

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE: A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY

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Study Material

The University of Burdwan

- B.A. Hons (C.B.C.S.)
- REQUIRED FOR ALL SEMESTERS AS BACKGROUND STUDY
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THE IMPORTANT PERIODS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

- The old English [450AD -1066AD]
- The Middle English [1066AD-1500AD]
- The Renaissance period[1500-1600]
- The Elizabethan period[1558-1603]
- The Jacobean period[1603-1625]
- The Caroline period[1625-1649]
- The Puritan period[1649-1660]
- The Restoration period[1660-1700]
- The Augustan period[1700-1785]
- The Romantic period[1785-1830]
- The Victorian period[1830-1901]
- The Modern period[1890-1918]
- The Inter- war period[1918-1939]
- The Mid 20th century[1939 onwards]

THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD[450AD-1066]

According to British traditions the English from the continent came first as mercenaries to help in the defense against the Picts and Scots

- Then followed the Christianization of the pagan English tribes
- The establishment of the Dane law in English
- The accession of a Danish king
- The Norman influence on the English court when began before the conquest in 1066

Important works

❖ **Beowulf**

- The theme of the poem is continental Germanic
- The poem can be considered as the pagan origin
- Work is anonymous

❖ **Anglo- Saxon Chronicle**

- Inspired by king Alfred
- Description of the horrors of Stephen's reign
- Description of William the conqueror

Authors

❖ **Caedmon(poet)**

- The Genesis ,Exodus ,Daniel
- Three shorter poems often considered as one under the title 'Christ and Satan'

❖ **Cynewulf(poet)**

- Four poems contain the signature of Cynewulf in runic characters :Juliana , Elene ,Christ , and The Fates of Apostles

MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD[1066AD-1500]

- Establishment of Norman and Angevin dynasties
- Internal struggle between king, clergy , noble and people

General movements of the times:-the rise of the religious orders , the blossoming of chivalry, the spirit of romance, bringing new sympathy for women and poor, the crusades, widening European outlook, The Renaissance

Features of the Age

- The transition
- Period of transition and of experiment
- The anonymous nature

Works are entirely without known authors

- The domination of poetry
- surviving works of the period is poetry

Important Works

The vision of William concerning piers the plowman- William Langland
Brut- Lazamon

THE CHAUCEREAN PERIOD (1340-1400)

- The period includes the greater part of the reign of Edward III and the long French wars associated with his name
- The accession of his grandson Richard II
- The revolution of 1399, the deposition of Richard, and the foundation of the Lancastrian dynasty.
- The age of unrest and transition

The literary movement of the age clearly reflected by five famous poets

- ♦**Langland**:- voicing the social discontent, preaching the equality of men and the dignity of labor.
- ♦**Wycliffe**:- giving the gospel to the people in their own tongue
- ♦**Gower**:- criticizing the vigorous life and plainly afraid of its consequences
- ♦**Mandeville**:- romancing about the wonders to be seen abroad
- ♦**Chaucer**:- sharing in all the stirring life of the times
- The first humanist
- The first novelist in verse
- The father of modern English language

CHAUCER'S WORKS

Important works

- The Canterbury tales
- The book of the duchess
- The house of fame
- Anelida and Arcite
- The parliament of fowls
- Troilus and Criseyde
- The legend of good women

Shorter poems

- An ABC
- The complaint of mass
- The complaint to his lady
- The complaint of Venus
- Fortune
- truth

Early Tudor Age (1500-1557)

- Ideas of Ren. replacing those of the Middle Ages.
- The Reformation of English church and revival of learning known as humanism changed English life.
- Experimentation and French and Italian influences.
- Wyatt and Surrey introduced the Italian sonnet, terza rima, ottava rima.
- Surrey: first who used Blank Verse.
- Famous authors: Sir Thomas Elyot, More (*Utopia*).
- Medieval drama still dominant. Emerging works: mystery plays, moralities, interludes, school plays.
- "Ralph Roister Doister"—first regular English comedy
- *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557)—most important literary work: "new poetry" collection

ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD[1558-1603]

- The golden age of English history
- The Elizabethan era is perhaps more famous for its theatre and the works of William Shakespeare
- Elizabethan Renaissance theatre begins with the opening of the “the red lion” theatre in 1567
- Other famous theatres:-curtain theatre[1577]
- globe theatre[1599]
- Shakespeare is considered the greatest writer of the English language
- Important genres of theatre are history plays , the tragedy and the comedy

Important authors and works

❖ **Edmund Spenser** [1552-1599]

- Poets poet and prince of poet- called by Charles Lamb and Milton
- Poets poet and critic's critic - T.S. Eliot

Works

- The Faerie queen
- Shepherds calendar
- Prothalamion
- Epithalamion

❖ **Sir Philip Sidney** [1554-1586]

- Father of English criticism
- He took a brilliant in the military-literary-courtly life.

Works

Astrophel and stella
Arcadia
Apology for poetry

Francis Bacon 1561-1526

Father of English essays

Bacon's fame rests very largely on his essays

-the aphoristic style and epigrammatic brevity in his essay

-the compact and condensed thought in his essay, are very important

Works

- The history of Henry VII
- The new Atlantis
- The advancement of learning

Christopher Marlowe

- Dramatist and poet
- Works
- Doctor Faustus

William Shakespeare 1564-1616

- The greatest poet and dramatist in English literature
- Playwright, actor and shareholder in an acting company
- He wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets, 2 long narrative poem and 3 poems

Works

- Poems:- The rape of Lucrene 1594
 - Venus and Adonis 1593
 - The Passionate Pilgrim 1599
- Tragedies :-Hamlet
 - Othello
 - King Lear
 - Macbeth
- Comedies -The Midsummer Night's Dream
 - The Merchant of Venice
 - As You Like it
 - Twelfth Night
- Tragic comedies -Cymbeline
 - The Winter's Tale
 - The Tempest
- Last play :- The Tempest (an autobiographical play)

University wits

- Group of young dramatists associated with oxford and Cambridge
- They introduced Romantic drama into English theatre

The university wits are:-

- ❖ George peele 1558-1598
- ❖ Robert greene 1558-1592
- ❖ Thomas nash 1567-1601
- ❖ Thomas lodge 1558-1625
- ❖ Thomas kyd 1558-1594
- ❖ John Lyly
- ❖ Christopher marlowe 1564-1593

JACOBEAN PERIOD

JACOBEAN PERIOD[1603-1625]

- James ascended the throne in 1603
- Court standards were lowered
- Development of English prose
- Decline of the drama after the death of Shakespeare

Important events from Jacobean to restoration period

- Caroline age
- Metaphysical age
- Puritan revolution
- Puritan age
- Period of commonwealth

Important authors and work

(The cavalier poets)

- ❖ Robert Herrick:- Hesperides , noble numbers
- ❖ Edmund Waller:-go lovely Rose
- ❖ Richard Lovelace:- Lucasta , To Alter from Prison

(Metaphysical poets)

- ❖ John Donne:-
- ❖ Andrew Marvell:-the Rehearsal Transposed
- ❖ Henry Vaughan:- Silex Saintillans
- ❖ Abraham Cowley:- The Mistress

CAROLINE PERIOD

The Caroline Age covers the reign of Charles I (“Carolus”). John Milton, Robert Burton, and George Herbert are some of the notable figures.

TIME PERIOD: 1625–1649

PURITAN PERIOD[1649-1660]

- Clash between Catholics and Protestants
- Extreme fundamentalism
- Rebellion began during the age of Charles I
- Civil war between Charles I and Puritans for 7 years
- 1649-1660- Rule of commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell
- Charles I ascended the throne after the death of Cromwell ; beginning of Restoration period

Important authors and works

- ❖ John Milton
- The first literary epic poet
- Poetry , mathematics and music were his main studies

Works

- Paradise Lost
- Paradise regained
- Comus
- On Blindness
- lycidas

RESTORATION PERIOD

RESTORATION PERIOD[1660-1700]

- Death of Cromwell in 1660
- Accession marked the beginning of the Restoration Age
- Influence of French culture
- Theatres came back to life
- Witty intellectual satirizing manners and fashions of a particular time in society

Important works and Authors

- John Dryden:-The Rival Ladies Tyrannick Love, All for Love
- William Congreve:-The Old Bachelor , The Double Dealer , The Mourning Bride
- William Wycherley:-Love in a Wood, The Gentleman Dancing-Master
- George Etherege:-The Comical Revenge , She Would If She Could

AUGUSTAN AGE[1700-1785]

The main features

- Strong traditionalism
- Conceived literature primarily as an art
- To them poetry was an imitation of human life
- Rise and fall of satires
- New developments in science shattered man's ego
- Rise of novels

Important writers and works

- ❖ Alexander Pope:-An Essay on Criticism , The Rape of the Lock, Windsor Forest
- ❖ Oliver Goldsmith:-She Stoops to Conquer, The Deserted Village, The Man in Black
- ❖ Dr. Samuel Johnson:-Preface to Shakespeare ,London ,Rasellas
- ❖ Daniel Defoe:-A True -born English man , Robinson Crusoe, Raxona
- ❖ Henry Fielding:-Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, Amelia

ROMANTIC AGE[1785-1830]

- Inaugurated with the publication of the Lyrical Ballads(1798)
- English Romanticism came from Germany
- Give importance to subjectivity
- Love for external nature
- Revival of lyricism
- Interest in medievalism
- The influence of French literature

Important writers and works

- ❖ William Wordsworth:-The Prelude, The Excursion, Immortality Ode
- ❖ Samuel Taylor Coleridge:-Biographia Literaria , Kubla Khan , Scholar , Life of Nelson , Roderick
- ❖ Lord Byron:-Child Harold's Pilgrimage , House of Idleness Cain
- ❖ Mercy Bysshe Shelly:-Ode to the West Wind ,Prometheus, Unbound,
- ❖ John Keats:-Isabella , Hyperion, Lamia , ode to Nightingale
- ❖ Jane Austen:-Pride and Prejudice, Emma

VICTORIAN PERIOD[1830-1901]

- It extends to the death of Queen Victoria
- Industrial Revolution
- Mood of Nationalistic power
- Social stress
- Spiritual conflicts was evident
- Publication of Origin of Species

Important writers and works

- ❖Lord Tennyson:-Ulysses, Lotus Eaters , Idylls of the King
- ❖Robert Browning:-The Lady of Shalott ,Fra Lippo Lippi , Men and Women
- ❖Mathew Arnold:-Dover Beach , Scholar Gypsy , Essays on Criticism
- ❖Charles Dickens:-David Copperfield ,Dickens Papers, Hard times
- ❖Thomas Hardy:-Tess of D'Urbervilles ,Far from the Madding Crowd

EDWARDIAN PERIOD

- This period is named for King Edward VII and covers the period between Victoria's death and the outbreak of World War I. Although a short period (and a short reign for Edward VII), the era includes incredible classic novelists such as Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Henry James (who was born in America but spent most of his writing career in England); notable poets such as Alfred Noyes and William Butler Yeats; and dramatists such as James Barrie, George Bernard Shaw, and John Galsworthy.

GEORGIAN PERIOD

- The Georgian period usually refers to the reign of George V (1910–1936) but sometimes also includes the reigns of the four successive Georges from 1714–1830. Here, we refer to the former description as it applies chronologically and covers, for example, the Georgian poets, such as Ralph Hodgson, John Masefield, W.H. Davies, and Rupert Brooke.
- Georgian poetry today is typically considered to be the works of minor poets anthologized by Edward Marsh. The themes and subject matter tended to be rural or pastoral in nature, treated delicately and traditionally rather than with passion (like was found in the previous periods) or with experimentation (as would be seen in the upcoming modern period).

THE MODERN PERIOD[1890-1918]

- Break with tradition
- Rejected Romantic conventions
- Traditional verse patterns were rejected
- The catastrophe of the world wars had shaken faith in moral and spiritual life

Important writers and works

- ❖ T . S. Eliot:- Ash Wednesday, The Hollow Man, The Waste Land, Murder in the Cathedral
- ❖ W . B .Yeats:- Sailing to Bysantium, September 1913
- ❖ Ezra Pound:- Cantos
- W .H . Auden:- Age of Anxiety , Look Stranger
- D .H . Lawrence:- Sons And Lovers , Rainbow , Women in Love

The Postmodern Period (1945-...)

- The postmodern period begins about the time that World War II ended. Many believe it is a direct response to modernism. Some say the period ended about 1990, but it is likely too soon to declare this period closed. Poststructuralist literary theory and criticism developed during this time. Some notable writers of the period include Samuel Beckett, Joseph Heller, Anthony Burgess, John Fowles, Penelope M. Lively, and Iain Banks. Many postmodern authors wrote during the modern period as well.

SOME IMPORTANT TEXTS ON HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

