joyce) sense the illusion that the words are designed to capture the actual flow of thought of the character. Young James may find everything dominated by his immediate feelings, but it is the narrator who understand this, places his as a member of a "great clan," calls attention to the gap between the way he appears from the outside (an "image of stark and uncompromising severity") and what he feels inside ("extraordinary joy"). The language is adult language.

Yet is we compare this with the passage from *Emma* we looked at earlier, we can see that where Austen gives us thought as unspoken language and rational judgment, Woolf is focusing on feelings that seem out of proportion to the external circumstances that kindle them. We can extend this difference. In Austen, the **plot**—a linked sequence of external events—is integrally connected to everything that is important to these characters. Consider just one strand in *Emma*. At the beginning of the book, Mrs. Weston gets married; as a result, Emma needs a companion and picks on Harriet Smith; as a result she decides to make a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton; as a result Mr. Elton snubs Harriet; as a result Mr. Knightley champions Harriet; as a result Emma realizes that she actually wants to marry Mr. Knightley herself; as a result she does marry Mr. Knightley. Each link in the chain is necessary to reach the next link, and the final link is all-important: a suitable marriage is always the goal (and conclusion) of an Austen novel, as it assures lasting happiness to the Austen heroine.

But Woolf has no real plot, and in *To the Lighthouse* what is important to these characters has only a tenuous relationship to external events. The novel is in three parts. The second part, "Times Passes," serves as a bridge between the first section ("The Window") and the last, ten years later ("The Lighthouse"). In the second part we learn, in passing, of the death of Mrs. Ramsay, the outbreak of war, the death of two of the other Ramsay children: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]" In any sort of conventional plot the death of a major character would not be presented, parenthetically, in such an offhand way. But what not in their effect in a casual chain of other events.

If we go back and look at young James, cutting out his pictures of a refrigerator, we're also struck by the fact that he is a child. In Austen, children are of no real interest: they have not yet reached the age of reason. It was the Romantics (in some ways ultimately following the lead of Rousseau) who "discovered childhood"—discovered the "the child is father of the man" (as Wordsworth says), that what we are as adults owes a great deal to what we were as children, and that as adults we may feel nostalgia for the intense feelings of childhood. And, indeed, Woolf's technique in this novel is more akin to Wordsworth's in *The Prelude* than it is to the more traditional novelistic approach of Austen: spots of time, moments of feeling, linked in somewhat unpredictable ways to external events. How, in this passage, is Mrs. Ramsay, however kind a mother,, to guess at the magical joy her opening words have given to her severe-looking son?

6.8 Analysis C: from Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Chapter 10, Part 1

The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe begins his influential essay on "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" with a couple of illustrative anecdotes. In one, he receives two letters "from high school children in Yonkers, New York, who—bless their teacher—had just read *Things Fall Apart*. One of them was particularly happy to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe." This "young fellow from Yonkers," Achebe says, "is obviously unaware that the life of his own tribesmen in Yonkers, New York is full of odd customs and superstitions and, like everybody else in his culture, imagines that he need a trip to Africa to encounter these things." Achebe goes on to point out that Conrad's novella is both a symptom and a cause of this mistaken view.

Book jacket blurbs and anthology introductions agree that Okonkwo, the central figure of *Things Fall Apart*, is a **tragic hero**, noble but flawed. But the tenth chapter of Part One seems to have little to do with the tragedy of Okonkwo, except to suggest that Okonkwo is in fact one of the nine horribly masked *egwugwu*. Instead, the chapter might appear to justify the comment of the young fellow from Yonkers—there simply to provide a picture of the "customs and superstitions of an African tribe."

In fact Achebe's novel generally lacks the tightly-plotted structure of a Sophoclean tragedy. The events of the book revolve around Okonkwo, from his early success (at wrestling, at yam-growing, at becoming the opposite of everything his father stood for) to his unhappy death. The events themselves matter: this is not *To the Lighthouse*. But many of the episodes seem only loosely related to the developing "tragedy of Okonkwo": the search for Ekwefi's *iyi-uwa*; the story about Tortoise and the feast in the sky; this scene in which the *egwugwu* render judgments. Why has Achebe included these episodes, if not to provide some interesting local color? By what principle has he organized his story?

In his essay, Achebe accuses Conrad of a pervasive "dehumanization of African and Africans": Africa is the dark backdrop for the disintegration of the European mind, and the Africans themselves, lacking speech or thought, engage in terrifying displays of primitive savagery for no intelligible reason. Achebe quotes Conrad: "They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar." They appeal to some dark, savage substratum beneath the veneer of civilization.

Getting back to Achebe's own novel, in chapter ten he shows us, in these masked *egwugwu*, figures as terrifying as (and reminiscent of) Conrad's wild and barbarous crew. Smoke pours from the head of Evil Forest, for example. But Achebe gives his terrifying figures a real social function. In this chapter they are settling disputes. The first dispute involves a man whose wife's relatives have taken back his wife and refused to refund him the "bride price." The man, Uzowulu, states his side of the case. The wife's brother, Odukwe, gives his side, claiming that Uzowulu has behaved like a beast and beaten his wife; should he "recover from his madness" they would return his wife "on the understanding that if he ever beats he again we shall cut his genitals for him."

The crowd roared with laughter. Evil Forest rose to his feet and order was immediately restored. A steady cloud of smoke rose from his head. He sat down again and called two witnesses. They were both Uzowulu's neighbors, and they agreed about the beating. Evil Forest then stood up, pulled out his staff, and thrust it into the earth again. He ran a few steps in the dirction of the women; they all fled in terror, only to return to their places almost immediately. The nine *egwugwu* then went away to consult together in their house.

A barbarous, primitive, savage display—seen, from Conrad's perspective, from the outside, with no sense that the display could actually serve some real human function. But as Achebe presents it we see this display as no more bizarre (perhaps) than the spectacle of nine Supreme Court Justices in long black robes filing in to judgment as a clerk shouts as unintelligible announcement in Old French. The spectacle itself lends authority to the judgment. After the *egwugwu* have returned and Evil Forest has announced the verdict, the chapter ends:

> *"I don't know why such a trifle should come before the egwugwu," said one elder to another.*
> *"Don't you know what kind of man Uzowulu is? He will not listen to any other decision," replied the other.*
> *As they spoke two other groups of people had replaced the first before the egwugwu, and a great land case began.*

In the first of these passages, Evil Forest restores order to the assembly as a whole; in the second, through these anonymous commentators, we learn that the authority of the *egwugwu* will make the unruly Uzowulu comply with the decision and stop beating his wife. That is, the masks, the smoke, the weirdness—all have a purpose.

So why is Achebe showing us this? The organization of *Things Fall Apart* seems in many ways **thematic**—that is, based on certain underlying **themes** that we find in the novel. In this case we can identify two central themes to which the scene may be relevant. One has to do with the character of Okonkwo. Okonkwo is a violence-prone man. He tends to fly into rages and beat his wives. Achebe wants us to see that his behavior is specific to Okonkwo: it is not behavior condones or encouraged by the culture as a whole. The scene in chapter ten shows us this: "It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman."

More central still is the theme that the world of Umuofia is a coherent and functioning culture. A diverse group of human beings grow their crops, celebrate marriages, tell stories, exchange visits—in short, live like a human community. It was, you'll recall, this sense that Achebe says is lacking in Conrad's picture of Africa. And it is this culture, this coherence, that "falls apart" in the end as the result of the coming of the white man. The last line of the novel is the title of the book that the District Commissioner, a somewhat less loomy version of Mr. Kurtz, is planning to write: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. The title is ironic, of course: "pacification" is a euphemism for "destruction," and "primitive" results from the typical European-Conradian viewpoint. The English are bringing civilization, order, an up-to-date administrative and judicial system. But none of this works nearly as well as the native counterparts they supplant, flawed though those may have been. The assembly of the *egwugwu* looks like the epitome of the primitive, but, as we see, it succeeds: it settles disputes effectively, it maintains social order. When Evil Forest rises, the crowd stops laughing; when he rushes in the direction of the women, they run away. But the crowd laughed in the first place, and the women immediately return: they are on some level aware that this is a symbolic fiction, though a fiction they must take seriously. These are not, that is, ignorant savages paralyzed with superstitious dread. And the *egwugwu* base their judgment not on some demonic inspiration, but on the testimony of witnesses, the evaluation of the characters of the people involved a long consolation among themselves. Later, we see that the imported, "civilized" system of justice not only is more truly ignorant and barbarous, but is far less effective: it makes no effort the understand the people whom it is "judging."

This theme, then, is a kind of answer to Conrad: Africa was—and is—a real place, populated by genuine human beings (not parodic subhuman savages) who have real and functioning cultures. Okonkwo's fate epitomizes the fate of the culture

of Umuofia as a whole, so his story can be intertwined with scenes illustrative of the culture. But to whom does Achebe need to make the case? When we read Jane Austen, we are likely to find elements of the social order she depicts very strange. But Austen never does what Achebe does here—show us the working of that social order simply in order, and will have the same knowledge (or that) it works. That is because she assumes that her readers are part of the same order, and will have the same knowledge (and values) that she has. But Achebe is writing for two worlds, two audiences. There is the Nigerian audience, the descendants of the process he depicts in his novel, who might welcome a reminder, or reassurance, that when they read Conrad they aren't really looking into a mirror. And there is the European audience, trained (by Conrad and a lot else) to think of Africa as a land without a past, without any coherent tradition of humanity. How to dissuade them of that view without explicitly presenting a picture of precisely that tradition?

A Timeline of English Literature & History

BEFORE CHRIST (B.C)

1900 Construction of Stonehenge begins around this time

12-1300 Invasion of England by Celtic-speaking peoples

55-54 Julius Caesar's expeditions reach England

THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

5-40 Reign of Cunobelinus (Cymbeline)

43 Roman conquest of England

122 Romans begin construction of Hadrian's Wall to defend Britain against invasions from the north

313 Christianity introduced in England

350 Invasion of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes begins

429 Withdrawal of Roman legions from England is complete by this date or earlier

5?? Arthur defeated and killed in Civil War

597 St. Augustine re-establishes the Roman Church in England

663 Roman Christianity is endorsed by the Synod of Whitby (instead of Celtic Christianity)

731 **Bede**, *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People* ["Caedmon's Hymn"]

757 Offa, King of Mercia, begins his reign

802 Egbert, King of Wessex

856-75 Viking raids at their peak

871-99 King Alfred the Great of Wessex (defeater of the Danes)

900-950 An English state is established

978 Ethelred the Unready reigns; Danish invasions resume

____ ***The Dream of the Rood***
Beowulf
The Battle of Maldon
The Wanderer

1016 Canut of Denmark rules England, Denmark, and Norway

1042 King Edward the Confessor (Wessex line)

1066 **William the Conqueror** (*NORMANDY*) defeats Harold II in The Battle of Hastings

1086 *The Doomsday Book*

1087 William II (third son of William) King

1100 William II shot in ambush. Henry I (youngest son of William) King

1135 Stephen (*BLOIS*--grandson of William I by daughter) competes with Empress Matilda for throne ("The Anarchy")

1154 Henry II (*PLANTAGENT*-- grandson of Henry I by daughter)

1170 Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in the cathedral
Oxford University founded at about this time

1169 Conquest of Ireland is begun

1189 Richard I, Coeur de Lion (son of Henry II) King

1190 Richard goes on Crusade, to return in 1194

1199 John Lackland (son of Henry II, brother of Richard) King

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

1210 Cambridge University founded at about this time

1215 Magna Carta

1216 Henry III (son of John) King (builder of Westminster Abbey)

1272 Edward I, Longshanks, Prince of Wales King (son of Henry III)

1284 Conquest of Wales

1290 Jews Expelled from England

1307 Edward II (son of Edward I) King; deposed and murdered in 1327 by Queen Isabella and Mortimer

1327 Edward III of Windsor (son of Edward II, grandson of John) King

1337 100 Years War Begins (Edward III's claim to crown of France)

1346 Battle of Crecy, England defeats France's feudal armies

1348 The Black Death Strikes England

1362 William Langland, ***The Vision of Piers Plowman***
English officially replaces French as the language of the court

1375 ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

1377 Richard II (grandson of Edward III) King

1381 Peasant's Revolt

1386 ***Chaucer***, Canterbury Tales

1393 Julian of Norwich, Book of Showings, contains her visions from God

____ ***The Second Shepherds' Play***

1399 Henry IV (*LANCASTER*--grandson of Edward III) King

1400 Welsh revolt under Owen Glendower

1403 Henry Percy (Shakespeare's Hotspur) defeated at Shrewsbury

1413 Henry V, Prince Hal (son of Henry IV) King

1415 Battle of Agincourt; five years later, Henry recognised as heir to French crown

1422 Henry VI (Son of Henry V)

1431 Joan of Arc is burned

1432 Margery Kempe, ***The Book of Margery Kempe***

1453 Hundred Years War ends with conquest of of Guienne by the French

1455 The War of The Roses Begins--Lancaster vs. York

1461 Edward IV (*YORK*--Great-great-grandson Edward III) King, temporarily deposes Henry VI

1469 Sir Thomas Malory (***Morte D'arthur***)

1471 Henry VI murdered

1483 Edward V (son of Edward IV) King and murdered
Richard III, Crookback King

1485 Richard III dies in battle at Bosworth--The War of the Roses ends
Henry VII King (*TUDOR*-- married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV)

____ ***Everyman***

THE 16th CENTURY

1509 Henry VIII (son of Henry VII) King

1516 Sir Thomas Moore's *Utopia*
(also wrote *History of King Richard III*; he was killed for his Catholic faith)

1517 Reformation Begins

1533 Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterburry, validates Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn

1534-5 Papal authority abolished in England; Moore executed; Act of Supremacy

____ **John Skelton,** "Colin Clout"

1534 Henry VIII acknowledged "supreme Head on Earth" by Anglican Church

1537 **Howard, Earl of Surrey** ("My Friend, the Things That Do Attain") imprisoned

1538 Great English Bible

1541 **Wyatt** ("Whoso List to Hunt") imprisoned

1547 Edward VI King

1553 Mary I, "Bloody Mary" Queen (daughter of Henry VIII)
Attempts to restore Catholicism, repeals anti-papal legislation

1554 Lady Jane Grey executed

1558 Mary I dies childless. Elizabeth I (daughter Henry VIII) Queen

1559 Act of Supremacy restores Anglican Church

1560 Anglo-Scottish Alliance in Treaty of Edninburgh

1561 Mary Queen of Scotts (Catholic) begins rule in Scotland
Sir Thomas Hoby, translation of ***The Courtier***

1563 The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church

1564 **Shakespeare** is born

1567 Mary Queen of Scots imprisoned in England (driven from throne by Calvinists)

1578 John Lyly**,** *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*

1587 Elizabeth beheads Mary Queen of Scots for Catholic plots

1588 Defeat of the Spanish Armada

1590 **Edmund Spencer,** *The Faerie Queen*

1591 **Sir Philip Sidney**, "Astrophil and Stella"

1592 **Christopher Marlowe**, *Dr. Faustus* and *Hero and Leander*
Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless, His Supplication to the Devil*

1593 Richard Hooker defends existing practices in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*

1598 Revolt in Ireland

1601 Essex executed for rebellion
Thomas Campion ("My Sweetest Lesbia." "Rose-Cheeked Laura," "Fain Would I Wed")
Shakespeare begins *Hamlet* about this time

EARLY 17th CENTURY

1603 Elizabeth dies. James I (*STUART*), James VI of Scotland King

1605 **The Gunpowder Plot**
Francis Bacon writes *The Advancement of Learning* (In 1620 *Novum Organum*)

1606 **Ben Jonson's** play *Volpone* published

1611 King James Bible Published

1615 **John Donne** ("The Ecstasy", "The Canonization", etc.) becomes Anglican priest

1616 **Shakespeare** dies

1618 30 Years War begins in Europe

1620 Pilgrims depart for New England

1600's **John Webster** publishes his play *The Duchess of Malf*

1625 Charles I (son of James I) King

1629 Charles I dissolves parliament

1633 **George Herbert**, *The Temple* ("Jordan", "The Pulley", "Love", etc.)

1638 Scottish revolt over imposition of Laudian liturgy

1640 Charles I, in need of tax money for war, convenes "The Long Parliament"
Izaak Walton, *The Life of Donne*
Thomas Carew, "A Rapture"

1641 Irish revolt

1642 **English Civil War**
Theaters closed
Sir John Denham, "Cooper's Hill"

1645 Edmund Waller, "Go, Lovely Rose!"

1646 **Richard Crashaw**, "Steps to the Temple", "The Flaming Heart"
Sir John Suckling, "Loving and Beloved"

1648 30 Years War Ends
Robert Herrick, *Hesperides* ("The Vine") and *Noble Numbers* (sacred)

1649 Charles I beheaded. Council of State rules (Commonwealth/Protectorate)
Richard Lovelace "To Althea, from Prison" and "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars"

1650 **Henry Vaughn**, "Silex Scintillans"

1651 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

1653 Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector

____ First appearance of women on stage
___ First performance of an English opera

1656 Abraham Cowley, "Ode: Of Wit"

1658 Richard Cromwell, "Tumble-down Dick" (son of Oliver), Lord Protector

____ **Andrew Marvell**, "To His Coy Mistress"
Samuel Pepys (diary later published in 1825)

THE RESTORATION AND 18th CENTURY

1660 **The Restoration** (Charles II)

1662 Royal Society of London incorporated to promote arts and sciences

1663 Samuel Butler, "Hudibras"
John Milton, **Paradise Lost**

1665 The Plague breaks out

1666 The Great Fire of London

1673 Test Act requires office holders to accept rites of the Anglican Church

1675 John Bunyan writes *Pilgrim's Progress* during second imprisonment
Christopher Wren is chosen to design St. Paul's

1676 Sir George Etherege, *The Man of Mode*

1677 John Dryden, *All For Love*

1678 Titus Oates exposes the details of a fictious Popish Plot to kill the King

1680 **Exclusion Bill Crisis**

1681 John Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel"

1682 Thomas Otway, **Venice Preserv'd**

1685 James II King

1687 Isaac Newton, *Principles of Mathematics*

1688 **The Glorious Revolution**

1689 Bill of Rights passed

1690 **John Locke**, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

1696 Sir John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*

1700 William Congreve, *The Way of the World*

1701 Act of Settlement stipulates that Anne, Protestant daughter of James II, is to succeed William

1702 Anne (second daughter of James II) Queen

1704 The Duke of Marlborough's victory at Blenheim against the French

1707 George Farquhar, *The Beaux' Stragem*
Act of Union (Scotland + England = "Great Britain")

1709-11 Addison (paper Tattler)

1711 Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism" (later wrote **"An Essay on Man"**)

1711-2 Steele's paper Spectator

1713 Treaty of Utrecht ends the war with Louis XIV

1714 George I (*HANOVER*--son of granddaughter of James I) King
Alexander Pope, "Rape of the Lock"

1715 First Jacobite Rebellion:
"The Old Pretender" (son of James II) attempts to restore Stuart rule

1719 Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is published

1726 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

1727 George II

1728 John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*

1729 John Wesley founds Methodist Society

1730 James Thomson, "The Seasons"

1731 Henry Fielding, *Tom Thumb*

1739 War of Jenkin's Ear (with Spain) begins (to 1741)

1746 Second Jacobite rebellion crushed at Culloden
(Bonnie Prince Charles--grandson of James II--tried to regain the throne)
William Collins ("Ode on the Poetical Character")

1751 Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"
Henry Fielding**,** *Amelia*

1755 Samuel Johnson finishes his Dictionary (James Boswell later writes his biography)

1756 The Seven Years' War (French and Indian Wars) begins

1759 Wolfe captures Quebec

1760 George III (grandson of George II) King

1761 William Pitt resigns as Prime Minister when his colleagues refuse to fight Spain

1763 Treaty of Paris ends the Seven Years War

1768 Cook's voyage to Australia

1770 Oliver Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village"

1771 Richard Cumberland, *The West Indian*

1773 Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*

1775 War for American Independence Begins
Jane Austen is born

1776 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (first volume)

1777 Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*

1783 William Pitt (younger) prime minister

1785 William Cowper, "The Task"

THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

1786 Robert Burns: *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*

1789 *The French Revolution begins*

1790 *Songs of Innocence and Experience* by **William Blake**

1792 Mary Wollstonecraft**,** *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

1793 Bastille stormed. Louis XVI executed. Reign of Terror under Robespierre.
England wars with France; the Napoleonic Wars begin

1798 **Wordsworth** and **Coleridge** publish *Lyrical Ballads*

1801 Great Britain and Ireland Unite as the "United Kingdom"

1804 Napoleon crowned emperor

1805 Battle of Trafalgar

1811 The Regency
Prince of Wales acts as regent for George III, who has been declared incurably insane

1812 War with the United States

1813 **Jane Austen**, *Pride and Prejudice*

1815 Napoleon defeated at Waterloo

1817 William Hazlitt, critic, *On Gusto*
Jane Austen dies

1818 **Lord Byron** begins "Don Juan"
Mary (Wollstonecraft) Shelly**,** *Frankenstein*

1819 John Keats "Ode to a Nightingale"
Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*
Peterloo Massacre

1820 George IV (son of George III) King
Thomas Love Peackock**,** critic *The Four Ages of Poetry*
Percy Shelley "To a Skylark" and "Adonais"

1821 Thomas De Quincey *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*

1823 **Charles Lamb**, *Christ Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago*

1829 Catholic Emancipation Act

1830 William IV (3rd son of George III) King
Thomas Moore *Life of Byron*

THE VICTORIAN AGE / 19th CENTURY

1832 First Reform Bill

1834 Poor Law Reform Act

1837 Victoria (daughter of 4th son of George III) Queen
Thomas Carlyle publishes *The French Revolution*

1841 Peel Prime Minister

1845 Great Potato Famine

1846 Corn Laws repealed (i.e the tariff on grains)

1847 Charlotte Bronte**,** *Jane Eyre*
Anne Bronte, *Agnes Gray*
William Thackery, *Vanity Fair*

1848 Emily Bronte *Wuthering Heights*
Macaulay, *History of England*

1850 Tennyson publishes "In Memoriam" and succeeds Wordsworth as poet laureate

1851 Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"
Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*

1854 Crimean War

1855 Robert Browning**,** "Men and Women"

1856 John Ruskin ,"On the Pathetic Fallacy"

1857 Elizabeth Barret Browning, "Aurora Leigh"
Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*
Indian Mutiny

1858 William Morris "The Defense of Guenevere"

1859 Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*
Edward Fitzgerald "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam"
George Eliot, ***Adam Bede***

1861 John Stuart Mill, *Representative Government*

1865 Lewis Carroll**,** *Alice in Wonderland*

1866 Algernon Swinburne, "The Triumph of Time" ("Poems and Ballads")

1867 Second Reform Act

1868 Walter Pater, **Aesthetic Poetry**
Gladstone Prime Minister

1870-1 Franco Prussian War

1871 George Eliot**,** ***Middlemarch***
Religious tests at Universities Abolished

1872 Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market"

____ Thomas Henry Huxley gives his "Science and Culture" lectures
Dante Gabriel Rosetti, "The House of Life"

1874 Disraeli Prime Minsiter
Thomas Harding, *Far From the Madding Crowd*

1875 William Ernest Henley, "In Hospital--Waiting"
Gilbert and Sullivan, *Trial by Jury*
Britain acquires Suez Canal

1877 Gerard Manley Hopkins**, "God's Grandeur"**
Victoria declared Empress of India

1879 George Meredith, *The Egoist*

1884 Third Reform Act

1886 Salsibury Prime Minister

1888 Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*

1891 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbevilles*

TWENTIETH CENTURY

1894 Rudyard Kipling, *Jungle Books*

1895 Oscar Wilde**,** *The Importance of Being Earnest*

1899 Boer War

1900 Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

1901 Edward VII (son of Victoria--*SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA*)

1902 William Butler Yeats "Adam's Curse"
Balfour Prime Minister

1903 Henry James, *The Ambassadors*

1905 H.G. Wells, *Kipps*

1908 E.M. Forster, *A Room With A View*

1910 George V (2nd son of Ed VII--*WINDSOR*)

1913 D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*
Vachel Lindsay, *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*

1914 World War I
Ezra Pound organizes the Imagists

1916 Lloyd George Prime Minister

1918 Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry published after death
Siegfried Sassoon "Glory of Women"; Wilfred Owen "Dulce Et Decorum Est"
Women (age 30 or over) get right to vote; universal male suffrage

1920 Partition established in Government of Ireland Act

1922 T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*
James Joyce, *Ulyssess*

1923 George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan*

1924 First Labour Government

1925 Virignia Wolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

1930 **Evelyn Waugh** publishes *Vile Bodies*

1932 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

1933 A.E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*

1934 Robert Graves, *I, Claudius*

1936 Edward VIII (son of Geroge V) King then abdicates
George VI (2nd son of George V) King
Spanish Civil War Begins
Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*

1937 W.H. Auden, "Spain, 1937"
Louis Macneice, "Carrickfergus"
Chamberlain Prime Minister

1938 Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock*
C.S. Lewis, *Out of The Silent Planet*

1939 World War II

1940 Churchill Prime Minister

1945 George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
Henry Reed, "Naming of Parts"

1947 Independence granted to India and Pakistan

1952 Elizabeth II (daughter of George VI)
Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

1954 William Golding, ***The Lord of the Flies***

1955 Philip Larkin, "Church Going"

1956 Suez Crisis

1957 Stevie Smith, "Not Waving But Drowning"
Ghana obtains independence

1960 Ted Hughes, "Relic"

1979 Thatcher Prime Minister

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