

# Core-306 :

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## Importance of Studying Literature :

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### Defining Literature .....

**Literature**, in its broadest sense, is any written work. Etymologically, the term derives from Latin *litaritura/litteratura* “writing formed with letters,” although some definitions include spoken or sung texts. More restrictively, it is writing that possesses literary merit. Literature can be classified according to whether it is fiction or non-fiction and whether it is poetry or prose. It can be further distinguished according to major forms such as the novel, short story or drama, and works are often categorized according to historical periods or their adherence to certain aesthetic features or expectations (genre).

Taken to mean only written works, literature was first produced by some of the world’s earliest civilizations—those of Ancient Egypt and Sumeria—as early as the 4th millennium BC; taken to include spoken or sung texts, it originated even earlier, and some of the first written works may have been based on a pre-existing oral tradition. As urban cultures and societies developed, there was a proliferation in the forms of literature. Developments in print technology allowed for literature to be distributed and experienced on an unprecedented scale, which has culminated in the twenty-first century in electronic literature.

*Meaning of literature in English :*

written **artistic works**, **especially** those with a high and **lasting artistic value**.

- all the **information relating** to a **subject**, **especially information** written by **experts**.
- **printed material published** by a **company** that is **intended** to **encourage people** to **buy** that company's **products** or **services**; **material** that an **organization publishes** in **order** to **persuade people** to **agree** with **its opinions**.
- writing that has **lasting value** as **art**.
- all the **information** written about a **subject**.

- Literature is also **printed material published** by a **company** that **informs people** about **its products** or **services**:
- all the **information relating** to a **subject**, **especially information** written by **specialists**.
- **printed material published** by a **company**, etc. to **encourage people** to **buy its products** or **services**.

## Definitions :

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Definitions of literature have varied over time: it is a "culturally relative definition". In [Western Europe](#) prior to the 18th century, literature denoted all books and writing. A more restricted sense of the term emerged during the [Romantic period](#), in which it began to demarcate "imaginative" writing. Contemporary debates over what constitutes literature can be seen as returning to older, more inclusive notions; [cultural studies](#), for instance, takes as its subject of analysis both popular and minority genres, in addition to [canonical works](#). The [value judgment](#) definition of literature considers it to cover exclusively those writings that possess high quality or distinction, forming part of the so-called [belles-lettres](#) ('fine writing') tradition. This sort of definition is that used in the [Encyclopædia Britannica Eleventh Edition](#) (1910–11) when it classifies literature as "the best expression of the best thought reduced to writing." Problematic in this view is that there is no objective definition of what constitutes "literature": anything can be literature, and anything which is universally regarded as literature has the potential to be excluded, since value judgments can change over time.

The [formalist](#) definition is that "literature" foregrounds poetic effects; it is the "literariness" or "poetic" of literature that distinguishes it from ordinary speech or other kinds of writing (e.g., [journalism](#)). Jim Meyer considers this a useful characteristic in explaining the use of the term to mean published material in a particular field (e.g., "[scientific literature](#)"), as such writing must use language according to particular standards. The problem with the formalist definition is that in order to say that literature deviates from ordinary uses of language, those uses must first be identified; this is difficult because "[ordinary language](#)" is an unstable category, differing according to social categories and across history.

[Etymologically](#), the term derives from [Latin](#) *literatura/litteratura* "learning, a writing, grammar," originally "writing formed with letters," from *litera/littera* "letter". In spite of this, the term has also been applied to [spoken or sung texts](#). In Western Europe prior to the eighteenth century, literature as a term indicated all books and writing. A more restricted sense of the term emerged during the Romantic period, in which it began to demarcate "imaginative" literature. Contemporary debates over what constitutes literature can be seen as returning to the older, more inclusive notion of what constitutes literature. Cultural



traditionally been distinguished from [prose](#) by its being set in [verse](#); prose is cast in [sentences](#), poetry in [lines](#); the [syntax](#) of prose is dictated by meaning, whereas that of poetry is held across meter or the visual aspects of the poem. This distinction is complicated by various hybrid forms such as the [prose poem](#) and [prosimetrum](#), and more generally by the fact that prose possesses rhythm. Abram Lipsky refers to it as an "open secret" that "prose is not distinguished from poetry by lack of rhythm".

Prior to the 19th century, poetry was commonly understood to be something set in metrical lines; accordingly, in 1658 a definition of poetry is "any kind of subject consisting of Rhythm or Verses". Possibly as a result of [Aristotle's](#) influence (his *Poetics*), "poetry" before the 19th century was usually less a technical designation for verse than a normative category of fictive or rhetorical art. As a form it may pre-date [literacy](#), with the earliest works being composed within and sustained by an oral tradition; hence it constitutes the earliest example of literature.

Prose:

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Prose is a form of [language](#) that possesses ordinary [syntax](#) and [natural speech](#), rather than a regular [metre](#); in which regard, along with its [presentation](#) in sentences rather than lines, it differs from most poetry. However, developments in modern literature, including [free verse](#) and [prose poetry](#) have tended to blur any differences, and American poet [T.S. Eliot](#) suggested that while: "the distinction between [verse](#) and prose is clear, the distinction between [poetry](#) and prose is obscure".

On the historical development of prose, Richard Graff notes that "[In the case of [ancient Greece](#)] recent scholarship has emphasized the fact that formal prose was a comparatively late development, an "invention" properly associated with the [classical period](#)".

The major forms of literature in prose are novels, novellas and short stories, which earned the name "fiction" to distinguish them from non-fiction writings also expressed in prose.

**Literary fiction:**

[Literary fiction](#) is a term used to describe [fiction](#) that explores any facet of the [human condition](#), and may involve [social commentary](#). It is often regarded as having more artistic merit than [genre fiction](#), especially the most commercially-oriented types, but this has been contested in recent years, with the serious study of genre fiction within universities. The following, by the award-winning British author [William Boyd](#) on the short story, might be applied to all prose fiction:[short stories] seem to answer something very deep in our nature as if, for the duration of its telling, something special has been created, some essence of our experience extrapolated, some temporary sense has been made of our common, turbulent journey towards the grave and oblivion.

## **Novel:**

A novel is a long [fictional](#) prose narrative. In English, the term emerged from the [Romance languages](#) in the late 15th century, with the meaning of "news"; it came to indicate something new, without a distinction between fact or fiction. The romance is a closely related long prose narrative. [Walter Scott](#) defined it as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents", whereas in the novel "the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society". Other European languages do not distinguish between romance and novel: "a novel is *le roman, der Roman, il romanzo*", indicates the proximity of the forms. Although there are many historical prototypes, so-called "novels before the novel", the modern novel form emerges late in cultural history—roughly during the eighteenth century. Initially subject to much criticism, the novel has acquired a dominant position amongst literary forms, both popularly and critically.

## **Novella:**

In purely quantitative terms, the novella exists between the novel and short story; the publisher [Melville House](#) classifies it as "too short to be a novel, too long to be a short story". Publishers and literary award societies typically consider a novella's [word count](#) to be between 17,000 and 40,000 words.

## **Short story:**

A dilemma in defining the "[short story](#)" as a literary form is how to, or whether one should, distinguish it from any short narrative and its contested origin, that include the [Bible](#), and [Edgar Allan Poe](#)).

## **Drama:**

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Drama is literature intended for [performance](#). The form is combined with music and dance in [opera](#) and [musical theatre](#). A [play](#) is a subset of this form, referring to the written dramatic work of a [playwright](#) that is intended for performance in a theater; it comprises chiefly [dialogue](#) between [characters](#), and usually aims at dramatic or theatrical performance rather than at reading. A [closet drama](#), by contrast, refers to a play written to be read rather than to be performed; hence, it is intended that the meaning of such a work can be realized fully on the page. Nearly all drama took verse form until comparatively recently.

[Greek drama](#) is the earliest form of drama of which we have substantial knowledge. [Tragedy](#), as a dramatic [genre](#), developed as a performance associated with [religious](#) and civic [festivals](#), typically enacting or developing upon well-known [historical](#) or [mythological](#) themes. Tragedies generally presented very serious [themes](#). With the advent of newer technologies, scripts written for non-stage media

have been added to this form. [War of the Worlds \(radio\)](#) in 1938 saw the advent of literature written for radio broadcast, and many works of Drama have been adapted for film or television. Conversely, television, film, and radio literature have been adapted to printed or electronic media.

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## Characteristics in Literature

There are certain aspects of stories that are found in most literature. These are known as the common characteristics. These characteristics are what make up the backbone of any story. The following represent the common characteristics of any story: Characters, which are the people who are active within the story; a Plot, also known as a storyline, which presents a conflict or issue, as well as a resolution to said conflict or issue; and a Setting, which is the time and location in which the story develops.

### Common Characteristics in Literature

There's some common characteristics that are found in all genres of literary text. One of those is **characters**, there's going to be characters in every story. The characters are the people who do the action in the story. Basically, when I said there's common characteristics found in all genres of literary text,

I could have also said there's common aspects, or common parts, to every story. In every story you're going to have characters, you're going to have a **plot**, and you are going to have a **setting**. The plot is basically the story line. It's what happens in the story, so in pretty much every plot you're going to have conflict or problem.

After that, you're going to have a resolution to that **conflict** or problem. In other words, that conflict or problem is going to be resolved—during the story there's this issue, by the end of the story that issue is gone. The third common characteristic is setting, which is the time and place where the story takes place.

Say there was a book written about Plymouth Colony, then the time would be during the 1600s, and the place would be in North America, which you could be more specific and say it's in modern-day Massachusetts. That's the time and place. Sometimes it's more specific, about a certain city, or a certain place within a city (then just the time period).

There's going to be a setting to the story, and the author, oftentimes, is going to make that pretty clear, and that helps you understand the story, helps you understand the way those people are talking, or helps you understand their actions, or the social customs. Those three common characteristics are characters, plot, and setting.

You're going to find characters, plot, and setting in pretty much every story. Of course, every story is going to have a different plot, stories are going to have a different setting, stories are going to have different characters. In pretty much every story you have the main character, which is the protagonist, and then sometimes you have a person that's against that main character, called the antagonist, then you're going to have other characters.

Sometimes the plot has multiple conflicts or problems, sometimes there's only one. Sometimes a story may have multiple settings, but no matter what, the point here is that every story is going to have a character, a plot, or a setting. That's going to be true whether this is historical fiction or just a fable. Those are some common characteristics in literature.

### **Some Features of Great Literature :**

1. Able to present many different situations convincingly and characters from a broad range of social classes with empathy and understanding; not limited to a "single-point" perspective on situations.
2. Characters shown with psychological depth and clarity of motivation; trajectories of characters involve true change, growth or awareness that is motivated by represented experience that is appropriate to cause such change.
3. Grasps the spirit and historical particulars of the age yet seems able to transcend them, maintaining a grasp of particulars that goes beyond the topical to explore imaginative nexus of deeper significance.
4. Language: often expands the use of language by breaking "rules" and by including the language of many social classes while presenting virtuoso use of techniques available in the medium.
5. Philosophical function: the work explores the complexities of philosophical issues pertinent not only to the time, but for every age; yet it is not merely programmatic or

hortatory: themes grow out of presented situations. Besides these complexities of thought, the greatest texts contain, imply, or represent skepticism about the most hallowed assumptions of their day: they challenge us to rethink our humanity and our relationship to society and the larger cosmos we inhabit.

6. Influence: the work is of such importance that it exercises an influence on later artists working in the medium, either stylistically or through its exploration of themes.

7. Ambiguity sufficient to stir continuous debate as to what the text presents: psychological, economic and social complexity, sub-textual movements that increase irony or paradox when viewed in relation to the text's apparent "project."

8. A variety of "styles"—refusal to be limited to one continuous and unrelieved approach to the subject, with use of figures of speech, symbols, and conventional motifs to elaborate and complicate narrative form.

9. Formal integrity: the author controls the text well enough so that its apparent agenda is realized (with the aforementioned subtexts) with enough economy—as Pound said, use no word that doesn't contribute to the presentation. At the same time, the text should absolutely refuse the programmatic—those texts conceived to fulfill or promote a narrowly defined political agenda. Nor should control be so lax that the text wanders without purpose.

## **7 Reasons You Should Study Literature :**

For many students, the studying literature is boring and annoying but for some students, they take literature as their subjects but they don't develop interested in it and find it difficult to study and always do struggle to understand the depth of literature.

Well, as far as I know, there are plenty of reason and some of them I am going to discuss in this article of why you should study literature. In the time of Socrates and Plato, they kicked out the poets because they considered them lunatic and unrealistic however both Socrates and Plato enjoyed going to plays, theatre and listening music.

Literature or a literacy person can imitate the unrealistic world into the words and express it through words, phrases and amazing sentences. Studying literature gives the student exposure and develops the emotional and intellectual depth in a person. Although it is boring and too difficult for extroverted people to study literature but here are fantastic reasons for you that you should study literature.

### **1. Exposure to Intellect**

Well Well! The exposure to intellect is way too important for every student. Studying



literature is best as it can give you the exposure to different literature, culture and history! Well, history can give you the exposure to past happenings in the world. And a person gets the exposure to different things, cultures, and wisdom! Intellect grows and the growth of intellect is very crucial for the student. Intellect gives the strength to your way of conversation and understandability towards the environment.

## **2. A leap into Past**

If you are interested and adventurous, about taking the leap into the past then you should read, the history! There are plenty of interesting books available for students in which they can take a leap of past and get informed about of your cultural history! About the different mythologies!

## **3. Dept. and Emotions**

People with the taste literature are always good listener why? Because they love and enjoy listening to other before speaking the listening comes and if you are not good listener you can never become a good speaker!

Literature can develop a good depth inside you! You will have a better understanding of your emotions and you will have the better knowledge about different emotions.

## **4. Insight of others**

Well if you know that the books are written by other which common sense is but let me tell you one book is written after the long journey of research personal experience and the author who writes the book have his insight in the book so in short in you are reading a words of other in short you having the insight of long journey and time in no mean of time and you can benefit your wisdom with that insight.

## **5. Critical Thinking**

You can develop a great insight get of critical thinking, well negative critical thinking isn't good thing but a positive critical thinking is great you can deal and improve your daily life routine decisions by reading the various type of literature there is a variety of different sort of literature!

For some people when they hear the word literature, they only word comes to their mind are Shakespeare!! But the literature isn't only about Shakespeare there is a variety of genre in literature and you can read accordingly your taste.

## **6. Better Understanding**

Literature can give you the better understanding about different things, in your daily life stuff after reading a good literary book you can get the experience of many years of handwork writing a few days and once you absorb that literature greatly than a single book can change

your life and you can develop a good insight about your book. So the final thought you will have the better understanding.

## **7. Encouragement Mastery of Languages**

Well, you have seen around you that there are some people whom personality always inspire use why because they tend to develop a good taste for literature and people with literature are more good at encouragement and motivation and they have the skill of different vocabulary.

Literature is the experience of other and there are plenty of more reasons that you should study literature. You will become a great reader, you can become a good speaker and more often you can become a person with great insight and emotional balance.

### **Reasons Why Literature Is So Important ?**

"Literature is one of the most interesting and significant expressions of humanity." — P. T. Barnum

Today, there are too many people who believe that literature is simply not important or underestimate its abilities to stand the test of time and give us great knowledge.

There is a stigma in society that implies one who is more inclined toward science and math will somehow be more successful in life, and that one who is more passionate about literature and other art forms will be destined to a life of low-paying jobs and unsatisfying careers. Somewhere along the line, the world has come to think that literature is insignificant.

Here are just a few reasons why literature is important.

### **1. Expanding horizons**

First and foremost, literature opens our eyes and makes us see more than just what the front door shows. It helps us realize the wide world outside, surrounding us. With this, we begin to learn, ask questions, and build our intuitions and instincts. We expand our minds.

### **2. Building critical thinking skills**

Many of us learn what critical thinking is in our language arts classes. When we read, we learn to look between the lines. We are taught to find symbols, make connections, find themes, learn about characters. Reading expands these skills,

and we begin to look at a sentence with a larger sense of detail and depth and realize the importance of hidden meanings so that we may come to a conclusion.

### **3. A leap into the past**

History and literature are entwined with each other. History is not just about power struggles, wars, names, and dates. It is about people who are products of their time, with their own lives. Today the world is nothing like it was in the 15th century; people have changed largely. Without literature, we would not know about our past, our families, the people who came before and walked on the same ground as us.

### **4. Appreciation for other cultures and beliefs**

Reading about history, anthropology, or religious studies provides a method of learning about cultures and beliefs other than our own. It allows you to understand and experience these other systems of living and other worlds. We get a view of the inside looking out, a personal view and insight into the minds and reasoning of someone else. We can learn, understand, and appreciate it.

### **5. Better writing skills**

When you open a book, when your eyes read the words and you take in its contents, do you ask yourself: How did this person imagine and write this? Well, many of those authors, poets, or playwrights used literature to expand their writing.

### **6. Addressing humanity**

All literature, whether it be poems, essays, novels, or short stories, helps us address human nature and conditions which affect all people. These may be the need for growth, doubts, and fears of success and failure, the need for friends and family, the goodness of compassion and empathy, trust, or the realization of imperfection. We learn that imperfection is not always bad and that normal can be boring. We learn that life must be lived to the fullest. We need literature in order to connect with our own humanity.

Literature is important and necessary. It provides growth, strengthens our minds, and gives us the ability to think outside the box.

## (2)

### Epic as a Literary Form : /'ɛpɪk/

- a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation.
- An **epic poem**, **epic**, **epos**, or **epopee** is a lengthy [narrative poem](#), ordinarily involving a time beyond living memory in which occurred the extraordinary doings of the extraordinary men and women who, in dealings with the gods or other superhuman forces, gave shape to the moral universe that their descendants, the poet and his audience, must understand to understand themselves as a people or nation.
- Another type of epic poetry is [epyllion](#) (plural: epyllia), which is a brief narrative poem with a [romantic](#) or [mythological theme](#). The term, which means "little [epic](#)", came into use in the nineteenth century. It refers primarily to the erudite, shorter hexameter poems of the [Hellenistic period](#) and the similar works composed at Rome from the age of the [neoterics](#); to a lesser degree, the term includes some poems of the [English Renaissance](#), particularly those influenced by [Ovid](#). The most famous example of [classical](#) epyllion is perhaps [Catullus 64](#).
- Etymology

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- The English word *epic* comes from the [Latin](#) *epicus*, which itself comes from the [Ancient Greek](#) adjective ἔπικός (*epikos*), from ἔπος(*epos*), "word, story, poem".
- Overview

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- Originating before the invention of writing, primary epics were composed by bards who used complex rhetorical and metrical schemes by which they could memorize the epic as received in tradition and add to the epic in their performances. Hence aside from writers like Dante, Camões, and Milton, [Apollonius of Rhodes](#) in his [Argonautica](#) and Virgil in [Aeneid](#) adopted and adapted [Homer's style and subject matter](#), but used devices available only to those who write, and in their works [Nonnus' Dionysiaca](#) and [Tulsidas' Sri Ramacharit Manas](#) also used stylistic elements typical of epics.
- The oldest epic recognized is the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#) (c. 2500–1300 BCE), which was recorded in ancient [Sumer](#) during the [Neo-Sumerian Empire](#). The poem details the exploits of [Gilgamesh](#), the king of [Uruk](#). Although recognized as a historical figure, Gilgamesh, as represented in the epic, is a largely legendary or mythical figure.

- The longest epic written is the ancient Indian *Mahabharata*, which consists of 100,000 *ślokas* or over 200,000 verse lines (each shloka is a couplet), as well as long prose passages, so that at ~1.8 million words it is roughly four times the length of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and roughly ten times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined.
- Famous examples of epic poetry include the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the ancient Indian *Mahabharata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Tamil *Silappatikaram*, the Persian *Shahnameh*, the Ancient Greek *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Old English *Beowulf*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the Finnish *Kalevala*, the German *Nibelungenlied*, the French *Song of Roland*, the Spanish *Cantar de mio Cid*, the Portuguese *Os Lusíadas*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*.

### ➤ Oral epics

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- The first epics were products of *preliterate societies* and *oral history* poetic traditions. *Oral tradition* was used alongside written scriptures to communicate and facilitate the spread of culture. In these traditions, poetry is transmitted to the audience and from performer to performer by purely oral means. Early twentieth-century study of living oral epic traditions in the *Balkans* by *Milman Parry* and Albert Lord demonstrated the *paratactic* model used for composing these poems. What they demonstrated was that oral epics tend to be constructed in short episodes, each of equal status, interest and importance. This facilitates memorization, as the poet is recalling each episode in turn and using the completed episodes to recreate the entire epic as he performs it. Parry and Lord also contend that the most likely source for written texts of the epics of *Homer* was dictation from an oral performance.
- *Milman Parry* and *Albert Lord* have argued that the Homeric epics, the earliest works of Western literature, were fundamentally an oral poetic form. These works form the basis of the epic genre in Western literature. Nearly all of Western epic (including Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*) self-consciously presents itself as a continuation of the tradition begun by these poems. Classical epic poetry employs a meter called *dactylic hexameter* and recounts a journey, either physical (as typified by Odysseus in the *Odyssey*) or mental (as typified by Achilles in the *Iliad*) or both. Epics also tend to highlight cultural norms and to define or call into question cultural values, particularly as they pertain to *heroism*.

### ➤ Composition and conventions

- In his work *Poetics*, Aristotle defines an epic as one of the forms of poetry, contrasted with *lyric poetry* and with drama in the form of tragedy and comedy.
- In *A Handbook to Literature* (1999), Harmon and Holman define an epic:
 

“ Epic: a long narrative poem in elevated style presenting characters of high position in adventures forming an organic whole through their relation to a central heroic figure and

through their development of episodes important to the history of a nation or race.” - (Harmon and Holman).

- An attempt to delineate ten main characteristics of an epic:
- The setting is vast, covering many nations, the world or the universe.
- Begins with an invocation to a [muse](#) (epic invocation).
- Begins with a statement of the theme.
- Includes the use of [epithets](#).
- Contains long lists, called an [epic catalogue](#).
- Features long and formal speeches.
- Shows divine intervention in human affairs.
- Features heroes that embody the values of the civilization.
- Often features the tragic hero's descent into the [underworld](#) or [hell](#).
- The hero generally participates in a cyclical journey or quest, faces adversaries that try to defeat him in his journey and returns home significantly transformed by his journey. The epic hero illustrates [traits](#), performs deeds, and exemplifies certain morals that are valued by the society the epic originates from. Many epic heroes are [recurring characters](#) in the legends of their native cultures.
- Conventions of epics:
  - *Proposition*: Opens by stating the theme or cause of the epic. This may take the form of a purpose (as in Milton, who proposed "to justify the ways of God to men"); of a question (as in the *Iliad*, which [Homer](#) initiates by asking a Muse to sing of Achilles' anger); or of a situation (as in the *Song of Roland*, with [Charlemagne](#) in Spain)
  - *Invocation*: Writer invokes a [Muse](#), one of the nine daughters of [Zeus](#). The poet prays to the Muses to provide him with divine inspiration to tell the story of a great hero. (This convention is restricted to cultures influenced by European Classical culture. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for example, or the *Bhagavata Purana* do not contain this element.)

- *In medias res*: narrative opens "in the middle of things", with the hero at his lowest point. Usually flashbacks show earlier portions of the story.
- *Enumeratio*: Catalogues and genealogies are given. These long lists of objects, places, and people place the finite action of the epic within a broader, universal context. Often, the poet is also paying homage to the ancestors of audience members.
- *Epithet*: Heavy use of repetition or stock phrases: e.g., [Homer's](#) "rosy-fingered dawn" and "wine-dark sea".

### ➤ **Form :**

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- Many verse forms have been used in epic poems through the ages, but each language's literature typically gravitates to one form, or at least to a very limited set. Ancient Sumerian epic poems did not use any kind of [poetic meter](#) and [lines](#) did not have consistent lengths; instead, Sumerian poems derived their rhythm solely through constant [repetition](#), with subtle variations between lines. [Indo-European](#) epic poetry, by contrast, usually places strong emphasis on the importance of line consistency and poetic meter.
- Ancient Greek and Latin poems were written in dactylic [hexameter](#). Old English, German and Norse poems were written in [alliterative verse](#), usually without [rhyme](#). Italian, Spanish and Portuguese long poems were usually written in [terza rima](#) or especially [ottava rima](#). From the 14th century English epic poems were written in [heroic couplets](#), and [rhyme royal](#), though in the 16th century the [Spenserian stanza](#) and [blank verse](#) were also introduced. The [French alexandrine](#) is currently the heroic line in French literature, though in earlier periods the [decasyllable](#) took precedence. In Polish literature, couplets of [Polish alexandrines](#) (syllabic lines of 7+6 syllables) prevail. In Russian, [iambic tetrameter](#) verse is the most popular. In Serbian poetry, the decasyllable is the only form employed.

### ➤ **Epic Poetry :**

- An **epic poem** is a long, narrative poem that is usually about heroic deeds and events that are significant to the culture of the poet. Many ancient writers used epic poetry to tell tales of intense adventures and heroic feats. Some of the most famous literary masterpieces in the world were written in the form of epic poetry.
- Epic poems were particularly common in the ancient world because they were ideal for expressing stories orally. These works continue to be well regarded today. Many high school students read famous examples of epic poetry, such as *Gilgamesh* and *The Iliad*.

### ➤ **Definition & Etymology of Epic**

➤ It is imperative to know about the etymology of the word *epic*. The word *epic* has been derived a Greek word *epikos*, which means *a word, song or speech*. An epic is well-defined as a long story in verse dwelling upon an important theme in a most elegant style and language. According to Webster's New World dictionary, "*epic is a long narrative poem in a dignified style about the deeds of a traditional or historical hero or heroes; typically a poem like Iliad or the Odyssey with certain formal characteristics.*" An epic is absolutely much like a ballad pretty much in all its features, however just one thing that differentiates epic from a ballad is its length. An epic is a long narrative in verse, while ballad is a short story in verse.

➤ **Definition of Epic**

➤ *Britannica Encyclopedia explains the word epic as:*

➤ "*epic, long narrative poem recounting heroic deeds. .... literary usage, the term encompasses both oral and written compositions. The prime examples of the oral epic are Homer's Iliad and Odyssey.*"

➤ **Characteristics of an Epic :**

- There are several characteristics of an epic , which distinguishes it from other forms of poetry . They are discussed below:
- The first and foremost characteristic of an epic is its bulky size . An epic is an extensive and prolonged narrative in verse. Usually, every single epic has been broken down in to multiple books. For example, Homer's epics are divided into twenty four books .Similarly, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been divided into twelve books.
- Another essential feature of an epic is the fact that it dwells upon the achievements of a historical or traditional hero, or a person of national or international significance. Every epic extolls the valour, deeds, bravery, character and personality of a person, who is having incredible physical and mental traits.
- Exaggeration is also an important part of an epic. The poet uses hyperbole to reveal the prowess of a hero. He doesn't think twice to use exaggeration to make an impression on the audience.
- Supernaturalism is a must-have feature of an every epic. Without having to use supernatural elements, no epic would certainly produce awe and wonder. There are certainly gods, demons, angels, fairies, and use of supernatural forces like natural catastrophes in every epic. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Homer's *Iliad*, *Beowulf* and Spenser's *Faerie Queen* are replete with supernatural elements.



Morality is a key characteristic of an epic. The poet's foremost purpose in writing an epic is to give a moral lesson to his readers. For instance, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a perfect example in this regard. The poet wants to **justify the ways of God to man** through the story of Adam. This is the most didactic theme of the epic.

- The theme of each epic is sublime, elegant and having universal significance. It may not be an insignificant theme, which is only limited to the personality or the locality of the poet. It deals with the entire humanity. Thus; John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a great example in this regard. The theme of this epic is certainly of great importance and deals with entire humanity. Its theme is **to justify the ways of God to man**.
- Invocation to the *Muse* is another important quality of an epic. The poet, at the very beginning of the epic, seeks the help of the *Muse* while writing his epic. Look at the beginning lines of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Paradise Lost*.
- The diction of every epic is lofty, grand and elegant. No trivial, common or colloquial language is used in epic. The poet tries to use sublime words to describe the events.
- Use of Epic Simile is another feature of an epic. Epic simile is a far-fetched comparison between two objects, which runs through many lines to describe the valour, bravery and gigantic stature of the hero. It is also called *Homeric simile*.
- An epic is the highest type of narrative poetry. It is a long narrative poem in which the characters and the action are of heroic proportions. From the works of Homer and Virgil, certain characteristics have become established in the West as standard attributes of the epic. The main attributes are given below.
- The hero is a figure of great national or international importance. Moreover, the characters must belong to the highest class in a society, raised above the common man by birth, position, manners and appearance. They must be kings and princes descended from heroes, and even from the gods, compelling in their deportment and arresting in their personal appearance. In *Paradise Lost* the hero is Adam, who incorporates in himself the entire race of man.
- The setting is ample in scale, sometimes world-wide, or even larger in the classical epic. The scope of *Paradise Lost* is cosmic, for it includes Heaven, Earth and Hell.
- The action involves heroic deeds: *Paradise Lost* includes the war in Heaven, the journey of Satan to discover the newly created world, and his audacious attempt to outwit God by corrupting mankind.
- The action should be an entire action, complete in itself. By this is meant that it should have a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- The next characteristic of the epic poem according to Aristotle is that it must have greatness, by which is meant that it must produce far-reaching consequences in which the destinies of great men and nations are involved.

- Gods are also used in the epic as a tragedy, as *deus ex machina*; the intervention of supernatural machinery advances the plot and solves its complications. It not only gives ample scope for the exercise of the poet's imagination, it also provides a proper spiritual support for the heroic deeds.
  - An epic poem is a ceremonial composition and deliberately given a ceremonial style proportionate to its great subject and architecture. Hence, Milton's Latinised diction and stylized syntax, his resounding lists of strange and sonorous names, and his epic similes, that is, sustained similes in which the comparison is developed far beyond the specific points are appropriate.
  - The poet begins by stating his theme, then invokes a Muse in his great undertaking and addresses the Muse.
- 

### ➤ **Types of Epic**

#### ➤ Folk Epic

- Folk epic is an ancient epic, which was originally in oral form. With the passage of time, one author or many authors tried to preserve them in the form of writing. Thus, nobody happens to know about the exact authorship of the folk epics. The folk epic is different from the art epic or literary epic in the simplest sense that the former is based on a particular mythology, while the latter is based on the ideas of the author. In art epic, the poet invents the story, while the folk epic is the product of the mythology of the locality. The folk epic is basically in oral form, while the art or literary epic is in written form. The author of the literary epic is a well-known personality, while the author of the folk epic may be a common man.

- William Henry Hudson says in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*:

- *"The epic of growth is fresh, spontaneous, racy, the epic of art is learned, antiquarian, bookish, imitative. Its specifically 'literary' qualities-its erudition, its echoes, reminiscences, and borrowings- are indeed, as the Aeneid and Paradise Lost will suffice to prove, among its most interesting characteristics for a cultured reader."*

#### ➤ **Literary Epic**

- Literary epic is usually known as art epic. It is an epic, which imitates the conventions of the folk epic, but gives it a written shape. It is absolutely opposite to the folk epic. They were written unlike the folk epics, which came all the way down to us through oral tradition. The literary epics tend to be more polished, coherent, and compact in structure and style when contrasted with the folk epics. Literary epics are the result of the genius of the poet. That is why; they have great significance from literary point of view.

➤ William Henry Hudson says in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*:

*“The literary epic naturally resembles the primitive epic, on which it is ultimately based, in various fundamental characteristics. Its subject-matter is of the old heroic and mythical kind; it makes free use of supernatural; it follows the same structural plan and reproduces many traditional details of composition; while, greatly it necessarily differs in style, it often adopts the formulas, fixed epithets, and stereo typed phrases and locutions, which are among the marked feature of the early type.”*

➤ *The Classical Epics are:*

○ Homer, **The Iliad**

• Language: Greek

○ Heroes: Achilles (Greek) and Hector (Trojan)

▪ Homer, **The Odyssey**

• Language: Greek

○ Hero: Odysseus

○ Virgil (Vergil) **The Aeneid**

• Language: Latin

○ Hero: Aeneas

○ Classical epics are marked by at least the illusion of orality, that is, a speaker (bard, scop, singer of tales) tells a story, presumably of events that he has either witnessed himself or heard tell of. The gods play an active and important role in the stories, often intervening in the affairs of men to change the course of events.

➤ *Epic Style:*

▪ The style is marked by **repetition**, a pronounced use of **epithets** and a variety of names for the main characters. The speaker often refers to events, places, and characters outside the main narrative, giving the poems a feeling of great scope and comprehensiveness. The style (usually called **high style**) is elevated and formal. All the epics begin with an **epic invocation**, involving an announcement in the first person of the subject (or argument) of the work (*The Iliad* and *The Aeneid* announce a **double subject**) and an extremely brief description of the main action of the work, in the course of which the speaker calls upon a **muse** to inspire

the speaker and give him strength to carry out his weighty undertaking and to answer an **epic question** about the causes of the main action. Classical epic begins **in medias res** (in the middle of things), at a critical point in the action, rather than at the beginning of the story.

➤ *The Epic Hero:*

- The protagonists of classical epic are larger-than-life men who are capable of great deeds of strength and courage. In addition, Odysseus is noted for his great cleverness, whether for good (as in his defeat of his rivals) or evil (as in his part in the destruction of Troy). All epic heroes are great warriors. Epic heroes are also national heroes.

➤ *The Epic simile:*

- An epic simile is a fully developed simile that likens some thing or action in the epic to some (usually) natural action or image (landscapes, trees, the moon, the seasons, common men in everyday activities, insects or other creatures, etc.).

- Consider the following example from Homer's **Iliad**; the speaker is describing a volley of missiles from men defending a wall:

- . . . as storms of snow descend to the ground incessant on a winter day, when Zeus of the counsels, showing before men what shafts he possesses, brings on a snowstorm and stills the winds asleep in the solid drift, enshrouding the peaks that tower among the mountains and the shoulders out-jutting, and the low lands with their grasses, and the prospering work of men's hands, and the drift falls along the grey sea, the harbours and beaches, and the surf that breaks against it is stilled, and all things elsewhere it shrouds from above, with the burden of Zeus' rain heavy upon it; so numerous and incessant were the stones volleyed from both sides, some thrown on Trojans, others flung against the Achaians [i.e., Greeks] by Trojans, so the whole length of the wall thundered beneath them. (12.278-89)

- Richard Lattimore says of this simile, "What the missiles have in common with the snow is, of course, descent in infinite quantity, but the snowfall, described first, builds a hushed world from which we wake with a shock to the crashing battle. The ultimate effect is not of likeness, but contrast. Simile offers the most natural and frequently used, but not the only, escape from the heroic" (*The Iliad of Homer*, pp. 42-43). Epic similes (which often employ images from nature) are often used to give the reader the sense of great size, number, or intensity. Classical

epics include **epic games** (played on the plains of Troy, between the walled city of Troy and the Greek camp on the shore, in the *Iliad*), a **trip to the Underworld**, a **vision of the future**, an **epic catalogue** of heroes, ships, or armies. The *Odyssey* contains an epic journey all over the known (Mediterranean) world; The **Aeneid** contains a journey all the way from Troy to Rome. Each journey is marked by adventure and danger.

(3)

## Elizabethan Drama :

### ( Part-1)

Out of all dramatic genres, tragedy ruled the English stage during the Elizabethan age. The English tragedy, at any rate, was not developed from the miracle plays, but from the classical models of Seneca. Seneca's tragedies are notable for the horrors, for their exaggerated character-drawing, their aggressively rhetorical language coupled with emotional hyperboles, and a wealth of epigram. By 1581, Seneca had become the first classical dramatist to have all his works translated into English. Gorbudoc (1562) was the first English play in Senecan form, and was followed by Gascoigne's *Jocasta*

(1566) and Hughes's *Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588), both on the Senecan model. Most important of the Senecan plays was Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedie* (1593) and *Philotas* (1604). With Kyd began the tradition of the Revenge Play, many features of which are to be seen in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and in the work of late Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatists like Webster, Tourneur, and Marston. Other Shakespearean plays showing a strong Senecan influence are *Richard III* and *Macbeth*.

Elizabethan drama began and flourished in the hands of University Wits, matured to the fullest with the genius of Shakespeare and almost ended with the creative writer Ben Jonson.

### **The University Wits:**

These young men, nearly all of whom were associated with Oxford and Cambridge, did

much to found the Elizabethan school of drama. They were all more or less acquainted with each

other, and most of them led irregular and stormy lives. Their plays had several features in common.

(a) There was a fondness for heroic themes, such as the lives of great figures like Mohammed and Tamburlaine.

(b) Heroic themes needed heroic treatment: great fullness and variety; splendid descriptions,

long swelling speeches, the handling of violent incidents and emotions.

(c) The style also was 'heroic'. The chief aim was to achieve strong and sounding lines,

magnificent epithets, and powerful declamation. In this connection it is to be noted that the

best medium for such qualities was blank verse, which was sufficiently elastic to bear the

strong pressure of these expansive methods.

(d) The themes were usually tragic in nature, for the dramatists were as a rule too much in

earnest to give heed to what was considered to be the lower species of comedy.

The general

lack of real humour in the early drama is one of its prominent features. Humour, when it is brought in at all, is coarse and immature. Almost the only representative of the writers of real comedies is Lyly, who in such plays as *Campaspe*(1584), *Endymion*(1592), and *The Woman in the Moone*' (1597) gives us the first examples of romantic comedy.

### **1. George Peele(1558-98)**

Peele's plays include *The Araygnement of Paris*(1584), a kind of romantic comedy, *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First* (1593), a rambling chronicle-play; *The Old Wives' Tale*(1591-94), a clever satire on the popular drama of the day; and *The Love of King David* and *Fair Bethsabe*(1599). Peele's style can be violent to the point of absurdity; but he has his moments of real poetry; he could handle his blank verse with more ease and variety than was common at the time; he is fluent; he has humour and a fair amount of pathos. In short, he represents a great advance upon the earliest drama, and is perhaps one of the most attractive among the playwrights of the time.

### **2. Robert Greene (1558-92)**

Greene's four plays : *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*(1587), an imitation of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*; *Frier Bacon* and *Frier Bongay* (1589), easily his best, and containing some fine representations of Elizabethan life; *Orlando Furioso* (c.1591), adapted from an English translation of Ariosto; and *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth* (acted in 1592), not a 'historical' play, but founded on an imaginary incident in the life of the King. Greene is weak in creating characters, and his style is not of outstanding merit; but his humour is somewhat genial in his plays, and his methods less austere than those of the other tragedians.

### **3. Thomas Nash (1567-1601)**

Nash finished Marlowe's *Dido*, but his only surviving play is *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592), a satirical masque.

#### **4. Thomas Lodge (1558-1625)**

Lodge's available works are comparatively less in numbers. He probably collaborated with Shakespeare in *Henry VI*, and with other dramatists, including Greene. The only surviving play entirely his own is *The Woundes of Civile War*, a kind of chronicle-play. The most famous of his romances is *Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590), which Shakespeare is believed to have followed very closely in the plot of *As You Like It*.

#### **5. Thomas Kyd (1558-94)**

Out of Kyd's surviving plays, *The Spanish Tragedie* (abt 1585) is the most important. Its horrific plot, involving murder, frenzy, and sudden death, gave the play a great and lasting popularity. There is a largeness of tragical conception about the play that resembles the work of Marlowe, and there touches of style that dimly foreshadow the great tragical lines of Shakespeare. The only other surviving play known to be Kyd's is *Cornelia* (1593), a translation from the French Senecan, Garnier, but his hand has been sought in many plays including *Soliman and Perseda* (1588), the *First Part of Jeronimo* (1592), an attempt, after the success of *The Spanish Tragedie*, to write an introductory play to it, and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.

#### **6. Christopher Marlowe (1564-93)**

Marlowe is one of the most renowned among the pre-Shakespearean dramatists. Marlowe's plays, all tragedies, were written within the period of five years (1587-92). All the plays, except *Edward II*, revolve around one figure drawn in bold outlines. Each of the plays has an artistic and poetic unity. It is, indeed, as a poet that Marlowe excels. Though not the first



to use blank verse in English drama, he was the first to exploit its possibilities and make it supreme. His verse is notable for its burning energy, its splendour of diction, its sensuous richness, its variety of pace, and its responsiveness to the demands of varying emotions.

Tamburlaine the Great (1587), centred on one inhuman figure, is on a theme essentially undramatic, in that the plot allows no possibility of complication. The play is episodic and lacking any cohesion save the poetic one already referred to. Yet it contains much of Marlowe's best blank verse. Its sequel, The Second Part of Tamburlaine the Great (1588), is inferior to its predecessor. It contains still less plot and far more bombast. The Jew of Malta (1589) has two fine, economically handled opening acts, but deteriorates later when the second villain, Ithamore, enters. Edward II (1591) shows the truest sense of the theatre of all his plays. Its plot is skilfully woven, and the material, neatly compressed from Holinshed's Chronicles, shows a sense of dramatic requirements new in his plays, and indeed, in English historical drama. The play has less poetic fervour than some of the others and its hero is not great enough to be truly tragic, but it works up to a fine climax of deep pathos. In its multiplicity of 'living' characters and lack of bombast it stands apart from the other plays. Doctor Faustus (probably 1592) has good beginning, and an ending which is Marlowe's supreme achievement, but the comic scenes in the middle are poor and may be by another hand. The play contains some interesting survivals of the miracle plays in the conversations of the Good and Evil Angels. The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage (1593) is an inferior piece, in which Nash shared, and The

Massacre at Paris (1593) is unfinished. A part of the superb ending of Doctor Faustus is created

by Marlowe when Faustus realizes the near approach of his departure to Hell.

*Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
That time may cease, and midnight never come;*

*Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make  
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but*

*A year, a month, a week, a natural day,*

*That Faustus may repent and save his soul !*

*O lente, lente curtile, noctis equi !*

*The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,*

*The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.*

*O, I'll leap up to my God ! - Who pulls me down? -*

*See, see, wher Christ's blood streams in the firmament !*

*One drop would save my soul, half a drop; ah, my Christ -*

*Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ !*

*Yet will I call on him: O, spare me, Lucifer ! -*

*Where is it now? 'tis gone: and see, where God*

*Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows !*

*Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,*

*And hide me from the heavy wrath of God !*

*(From Doctor Faustus)*

### **William Shakespeare**

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born at Stratford-on-Avon. In 1592, he appeared as a

rising actor. His chief function was to write dramas for his company, and the fruit of such labour was

his plays.

**His plays.** Concerning the plays that are usually accepted as being

Shakespeare's, almost

endless discussion has arisen. It was not till 1623, seven years after his death, that the First Folio

edition was printed. In the Folio edition the plays are not arranged

chronologically, nor are the dates

of composition given.

### **Classification of the plays.**

**(1) The Early Comedies.** In these amateur plays, the plots are less original, the characters less

finished, and the style lacks the power of the mature Shakespeare. They are full of wit and word play.

Of this type are *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

**(2) The English Histories.** These plays show a rapid maturing of Shakespeare's technique.

Figures like Falstaff illustrate his increasing depth of characterization, and the mingling of low life

with chronicle history is an important innovation. The plays in this group, to which belong *Richard II*,

*1 Henry IV* *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, contain much more blank verse than those of the earlier group.

**(3) The Mature Comedies.** Here is the time when Shakespeare's comic genius flourished. To

this group belong *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like*

*It*. The plays are full of vitality, contain many truly comic situations, and reveal great warmth and

humanity. In this group there is much prose.

**(4) The Sombre Plays.** In this group are *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and

*Troilus and Cressida*. Though comedies in the sense that the chief characters do not die, their tone is

sombre and tragic. They reflect a fondness for objectionable characters and situations.

**(5) The Great Tragedies.** *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are the climax of

Shakespeare's art. In intensity of emotion, depth of psychological insight, and power of style they

stand supreme. Hamlet is seen contemplating suicide in his famous soliloquy:

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:*

*Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer*

*The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,*

*Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,*

*And by opposing end them. To die: to sleep; (From Hamlet)*

**(6) The Roman Plays.** These are based on North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. *Julius Caesar*

shows the same concern with political security, and in its depth of character study is approaching the

great tragedies. Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus follow the great tragic period. Both of them show some relaxation of tragic intensity. In Julius Caesar, Caesar tells his wife, brushing aside her fear that he will soon die, which he does: *Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once.*

**(7) The Last Plays.** A mellowed maturity is the chief feature of this group, which contains Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest. The creative touch of the dramatist is abundantly in view; the style is notable and peacefully adequate. No more fitting conclusion — rich, ample, and graciously dignified would be found to round off the work of our greatest literary genius than these plays of reconciliation and forgiveness.

**Features of his Plays.** The extent, variety, and richness of the plays are quite bewildering as one approaches them.

**(a) Their Originality.** In the narrowest sense of the term, Shakespeare took no trouble to be original in traditional sense. Following the custom of the time, he borrowed freely from older plays (such as *King Leir*), chronicles (such as Holinshed's) and tales (such as *The Jew*, the part-origin of *The Merchant of Venice*).

**(b) Characters.** In sheer prodigality of output Shakespeare is unrivalled in literature. From king to clown, from lunatic and demi-devil to saint and seer — all are revealed with the hand of the master. Another feature of Shakespeare's characterization is his objectivity. He seems indifferent to good and evil; he has the eye of the creator. Thus the villain Iago is a man of resolution, intelligence, and fortitude; the murderer Claudius (in Hamlet) shows affection. Hence follows the vital force that resides in the creations of Shakespeare. They live, move, and utter speech; they are rounded, entire and capable.

**(c) Meter.** As in all the other features of his work, in meter Shakespeare shows abnormal range and power. In the earlier plays the blank verse is regular in beat and pause; there is a fondness for the stopped and rhymed couplet.

**(d) Style.** For an appropriate name we call Shakespeare's style Shakespearian. It is a difficult, almost an impossible matter to define it. There is aptness and quotability in it: sheaves of Shakespeare's expressions have passed into common speech. To a very high degree it possesses sweetness, strength, and flexibility; and above all it has a certain inevitable and final felicity that is the true mark of genius. His style, sometimes moves easily into the highest flights of poetry:

*That strain again ! it had a dying fall:  
O ! it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound  
That breaths upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour.* (From Twelfth Night)

"He was the man", said Dryden, "who of all modern, and perhaps ancient writers, had the largest and most comprehensive soul."

## **Ben Jonson**

The comedy of humours is a phrase generally used in connection with Ben Jonson (1572-1637), who was the most influential dramatist of Elizabethan age, though certainly not the best. He was an extremely productive writer not only of plays, but also of masques, poetry and criticism. His comedies include Every Man in his Humour, Every Man out of his Humour, The silent Woman, Volpone, The Alchemist and Bartholomew fair. Jonson's idea was that comedy should not be 'true to life' but 'larger than life'. Each character should be not so much a real man or woman as a personification of some human passion or weakness. He explains something of this in the introduction to Every Man Out of

his Humour:

*As when some one particular quality  
Doth so possess a man that it doth draw  
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,  
In their confluxions, all to run one way,*

*This may be truly said to be a humour.* (From Every Man Out of his Humour)

The word 'humour' is not used in any of its modern senses, but in the sense of a dominant

passion or obsession. In Every Man in his Humour the rich merchant Kiteley has a young and pretty

wife of whom he is madly jealous: jealousy is his humour, the passion that rules his whole life; the

young hero's father, old Knowell, is always worried about his son's behaviour and safety: anxiety is

his humour; Captain Bobadill is the talkative but cowardly old soldier: boastfulness is his humour.

In *Barholomew Fair* Jonson shows us how the humours of various types of Londoners are taken

advantage of by the hard-headed and quick-witted market people. One man is tricked out of his

money because he fancies himself as a smart leader of fashion, another because he is proud of being

clever businessman, and so on. There was in fact little that was new in the way Jonson invented his

characters and constructed his plays; characters like the boastful soldier or the jealous husband were,

as we have seen, at least as old as Plautus. What was new was the name 'comedy of humours', and the

very questionable scientific support which Jonson found for it. He borrowed it from the beliefs of

medieval doctors and scientists who thought that the human body was made up of four humours

which corresponded to the four elements of the physical world—earth, air, fire and water. A man's

health and indeed his whole character, was thought to depend on the balance between the four

humours in his body: thus, too much of the choleric (or angry) humours (corresponding to the

element of fire in nature) made a man energetic and hot tempered too much of the lymphatic (or watery) humours (corresponding to water in nature) made him cold and spiritless. This kind of science was of course out of date even in Jonson's time, but he found it useful as a support for his theory of comedy-just as modern writers sometimes like to support their literary theories by referring to out-of-date psychology.

Jonson's importance does not depend on his theory of comedy, but upon his success as a comic dramatist. Every man in his *Humour* and *Volpone*, like most of his other comedies, are still to be seen on the English stage. In some way his comedies are more acceptable to modern audiences than the romantic comedies of Shakespeare; and perhaps this is because we live at a time when romantic comedy in general is out of fashion. It is not that love, and laughter are out of favour but that many of us prefer comedy with a satirical tone, comedy based (as Jonson said in the introduction to *Every man in his Humour*) on

*. . . deeds and language such as men do use*

*And persons such comedy would choose,*

*When she would show an image of the times*

*And sport with human follies, not with crimes.* (From *Every man in his Humour*)

### **Summing up:**

The dramatic form continued to reign in the hands of extremely talented writers during the

Elizabethan age. Along with Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson, many other wonderful writers

successfully tried their hand at drama. The names are: Beaumont, Fletcher, George Chapman, John

Marston, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Heywood, John Webster, Cyril Tourneur.

Overall every aspect of theatre flourished during the Elizabethan Age and the literary genres like

Tragedy, Comedy and History plays touched the zenith of theatre art.

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## **(Part-2)**

### **Historical background and literary features of the Elizabethan age (1550-1630).**

The background of the Elizabethan socio-political life includes two great movements—"The Reformation" and "the Renaissance". The Reformation movement began completed before the Renaissance. It began during the reign of Henry VIII, the father of Queen Elizabeth I and the king of England. His reign ended in 1547. In fact, the entire period was a period of religious movement in the English religio-political life. The national focus was on the liberation of the Church of England from the authority of the Roman church. This liberation movement is known as the Reformation. This is also known as the Protestant Revolution because it could establish the Reformation Church or Protestant Church, making a complete break with Roman Church. This movement was greatly influenced by a German leader—Martin Luther and spread all over Europe, leading to the establishment of Protestant Church.

In England, the Reformation movement and the Renaissance came together. The Reformation had its impact on Renaissance literature. In fact, the literary and cultural history of Renaissance will not be understood without a reference to the Reformation and its influence on it. We may in this connection refer to such authors as Marlowe, Spenser, and Shakespeare even to Milton. Milton alone represents the Puritan role and its interest in the history of religious evolution against the Church of Rome. In fact, Protestantism is a humane interpretation of Catholic religion. It is a modern attitude to Christian religion. There is another important event to note is the translation of the Bible—The Old Testament and The New Testament and its publication in 1611. This version is known as the authorized version of King James. In this regard, forty three scholars were appointed by the king. The facility was thus created for the Bible to be read by all classes of people and by the writers of different branches of literature. Numerous writers made a reference to the Bible. In other words, in the cultural revival of the Renaissance, the Bible added a special dimension. Therefore, the authorized version of the Bible contributed to the national life of Renaissance and Reformation of Europe. For an example, we can say the spiritual conflict in Doctor Faustus' soul was historically a conflict in the soul of Renaissance England. This was produced by the forces of Renaissance and Reformation coming together.

During the Elizabethan era, the Renaissance had made a massive contribution to art, culture and literature. Renaissance was a revival in the study of Greek which brought light into many dark places of the intellect. The new passion for classical learning in itself became a rich and worthy enthusiasm. In all branches of literature Greek and Latin ideas began to force themselves upon English. The new romanticism of the Elizabethan age is for the remote, the wonderful and the beautiful. This is why



Elizabethan age is the first and greatest romantic age. There was an adventure in literary field. It was the ardent youth of English literature and the achievement was worthy of it.

In Drama, there has been massive progress. There arrived hosts of dramatist including Shakespeare. In spite of some early difficulties, drama reached its climax in the hand of Shakespeare. Although the poetical production was not quite equal to the dramatic, it was nevertheless of great and original beauty and prose for the first time also rises to a position of first rate importance. The Latin tradition passed away and English prose acquired a tradition and a universal application. There was a minor feature of the age and it was the disappearance of Scottish literature which was brief but remarkable in the previous age.

It is to be noted that Elizabethan literature was born under the influence of Renaissance or humanism. The Elizabethan age is called the first and greatest epoch in English literature, the romantic quest of this age is for the remote, the wonderful and the beautiful. Love for beauty, sensuousness, imagination etc. constitute the romantic temper of the Elizabethan period. For these reasons Elizabethan period is rightly called the first romantic age in English literature. In the Elizabethan age, England challenged the modern and ancient writers in various fields of literature – drama, epic, pastoral, lyric, romance, allegory, history and philosophy. It is as if the whole nation became a nest of birds. As a result there burst out the spring time of English literature. A host of writers with Shakespeare on their top came and pushed back the old English literature to the first place in the European Literature.

Renaissance and Elizabethan age :

1. 1. RENAISSANCE
2. 2. WHAT DOES RENAISSANCE MEAN? ♣ The term 'renaissance' is derived from the French word meaning 'rebirth'. ♣ It is used to describe this phase of European history because many of the changes experienced between the 14th and 17th centuries were inspired by a revival of the classical art and intellect of ancient Greece and Rome.
3. 3. ORIGIN The European Renaissance began in Northern Italy in the 14th century. The Tuscan city of Florence is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance. Gradually, the movement spread from Italy to other parts of Europe
4. 4. ENGLISH RENAISSANCE ♣ The Renaissance takes place at different times in different countries. ♣ The English Renaissance (also called the Early Modern period) dates from the beginning of the Protestant Reformation and from the height of Quattrocento in Italy . ♣ The period is characterized by a rebirth among English elite of classical learning, a rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman authors. Middle English Era Modern English Period Renaissance – A Bridge

5. [5. CHANGES – WHICH RENAISSANCE BROUGHT](#) Renaissance brought change in Art, literature, philosophy, science, discovery and exploration. Every field of life was striving for perfection
6. [6. Christopher Columbus William Caxton Printing Press](#)
7. [7. PROTESTANT REFORMATION](#) The Protestant Reformation was a major 16th century European movement aimed initially at Reforming the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther John Calvin
8. [8.](#) In 1517, in one of the signal events of western history, Martin Luther, a German Augustinian monk, posted 95 theses on a church door in the university town of Wittenburg. Martin Luther's Ninety Five Theses Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg
9. [9. Protestant Reformers Martin Luther's 1534 Bible translated into German](#) Martin Luther's Life
10. [10. GREAT CHAIN OF BEING](#)
11. [11. HIERARCHY](#)
12. [12. HUMANISM](#) Desiderius Erasmus Renaissance Man. A person whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas; such a person is known to draw on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems. ♣ The gifted people of that age who sought to develop their abilities in all areas of accomplishment: intellectual, artistic, social and physical Galileo – One of the most influential Renaissance Man The whole universe according to humanists existed for man and therefore man must participate actively in practical matters of life.
13. [13.](#) The dignity and worth of the individual was emphasized. This movement originated with the study of classical culture and a group of subjects known collectively as the “studia humanitatis”, or the humanities Education, the key to the discovery of one's humanitas, was a fundamental element in the development of “humanism
14. [14.](#) Leonardo Da Vinci John Milton Francis Bacon Humanist thought and practice spread widely beyond the original center in Florence (Italy) to other parts of Europe
15. [15. CONCEPT OF IMITATION](#) The action of using someone or something as a model: a child learns to speak by imitation
16. [16. PAINTINGS](#)
17. [17. DRESSING AND FASHION](#)
18. [18. ELIZABETHAN AGE](#)
19. [19. ELIZABETHAN AGE – A GOLDEN ERA](#) ♣ The Elizabethan era is the epoch in English history marked by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) ♣ This period saw the flowering of poetry, music and literature. ♣ The era is most famous for drama because of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. It is often called as the Golden Age of Drama ♣ In this period, the Protestant Reformation became more acceptable to the people
20. [20. LIFE OVERVIEW OF QUEEN ELIZABETH \(7 September 1533 ~ 24 March 1603\)](#) ♣ She was daughter of Henry-VIII and Anne Boleyn ♣ Queen of England and Ireland from 17

November 1558 until her death ♣ 15th January 1559 coronation ♣ Queen Merry and King Philip was her predecessors. ♣ She did not marry her whole life - The Virgin Queen ♣ After her death, James I became her successor Signature of Queen

21. [21.](#) She was a good dancer, composer and loved music
22. [22.](#) Literature flourished in Queen Elizabeth era and poets and writers were admired and appreciated in her court. She herself was an avid reader of literature and appreciated the literature
23. [23.](#) AGE OF SHAKESPEARE
24. [24.](#) INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY Less War Peaceful Environment More Time to Develop Political Stability and Peace Social Development Religious Tolerance Literary Taste Patriotism Discovery and Exploration
25. [25.](#) DRAMA Tragedy Tragedy is a form of drama based on human suffering that invokes an accompanying catharsis or pleasure in audiences Marlowe's tragedies were exceptionally popular, such as - Dr. Faustus - The Jew of Malta The audiences particularly liked revenge dramas such as - Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy. The four tragedies considered to be Shakespeare's greatest (Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth)
26. [26.](#) Tragicomedy A mixed mode of drama was developed called Tragicomedy. Tragicomedy basically a type of drama which intermingled with both standards of tragedy and comedy. History Plays Depicted English or European history. - Shakespeare's plays about the lives of kings, such as Richard III and Henry V - Christopher Marlowe's Edward II - George Peele's Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First Comedy A comedy is entertainment consisting of jokes and satire, intended to make an audience laugh - A Midsummer Night's Dream by Shakespeare - Thomas Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday - Thomas Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.
27. [27.](#) UNIVERSITY WITS The University Wits is a group of late 16th century English playwrights who were educated at the universities of Oxford or Cambridge Prominent members of this group were: From Cambridge - Christopher Marlowe - Robert Greene - Thomas Nash From Oxford - John Lyly - Thomas Lodge - George Peele The term "University Wits" was not used in their lifetime, but was coined by George Saintsbury, a 19th- century Christopher Marlowe
28. [28.](#) POETRY ♣ The sonnet was first introduced into English by Thomas Wyatt in the early 16th century ♣ A sonnet is a poetic form which originated in Italy; Giacomo Da Lentini is credited with its invention. Nest of singing birds Love Poetry Patriotic Poetry Philosophical Poetry Satirical Poetry Thomas Wyatt
29. [29.](#) Edmund Spenser Earl of Surrey Philip Sydney Probably composed in the 1580s, Philip Sidney's Astrophil and Stella is a sonnet sequence containing 108 sonnets and 11 songs.
30. [30.](#) MUSIC ♣ Music experienced a shift in popularity from sacred to secular music and the rise of instrumental music. ♣ Professional musicians were employed by the Church of England, the nobility, and the rising middle-class. ♣ Elizabeth I was very fond of music and played the lute

and virginal among others. ♣ She also felt that dancing was a great form of physical exercise and employed musicians to play for her while she danced. ♣ During her reign, she employed about 70 musicians. ♣ Her example made it essential for courtiers and gentlemen to understand the art of music. William Byrd The greatest of all the Elizabethan composers Church Music Court Music Street Music Theatre Music Town Music

31. [31.](#) ARCHITECTURE ♣ Classic design ♣ Elements of Greek and Roman style ♣ Civic and institutional buildings were becoming increasingly common ♣ Manifestation in the distinct form of the prodigy house, large, square, and tall houses such as Longleat House, built by courtiers who hoped to attract the queen for a ruinously expensive stay, and so advance their careers. ♣ Long gallery became popular in English houses. This was apparently mainly used for walking in, and a growing range of parlours and withdrawing rooms supplemented the main living room for the family, the great chamber. ♣ Important building that survive include: ∞ Audley End ∞ Blickling Hall ∞ Charterhouse (London) ∞ Conover Hall (Shropshire) ∞ Danny House ∞ Hatfield House ∞ Longleat House ∞ Wollaton Hall
32. [32.](#) Wollaton Hall (1588) Hardwick Hall (1590~1597) Burghley House (1587)
33. [33.](#) DRESSING AND FASHION ♣ Silk, satin, velvet used by upper class ♣ Wool, sheepskin, linen used by lower lot ♣ Status and class was recognized by fashion and style

## Elizabethan Theatre :

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**Elizabethan theatre**, sometimes called English Renaissance **theatre**, refers to that style of performance plays which blossomed during the reign of **Elizabeth I of England** (r. 1558-1603 CE) and which continued under her Stuart successors. Elizabethan theatre witnessed the first professional actors who belonged to touring troupes and who performed plays of blank verse with entertaining non-religious themes. The first purpose-built permanent theatre was established in London in 1576 CE and others quickly followed so that drama simply to entertain became a booming industry. Theatres showing plays daily led to permanent acting companies which did not have to tour and so could invest more time and money into wowing their audience of both sexes and all social classes. The most celebrated playwright of the period was William Shakespeare (1564-1616 CE) whose works were performed at the famous Globe Theatre in London and covered such diverse themes as history, romance, revenge, murder, comedy and tragedy.

### Elizabeth I & the Arts

The Elizabethan age saw a boom in the arts in general but it was the performance arts that perhaps made the most lasting contribution to English and even world culture. The queen was herself an admirer of plays, performances, and spectacles which were frequently held at her royal residences.

Elizabeth carefully managed her image as the Virgin Queen who had sacrificed her personal life to better concentrate on the good of her people. Theatre was, therefore, just one of the media she used to project her own glory and that of her family, the Tudors. The queen actively sponsored artists and playwrights. Naturally, the Elizabethans did not invent theatre as plays have been performed ever since their invention by the ancient Greeks of the 6th century BCE. Medieval England had witnessed the performance of morality plays and mystery plays, there were even dramas performed by actors during religious ceremonies and holidays. There were also Masques, a type of mime where masked performers sang, danced, and recited poetry, wearing extravagant costumes, and stood before painted scenery. Finally, towns across England had long funded public shows, which involved musicians, acrobats, and jesters, and these continued even as theatre became popular.

The Elizabethan period saw these public performers become a professional body of entertainers. The first professional troupes of actors were sponsored by the queen, nobles, and anyone else who had the money for such entertainments. Plays were performed which, perhaps thanks to the **English Reformation**, were now entirely free from religious themes and not connected to public holidays or religious festivals. Secular plays presented a new challenge, though, and the influence of popular art on politics and public minds was recognised by Elizabeth, who banned performances of unlicensed plays in 1559 CE. In the 1570s CE, religious play cycles were also banned. The royal control of theatre continued in 1572 CE when only nobles were permitted to sponsor professional acting troupes. From 1574 CE all troupes had to be licensed, too.

The move away from divisive religious topics had led writers to explore other themes, and their imaginations knew no bounds. Historical topics were especially popular with the new playwrights in a period when a sense of English nationalism was developing as never before. This combined with a Humanist interest in **Greek** and **Roman** antiquity. Royal patronage of theatre would continue during the reign of Elizabeth's successor, James I of England (r. 1603-1625 CE) who funded three professional actor companies (aka playing companies).

## **William Shakespeare :**

William Shakespeare has become one of the most celebrated authors in any language. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 CE, it was not until 1592 CE that William became known in theatre circles. Two years later he joined Chamberlain's Men and then, as mentioned above, became an important member of the Globe Theatre's permanent staff, a position he held throughout his **writing** career. William produced on average two plays every year, writing 37 in all. The dating of Shakespeare's works is problematic as none have surviving original manuscripts and so historians have looked to their content and other documentary evidence. The plays are usually divided into four groups and illustrate the broad scope of Elizabethan theatre in general. These categories are: comedies, romances, histories, and tragedies. The works, like many plays of the period, combine

wordplay and in-joke references to contemporary politics with tales of love, dark deeds of revenge and murder, historical events, historical fiction, and a big dollop of jingoism.

Shakespeare's first play is usually cited as *Henry VI Part I*, written around 1589 CE. His most popular plays include *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1596 CE) which revolves around the wedding of the Greek hero **Theseus** and the **Amazon** Hippolyte, *Henry V* (1599 CE) which includes a fictionalised version of that king's rousing speech at the **Battle of Agincourt** of 1415 CE, *Hamlet* (c. 1601 CE) which tells the revenge of the Danish prince of that name against his evil uncle, and *Macbeth* (1606 CE), titled after the Scottish king who descends into madness after embarking on a rampage of murder.

### Other Playwrights & Actors :

Under the Stuart kings, it became fashionable and profitable to print the scripts of plays, even if they were always originally written with performance in mind. Some 800 play scripts survive from the 16th and 17th century CE, although this is only a small proportion of those produced at the time. After Shakespeare, the next most celebrated Elizabethan playwright is Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593 CE). In 1587 CE his first play was performed, *Tamburlaine the Great*. The play was a smash hit and told the epic tale of Timur, the founder of the Timurid **Empire** in central Asia (1370-1507 CE). Other successes followed such as *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage* but, like many playwrights and poets of the period, Marlowe was prone to drinking bouts, and it was a brawl in a tavern that ended in his **death**. As Marlowe also worked as a spy for the government, some have speculated that his death was actually an assassination.

The third great playwright of the period was Ben Jonson (1572-1637 CE). Escaping an early career path as an apprentice bricklayer, Jonson's first play, *Isle of Dogs* (1597 CE), was successful but got him into trouble with the authorities who regarded it as inciting rebellion. After a short term in prison, Jonson soon found himself back in confinement after he killed an actor in an argument. Out for a second time, Jonson concentrated on what he was good at and wrote a string of hit plays, many of which were performed at the Globe Theatre. Jonson's other works included poetry, masques, and a huge body of literary criticism.

Accomplished actors, of course, made a name for themselves in the new genre. One famous figure was the comic actor Richard Tarlton (d. 1588 CE) who was also a court jester who made Elizabeth I titter until his jokes went too far and ridiculed some of her noble favourites. Multi-talented, Tarlton co-founded the Queen's Men company and wrote many successful plays, his most popular being *Seven Deadly Sins* (1585 CE). Tarlton's most famous character was a little Chaplinesque: a small man with baggy trousers and carrying a large stick.

### **Trace the development of English Drama in the Elizabethan period-**

The reign of Queen Elizabeth lasted from 1558 to 1603. It was one of the great periods in which English drama flourished and changed, in part due to Elizabeth's own support for the arts.

The first major transition we observe is from a medieval model, with limited genres and performance opportunities, to a far more diverse model. At the start of Elizabeth's reign, there were two main forms of drama. Mystery drama consisted of plays that told Bible stories in English. These were initially developed in part because Roman Catholics (before the foundation of the Church of England by Elizabeth's father Henry VIII) conducted church services and read the Bible in Latin, which was incomprehensible to most of the population, who did not know Latin and were illiterate. Another genre common in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the [morality play](#), also a fundamentally religious genre in which various virtues and vices were personified and the plots were generally allegories of religious and conventional morality.

The revival of classical knowledge, and especially Roman drama, led to the development of more realistic forms of drama, including comedies, tragedies, and history plays. Interludes and masques were often performed at court and permanent theaters were built, supplementing the *ad hoc* performance spaces used earlier. Court patronage allowed playwrights to earn a living and popular audiences, and aristocratic patronage supported the foundation of professional theater companies.

#### FURTHER READING:

Elizabeth had already been on the throne for ten years when we see the first commercial public play house being built by records from 1567 and these venues were specially for the performance of plays. They offered novel entertainment opportunities for London, but drama, plays and pageantry had toured the countryside a long time before.

There were performances called mystery plays and miracle plays which were the main part of early Elizabethan performance and drama – and these had been going around for centuries. They dramatised the Bible and illustrated the lives of saints, so were linked to the church's calendar being performed at special times of the year, such as holy days and saints' feast days.

Play wagons were taken around the towns, halting at important locations to perform plays outside for the general public. Players would sometimes act out the whole Bible and a holiday [atmosphere](#) prevailed with side shows and music and trade.

However Henry VIII split with the Catholic church so the religious drama died out and the space was filled with tragedies, histories and comedies which we now link with Shakespeare and other writers of his time.

This new kind of drama was more professional and commercial performed by employed actor/writers who travelled the country staging plays wherever they might get a ready audience such as pubs, taverns, guildhalls, churches and churchyards, Eventually of course, one enterprising young actor/writer realised the entrepreneurial potential of a fixed venue - and that was William Shakespeare's first theatre.

## The University Wits: Their Contribution to English Drama

Sibaprasad Dutta

In the history of the growth of English drama, particularly English tragedy, Seneca, the Latin dramatist who wrote in the first century AD, exercised enormous influence. His influence was felt in Cambridge between 1550 and 1560, and his appeal was so great that his ten tragedies were translated into English by 1581. When the universities were raging with Senecan blaze, Marlowe, Peele and Greene studied at the universities. These young men, and some of their followers, who knew each other were responsible for the emergence of the Elizabethan school of drama, and their plays had several features in common. These plays chose heroic themes like the lives of Mahomet and Tamburlaine, and these themes were treated heroically – with splendid descriptions, elaborate speeches, violent incidents and emotions. The style of the plays was marked by strong and sonorous lines, grand epithets, and powerful declamation. For obvious reasons, blank verse was the medium so that the high emotions could be sustainably expressed. Seneca being the guiding star, the dramatists opted to write tragedies and neglected to write comedies, considered a lower form of dramatic art. Naturally, real humour was lacking, and even if present somewhere it was coarse and boorish. Comedy had a day when Lyly appeared in the field, and his Campaspe (1584), Endymion (1592) and The Woman in the Moone are forerunners of Shakespeare's romantic comedies like The Twelfth Night or 'As You Like It'.

01. George Peele (c.1558-98) who was born in London was educated at Broadgate Hall, Oxford, where he completed his degree in arts in 1579. Peele was an actor as well as a writer of plays, and for some time, he was a member of Lord Admiral's Company. Peele has left behind some half dozen plays, rich in poetic beauty paralleled by none except Marlowe's. The Arraignment of Paris (c.1584) is supposed to be his earlier work. A kind of romantic comedy, it contains an elaborate tribute to the Queen and shows great skill in the variation of metre. Less musical than David and Bathsheba (1599), it has some striking passages of melodious beauty. David and Bathsheba contains many lines of great beauty – 'not the sweeping beauty of Marlowe, but a gentler and more insinuating charm.' Peele's other works include Edward I (1593), an incoherent chronicle play; The Old Wives' Tale, a clever satire on the popular drama of the day ; The Hunting of Cupid, an earlier play now lost. Peele's poetical works include Polyhymnia (1590), a poem in blank verse, The Honour of the Garter (1593), The Fall of Troy, and a



thumb book 1.5" x 1".

02. Robert Greene (1558-92) too was a student of St. John's College, Cambridge, and later of Clare Hall, Oxford wherefrom he took his M.A. degree in 1583. He lived a lecherous life, and his life, which had much promise, came to an end nearly in the bud. Greene was, first of all, a storyteller and a pamphleteer who turned to drama for the lucre it offered. His plays are four in number: *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, (1587); *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589), *Orlando Furioso* (c.1591) and *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth* (1592). *Alphonsus* is modelled on Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*; *Orlando Furioso* (c.1591) has its source in an English translation of Ariosto; and *The Scottish Historie of James, the Fourth*, staged in 1592, is not a historical play, but has for its theme an imaginary incident of King's life. *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, the finest of Greene's works is a tale of love of a maid with two men. Though it lacks in complications that it could have, the chief merit of the play lies in the lively method of presenting the story. It can, to a great extent, be called a document of Elizabethan life. Greene wrote thirty-five prose pieces. They are also important works in that they reveal the author's erratic energy, his quick, malicious wit, and his powerful imagination. "Greene is weak in creating characters, and his style is not of outstanding merit, but his humour is somewhat genial in his plays, and his methods less austere than those of other tragedians."

03. Thomas Kyd (1558-94), one of the important university wits, was the son of a London Notary and was educated at Merchant Taylor's School. A dramatist and translator, he achieved great popularity with his first work, *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was translated into German and Dutch. The horrific plot of the play, stuffed with murder, frenzy and sudden death, has gained the play lasting importance and popularity. While the play bears resemblances of Marlovian lines, 'there are touches of style that dimly foreshadow the great tragical lines of Shakespeare.' The only other play of Kyd that still survives is *Cornelia* (1593), a translated version of a work of the French Senecan, Garnier, 'but his hand has been sought in many plays including *Soliman and Perseda* (1588), the *First Part of Jeronimo* (1592), an attempt, after the success of *The Spanish Tragedie*, to write an introductory play to it, and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*'.

04. The most important figure among the university wits, that could be placed in the rank of Shakespeare, is Christopher Marlowe (1564-93). The greatest among the pre-Shakespearean dramatists, Marlowe was educated at Canterbury and Cambridge. He led a dissolute life, and could be arrested but for his untimely death in a fight in a tavern.

Marlowe wrote only tragedies, and they all were written within five years (1587-92). Among his plays, *Edward II* is his best work, with a well-constructed plot, though the characterisation is simple. In this play, the material drawn from Holinshed's *Chronicles* is neatly compressed. Its hero cannot claim to be truly tragic, but in the *Murder Scene* he arouses deep pathos.

Tamburlaine the Great (1587), dealing with one ‘inhuman figure’ (Albert), cannot be called to have dramatic excellence. The plot is episodic and lacks cohesion. The Second Part of Tamburlaine the Great (1588) is inferior to its predecessor. The Jew of Malta (1589) projects a Machiavellian villain. In spite of a good opening, the play deteriorates with the introduction of the second villain, Ithamore. Doctor Faustus (1592?) has a good beginning and an ending, but the comic scenes appearing inside are not enough charming. The conversations between the good and the evil angels remind us of the mediaeval Miracle plays. The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage (c. 1593) written in collaboration with Nash demonstrates sub-standard dramatic art, and The Massacre at Paris (1593) was left unfinished. Marlowe’s plays represent ‘a poetic vision, the typically Renaissance quest for power – l’mour de l’mpossible – combined with the quest for beauty.’ In Tamburlaine, the shepherd seeks the “sweet fruition of an earthly crown”, in The Jew of Malta, Barabas seeks “infinite riches in a little room”, while the quest in Doctor Faustus is for infinite knowledge. If not the first experimenter with blank verse, Marlowe raised it to a certain height.’ His verse is notable for its burning energy, its splendour of diction, its sensuous richness, its variety of pace, and its responsiveness to the demands of varying emotions.’ Marlowe’s contribution to English play may be said to have been:

(a) He glorified the matter of the drama by his sweep of imagination as reflected in the stories.

(b) He vitalized the manner and matter of the drama, as reflected in characterization.

(c) He clarified and gave coherence to the drama, as reflected in his blank verse.

05. The ‘university wits’ include another playwright, Thomas Nash (1567-1601). After completing his education at Cambridge, he went in 1586 to London to earn by writing. He took an active part in the political and personal questions of the day, and his aggressive method took him behind the bars. He finished Marlowe’s The Tragedy of Dido, but his only surviving play is Summer’s Last Will and Testament, a satirical masque. Nash also wrote The Unfortunate Traveller or The Life of Jacke Wilton (1594), a prose tale that has enough importance in the growth English fiction.

06. Born in the same year (1558) as Thomas Nash, Thomas Lodge (1558-1625) was educated at both Oxford and Cambridge where he studied law. He, however, gave up his legal studies and took to writing, and while writing, he acted too. Nash produced very little in quantity, and it is assumed that he collaborated with Shakespeare in Henry VI. The Woundes of Civile War, a kind of chronicle play, is considered to be Lodge’s own work. He also wrote prose romances, the most famous of which is Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie (1590) which was the chief source of Shakespeare’s As You Like It.

07. John Lyly (1554-1606) was more famous as a writer of prose than a dramatist proper. The

plays of Lyly were written after the publication of *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* (1579) and were acted by ‘the children of Paul’s before her majesty.’ His best-known dramas include *Alexander and Campaspe*, played on New Year’s Eve in 1581; *Sapho and Phao* (1584); *Endymion* (1591) written around the friendship between the Queen and the Earl of Leicester, and *Midas* (1592). He also wrote two other plays – *The Woman in the Moon* and *Love’s Metamorphosis*. Lyly’s plays might lack stage effectiveness, but they display the dramatist’s superior culture and a fine sense of style. His plays have more kinship with masques than the drama, and the delightful songs that are interpolated in the plays enhance their charm by a great measure. His dialogues are really admirable at times, happy in clear-cut phrases and allusiveness. After all said and done, the fame of Lyly rests on his prose work *Euphues* and the play, *Endymion*.

The university wits were ‘a new school of professional literary men. Of this little constellation, Marlowe is the central sun, and round revolved as minor stars, Lyly, Greene, Peele, Lodge, and Nash.’ In their hands, Elizabethan period saw the drama in its adolescence, struggling hard to maturity that was accomplished by Shakespeare.

What is University Wits

University Wits were a group of young dramatists who wrote and performed in London towards the end of the 16th century. They are called University Wits because they were the witty students of Cambridge or Oxford. They were all more or less acquainted with each other and most of them led irregular and uncertain life. Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nash, Robert Greene, George Peele and John Lyly were the members of this group. Their plays had some common characteristics.

University Wits had a fondness of introducing heroic themes in their dramas. They often took it from the lives of great figures. They gave heroic treatment to the heroic themes. Their dramas usually had variety, splendid description and violent incidents. Their chief aim was to achieve strong and sounding lines. The best example was Marlowe, who is famous for his use of blank-verse. Again, the themes, used in their dramas, were usually tragic in nature. There was lack of real humor in their dramas. The only exception was Lyly. His “*The Woman in the Moon*” is the first example of romantic comedy.

## CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Christopher Marlowe was perhaps the greatest among the University Wits. He was the only dramatist who was compared to Shakespeare even though he lacked the warm humanity of Shakespearean plays. Marlowe was fond of tragic in literature. He had no interest in comedy. Again, as a dramatist, he had some serious limitations, specially, in plot construction. His art of characterization was simple. His plays were one man show- they centered around one figure. Though he had some lacking, he was

remarkable for being lyrical and romantic in his dramatic presentation of life. All his plays were poetic and artistic. “The Jew of Malta” and “Dr. Faustus” are two of his best works. These two plays clearly show Marlowe’s love for conventional Machiavellian hero.

## THOMAS KYD

Thomas Kyd is another important dramatist of the University Wits. He introduced the tradition of revenge play. We can easily find the influence of Kyd in the works of Shakespeare. “The Spanish Tragedy” is the best work of Thomas Kyd. This play had some outstanding features. The plot is horrific. There are murders, madness and death, but it earned a huge popularity for the play.

## THOMAS LODGE

Thomas Lodge was a lawyer by profession but he gave up his career and took literature as career. He wrote only few dramas. “Rosalynde” is the most famous of his romantic comedies. It is said that Shakespeare took the plot of his “As You Like It” from Lodge’s “Rosalynde”.

## THOMAS NASH

Thomas Nash was a professional journalist. He got involved in politics as well. His works had satiric tone. “Unfortunate Traveller” is his best work, which had much influence as far as the development of English novel is concerned.

## ROBERT GREENE

Robert Greene’s plays had a great contribution in the development of English drama. Although his art of characterization was weak and his style was not outstanding, his humor was highly interesting. His method was not very strict like the other tragedians of that time. He was witty, humorous and imaginative.

## GEORGE PEELE

George Peele was another important dramatist of the University Wits. His plays had romantic, satiric and historical evidence. He had no attraction towards the poetry. He handled Blank-verse with variety, and had a sense of humor and pathos. “Edward the 1st” was perhaps his best work.

## JOHN LYLY

John Lyly was another great dramatist who had a strong interest towards the romantic comedy. His comedies were marked by elaborate dialogues, jests and retorts. We can find his influence in

Shakespearean comedies. “Midas” is one of the most important work of John Lyly which had shaken the development of the romantic comedy in English literature.

## Shakespeare's plays

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**Shakespeare's plays** are a canon of approximately 39 dramatic works written by English poet, playwright, and actor [William Shakespeare](#). The exact number of plays—as well as their classifications as [tragedy](#), [history](#), or [comedy](#)—is a matter of scholarly debate. Shakespeare's plays are widely regarded as being among the greatest in the English language and are continually performed around the world. The plays have been translated into every major [living language](#).

Many of his plays appeared in print as a series of [quartos](#), but approximately half of them remained unpublished until 1623, when the posthumous [First Folio](#) was published. The traditional division of his plays into tragedies, comedies, and histories follows the categories used in the First Folio. However, modern criticism has labeled some of these plays "[problem plays](#)" that elude easy categorisation, or perhaps purposely break generic conventions, and has introduced the term [romances](#) for what scholars believe to be his later comedies.

When Shakespeare first arrived in London in the late 1570s or early 1580s, dramatists writing for London's new commercial playhouses (such as [The Curtain](#)) were combining two strands of dramatic tradition into a new and distinctively Elizabethan synthesis. Previously, the most common forms of popular English theatre were the [Tudor morality plays](#). These plays, generally celebrating [piety](#), use [personified](#) moral attributes to urge or instruct the [protagonist](#) to choose the virtuous life over Evil. The characters and plot situations are largely symbolic rather than realistic. As a child, Shakespeare would likely have seen this type of play (along with, perhaps, [mystery plays](#) and [miracle plays](#)).<sup>[1]</sup>

The other strand of dramatic tradition was [classical](#) aesthetic theory. This theory was derived ultimately from [Aristotle](#); in [Renaissance England](#), however, the theory was better known through its Roman interpreters and practitioners. At the universities, plays were staged in a more academic form as [Roman](#) closet dramas. These plays, usually performed in [Latin](#), adhered to classical ideas of [unity](#) and [decorum](#), but they were also more static, valuing lengthy speeches over physical action. Shakespeare would have learned this theory at grammar school, where [Plautus](#) and especially [Terence](#) were key parts of the curriculum<sup>[2]</sup> and were taught in editions with lengthy theoretical introductions.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Theatre and stage setup:

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Archaeological excavations on the foundations of the [Rose](#) and the [Globe](#) in the late twentieth century<sup>[4]</sup> showed that all London [English Renaissance theatres](#) were built around similar general plans. Despite individual differences, the public theatres were three stories high and built around an

open space at the center. Usually polygonal in plan to give an overall rounded effect, three levels of inward-facing galleries overlooked the open center into which jutted the stage—essentially a platform surrounded on three sides by the audience, only the rear being restricted for the entrances and exits of the actors and seating for the musicians. The upper level behind the stage could be used as a [balcony](#), as in [Romeo and Juliet](#), or as a position for a character to harangue a crowd, as in [Julius Caesar](#).

Usually built of timber, lath and plaster and with thatched roofs, the early theatres were vulnerable to fire, and gradually were replaced (when necessary) with stronger structures. When the Globe burned down in June 1613, it was rebuilt with a tile roof.

A different model was developed with the [Blackfriars Theatre](#), which came into regular use on a long term basis in 1599. The Blackfriars was small in comparison to the earlier theatres, and roofed rather than open to the sky; it resembled a modern theatre in ways that its predecessors did not.

### Elizabethan Shakespeare:

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For Shakespeare, as he began to write, both traditions were alive; they were, moreover, filtered through the recent success of the [University Wits](#) on the London stage. By the late 16th century, the popularity of morality and academic plays waned as the [English Renaissance](#) took hold, and playwrights like [Thomas Kyd](#) and [Christopher Marlowe](#) revolutionized theatre. Their plays blended the old morality drama with classical theory to produce a new secular form.<sup>[5]</sup> The new drama combined the rhetorical complexity of the academic play with the bawdy energy of the moralities. However, it was more ambiguous and complex in its meanings, and less concerned with simple allegory. Inspired by this new style, Shakespeare continued these artistic strategies,<sup>[6]</sup> creating plays that not only resonated on an emotional level with audiences but also explored and debated the basic elements of what it means to be human. What Marlowe and Kyd did for tragedy, [John Lyly](#) and [George Peele](#), among others, did for comedy: they offered models of witty dialogue, romantic action, and exotic, often pastoral location that formed the basis of Shakespeare's comedic mode throughout his career.<sup>[7]</sup>

Shakespeare's Elizabethan tragedies (including the history plays with tragic designs, such as *Richard II*) demonstrate his relative independence from classical models. He takes from Aristotle and [Horace](#) the notion of decorum; with few exceptions, he focuses on high-born characters and national affairs as the subject of tragedy. In most other respects, though, the early tragedies are far closer to the spirit and style of moralities. They are episodic, packed with character and incident; they are loosely unified by a theme or character.<sup>[8]</sup> In this respect, they reflect clearly the influence of Marlowe, particularly of [Tamburlaine](#). Even in his early work, however, Shakespeare generally shows more restraint than Marlowe; he resorts to grandiloquent rhetoric less frequently, and his attitude towards his heroes is more nuanced, and sometimes more sceptical, than Marlowe's.<sup>[9]</sup> By the turn of the century, the bombast of *Titus Andronicus* had vanished, replaced by the subtlety of *Hamlet*.

In comedy, Shakespeare strayed even further from classical models. *The Comedy of Errors*, an adaptation of [Menaechmi](#), follows the model of [new comedy](#) closely. Shakespeare's other Elizabethan

comedies are more romantic. Like Lyly, he often makes romantic intrigue (a secondary feature in Latin new comedy) the main plot element;<sup>[10]</sup> even this romantic plot is sometimes given less attention than witty dialogue, deceit, and jests. The "reform of manners," which Horace considered the main function of comedy,<sup>[11]</sup> survives in such episodes as the gulling of [Malvolio](#).

Shakespeare is known as the 'Father of English Drama'. He is known as England's national poet, and the "Bard of Avon". His works, including collaborations, consist of 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and some other verses, some of the uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other dramatist.

## Characteristics

- Shakespeare wrote 37 plays in about 24 years. His plays were written for performance.
- His dramas can be divided into histories, tragedies and comedies.
- The protagonists in the early plays are historical figures, including rulers of England.
- His play [Hamlet](#) is considered to be the epitome of the Renaissance in which the protagonist achieves his perfection only after death.
- His play Richard-III is the epitome of Machiavellian evil in which Shakespeare balances between the role of the king and the role of the man.
- As the dramatist of the [Renaissance Age](#), Shakespearean plays focus on the man, exploring his weaknesses, depravities, flaws etc.
- All the characters ranging from soldiers to king speak English.
- His plays have been divided into five acts. However, the division was imposed on the Shakespearean play by Nicholas Rowe; one of the first editors of Shakespeare.
- Most of the [Shakespearean plays](#) are [problem plays](#) in which the playwright do not provide any solutions and audience are supposed to decide.
- Shakespeare, in his plays, goes into the depth of human behaviour and redefines the geography of the human soul.
- His final plays move against the wave of [Jacobean Theatre](#) that focused on blood tragedy and [social comedy](#).
- One finds the traces of colonialism in his plays. e.g. In *The Tempest* Prospero enslaves Caliban who is the native of that island.

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Because Shakespeare's plays are written to be acted, they are constantly fresh and can be adapted to the place and time they are performed. Their language is wonderfully expressive and powerful, and although it may sometimes seem hard to understand in reading, actors can bring it to vivid life for us.

The plays provide actors with some of the most challenging and rewarding roles ever written. They are both entertaining and moving.

In the first Folio of 1623, the earliest edition of Shakespeare's collected plays, they are divided into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. Over time, these have been further divided into Romances which include *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Pericles*. The term 'Problem Plays' has been used to include plays as apparently diverse as *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida*.

In his history plays, Shakespeare sometimes had the same character appear over and over. For example, the character 'Bardolph' appears in the the most plays of any characters, including *Henry IV Part 1*, *Henry IV Part 2*, *Henry V*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

## Playwrights after Shakespeare

Shakespeare's perception of a crisis in public norms and private belief became the overriding concern of the [drama](#) until the closing of the theatres in 1642. The prevailing manner of the playwrights who succeeded him was realistic, satirical, and antiromantic, and their plays focused predominantly on those two symbolic locations, the city and the court, with their typical activities, the pursuit of wealth and power. "Riches and glory," wrote Sir Walter Raleigh, "Machiavel's two marks to shoot at," had become the universal aims, and this situation was addressed by city comedies and tragedies of state. Increasingly, it was on the stages that the rethinking of early [Stuart](#) assumptions took place.

On the one hand, in the works of [Thomas Heywood](#), [Thomas Dekker](#), [John Day](#), [Samuel Rowley](#), and others, the old tradition of festive comedy was reoriented toward the celebration of confidence in the dynamically expanding commercial metropolis. [Heywood](#) claimed to have been involved in some 200 plays, and they include fantastic adventures starring citizen heroes, spirited, patriotic, and inclined to a leveling attitude in social matters. His masterpiece, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), is a middle-class tragedy. [Dekker](#) was a kindred spirit, best seen in his *Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599), a celebration of citizen brotherliness and [Dick Whittington](#)-like success; the play nevertheless faces squarely up to the hardships of work, thrift, and the [contempt](#) of the great. On the other hand, the very industriousness that the likes of Heywood viewed with civic pride became in the hands of Ben Jonson, George Chapman, John Marston, and Thomas Middleton a sign of self-seeking, [avarice](#), and [anarchy](#), symptomatic of the sicknesses in society at large.

## [Jonson](#)

The crucial [innovations](#) in satiric comedy were made by [Ben Jonson](#), Shakespeare's friend and nearest rival, who stands at the fountainhead of what subsequently became the dominant modern comic tradition. His early plays, particularly *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) and *Every Man Out of*



*His Humour* (1599), with their galleries of grotesques, scornful detachment, and rather academic effect, were patently indebted to the verse satires of the 1590s; they introduced to the English stage a vigorous and direct anatomizing of “the time’s deformities,” the language, habits, and humours of the London scene. Jonson began as a self-appointed social legislator, socially conservative but intellectually radical, outraged by a society given over to inordinate appetite and egotism, and ambitious through his mammoth learning to establish himself as the privileged artist, the fearless and faithful mentor and companion to kings; but he was ill at ease with a court inclined in its masques to prefer flattery to judicious advice. Consequently, the greater satires that followed are marked by their gradual accommodations with popular comedy and by their unwillingness to make their implied moral judgments explicit: in *Volpone* (1606) the theatrical brilliance of the villain easily eclipses the sordid legacy hunters whom he deceives; *Epicoene* (1609) is a noisy farce of metropolitan fashion and frivolity; *The Alchemist* (1610) exhibits the conjurings and deceptions of clever London rogues; and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) draws a rich portrait of city life parading through the annual fair at Smithfield, a vast panorama of a society given over to folly. In these plays, fools and rogues are indulged to the very height of their daring, forcing upon the audience both criticism and admiration; the strategy leaves the audience to draw its own conclusions while liberating Jonson’s wealth of exuberant comic invention, virtuoso skill with plot construction, and mastery of a language tumbling with detailed observation of London’s multifarious ephemera. After 1616 Jonson abandoned the stage for the court, but, finding himself increasingly disregarded, he made a hard-won return to the theatres. The most notable of his late plays are popular in style: *The New Inn* (1629), which has affinities with the Shakespearean romance, and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633), which resurrects the Elizabethan country farce.

## Other Jacobean dramatists

Of Jonson’s successors in city comedy, Francis Beaumont, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), amusingly insults the citizenry while ridiculing its taste for romantic plays. John Marston adopts so sharp a satirical tone that his comic plays frequently border on tragedy. All values are mocked by Marston’s bitter and universal skepticism; his city comedy *The Dutch Courtezan* (1605), set in London, explores the pleasures and perils of libertinism. His tragicomedy *The Malcontent* (1604) is remarkable for its wild language and sexual and political disgust; Marston cuts the audience adrift from the moorings of reason by a dizzying interplay of parody and seriousness. Only in the city comedies of Thomas Middleton was Jonson’s moral concern with greed and self-ignorance bypassed, for Middleton presents the pursuit of money as the sole human absolute and buying and selling, usury, law, and the wooing of rich widows as the dominant modes of social interaction. His unprejudiced satire touches the actions of citizen and gentleman with equal irony and detachment; the only operative distinction is between fool and knave, and the sympathies of the audience are typically engaged on the side of wit, with the resourceful prodigal and dexterous whore. His characteristic form, used in *Michaelmas Term* (1605) and *A Trick to Catch the*

*Old One* (1606), was intrigue comedy, which enabled him to portray his society dynamically, as a mechanism in which each sex and class pursues its own selfish interests. He was thus concerned less with characterizing individuals in depth than with examining the inequalities and injustices of the world that cause them to behave as they do. His *The Roaring Girl* (c. 1608) and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) are the only Jacobean comedies to rival the comprehensiveness of *Bartholomew Fair*, but their social attitudes are opposed to Jonson's; the misbehaviour that Jonson condemned morally as "humours" or affectation Middleton understands as the product of circumstance.

Middleton's social concerns are also powerfully to the fore in his great tragedies, *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621) and *The Changeling* (1622), in which the moral complacency of men of rank is shattered by the dreadful violence they themselves have casually set in train, proving the answerability of all men for their actions despite the exemptions claimed for privilege and status. The hand of heaven is even more explicitly at work in the overthrow of the aristocratic libertine D'Amville in *Cyril Tourneur's The Atheist's Tragedy* (c. 1611), where the breakdown of old codes of deference before a progressive middle-class morality is strongly in evidence. In *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), now generally attributed to Middleton, a scathing attack on courtly dissipation is reinforced by complaints about inflation and penury in the countryside at large. For more traditionally minded playwrights, new anxieties lay in the corrupt and sprawling bureaucracy of the modern court and in the political eclipse of the nobility before incipient royal absolutism. In Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) Machiavellian statesmen abound, while *George Chapman's Bussy d'Ambois* (1604) and *Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608) drew on recent French history to chart the collision of the magnificent but redundant heroism of the old-style aristocrat, whose code of honour had outlived its social function, with pragmatic arbitrary monarchy; Chapman doubtless had the career and fate of Essex in mind. The classic tragedies of state are *John Webster's*, with their dark Italian courts, intrigue and treachery, spies, malcontents, and informers. His *The White Devil* (1612), a divided, ambivalent play, elicits sympathy even for a vicious heroine, since she is at the mercy of her deeply corrupt society, and the heroine in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) is the one decent and spirited inhabitant of her world, yet her noble death cannot avert the fearfully futile and haphazard carnage that ensues. As so often on the Jacobean stage, the challenge to the male-dominated world of power was mounted through the experience of its women.

## **The last Renaissance dramatists**

Already in the Jacobean period, signs of a politer drama such as would prevail after 1660 were beginning to appear. Simply in terms of productivity and longevity, the most successful Jacobean playwright was *John Fletcher*, whose ingenious tragicomedies and sometimes bawdy comedies were calculated to attract the applause of the emerging Stuart leisured classes. With plays such as *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609 or 1610), Fletcher caught up with the latest in avant-garde Italianate drama, while his most dazzling comedy, *The Wild Goose Chase* (produced 1621, printed 1652), is a battle of the sexes set among Parisian gallants and their ladies; it anticipates the Restoration comedy

[of manners](#). Fletcher's successor in the reign of [Charles I](#) was [James Shirley](#), who showed even greater facility with romantic comedy and the mirroring of fashions and foibles. In *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635) and *Hyde Park* (1637), Shirley presented the fashionable world to itself in its favourite haunts and situations.

However, the underlying tensions of the time continued to preoccupy the drama of the other major Caroline playwrights: [John Ford](#), [Philip Massinger](#), and [Richard Brome](#). The plays of Ford, the last major tragic dramatist of the [Renaissance](#), focus on profoundly conservative societies whose values are in crisis. In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633?), a seemingly typical middle-class family is destroyed by the discovery of incest. In *The Broken Heart* (1633?), a courtly society collapses under the pressure of hidden political maladies. Massinger, too, wrote some fine tragedies (*The Roman Actor*, 1626), but his best plays are comedies and tragicomedies preoccupied with political themes, such as *The Bondman* (1623), which deals with issues of liberty and obedience, and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (performed 1625, printed 1633), which satirizes the behaviour and outlook of the provincial gentry. The tradition of subversive domestic satire was carried down to the [English Civil Wars](#) in the plays of Brome, whose anarchic and popular comedies, such as *The Antipodes* (1640) and *A Jovial Crew* (produced 1641, printed 1652), poke fun at all levels of society and include caustic and occasionally libelous humour. The outbreak of fighting in 1642 forced the playhouses to close, but this was not because the theatre had become identified with the court. Rather, a theatre of complex political sympathies was still being produced. The crisis in which the playhouses had become embroiled had been the drama's preoccupation for three generations.

From the Elizabethan Age come some of the most highly respected plays in [Western drama](#). Although it is generally agreed that the period began at the commencement of the reign of Queen [Elizabeth I](#) in 1558, the ending date is not as definite. Some consider the age to have ended at the queen's death in 1603, whereas others place the end of Elizabethan Drama at the closing of the theaters in 1642. [Elizabeth I](#) was a powerful, resolute monarch who returned England to Protestantism, quelled a great deal of internal turmoil, and unified the nation. She was also a avid supporter of the arts which sparked a surge of activity in the theater. During her reign, some playwrights were able to make a comfortable living by receiving royal patronage. There was a great deal of theatrical activity at Court, and many public theaters were also built on the outskirts of London. Theater was a popular pastime, and people of all walks of life attended. Although women were not allowed onstage, they did attend performances and often made up a substantial part of the audience. The theater also drew many unsavory characters, including pickpockets, cutpurses, and prostitutes. Because of the perceived bad influence of the theaters, the Puritans were vocally opposed to them and succeeded in shutting them down in 1642. Some of the most important playwrights come from the Elizabethan era, including [William Shakespeare](#), [Ben Jonson](#), and [Christopher Marlowe](#). These playwrights wrote plays that were patterned on numerous previous sources, including Greek tragedy, Seneca's plays, Attic drama, English miracle plays, morality plays, and interludes. Elizabethan tragedy dealt with

heroic themes, usually centering on a great personality who is destroyed by his own passion and ambition. The comedies often satirized the fops and gallants of society.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### [George Chapman](#) (c. 1559–1634)

[George Chapman](#) was born around 1559 in the town of Hitchin in Hertfordshire, near London. He was the second son of Thomas and Joan Chapman. Little is known of his early life except that he attended Oxford in 1574 but left before completing his degree. From 1583 through 1585, he was in the household of [Sir Ralph Sadler](#), although his exact position there is somewhat unclear. It seems that Chapman served in the military in 1591 and 1592 but returned to London prior to 1594. Chapman's earliest drama, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, was produced in 1596, and he quickly gained a reputation as a talented playwright. Chapman wrote approximately twenty-one plays between 1596 and 1613, but his output was very sporadic. Some years he wrote no plays, instead concentrating his efforts on translating the poetry of Homer. Chapman experienced financial troubles throughout his life and spent some time in debtor's prison. His fortune changed for a brief time in 1603, when he was given a position in the household of the young Prince Henry. Henry undertook sponsorship of the Homer project. During this time, Chapman also wrote plays for the Children of the Chapel, and the company produced Chapman's most famous tragedies: *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604) and two plays on Byron (1608). When Henry died in 1612, Chapman once again found himself in financial trouble. Very little is known about the last twenty years of his life. He died on May 12, 1634.

### [Thomas Dekker](#) (c. 1572–1632)

The exact date of [Thomas Dekker](#)'s birth is unknown. In a document from 1632, he speaks of his "three-score years," and this is the basis for the assumption that he was born in or around the year 1572. He is thought to have been born and raised in London, but little is known about his life prior to January 1598, when his name begins to appear on the payment books of Philip Henslowe, theater owner and financier of two London theater companies. From 1598 to 1600, Dekker wrote eight plays for the Lord Admiral's Men and collaborated on twenty-four others. In 1600, his most famous play, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, was produced. The play is notable for its realistic depiction of everyday life in seventeenth-century London as well as for Dekker's effective use of romantic fantasy in his depiction of characters. The play was extremely popular with London audiences. Around 1606, Dekker turned to writing pamphlets. His most notable works of this genre are *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606) and *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609). In 1610, he returned to writing plays, but many of his later works were lost. Even though Dekker was a talented playwright, he was never able to make a comfortable living. As Diane Yancey notes in *Life in the Elizabethan Theater*, "Thomas Dekker was a talented and overworked man who spent his life in hopeless poverty." He served several prison terms for debt, with the longest being the six years from 1613 to 1619. Dekker was last heard from in

1632. It is assumed that this was the year of his death, as there is a record of one "Thomas Decker householder" being buried on August 25.

### **Thomas Heywood (c. 1573–1641)**

**Thomas Heywood** was a prolific writer who claimed to have written and collaborated on more than two hundred plays. He is most famous for his plays dealing with contemporary English life. Heywood was born in the county of Lincolnshire to Elizabeth Heywood and the Reverend Robert Heywood. His family was fairly well off, and he is believed to have studied at **Cambridge University**. However, he did not complete his degree. On June 13, 1603, Heywood married Anne Butler. It is uncertain how many children the couple had. There are baptismal records for eight Heywood children, but there is no way to verify if these were all sons and daughters of the dramatist. By 1598, Heywood was gaining recognition as a comic writer, although most of his significant literary activity was done between 1600 and 1620. His best-known play, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, was produced during this period, in 1603. After the death of his first wife, Heywood married Jane Span, on January 18, 1633. In his later years, Heywood served as City Poet and produced several pageants for the Lord Mayor. He was buried on August 16, 1641, in Clerkenwell.

### **Ben Jonson (1572–1637)**

Ben Jonson was born in 1572 in Westminster, near London. His stepfather was a master bricklayer, and Jonson briefly took up this trade in his youth. He also spent a brief time as a soldier, returning to England and marrying sometime prior to 1592. Upon his return to England, Jonson became an actor and by 1597 was working as a dramatist for the theatrical entrepreneur Phillip Henslowe. Jonson's first play, co-written with Thomas Nashe in 1597, was *The Isle of Dogs*. It was deemed offensive and landed Jonson in jail for a brief time. Then, in 1598, Jonson was arrested for killing a fellow actor in a duel. That same year, however, Jonson also gained his first dramatic success with the play *Every Man in His Humour*. This play was the first instance of a new comic form that came to be known as "the comedy of humours," and it turned him into a celebrity. Jonson became a favorite of King James I and wrote over thirty masques for court performance. In 1616, King James I made him **poet laureate**, the official poet of the Court. This position also came with an annual pension, allowing Jonson to live out his life comfortably. Jonson suffered a severe stroke in 1628 and died in Westminster on August 6, 1637.

### **Thomas Kyd (1558–1594)**

**Thomas Kyd** was born in London in November 3, 1558, the son of Thomas Kyd, a scrivener, and his wife, Anna. Kyd went to Merchant Taylors' school but did not enter a university. From about 1587 to 1593, Kyd was in the service of a lord. He began to write plays, and it was during this time that Kyd had his greatest theatrical success, with the production of *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was wildly popular with Elizabethan audiences and established Kyd as the founder of a new genre of Elizabethan

Drama known as "blood tragedy." The exact date of the first production of *The Spanish Tragedy* is unknown. Matters seemed to go along fairly smoothly until 1591, when Kyd ran into some very serious trouble due to his earlier acquaintance with the dramatist [Christopher Marlowe](#). During a government search, some antireligious papers were seized in Kyd's home, and he was accused of atheism. He was arrested and tortured but was freed after maintaining that the papers belonged to Marlowe and had become inadvertently mixed with his own belongings when the two shared a room for a brief time. Kyd was eventually freed, but the lord he served was not convinced of his innocence. He released Kyd from service in 1593. Kyd was unable to obtain other financial assistance and died in July 1594 in extreme poverty.

### ***[John Lyly](#) (c. 1553–1606)***

[John Lyly](#) was born in Kent, England, around 1553 or 1554 and grew up in Canterbury. He attended Magdalen College at [Oxford University](#), earning his bachelor's degree in 1573 and his master's in 1575. He applied for a fellowship but was turned down and so left the university and moved to London where he pursued writing. Known at university as a wit, he was an immediate success with the publication of a novel in two parts, *Euphanes, or the Anatomy of Wit* (1579) and *Euphanes and His England* (1580). Through these works, Lyly introduced the euphemism, or indirect expression, to the [English language](#). Having lost a bid for Master of the Revels in 1579, which would have elevated his standing at royal court, Lyly turned to playwriting and also served as a member of Parliament between 1580 and 1601. He married Beatrice Browne in 1583 and later that year took control of the first Blackfriars Theatre. Lyly's comedies were very popular, with eight of them being performed between 1584 and 1591 by children in children's theaters. These plays included *Campaspe* (1584), *Endymion*, *the Man in the Moon* (1588), and *Midas* (1590), and were later noteworthy for being the first prose comedies. *The Woman in the Moon* (1594) is his only play in verse. Lyly petitioned Queen Elizabeth I for the post of Master of the Revels again in 1589 and 1593 but did not meet with success. Thereafter, his popularity declined, and Lyly died in poverty in London in November 1606.

### ***[Christopher Marlowe](#) (1564–1593)***

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury on February 26, 1564, the eldest son of master shoemaker John Marlowe and Katherine Arthur. Marlowe attended [Cambridge University](#), quickly distinguishing himself as a brilliant student. During his time at Cambridge, Marlowe became part of Queen Elizabeth's secret service and carried out several secret missions for the Crown. After receiving his degree in July 1587, he went to London, where he became an actor and dramatist for the Lord Admiral's Company. During that same year, both parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* were performed on the London stages, catapulting Marlowe into celebrity status. Marlowe lived a reckless life and had several scrapes with the law. In 1591, Marlowe's former roommate, playwright Thomas Kyd, was imprisoned and tortured after authorities found heretical writings in Kyd's room. Kyd insisted, perhaps while being tortured, that the writings belonged to Marlowe, who was known by

some to be an atheist. Marlowe was also brought in for questioning and then released. Marlowe's life ended when he was only twenty-nine years old. On the night of May 30, 1593, he was stabbed in the head and probably died instantly. The circumstances of his death remained unclear, but the story that it occurred in a barroom fight was later discredited. Some scholars speculate that his death was arranged by secret service men and may have been ordered because he was reported to be a heretic. He was buried in an unmarked grave.

### ***William Shakespeare (1564–1616)***

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was the third of eight children. At age eighteen, Shakespeare married the already-pregnant Anne Hathaway. They would eventually have three children. Very little is known about Shakespeare's life from 1583 to 1592. By 1594, however, he had joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, serving as both an actor and a playwright. By the end of that year, six of his plays had already been performed. In 1599, Shakespeare and other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men financed the building of the [Globe Theatre](#), and the Lord Admiral's Men continued to mount popular performances there, including many of Shakespeare's plays. The Lord Admiral's Men became the foremost London company, performing at Court on 32 occasions between 1594 and 1603. After his ascension to the throne, James I granted the Lord Chamberlain's Men a royal patent, and the company's name was changed to the King's Men. Shakespeare's talent as a playwright was widely recognized. He became one of the wealthiest dramatists of his day and lived a comfortable life. He retired to Stratford in 1610 and died on April 23, 1616. (That he is reported to have died on his birth date, which happens to be the date of the Feast of St. George, patron saint of England, has suggested to some that his dates are fictional.) In 1623, actors Henry Condell and John Heminge published his plays as a collection known as the First Folio.

### ***John Webster (c. 1580–c. 1634)***

[John Webster](#) was born in the late 1570s or early 1580s to a coachmaker and the daughter of a blacksmith near London. Perhaps because of his low station, not much was recorded about Webster's life. Webster married Sara Peniall in March 1606, and they had several children. Beginning in 1602, he worked with teams of playwrights on comedies and history plays for the popular theater, but his lasting fame was made by his writing two tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, both of which derive from Italian stories. *The White Devil*, first performed in 1612, was a failure with audiences because it was so unusual. *The Duchess of Malfi* was more successful with its first staging two years later. Some scholars have argued that Webster's work is Gothic in nature, predating that movement by more than a hundred years. Webster continued to write through the 1620s but by 1634, as recorded by his contemporary Thomas Heywood, he was dead. His plays, especially the two tragedies, continued to be staged throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries to audiences that can appreciate Webster's grim vision and complex, intellectual writing.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### **The Duchess of Malfi**

*The Duchess of Malfi* is a tragedy by John Webster, first performed at the [Globe Theatre](#) in London in 1614 and published in 1623. The play is based on a true story, which took place around 1508. In Webster's retelling, the widowed Duchess falls in love with a steward named Antonio, whom her brothers forbid her from marrying. She secretly marries Antonio anyway. When discovered by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, the Duchess concocts a plan by which she and Antonio will escape Malfi with their children. They are betrayed; Antonio and their eldest son escape while the Duchess and the two younger children are captured and executed by Bosola, a servant of the Cardinal. Bosola is affected by her death and decides to avenge her. In his attempt to kill the Cardinal, he accidentally murders Antonio, and, in the ensuing brawl, Bosola, the Cardinal, and Ferdinand all kill each other. The eldest son of the Duchess and Antonio then inherit all of the wealth of Malfi. *The Duchess of Malfi* was an unusually dark and intellectual piece for Elizabethan audiences but was well-received. In the twenty-first century, Webster's tragedies are considered to be quite modern and continue to be popular with actors and audiences alike.

### **Everyman in His Humour**

Ben Jonson's *Everyman in His Humour* was first produced in 1598 by Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. It is Jonson's first important play and is also the first play to be labeled a "comedy of humours." The belief was that humours were bodily fluids, which controlled a person's temperament. If an individual had too much of any one humour, he would exhibit that characteristic to excess. In the play, Jonson emphasizes these humours and achieves his comic effect by exaggerating each character's quirks, almost to the point of caricature. The play was extremely popular and made Jonson a celebrity. Because of its popularity, other playwrights also began to copy the play's style. *Everyman in His Humour* was originally published in 1601, and a revised version appeared as one of the plays in Jonson's folio of 1616.

### **Hamlet**

Perhaps Shakespeare's most well-loved play, *Hamlet* was first produced around 1600 with

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

*Hamlet* was adapted to film by [Laurence Olivier](#) in 1948. Many still consider this the best version of the play ever recorded. Olivier gives a stunning performance in the title role. The film was released by Universal-International and in 2000 became available on a DVD.

The British Broadcasting Company has produced several excellent audio book versions of Shakespearean plays. Their version of *Hamlet* is performed by [Kenneth Branagh](#) and features Derek



Jacobi. It is published by Bantam Doubleday Dell. This audio book contains the unabridged reading of the play.

Christopher Marlowe's epic work *Tamburlaine the Great* has been recorded on audio cassette by the Center for Cassette Studies.

The Marlowe Society maintains a website on Christopher Marlowe at <http://www.marlowe-society.org> with comprehensive information on Marlowe's life, a newsletter, and links to other interesting information.

*Shakespeare in Love* (1998) is a fictional representation of Shakespeare when his playwriting career was just beginning. Contemporary dramatists Marlowe and Webster are also represented in the movie. Directed by John Maddon, the movie stars Joseph Fiennes as Will Shakespeare, [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) as Shakespeare's love interest, Viola de Lesseps, and [Dame Judi Dench](#) as Queen Elizabeth I. It is available on DVD from [Walt Disney](#) Video.

[Richard Burbage](#), the leading actor of Shakespeare's company, in the title role. It is believed that Shakespeare himself played the ghost of Hamlet's father. *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy that tells the story of the melancholy Prince of Denmark, who vows to avenge his father's murder by killing his uncle, the king. It was well received by Elizabethan audiences who were probably already somewhat familiar with the story. *Hamlet* was first published in the 1603 quarto. *Hamlet* has been the subject of much discussion and literary criticism and is still considered by many to be the finest of Shakespeare's plays.

## **The Jew of Malta**

*The Jew of Malta*, first produced in 1592, is Christopher Marlowe's play of Machiavellian policy. Though it is described on the title page of the 1633 edition as a tragedy, it is really a dark, satirical comedy. The play recounts how Barabas, a rich Jew, is deprived of his wealth by Farnese, the Christian governor of Malta, in order that some long-overdue tribute money is paid. Farnese justifies this extortion by saying that Malta is accursed for harboring Jews at all, and he gives Barabas the choice of becoming a Christian and giving up only half his wealth or remaining a Jew and losing it all. Barabas chooses the latter. This was a very important play for Marlowe. As Robert E. Knoll notes in his article presented in *Christopher Marlowe of the Twayne's Authors Series*, "Written in the chronological middle of his career, *The Jew of Malta* is a benchmark in Marlowe's development and is an important play for several reasons; it exhibits the direction of his growth, and, in addition, it had a notable influence on Marlowe's greatest contemporaries." Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is said to have been directly influenced by this play. Arata Ide argues that Marlowe imbued his characters with theatrical behavior in *The Jew of Malta*, which the antitheatrical Protestants found very threatening because it makes it difficult to discern what is artificial and what is genuine. While the play was popular with audiences from the beginning, the success of *The Jew of Malta* was

increased in 1594 when Queen Elizabeth's Jewish doctor was executed on the charge of trying to poison her. This inflamed anti-Semitism among the Elizabethan people, and they flocked to the theater to see the evil Barabas get his due. The play was first published in the 1633 quarto.

### **The Shoemaker's Holiday**

Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is based upon three tales about shoemakers from Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (1598). This delightful domestic comedy depicts the pleasant, simple lives of apprentices and tradesmen. In it, a young nobleman disguised as a Dutch shoemaker courts the daughter of the Lord Mayor of London. Elizabethan audiences were delighted by the depiction of the everyday lives of contemporary Londoners. Dekker's best play, it remained a favorite among Londoners for many years. The first published edition appeared in 1600, but the play was so popular that it was republished in 1610, 1618, 1624, 1637, and 1657.

### **The Spanish Tragedy**

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was wildly successful and propelled Kyd to fame. The story concerns a father's desire to avenge his son's death. Although this was not a new story in Elizabethan Drama, the style of *The Spanish Tragedy* was relatively new to London. Instead of having the violence narrated as was the convention, Kyd moves it onstage; most of the carnage and brutality take place right in front of the audience. This innovation sparked an entirely new genre in England that came to be known as "blood tragedy." As [William Green](#) notes in his essay "Elizabethan Drama," Kyd "set a pattern for playwrights who invigorated the drama with their 'unclassical' shows of violence on the stage." It was not only the violence, however, that made Kyd's play unique and popular. The piece contains skillful rhetoric that serves to sustain the tension. The rhetoric actually functions as action within the play and is an example of Kyd's great skill with language and poetry. References by other playwrights and parodies of *The Spanish Tragedy* indicate that the play was popular from its first staged edition in 1586 through about 1615. The earliest published edition is from 1592. It claims, however, to be a corrected edition of an earlier published version.

### **Tamburlaine the Great**

Part one of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* was produced about 1587. The play was so successful that Marlowe immediately wrote a sequel. Both parts were published in 1590. These were the only published works of Marlowe during his brief life. The story is based upon the career of the Mongolian conqueror Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane, who overthrew the Turkish Empire in 1402. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is an ambitious character who overcomes all resistance through the use of both arms and rhetoric. Throughout the course of the play, he gains allies, conquers kings, and succeeds in winning the affection of the woman of his dreams. While the Elizabethan audiences appreciated the story of *Tamburlaine*, it was the poetry that really set this play apart from other plays. Previous drama had often been halting and didactic in its speech, but with this production, Marlowe

took Elizabethan Drama to a higher level of eloquence and sophistication. As R. C. Bald notes in his introduction to *Six Elizabethan Plays*, "Before his time dramatic verse had usually been rhymed, but Marlowe's sense of style gave the new measure a strength and dignity previously lacking in dramatic verse."

## **The Woman in the Moon**

*The Woman in the Moon* is a comedic play in blank verse written by John Lyly. When this play was written and first produced on stage is not known, but its use of blank verse dates its composition to the early 1590s. It was published in 1597. Except for this piece, Lyly wrote all of his plays in prose and these were performed by and for children. The sudden change in style with *The Woman in the Moon* was probably meant to appeal to adult audiences. The subject matter—[Greek mythology](#)—would have appealed to a fashionable interest in astronomy and astrology. *The Woman in the Moon* is about the first human woman, named Pandora according to [Greek mythology](#). She is gifted with the best attributes of each of the seven planets, or major deities, which makes them jealous. The gods each take a turn exerting their powers to make her unhappy, until Pandora is forced to flee earth. She chooses to live on the Moon, the realm of the goddess Luna.

## **A Woman Killed with Kindness**

Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* was first produced in 1603. The play dealt with contemporary English life and is recognized as one of the finest examples of domestic tragedy in English drama. English audiences appreciated stories that depicted elements of their everyday lives and thus were charmed by Heywood's play. In it, a devout husband, Frankford, is betrayed by his wife who surrenders her honor to a house-guest. She repents, however, and confesses her evil deed. Instead of seeking vengeance and retribution, Frankford continues to treat her with kindness. She is eventually so overcome by guilt and sorrow that she punishes herself and dies of remorse. Therefore, instead of being killed by her husband's wrath, she is ultimately killed by his kindness. The play is considered Heywood's masterpiece, due to his skillful handling of a story that has a unique twist. Heywood preserves sympathy for his heroine throughout the play while still delivering the proper moral message. The first known printed edition of the play appeared in 1607.

## **THEMES**

### ***Anti-Semitism***

Hatred of Jews prevailed in Elizabethan society and is reflected in plays of the period. Two examples of anti-Semitic plays are Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In Marlowe's play, Barabas, the Jew of Malta, is a cruel, egotistic, and greedy

## **TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Research various aspects of Elizabethan costume. If you were a nobleman or noblewoman of the time, how would your costume be different than those of the lower classes? What are some of the elements of your dress that would indicate your social status?

What do you think a typical day was like for members of an Elizabethan acting troupe? What were some of the difficulties they might encounter in trying to prepare for a performance?

Elizabethan Drama gives some clues into the remedies, medicines, and herbs used to cure ailments during that time period. What were some of these treatments? Do people still use any of them today?

man. In Elizabethan times, he was played in a confrontational and somewhat comic manner, with the actor wearing a red wig and a long hooked nose. Shylock, the Jewish merchant in *The Merchant of Venice*, is also presented as a greedy, vindictive man. Shakespeare tempers his character, however, with a bit more humanity than is found in Barabas. Elizabethan anti-Semitism was fueled in 1594 when Queen Elizabeth's Jewish doctor was executed on the charge of trying to poison her.

### ***Disguise***

Disguise is a device that is used frequently by characters in Elizabethan plays. It is a way in which characters gain information that would be otherwise withheld from them. For example, in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Rosalind discovers that her true love, Orlando, is indeed in love with her while she is disguised as a boy. Some critics also believe that disguising female characters in male garb allowed men and boys who were playing these roles to spend part of the play in costumes that were more comfortable and familiar.

### ***Humours***

Elizabethan psychology was based on the theory of four bodily humours—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Proper physical and mental health supposedly depended upon a proper balance among these fluids. A particular emotion or mood was associated with each, and it was believed that if a person had too much of one humour in his body, that particular emotion would be emphasized. With the production of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, a new species of comedy devoted solely to the interplay of these elements was created, known as the "comedy of humours." The humours were prevalent forces in the tragedies as well. Hamlet is described as the "melancholy Dane," thus implying that he has too much black bile, which would make him tend to be depressed.

### ***Revenge***

Revenge is one of the most prevalent themes in Elizabethan drama. In the plays, it is often motivated by the visitation of a ghost who delivers the story of his murder to the character who must now

become the avenger. Such is the case in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, as the Ghost of Don Andrea recounts his death, calls for revenge, and then sits onstage to watch his enemies meet their fate. Revenge is also the motivator in *Hamlet*, as the Prince of Denmark vows to avenge his father's murder. In her article "Common Plots in Elizabethan Drama," Madeleine Doran reflects upon why the subject of revenge was so popular:

*Why the motive of revenge should enjoy such popularity from the early days of Elizabethan down to Caroline times naturally provokes speculation. That it had deeply sympathetic affinities with the conditions of actual life we must suppose. Yet its very endurance, even after it had lost its vitality, as the commonest counter-motive in tragedy, suggests something besides imitative Realism. Its persistence may have been to some extent owing to its great usefulness for play construction in furnishing so practicable a method of counteraction.*

### ***The Supernatural***

In Elizabethan times, people were very superstitious, and many people believed in the supernatural. Queen Elizabeth I had a personal astrologer whom she would consult regularly, and, as Diane Yancey notes, "Almost every village had an old woman who could be persuaded to cast a spell to protect cattle from illness or keep one's lover faithful and true." Given this context, it is not surprising that supernatural elements are found in many Elizabethan plays. Fairies, ghosts, and witches often figure prominently in the action. Ghosts are very important in revenge tragedies and are often used as a catalyst for the action. Several Elizabethan plays contain a ghost who recounts his own murder, thus beginning a cycle of revenge. Such is the case in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Sprites and fairies were also popular characters of the time. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is populated with fantastical creatures.

## **STYLE**

### ***Asides***

Asides are brief comments spoken privately to another character or directly to the audience. They are not heard or noticed by the rest of the characters onstage. Typically, the character turns toward the audience and delivers the aside from behind his hand, thus hiding it from the rest of the players. This technique is used often by Elizabethan dramatists as a device to let the audience in on the character's thoughts.

### ***Blank Verse***

[Blank verse](#) is unrhymed iambic pentameter, the primary form used by Elizabethan playwrights, although prose and many other forms of poetry are also found throughout their plays. Serious characters of high stature and nobility often speak in blank verse, especially when discussing important issues, while comic and lower class characters are less likely to do so.

## ***Iambic Pentameter***

Iambic pentameter is the rhythm used in Elizabethan blank verse. Each line has five two-syllable units, or "feet," with the second syllable of each unit receiving the heaviest stress. Iambic pentameter is relatively close to spoken English. For example, "She WENT to SEE a PLAY a-BOUT a KING" is a line of iambic pentameter.

## ***Insults***

Name-calling was an art form during the Elizabethan Age, and this is reflected in the plays from that period. Characters often engage in "verbal dueling," hurling creative slurs at one another, hoping to get the upper hand or have the last word by delivering the best insult. Shakespeare was a master at creating these insults. Insults such as, "You ungrateful fox!" "You overweening slave!" and "Thou art a boil! A plague-sore!" are sprinkled liberally throughout his plays. He was not the only playwright to use this technique, however. The art of creating insults permeated Elizabethan plays.

## ***Wordplay***

Elizabethans were fond of wordplay, and they especially appreciated puns, which employ different words that sound alike or the same word, which has several definitions or functions in a sentence. One of the most skilled in the use of puns and wordplay was Shakespeare. One famous example occurs in *Romeo and Juliet*. As Mercutio lies dying from a sword wound, he says to his friend, Romeo, "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man."

## ***Rhymed Couplets***

Rhymed couplets are two lines of poetry that rhyme as in "Well, I will in, and do the best I can; To match my daughter to this gentleman" from Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Rhymed couplets often signal the end of a scene or act.

## ***Scenery and Settings***

Most Elizabethan plays were performed on a bare stage with no scenery and no sets. Therefore, to let the audience know where and when the action was taking place, playwrights would begin scenes with lines that establish place and time. For example, the opening line of Act IV, Scene I of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* lets the audience know right away where they are: "Yonder's the shop, and there my fair love sits." Sometimes settings were conveyed by the use of placards that would be hung onstage immediately prior to the scene. These would tell the audience in what town or village the action was taking place.

## ***Soliloquy***

A soliloquy is a speech that reveals a character's thoughts, rather like thinking aloud. The soliloquy tells the audience what is going on in a character's mind. The most famous soliloquy in all of drama is the "To be or not to be" speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. In it, Hamlet ponders whether to kill himself and considers the consequences of living or dying. The soliloquy is sometimes confused with monologue. In both speeches, only one person speaks. In soliloquy the character reveals his inner thoughts to the audience; no one in the play hears the speech. In a monologue, one character speaks all the words but he may be overheard by other characters in the play.

## ***Violence***

In most Elizabethan plays, the violent acts occur offstage. These acts are then reported onstage by one character to other characters, and thus the audience learns of action that does not need to be enacted directly. This convention allowed Elizabethan dramatists to include huge battles as part of the "action" of their plays without the theaters having to hire hundreds of actors to perform the plays. Also, horrific acts of brutality that are difficult to execute onstage are often more effective when described than when actually shown. Members of the audience must use their imaginations to visualize the carnage, often creating a scene in their minds, much worse than ever could be created on the stage. The Elizabethan dramatists borrowed this tradition from Greek tragedy. The tradition changed, however, with the development of the "blood tragedy" (also known as "revenge tragedy"). In these plays, acts of violence are performed onstage, in full view of the audience. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is one of the best-known plays of this genre. Webster's tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, were also noted in their time for graphic violence, which required staging in a controlled environment.

## **MOVEMENT VARIATIONS**

### ***Boys' Companies***

Boys' companies were performing troupes that were made up entirely of young boys. The practice of using boys in the English theater dates back to the early 1500s, when choirboys sang and performed at court for the king, and during Elizabethan times, these acting companies were still usually under the training and direction of a choirmaster. During the latter part of the 1500s, boys' companies were very popular. Their popularity faded around the turn of the century, however, due to several scandals that took place. In 1597, Nathaniel Giles, manager of the Chapel Children, was charged with kidnapping boys and forcing them into servitude as actors, and in 1600, Henry Evans, another manager of the Chapel Children, involved the boys in several politically controversial plays. Public support for the troupes waned, and boys' companies dissolved around 1608.

### ***Court Masques***

Masques were short entertainments that were held at Court as one part of a royal evening of entertainment. They were much shorter than regular plays. Masques usually contained romantic and

mythological themes and consisted of elaborate settings in which players posed, danced, and recited poetic lines of dialogue. Nobles and guests of the Court would often take part, and although women were banned from appearing on the public stage, they were allowed to participate in Court masques. Queen Elizabeth I held very few court masques, but when James I took the throne, masques were revived with increasing grandeur. Ben Jonson was the primary writer of masques during the reign of James I, but other playwrights also tried their hand at the form.

### ***Inn Courtyards***

Many acting troupes performed in the courtyards of English inns both before and after permanent theaters were built. The inns were usually multi-storied, U-shaped buildings, and they prefigured the design of the public playhouses. Players constructed a rough stage made of boards on trestles at one end of the courtyard, and audience members would stand in the yard to watch the performance. Well-to-do patrons brought their own chairs and watched from the balconies overlooking the courtyard. Playing inn courtyards was sometimes difficult for acting troupes because their performances could be interrupted or even cancelled if the business at the inn was brisk.

### ***Interludes***

Interludes are short plays that were often performed during a break in a royal or noble banquet. They were typically a small scene or conversation between two or more persons. Diane Yancey sees interludes as an important link to English secular drama: "By shying away from religious themes, the interludes made it acceptable for the later Elizabethan dramatists to write plays that had little, if anything, to do with the Bible."

### ***Miracle Plays***

[Miracle plays](#) were also known as "mysteries," from the Latin word *ministerium*, which means "act." They were performed on [Corpus Christi](#) and other feast days, and they depicted biblical history. Residents of English towns would gather along the streets to watch the plays, which were performed on moveable stages known as pageant wagons. Several miracle plays would make up an entire cycle; the first play was presented, and then its wagon would move along to the next stop on the street while another wagon moved in to take its place. The second part of the play was performed on this pageant wagon, and then it would move along, and so on. This procession would continue until the entire history of the Bible had been told. Because of this convention of staging, these productions were also known as cycle plays. The structure of miracle plays had an important influence on English history plays. As Diane Yancey notes, "Histories borrow medieval techniques found in miracle plays, including rearranging historical events, using anachronisms, and writing a subplot that parallels the main plot."

### ***Morality Plays***



[Morality plays](#) were religious plays that first appeared in the fourteenth century. They most likely had their beginnings when popular outdoor preachers began telling stories that applied biblical teachings to the problems of daily living. They began as biblical allegories but gradually became more and more secularized. They were one of the major links between the religious and professional stages. Oscar Brockett observes in "Theatre and Drama in the Late [Middle Ages](#)" that "Elements of the morality play persisted into Shakespeare's time. But as the morality play was increasingly secularized during the sixteenth century, the distinctions vanished between it and the type of play commonly labeled 'interlude.'"

### ***Private Theaters***

Indoor, roofed theaters were known as "private theaters" during Elizabethan times, even though the public could attend the performances. These playhouses catered to a more aristocratic audience and were different from the public theaters in many ways: they accommodated less than one-half as many spectators; they charged considerably higher admission prices; seats were provided for all spectators; and, candles were used for illumination. The Blackfriars, the first private theater, opened its doors in 1576. Coincidentally, this same year the first public theater opened. It was built as part of a former monastery. Until 1610, private theaters were used exclusively by boys' companies. After that time, the popularity of the children faded, and the private theaters passed into the hands of adult troupes.

### ***Public Playhouses***

The first permanent theater in England opened in 1576. It was called The Theatre and was built by James Burbage, who based its design upon the English inn courtyards. It formed a model for numerous English playhouses that were to follow. It is not known exactly what Elizabethan playhouses looked like because no detailed drawings have been discovered as of 2008, but some extant sketches from audience members in attendance do remain. From these drawings, along with some written reports and other documents, historians have concluded that most of the Elizabethan playhouses were similar in structure. They were many-sided, open-air structures, made of a timber frame covered with clay plaster or mortar. They had three tiers of galleries with a thatched roof covering only the gallery seating area and the rear, housed-in part of the stage. This stage-house was also called a tiring house because it was the area in which the actors *attired* themselves for the plays. The playing area was an open-air platform that protruded into the middle of the yard, and the lower-class patrons would stand on the ground surrounding the stage; thus they were called groundlings. Aristocratic patrons would pay more to sit in the tiered galleries, and very wealthy patrons could pay to actually be seated onstage.

### ***Jacobean Age***

Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603 and was succeeded by James I, who ruled England, Scotland, and Ireland until his death in 1625. The flourishing of the arts, which began in the Elizabethan Age,

continued into the Jacobean Age. King James I was himself a scholar and a writer. The literature of this generation is characterized by a darker, more cynical view of the world. The literature of the Jacobean Age includes Shakespeare's tragedies, tragi-comedies, and sonnets; Webster's tragedies; Jonson's dramas and verse; Sir [Francis Bacon](#)'s essays; and the metaphysical poetry of [John Donne](#). The Jacobean Age came to an end with the co-occurrence of an economic depression, the death of King James I, and the outbreak of the bubonic plague in London, a serious infestation that killed over 30,000 people in 1625.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### ***Master of Revels and Censorship***

Every play had to be submitted to the Master of Revels for licensing before performance. He acted as the official censor and would often force the deletion of passages or references that were deemed offensive. Gerald Eades Bentley, in "Regulation and Censorship" from *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590– 1642*, observes:

*most of the censoring activities were intended to eliminate from the stage five general types of lines or scenes: 1. Critical comments on the policies or conduct of government. 2. Unfavorable presentations of friendly foreign powers or their sovereigns, great nobles or subjects. 3. Comment of religious controversy. 4. Profanity (after 1606). 5. Personal satire of influential people.*

The Office of Revels was originally established to select and supervise all entertainment of the sovereign, but as time progressed, its power grew. In 1581, a patent was issued that centralized the regulation of all plays and players with the Master of Revels. The man holding this position became powerful and prestigious, for he could significantly change the tone and intent of any production through censorship or could prevent the production from occurring altogether. The position was also lucrative, as the Master of Revels received a tidy sum for each play that was licensed.

### ***Puritans***

The Puritans were extremely zealous Protestants who held strict views on matters of religion and morality. They shunned all forms of entertainment, including music and dancing, because they believed that these diversions turned a person's thoughts from concentration upon the Bible and spiritual matters. Puritans considered the theater to be an ungodly institution and denounced it as wicked and profane. Throughout the Elizabethan era, they actively campaigned against the public playhouses because they felt that such institutions threatened England's morality. Numerous Puritan writers produced pamphlets warning against the dangers of attending the theater and attacked the actors as sinners and heretics. As John Addington Symonds notes in his essay "Theatres, Playwrights, Actors, and Playgoers," "The voices of preachers and Puritan pamphleteers were daily raised against playhouses." The Puritan mindset eventually prevailed, and the Puritans succeeded in closing all of the public theaters in 1642.

## ***Plague***

The bubonic plague, or [Black Death](#), which had begun in southern Europe, originally made its way to England around 1348. Although this was well before the Elizabethan era, the effects of the plague continued to be felt for centuries. Plague broke out frequently, and London was visited by the dreaded disease in 1563, 1578–1579, 1582, 1592–1593, and 1603. During the outbreak of 1603, over 30,000 people died. The plague was so deadly because of the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in the city of London. Fleas carried by rats spread the plague, and the overcrowded conditions provided ample breeding grounds and hosts for the disease-carrying insects. These conditions also caused the disease to spread quickly once someone had been infected. The term "plague-sore," an insult that can be found in the drama of the time, is a reference to the visible sores that would cover people's bodies once they had contracted bubonic plague.

## ***Royal Patronage***

Actors were subject to the same laws as vagrants and were in danger of arrest if they could not prove that they had a permanent residence. In order to avoid persecution, they sought a noble patron to support and promote them. They became servants of the nobleman, thus providing him more prestige. In return, the nobleman would protect them if they got into trouble. He did not pay them regular wages or allowances, however. In 1572, noble patronage became very significant because of a law that allowed only registered servants of a nobleman to go on tour. Since touring was one of the main sources of income for theater troupes, it was necessary for the actors to gain patronage to survive financially.

## ***Machiavelli***

[Niccolo Machiavelli](#), a sixteenth-century Italian philosopher, was famous for the political theories put forth in his book, *The Prince*. Machiavelli believed in man's capacity for determining his

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE ROMANTIC PERIOD :

Firstly , place this phrase denotes the insurmountable otherness of the material world :not simply the indifference of non-human species and phenomena to human need sand desires, but more profoundly the resistance of materiality to consciousness and to representation.

Secondarily, it denotes the feeling produced in the mind when it is made to register that resistance. Requiring consciousness both to acknowledge its own limits and to confront the paradox that materiality is the ground for its own being, the material sublime for Oerlemans is the necessary starting point for the properly environmental imagination. To demonstrate how the Romantics initiated, and can continue to contribute to, this environmental awareness, Oerlemans looks for Romantic-era writings which manifest ‘a resistance to a sense that we can and should be able to come

to a complete and comfortable understanding of nature, [writing] where a sense of [nature's] complexity, intricacy, and otherness is primary and sufficient' (p. 23). It is a resistance that is found chiefly in the poetry of the period (for Oerlemans, as for several recent ecocritics, it is a strong article of faith that lyric is the literary mode most open to otherness and to alienating effects). The first chapter presents a reading of Wordsworth as not so much a 'green' as a 'gray' poet (a distinction borrowed from the critic Paul Fry), attuned to rocks rather than trees, and alert to 'the indifference, hostility, and inimicalness of material reality to an idea of the "one life"' (p. 35). Chapter 2 then deals with the notorious tendency of much Romantic writing to anthropomorphize animals. Refreshingly, Oerlemans does not just trot out the usual objections raised against this rhetorical manoeuvre. In a wide-ranging discussion of the horse paintings of George Stubbs, and the animal poetry of Burns, Clare, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, it is suggested that Romantic anthropomorphisms may (sometimes) be better understood as a recognition of the sentience, emotion, and even consciousness that animals undoubtedly possess, and so in fact repudiate an anthropocentrism that would see these attributes as wholly the preserve of humans (expressed, for example, in the Cartesian understanding that animals are little better than automata). Chapter 3 focuses on Shelley's vegetarianism: the connection here with the 'material sublime' is not entirely clear, but the chapter nevertheless contains many useful insights. Chapters 4 and 5, finally, discuss the many classificatory systems applied to nature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the abundant travel writing of the period (in particular, Dorothy Wordsworth's tour journals), emphasizing in both cases those moments at which natural phenomena seem to surpass and confound the categories that the writer seeks to impose upon them. Rachel Crawford's

### ***Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700–1830:***

Crawford addresses the shifts in taste that took place in the eighteenth century in relation both to landscape and to poetry, and traces the many parallels and interconnections between developments in these two cultural domains. Broadly speaking, her thesis is that the shift witnessed with regard to landscape, from an early eighteenth-century expansionist discourse favouring vast parks and seemingly unbounded views to an early nineteenth-century discourse that celebrates smaller, contained spaces such as the cottage garden and the bower, corresponds with (and possibly even shapes) the course of literary history, as we move from the early eighteenth-century taste for the 'sprawling form' (p. 5) of georgic poetry to a Regency preference for minor lyric forms. In both contexts, Crawford suggests,

### **About the Romantic Period :**

The romantic period is a term applied to the literature of approximately the first third of the nineteenth century. During this time, literature began to move in channels that were not entirely new but were in strong contrast to the standard literary practice of the eighteenth century.

How the word *romantic* came to be applied to this period is something of a puzzle. Originally the word was applied to the Latin or Roman dialects used in the Roman provinces, especially France, and to the stories written in these dialects. *Romantic* is a derivative of *romant*, which was borrowed from the French *romaunt* in the sixteenth century. At first it meant only "like the old romances" but gradually it began to carry a certain taint. *Romantic*, according to L. P. Smith in his *Words and Idioms*, connoted "false and fictitious beings and feelings, without real existence in fact or in human nature"; it also suggested "old castles, mountains and forests, pastoral plains, waste and solitary places" and a "love for wild nature, for mountains and moors."

The word passed from England to France and Germany late in the seventeenth century and became a critical term for certain poets who scorned and rejected the models of the past; they prided themselves on their freedom from eighteenth-century poetic codes. In Germany, especially, the word was used in strong opposition to the term *classical*.

The grouping together of the so-called Lake poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey) with Scott, Byron, Keats, and Shelley as the romantic poets is late Victorian, apparently as late as the middle 1880s. And it should be noted that these poets did not recognize themselves as "romantic," although they were familiar with the word and recognized that their practice differed from that of the eighteenth century.

According to René Wellek in his essay "The Concept of Romanticism" (*Comparative Literature*, Volume I), the widespread application of the word *romantic* to these writers was probably owing to Alois Brandl's *Coleridge und die romantische Schule in England* (*Coleridge and the Romantic School in England*, translated into English in 1887) and to Walter Pater's essay "Romanticism" in his *Appreciations* in 1889.

The reaction to the standard literary practice and critical norms of the eighteenth century occurred in many areas and in varying degrees. Reason no longer held the high place it had held in the eighteenth century; its place was taken by imagination, emotion, and individual sensibility. The eccentric and the singular took the place of the accepted conventions of the age. A concentration on the individual and the minute replaced the eighteenth-century insistence on the universal and the general. Individualism replaced objective subject matter; probably at no other time has the writer used himself as the subject of his literary works to such an extent as during the romantic period. Writers tended to regard themselves as the most interesting subject for literary creation; interest in urban life was replaced by an interest in nature, particularly in untamed nature and in solitude. Classical literature quickly lost the esteem which poets like Pope had given it. The romantic writers

turned back to their own native traditions. The Medieval and Renaissance periods were ransacked for new subject matter and for literary genres that had fallen into disuse. The standard eighteenth-century heroic couplet was replaced by a variety of forms such as the ballad, the metrical romance, the sonnet, ottava rima, blank verse, and the Spenserian stanza, all of which were forms that had been neglected since Renaissance times. The romantic writers responded strongly to the impact of new forces, particularly the French Revolution and its promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The humanitarianism that had been developing during the eighteenth century was taken up enthusiastically by the romantic writers. Wordsworth, the great champion of the spiritual and moral values of physical nature, tried to show the natural dignity, goodness, and the worth of the common man. The combination of new interests, new attitudes, and fresh forms produced a body of literature that was strikingly different from the literature of the eighteenth century, but that is not to say that the eighteenth century had no influence on the romantic movement. Practically all of the seeds of the new literary crop had been sown in the preceding century. The romantic period includes the work of two generations of writers. The first generation was born during the thirty and twenty years preceding 1800; the second generation was born in the last decade of the 1800s. The chief writers of the first generation were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Southey, Blake, Lamb, and Hazlitt. The essayist Thomas De Quincey, born in 1785, falls between the two generations.

Keats and Shelley belong to the second generation, along with Byron, who was older than they were by a few years. All three were influenced by the work of the writers of the first generation and, ironically, the careers of all three were cut short by death so that the writers of the first generation were still on the literary scene after the writers of the second generation had disappeared. The major writers of the second romantic generation were primarily poets; they produced little prose, outside of their letters. Another striking difference between the two generations is that the writers of the first generation, with the exception of Blake, all gained literary reputations during their lifetime. Of the writers of the second generation, only Byron enjoyed fame while he was alive, more fame than any of the other romantic writers, with perhaps the exception of Scott, but Keats and Shelley had relatively few readers while they were alive. It was not until the Victorian era that Keats and Shelley became recognized as major romantic poets.

(4)

## ‘ Romantic poetry ‘:

### (Part-1)

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**Romantic poetry** is the poetry of the [Romantic era](#), an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century. It involved a reaction against prevailing [Enlightenment](#) ideas of the 18th century,<sup>[1]</sup> and lasted from 1800 to 1850, approximately.

#### [English Romantic poetry](#)

- [Characteristics of English Romantic poetry](#)
  1. [The Sublime](#)
  2. [Reaction against Neoclassicism](#)
  3. [Imagination](#)
  4. [Nature poetry](#)
  5. [Melancholy](#)
  6. [Medievalism](#)

7. [Hellenism](#)
8. [Supernaturalism](#)
9. [Subjectivity](#)

In early 19th century England, the poet [William Wordsworth](#) defined his and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge's](#) innovative poetry in his Preface to [Lyrical Ballads](#) (1798):

“ I have said before that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.“

The poems of *Lyrical Ballads* intentionally re-imagined the way poetry should sound: "By fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men," Wordsworth and his English contemporaries, such as Coleridge, John [Keats](#), [Percy Shelley](#), and [William Blake](#), wrote poetry that was meant to boil up from serious, contemplative reflection over the interaction of humans with their environment. Although many stress the notion of spontaneity in Romantic poetry, the movement was still greatly concerned with the difficulty of composition and of translating these emotions into poetic form. Indeed, Coleridge, in *On Poesy or Art*, sees art as “the mediatrix between, and reconciler of nature and man”.<sup>[5]</sup> Such an attitude reflects what might be called the dominant theme of English Romantic poetry: the filtering of natural emotion through the human mind in order to create meaning.

### **Characteristics of English Romantic poetry**

#### ***The Sublime :***

One of the most important concepts in Romantic poetry.

#### ***Reaction against Neoclassicism :***

Romantic poetry contrasts with [neoclassical poetry](#), which was the product of intellect and reason, while romantic poetry is more the product of emotion. Romantic poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth century was a reaction against the set standards, conventions of eighteenth century poetry. According to [William J. Long](#), “The Romantic Movement was marked, and is always marked, by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom which in science and theology as well as literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit.”<sup>[full citation needed]</sup>

#### ***Imagination :***

Belief in the importance of the imagination is a distinctive feature of romantic poets such as [John Keats](#), Samuel Taylor Coleridge and [P. B. Shelley](#), unlike the neoclassical poets. Keats said, “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination-



What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth.” For Wordsworth and [William Blake](#), as well as [Victor Hugo](#) and [Alessandro Manzoni](#), the imagination is a spiritual force, is related to morality, and they believed that literature, especially poetry, could improve the world. The secret of great art, Blake claimed, is the capacity to imagine. To define imagination, in his poem "[Auguries of Innocence](#)", Blake said:

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

### ***Nature poetry :***

Love for nature is another important feature of romantic poetry, as a source of inspiration. This poetry involves a relationship with external nature and places, and a belief in [pantheism](#). However, the romantic poets differed in their views about nature. Wordsworth recognized nature as a living thing, teacher, god and everything. These feelings are fully developed and expressed in his [epic](#) poem [The Prelude](#). In his poem "The Tables Turn" he writes:

One impulse from the vernal wood  
Can teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and good,  
Than all sages can.

Shelley was another nature poet, who believed that nature is a living thing and there is a union between nature and man. Wordsworth approaches nature philosophically, while Shelley emphasises the intellect. John Keats is another a lover of nature, but Coleridge differs from other romantic poets of his age, in that he has a realistic perspective on nature. He believes that nature is not the source of joy and pleasure, but rather that people's reactions to it depends on their mood and disposition. Coleridge believed that joy does not come from external nature, but that it emanates from the human heart.

### ***Melancholy :***

Melancholy occupies a prominent place in romantic poetry, and is an important source of inspiration for the Romantic poets. In "[Ode to a Nightingale](#)", Keats wrote:

.....for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

### ***Medievalism :***

Romantic poetry was attracted to nostalgia, and [medievalism](#) is another important characteristic of romantic poetry, especially in the works of John Keats and Coleridge. <sup>[citation needed]</sup> They were attracted to exotic, remote and obscure places, and so they were more attracted to [Middle Ages](#) than to their own age.

### ***Hellenism :***

The world of [classical Greece](#) was important to the Romantics. John Keats' poetry is full of allusions to the art, literature and culture of Greek, as for example in "[Ode on a Grecian Urn](#)".

### ***Supernaturalism:***

Most of the romantic poets used [supernatural elements](#) in their poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the leading romantic poet in this regard, and "[Kubla Khan](#)" is full of supernatural elements.

### ***Subjectivity:***

Romantic poetry is the poetry of sentiments, emotions and imagination. Romantic poetry opposed the objectivity of neoclassical poetry. Neoclassical poets avoided describing their personal emotions in their poetry, unlike the Romantics. <sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## **Introduction to Romantic Poetry:**

### Romantic Poetry

Feeling some sappy love poetry coming on. It's actually a little bit of a misconception about romantic poetry that it was all sappy and about love and stuff. They were kind of tortured souls, and they wrote stuff like *Dejection: An Ode* and *Ode on Melancholy*. I guess I shouldn't have thrown the tissues away just yet, but in this video, you'll learn that the Romantics were not just about that. They had a lot more going on than just touchy-feely, lovesick stuff.

### Themes

So, themes of Romantic poetry - we're going to start by setting the scene for the birth of Romantic poetry. It was the late 18th century. The French Revolution had begun in 1789. England, at this time, was at war with everybody, including itself. It was suppressing dissent, and things weren't going that great. By the end of the 18th century, industrialization was responsible for life as we know it - the ability to make a bunch of stuff quickly. 'Made in China' is kind of the culmination of industrialization. That was getting going by the end of the century, and it was making huge changes

in people's lives, understandably. The Age of Enlightenment, which had come before and led to this in a lot of ways, had its emphasis on science, reason and being intellectual - thinking things through - that had held sway for a while. For young writers at the time and when things were changing so much, the world just stopped making sense. It was too unfamiliar. The city was rising in this way that was unpleasant to them. The Romantics were really looking to do things differently. The first thing they wanted to do was to use regular language. This was a direct response to some of the poetry that had been written before. English poetry had been super formal. They wanted to write with words that regular people would know. They didn't want big band music - they wanted rock and roll. That's kind of the Romantic sentiment. You can see how this can be related to the French Revolution - 'for the people, by the people' and all that stuff. And then poetry you could actually understand.

They also wanted to focus on emotions and feelings more than anything else. This can be seen as a response to the cold science and industrialization thing that was sweeping the country. Enlightenment writers, again, were focused on science, fact and reason. The Romantics really wanted to focus on how people felt. So, it's like singer-songwriter, Bob Dylan and Alanis Morissette types rather than corporate manufactured boy band stuff. Like any good revolutionaries, the Romantics had a real love of nature. Celebrating nature was really central to a lot of their most significant works. Again, it's a reaction to the Enlightenment, because the natural world had been dissected and clinically examined by scientists. The Romantics wanted to get back to just appreciating it and seeing it in its whole. 'Relax bro, be cool' - that kind of sentiment towards nature.

Works by Romantics were also designed to represent the individual artist. The reader should feel like there's a voice behind the poem and that it's directly addressing you. This all comes back to the idea that we're not a monolith anymore. We're not a government that's a king and everyone else is a subject. We're entering a world in which individuality and individual voices can be heard. Again, this was spurred on by the French Revolution idea. How different is Romantic poetry than what came before it? I will give you an example. I'm going to show you some Alexander Pope, who is super popular. He was a prominent English poet from immediately before the Romantics. This is some of his poetry:

'Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill  
Appear in Writing or in Judging ill,  
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th'Offence,  
To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense'

And that was from a poem called *An Essay on Criticism*, which already blows your mind. And this was one of his greatest hits; people loved this thing. Just to contrast that, we're going to show you some William Wordsworth, who was a Romantic poet.

'I have a boy of five years old;

His face is fair and fresh to see;  
His limbs are cast in beauty's mould,  
And dearly he loves me.'

That's from a little poem called *Anecdote for Fathers*. You can see, the Romantic poem is way easier to understand, and it has normal human emotion in it. It has words like a regular person addressing the reader. It's more like something Wordsworth would put on Facebook rather than what Pope would write to put in the Journal of Stuffy Intellectualism

## Romantic Poets

Romantic poets are also called the early nineteenth-century poets. These poets revolted against the poetic tradition of the eighteenth century. They turned to the nature. They disliked the set rules and orders of the neo-classical poets. Instead, they gave too much focus on emotion, imagination, originality and freedom in their poetry. Simple and commonly used natural language was chosen for their poetry. The publication of the first edition of the Lyrical Ballad marks the beginning of the romantic period in English literature. It was combined work produced together by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Poetry was defined in a new light in this work. Much emphasis was given on simple language, imagination, originality and poetic freedom. Nature was thought to be a proper subject matter for poetry. It was a work of great change and experimentation in terms of poetry. Its publication gave a shock to the traditional poets and critics of the eighteenth century. They considered the language too simple.

## William Wordsworth :

Wordsworth is regarded as a forerunner of the romantic period. He brought a completely new approach to the writing of poetry. He had a great love for nature. Nature was God for him because it was a source of his poetic inspiration. Because of his poetic ability and imagination Wordsworth could paint ordinary things with beauty, poetic ability and imagination. Wordsworth could paint ordinary things with beauty and charm. His main purpose was to make ordinary things seem wonderful in his poetry. Though "Wordsworth argued that the language of poetry should be very simple, he could not truly apply it to his all poetry. Wordsworth wrote many poems and sonnets. In his poem *Tintern Abbey* the poet remembers his childhood days and describes the lovely view of the nature *Westminster Bridge* and *London* are among his best sonnets. *The Prelude* is his greatest long and autobiographical poem. It contains the own experience of French Revolution. The poet also

describes the gradual growth of his poetic genius in this poem. *The Excursion* is his great philosophical work which he planned but never completed.

### **S.T. Coleridge :**

Coleridge is also an important leading figure of the Romantic age. He is both a great critic and poet. He is also a literary partner of Wordsworth. Both of them worked together to publish the *Lyrical Ballad*. Coleridge could make mysterious events acceptable to a reader's mind. Coleridge's famous poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was published in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In this poem, an old sailor describes some mysterious events which occurred during the voyages. The wind failed, the water supply ended and all other sailors died of thirst. All these strange misfortunes happened because the old sailor had shot a great bird. Finally the curse is lifted and he is able to return home. Another good poem of Coleridge is *Christabel*. It is also magical and mysterious. Christabel finds a beautiful lady Geraldine alone in the forest and brings her home. But later on it is known that she is an evil spirit in the form of Geraldine. *Kubla Khan* is one of the most famous poems of Coleridge. The poem is a poetic vision which he saw in his dream and recorded it as a poem, later on. But he couldn't remember the whole dream because of some interference while recording. The poem contains the descriptions of the buildings which were built among the caves, woods and rivers. The poet seems successful in producing a strange and magical picture.

### **Lord Byron :**

Though Byron was a romantic figure, the classics had a great influence upon his poetry. His poetry is powerful but it lacks the poetical qualities of Wordsworth and Coleridge. His carelessly written poetry is often strong and beautiful. Byron's poem *Childe Harold* is written in the Spenserian stanza. It tells the story of a man who goes off to travel far and wide because he is disgusted with life's foolish pleasures. *Don Juan* a long poem of astonishing adventure is also a satire which attacks some of Byron's enemies. It starts with a shipwreck and continues with its later results. But the main story is often left and the poet puts forward ideas on various subjects. Byron also wrote a number of short poems which are popular.

### **P. B. Shelley :**

Shelley was a great romantic poet who belonged to the second generation of romantic poets. He was a very revolutionary and uncompromising figure, but his popularity as a lyric poet is undoubtedly very great. He struggled against the causes of human misery and against accepted religions. His first important poem *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* is written in blank verse and shows the Wordsworth's influence. It expresses joy in the universe and sorrow for the violent feelings of men. His fine poem *Adonis* is an elegy on the death of Keats. He wrote many beautiful lyrics in fine language. One of his finest sonnets, *Ozymandias*, expresses the uselessness and the shortness of all earthly power. Some of his best lyrics include *The Cloud*, *To a Skylark* and *Ode to the West Wind*. These poems express his free spirit, forceful imagination and desire to change the world.

### **John Keats :**

Keats blossomed early and died young. He was inspired by reading Spenser. He developed self-discipline both in feeling and skill which Shelley never attained. For Keats sensation was a path to the knowledge and it was the poet's duty to express it in words. His early poem *Endymion* is based on old ideas of religion so it was criticized. Keats wrote many beautiful poems in rich detail and accused Shelly of using thin language. He is also famous for his great odes and sonnets. *The Ode to a Nightingale* is his greatly admired poem. His *To Autumn* is a poem of scenes season and a mood. *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* is one the best sonnets of Keats. He also wrote a good ballad entitled *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* in which, a Knight dreams of his lady but later on he finds himself alone.

### **The Lake Poets :**

The lake poets are the romantic poets who liked the Lake District in the north-west England and lived in it. These poets are William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey. William Wordsworth was a poet of nature and had the ability to make even an ordinary thing charming. He is said to have democratized poetry and made poetry available for the farmers and shepherd. In the preface to the later edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) he said that the language of poetry should be the language of the common man. According to him poetry was a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility. His well known short poems are *The Daffodils*, *The Solitary Reaper* and *Lucy*. In *Lines Written above Tintern Abbey*, the poet returns to a scene of his boyhood. His best sonnets are *Westminster Bridge*, an emotional view of London asleep, and *London*, which is a cry for help in the troubles of the world. *The Prelude*, in fourteen books,

describes the poet's own progress in poetry and thought. It has an autobiographical element. S. T. Coleridge had the ability to make mysterious events acceptable to a reader's mind. His poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* appeared in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In this, an old sailor describes some strange misfortunes that happened to his ship when he killed an albatross. The mysterious surroundings of the silent ship are described in magic words. Two other important poems are *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*. The first one tells about Christabel and Geraldine, and the second describes Kubla Khan's great palace in Xanadu. It contains both mysterious and supernatural elements in the description of the palace, set among gardens, rivers, forests and caves of ice. Robert Southey was less important of the lake poets. He wrote a great amount of prose and poetry. His poems often told a story and were set in far-away lands. *The Inchcape Rock* and *The Battle of Blenheim* are two of his shorter poems.

## Romantic Age - poetry and authors

The period which extends **from 1798 to 1837** is known as "**Romantic Age**". The term "**romantic**" was used in England for the first time in the 16th century to indicate the **unreal and fanciful elements**. During the 18th century it was used with a negative connotation to indicate something in contrast with reason but **linked with emotions**. It was used for the first time with a positive connotation in Germany.

\* The Romantic Age is marked by **three important historical events**:

- the American Revolution (1775 – 1783);
- the French Revolution (1789 – 1799);
- the Napoleonic War (1796 – 1815).

The first literary movement in Europe was known as the "**Strum und Drang**" and was conceived in Germany. **Imagination became the source of knowledge** and the Romantic poet escapes from reality and looks for something new. The Romantic poet recognize the great modification occurred after the **Industrial Revolution** (discovery and development of the steam engine), they realize their inadequacy in representing the society to which they belong and so they become aware of man's unhappiness. The Romantic Movement in Britain started in **1798** when the *Lyrical Ballads* (by Wordsworth and Coleridge) appeared.

The most important British poets of this period are **Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats**. The most important character in the Romantic Age is landscape both in art and poetry. The most important romantic painters are Turner and Constable.

## William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was **born in the English Lake District** in 1770 and he was educated in Cambridge. In 1790 he went on a walking tour of France and the Alps where he had been influenced by the **ideas of French Revolution**. The development of the Revolution and the war between France and England brought him to the edge of a **nervous breakdown**. In 1795 he went to live with his sister, his most faithful friend. Then he **moved to Somerset** to be near to **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**. The development of their friendship brought them to write a collection of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798 anonymously and in 1800 containing Wordsworth's *Preface* (the *Manifesto of English Romanticism*). In 1799 he went to live in the Lake District and he got married. In 1805 he had finished *The Prelude*, a long autobiographical poem in 14 books. His reputation grew in 1843 he was made Poet Laureate. He died in 1850.

The main topic of Wordsworth's poetry are everyday situations and common people. He uses **simple language**. The most important theme of his poetry is **nature**, he shared Rousseau's faith in the goodness of nature and he believed in a **deep link between man and nature**. He thought the man and nature are inseparable, **nature comforts man in sorrow** and helps him to love, so he had a **pantheistic view**. Wordsworth believed that **memory** was very important because it **allows the poet to give poetry its life and power**. The importance of memory influences poetry because it take origin from **emotion recollected in tranquility**. The poet is a teacher who shows men how to understand their feelings and improve their moral being.

## Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was **born in Devonshire in 1772**, he was sent first to Christ's Hospital School and then to Cambridge where he never graduated. He was influenced by French revolutionary ideals but after the disillusionment, he and the poet Southey planned to establish a **utopian community** in Pennsylvania under the name of "**Pantisocracy**", but the project came to nothing. In 1797 he met William Wordsworth and he **settled in Somerset**. In these year he wrote: *The*



*Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (first poem of the *Lyrical Ballads*), *Christabel* (unfinished) and *Kubla Khan* (unfinished). In 1799 he moved to the Lake District and then he spent a period of solitude in Malta. In 1817 he settled in London where he produced *Biographia Literaria*. He died in 1834.

**Imagination** for Coleridge is very important and he **divided it in two kinds**:

- **Primary imagination**: everybody use it unconsciously and is connected with human perception;
- **Secondary imagination**: it is voluntary and used consciously, with that men perceive the world around them and have the faculty to use the data of reality to build new worlds.

**Fancy** is the mechanical ability the poet have to use device in order to express his ideas, it is the way the poet can communicate his ideas and vision to everybody.

Coleridge didn't view nature as a moral guide or a source of consolation and happiness. **He saw nature** and the material world **as the reflection of the perfect world of "ideas" (neoplatonic interpretation)**. In his poems Coleridge used archaic language, alliteration, repetition and onomatopoeias.

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a poem is **made up of 7 parts** and is set in a boundless sea. It is introduced by an "**Argument**" containing a short summary of the poem. The atmosphere is full of mystery, due to the presence of the supernatural and the common place. The characters are **the mariner, who is both a spectator and an actor**, and his mates whose sorrow represent the human one. The poem contains many of the feature associated to ballads as the use of dialogue and narration, the **four-line stanzas**, the repetitions, the alliterations and the internal rhyme and the themes of travel, wandering and supernatural elements.

- There are **different interpretation** of the poem:
  - Description of a dream;
  - Allegory of the life of the soul;
  - Description of the poetic journey of Romanticism (the mariner is the poet who feels guilty for the loss of innocence caused by the industrial revolution and tries to fill it with poetry).

## Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Shelley was **born in 1792** by a wealthy family. In 1810 he was expelled from Oxford University because of his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism*. At the age of 19 he got marry and he moved to Ireland. He was a free spirit, refused social conventions and tyranny and he believed

in a better future. He died in Italy in 1822. His best works are: *Ode to the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Adonais* and *A Defence of Poetry*.

The main themes of Shelley's poetry are **freedom and love** because they are **the solution to the evils of society**. The poetry is the expression of **imagination and it is able to change the material world** unable to change, in this way the poet can only suffer isolate from the world, finding comfort in hope. **The poet is both a prophet and a hero** who has to help mankind to reach an ideal world full of freedom, love and beauty. The **nature is the place where to escape from the ordinary world**, it is a veil that hides the eternal truth of the Divine Spirit. Shelley, in his poetry, used a wide range of styles but he is remembered for his short lyric poem.

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## **(Part-2)**

### **' Romantic Poetry ' :**

The Romantic period being instinct with the spirit of revolt, it may be taken for granted that in poetic style there is great range of effort and experiment. The general tendency is toward simplicity of diction and away from the mannerisms of the eighteenth century. The Romantic age was indeed the golden age of the lyric, which reflected the Romantic spirit of the time in liberal and varied measure. It comprised the exalted passion of Shelley, the meditative simplicity of Wordsworth, the sumptuous descriptions of Keats, and the golden notes of Coleridge. With descriptive and narrative poems the age was richly endowed. One has only to recall Byron's early work, Keats's tales, Coleridge's supernatural stories, and Scott's martial and historical romances to perceive how rich the harvest was. The Spenserian stanza was a favourite model, but

the ballad is nearly as popular. Satirical Poems were numerous; and their tone was fierce, for the success of the French Revolution led to the expression of new hopes and desires. **William Blake** ( 1757-1827) had been dissatisfied since boyhood with the current state of poetry and what he considered the irreligious drudgery of contemporary thought. His early development of a protective shield of mocking humour with which to face a world in which science had become trifling and art irrelevant is visible in the satirical *An Island in the Moon*. He then took the bolder step of setting aside sophistication in the visionary *Songs of Innocence* (1789). His desire for renewal encouraged him to view the outbreak of the French Revolution as a momentous event. In works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), he attacked the hypocrisies of the age and the impersonal cruelties resulting from the dominance of analytic reason in contemporary thought. As it became clear that the ideals of the Revolution were not likely to be realized in his time, he renewed his efforts to revise his contemporaries' view of the universe and to construct a new mythology centred not in the God of the Bible but in Urizen, a repressive figure of reason and law whom he believed to be the deity actually worshipped by his contemporaries. The story of Urizen's rise was set out in *The First Book of Urizen* (1794) and then, more ambitiously, in the unfinished manuscript *Vala* (later redrafted as *The Four Zoas*), written from about 1796 to about 1807. Blake developed these ideas in the visionary narratives of *Milton* (1804-08) and *Jerusalem* (1804-20). Here, still using his own mythological characters, he portrayed the imaginative artist as the hero of society and suggested the possibility of redemption from the fallen condition.

**William Wordsworth** (1770-1850) was born at Cockermouth, outside the Lake District. In 1839, Oxford conferred upon him the degree of D. C. L. (Doctor of Civil Law) and on the death of Southey he became Poet Laureate. Throughout his life, however, he never wavered in his faith in himself and his immortality as a poet. He records that his earliest verse was written at school. At the university he composed some poetry, which appeared as *An Evening Walk* (1793) and *Descriptive Sketches* (1793). In style these poems have little originality, but they already show the Wordsworthian eye for nature. The first fruits of his genius were seen in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a joint production by Coleridge and himself, which was published at Bristol. *Biographia Literaria* is epoch-making, for it is the prelude to the Romantic movement proper. The concluding piece, *Tintern Abbey*, is one of the triumphs of his genius. During the years 1798-99 Wordsworth composed some of his finest poems, which appeared in 1800. Among the most noteworthy of the new works in this collection were "Michael", "The Old Cumberland Beggar", "She dwelt among the untrodden ways", "Strange fits of passion I've known", and "Nutting". "The Prelude", which was completed in 1805 but not published until 1850, after Wordsworth's death, is the record of his development as a poet. He describes his experiences with a fullness, and laborious anxiety that are unique in our literature. The poem, which runs to fourteen books, is often dull and prosy, but at times, particularly, when he is describing the formative influence of nature, and his emotions when confronted by seemingly unreal natural objects, the blank verse is impassioned, and inspired by his exaltation, wonder and awe. "The Prelude" was intended to form part of a vast philosophical work called "The Recluse"

which was never completed.

Next to be published, in 1807, were two volumes of poems which represent the fine flower of

his genius. Wordsworth is here seen at the height of his powers. Some of the finest lyrics are: "The

Solitary Reaper", "The Green Linnet", "I wandered lonely as a cloud"; in the philosophical, "Ode on the

Intimations of Immortality", "Ode to Duty"; and the Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence and

Liberty - are of a quality which has led many critics to hail them as the finest sonnets in the language.

After the publication of "The Excursion" Wordsworth's poetical power was clearly on the

decline, but his productivity was unimpaired. His later volumes include The White Doe of Rylstone

(1815), The Waggoner (1819), Peter Bell (1819), Yarrow Revisited (1835).

**Theory of Poetry.** In the preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800) Wordsworth

set out his theory of poetry. It reveals a lofty conception of the dignity of that art which is "the breath

and finer spirit of all knowledge", Wordsworth rightly says,

*"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion*

*recollected in tranquillity."*

Regarding subject, Wordsworth declares his preference for "incidents and situations from

common life". He insists that his poems contain little poetic diction and are written in "a selection of

the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation."

**Features of his poetry.**

**(a) Its Inequality and its Limitations:** "The Excursion" is long, meditative, and often prosaic

poem and these tendencies become more marked as the years pass. Before the year 1808 he had

produced poems as intensely and artistically beautiful as any in the language.

He had little sense of

humour, a scanty dramatic power, and only a meagre narrative gift, but he

strove to exploit all that

qualities in his work.

**(b) Its Egoism:** The best of his shorter poems deal with his own experiences; and his longest works "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" describe his spiritual development in the minutest detail.

**(c)** In spite of this self-obsession he is curiously deficient in the purely lyrical gift. He excels

especially in the face of nature, in the expression of a reflective and analytic mood which is both

personal and general. The following lyric illustrates this mood to perfection:

*"My heart leaps up when I behold*

*A rainbow in the sky:*

*So was it when my life began;*

*So is it now I am a man;*

*So be it when I shall grow old,*

*Or let me die!*

*The Child is father of the man:"*

In his sonnets he his lyrical mood burns clear and strong, and as a result they rank among the

best in English poetry, Wordsworth's use of the Petrarchan form was so striking that he reestablished

its supremacy over the Shakespearian sonnet.

**(d) His treatment of Nature:** His dealings with nature are his chief glory as a poet. His treatment is

accurate and first-hand. His personal dealing with nature in all her moods produces a joy, a

plenteousness of delight, that to most readers is Wordsworth's most appealing charm. In his

treatment of nature, however, he is not content merely to rejoice: he tries to see more deeply and to

find the secret springs of this joy and thanksgiving.

**S. T. Coleridge** (1772-1834) : The real blossoming of **S. T. Coleridge's** poetical genius was brief

indeed, but the fruit of it was rich and wonderful. In collaboration with Wordsworth, he produced the

Lyrical Ballads (1798). The most noteworthy is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

In 1797, Coleridge also wrote the first part of "Christabel", but, though a second part was added

in 1800, the poem remained unfinished, and lay unpublished till 1816.

“Christabel” is the tale of a kind

of witch, who, by taking the shape of a lovely lady, wins the confidence of the heroine Christabel.

“Kubla Khan”, written in 1798, was, like “Christabel”, unfinished, and it also remained unpublished

until 1816. It is the echo of a dream – the shadow of a shadow. In 1802, he wrote the great ode

“Dejection”.

The most conspicuous feature of the poems is their intense imaginative power.

No poet has

ever excelled Coleridge in magic of language. For example, a passage from “The Ancient Mariner”:

*“And now ‘twas like all instruments,*

*Now like a lonely flute;*

*And now it is an angel’s song,*

*That makes the heavens be mute.”*

**Lord Byron**(1788-1824)’s first volume Hours of Idleness(1807) was a juvenile effort. He

composed a satire in the style of Pope, calling it English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809). Then

followed the two years of travel, which had their fruit in the first cantos of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage

(1812) which brought him fame. The hero of the poem is a romantic person, and is very clearly Byron

himself. A famous quotation from the poem speaks to humanity on a deeply emotional level:

*“The great object of life is sensation – to feel that we exist, even though in pain”.*

He also composed a large number of lyrics. He also wrote some satirical poems and the longest

of all is “Don Juan”. In range, in vigour, and in effectiveness “Don Juan” ranks as one of the greatest of

satirical poems. In it Byron expresses the wrath that consumes him, and all the human race comes

under the lash.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792-1822) was born in Sussex. He was educated at Eton and Oxford.

**His Poetry:**

Shelley's earliest effort of any note is *Queen Mab* (1813). *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude*

(1816) followed. It is a kind of spiritual autobiography. After this came *Laon and Cythna* (1817). Then

Shelley left for Italy. The first fruits of his new life were apparent in *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-19,

published in 1820). This wonderful production is a combination of the lyric and the drama. The story

is that of Prometheus, who defied the gods and suffered for his presumption.

There is a small

proportion of narrative in blank verse, but the chief feature of the poem is the series of lyrics that both

sustain and embellish the action.

Among the longer ones are *Julian and Maddalo* (1818) and *The Masque of Anarchy* (1819,

published 1832). The latter, inspired by the news of the massacre of Peterloo, expresses Shelley's

revolutionary political views, and is very severe on Lord Castlereagh.

In *The Witch of Atlas* (1820, published 1824) and *Epipsychidion* (1821) Shelley rises further

and further into the atmosphere of poetical imagination, until he becomes almost impossible of

comprehension.

"*Adonais*" (1821) is a lament for the death of Keats modelled on the classical elegy. Though

there is a loud note in the attack on the critics, whom Shelley held to be responsible for the poet's

early death, the Spenserian stanza is here used with a splendid tone and a force which increases as

the poem progresses. It glows with some of the most splendid of Shelley's conceptions.

With the longer poems he also wrote some shorter lyrical pieces. "*To a Skylark*" and "*The*

*Cloud*" are among them; so are some exquisite songs, such as "*The Indian Serenade*", "*Music*", "*When*

*soft voices die*", "*On a Faded Violet*", "*To Night*" and the longer occasional pieces—for example, "*Lines*

*written among the Euganean Hills*", and the "*Letter to Maria Gisborne*". Of his many beautiful odes,



the most remarkable is "Ode to the West Wind". The last line of the poem gives the reader a sense of hope towards the future:

*"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"*

### **Features of his Poetry:**

**(a)** His lyrical power is equal to the highest to be found in any language. It is now recognized to be one of the supreme gifts in literature, like the dramatic genius of Shakespeare. This gift is shown at its best when it expresses the highest emotional ecstasy, as in the lyrics of "Prometheus Unbound".

He can also express a mood of blessed cheerfulness, a sane and enjoyable joy. He can also express the keenest note of, depression and despair, as in the lyric "O World! O Life! O Time!"

**(b)** Shelley's choice of subject makes it convenient to divide his work into two broad groups, the one consisting of his visionary, prophetic works such as "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude", "The Revolt of Islam", "Prometheus Unbound" and similar poems, and the other of his shorter lyrics. In almost all of the visionary poems we see the Shelleyan hero, a rebel against tyranny and a leader in the struggle which is to bring about the ultimate happiness of humanity.

He rejoices in nature, but nature of a spiritual kind. Frequently he is concerned with the thought of death or his own sense of despair or loneliness:

*"O world! O life! O time !*

*On whose last steps I climb,*

*Trembling at that where I had stood before;*

*When will return the glory of your prime?*

*No more- Oh, never more!*

**(c)** His descriptive power at once strikes the imagination. The effect is instant. His fancy played among wild and elemental things, but it gave them form and substance, as well as a radiant loveliness.

**(d)** His style is perfectly attuned to his purpose. Like all the finest lyrical styles, it is simple, flexible,

and passionate. It has a direct clarity and a purity of language which are peculiarly Shelley's own.

**(e)** Shelley's limitations are almost as plain as his great abilities. He lacks humour; and his political poetry is often violent and unreasonable.

**(f)** During his lifetime Shelley's opinions obscured his powers as a poet. No fluctuations in taste can ever remove him from his place among the great.

**John Keats** was born in London. In 1821, he died in Rome early, at the age of twenty-five.

### **His Poetry:**

When Keats was about seventeen years old, he became acquainted with the works of Spenser, and this proved to be the turning-point in his life. His earliest attempt at verse is his "Imitation of Spenser" (1813), written when he was eighteen. This and some other short pieces were published together in his *Poems* (1817), his first volume of verse. This book contains little of any outstanding merit, except for some of its sonnets, which include the superb "On first looking into Chapman's Homer".

Of a different quality was his next volume, called "Endymion" (1818). This remarkable poem professes to tell the story of the lovely youth who was kissed by the moon-goddess on the summit of Mount Latmos. Keats develops this simple myth into a complex and flowery and rather obscure allegory of over four thousand lines. The work is clearly immature and flawed with many weaknesses both of taste and of construction, but many of the passages are most beautiful. The first line is often quoted, and it contains the theory that Keats followed during the whole of his poetical career:

*"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."*

Keats's health was already failing, but the amount of poetry he wrote is marvellous both in magnitude and in quality. His third and last volume, published in 1820 just before he left England,

contains a collection of poems of the first rank. "Isabella, or The Pot of Basil" (1818), is a version of a tale from Boccaccio, and deals with the murder of a lady's lover by her two wicked brothers. The poem, which is written in ottava rima, marks a decided advance in Keats's work. In "Hyperion", Keats took up the epic theme of the primeval struggle between the older race of gods, such as Saturn and Hyperion, and the younger divinities, such as Apollo. Both in style and structure the poem is modelled on Paradise Lost. "The Eve of St Agnes" (1819), regarded by others as his finest narrative poem, is a tale of the elopement of two lovers. The story is slight but moves quickly; the background of family dispute is kept well in mind, and the love scenes are more controlled than those in "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil". The poem is full of beauties of description, imagery, and colour. Together with the longer poems are many shorter pieces of supreme beauty. The great odes- "To a Nightingale", "On a Grecian Urn", "To Psyche", "On Melancholy", "To Autumn" - were nearly all written in 1819, and in their approach to flawless perfection the best of them are unequalled in Keats. All the odes, with the exception of "To Autumn", show a concern with the poet's desire for true beauty, and they thus have a close link with "Endymion", "Hyperion", "Lamia" and "The Fall of Hyperion". The odes are experiments in verse form based on the sonnet. A quotation from "Ode on a Grecian Urn" beautifully shows the natural, human inclination to imagine things as better than they are: *Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard, are sweeter*". As a sonneteer Keats ranks with the greatest English poets. Of his sixty-one sonnets some ten, including "On first looking into Chapman's Homer", "When I have fears that I may cease to be", and "Bright Star, would I were stedfast as thou art", are worthy to be ranked with those of Shakespeare.

Among the other shorter poems “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, a kind of lyrical ballad, is considered to be one of the choicest in the language.

**Features of his Poetry.**

**(a)** His choice of subject differs from that of most of the other major romantic poets. His love of nature is intense and is constantly to be seen in the imagery of his poems.

**(b)** His style is even more distinctively his own, and it has had a great effect on later English poets, most notably on Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites. His early verse was rich in melodic beauty and decorative effect full of colour and the images of the senses.

**Summing Up:**

Some minor poets during the period are Southey, Moore, Campbell, Rogers, Leigh Hunt. The

Romantic period, with the spirit of revolt, has great range of effort and experiment in poetic style. The

general tendency is toward simplicity of diction that is best seen in the works of Wordsworth,

Coleridge and Shelley. But Keats is too fond of golden diction to resist the temptation to be ornate.

Over the ages these poets have influenced many poets across the globe with their style, diction, philosophy and artistic poetry.

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