

GOVERNMENT ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGE, KOVILPATTI – 628503
PG DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
STUDY MATERIAL FOR II B.A ENGLISH
HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
SEMESTER – III, ACADAMIC YEAR 2020 - 21

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UNIT - I

OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

GEOFFREY CHAUCER OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

GEOFFREY CHAUCER MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

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

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Chaucer's first major work was 'The Book of the Duchess', an elegy for the first wife of his patron John of Gaunt. Other works include 'Parlement of Foules', 'The Legend of Good

Women' and 'Troilus and Criseyde'. In 1387, he began his most famous work, 'The Canterbury Tales', in which a diverse group of people recount stories to pass the time on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

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

Morality plays, Miracle plays, and Interlude

- Morality play is an allegorical drama popular in Europe especially during the 15th and 16th centuries, in which the characters personify moral qualities (such as charity or vice) or abstractions (as death or youth) and in which moral lessons are taught. Morality plays typically contain a protagonist who represents either humanity as a whole or a smaller social structure. Supporting characters are personifications of good and evil. This alignment of characters provides the play's audience with moral guidance. Morality plays are the result of the dominant belief of the time period, that humans had a certain amount of control over their post-death fate while they were on earth. Example is Everyman.
- Miracle plays (mystery plays) were stories taken from the Bible. Each play had four or five different scenes or acts. The priests and monks were the actors. Each scene or act was performed at a different place in town and the people moved from one stage to the next to watch the play. The play usually ended outside the church so that the people would go to church and hear a sermon after watching the play.
- The Interlude (another kind of play) was performed at court or at "great houses" by professional minstrels or amateurs at intervals between some other entertainment, such as a banquet, or preceding or following a play, or between acts. John Heywood, one of the most famous interlude writers, brought the genre to perfection in his Four Plays.

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UNIT – II
DEVELOPMENT OF DRAMA

ELIZABEHAN POETRY AND PROSE

After the death of Geoffrey Chaucer in 1400, a century has gone without great literary outputs. This period is known as Barren Age of literature.

Even though there are many differences in their work, Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey are often mentioned together. Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the Sonnet in England whereas Surrey wrote the first blank verse in English.

Thomas Wyatt followed the Italian poet Petrarch to compose sonnets. In this form, the 14 lines rhyme abbaabba (8) + 2 or 3 rhymes in the last six lines.

The Earl of Surrey's blank verse is remarkable. Christopher Marlow, Shakespeare, Milton and many other writers made use of it.

Tottel's Songs and Sonnets (1557) is the first printed anthology of English poetry. It contained 40 poems by Surrey and 96 by Wyatt. There were 135 by other authors. Some of these poems were fine, some childish.

In 1609, a collection of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets was printed. These sonnets were addressed to one "Mr. W.H.". The most probable explanation of the identity of 'W.H.' is that he was William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.

Other people mentioned in the sonnets are a girl, a rival poet, and a dark-eyed beauty. Shakespeare's two long poems, Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece are notable.

One of the most important poets of Elizabethan period is Edmund Spenser (1552-1599). He has been addressed "the poet's poet". His pastoral poem, The Sheppard's Calendar (1579) is in 12 books, one for each month of the year. Spenser's Amoretti, 88 Petrarchan sonnets celebrate his progress of love. The joy of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle is expressed in his ode Epithalamion. His Prothalamion is written in honour of the double marriage of the daughters of the Earl of Worester. Spenser's allegorical poem, "The Faerie Queene" is his greatest achievement. Spenser invented a special meter for The Faerie Queene. The verse has nine lines and the rhyme plan is ababbcbcc. This verse is known as the "Spenserian Stanza".

Sir Philip Sidney is remembered for his prose romance, Arcadia. His critical essay Apology for Poetry, sonnet collection Astrophel and Stella are elegant.

Michael Drayton and Sir Walter Raleigh are other important poets of Elizabethan England. Famous Elizabethan dramatist Ben Jonson produced fine poems also.

The University Wits John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Robert Green, Christopher Marlow, and Thomas Nash also wrote good number of poems. John Lyly is most widely known as the author of prose romance entitled Euphues. The style Lyly used in

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his Euphuism is known as Euphuism. The sentences are long and complicated. It is filled with tricks and alliteration. Large numbers of similes are brought in.

John Donne's works add the beauty of Elizabethan literature. He was the chief figure of Metaphysical Poetry. Donne's poems are noted for its originality and striking images and conceits. Satires, Songs and Sonnets, Elegies, The Flea, A Valediction: forbidding mourning, A Valediction: of weeping etc. are his famous works.

Sir Francis Bacon is a versatile genius of Elizabethan England. He is considered as the father of English essays. His Essays first appeared in 1597, the second edition in 1612 and the third edition in 1625. Besides essays, he wrote The Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis and History of Henry VII.

Bacon's popular essays are Of Truth, Of Friendship, Of Love, Of Travel, Of Parents and Children, Of Marriage and Single Life, Of Anger, Of Revenge, Of Death, etc.

ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

The English dramas have gone through great transformation in Elizabethan period. The chief literary glory of the Elizabethan age was its drama. The first regular English comedy was Ralph Roister Doister written by Nicholas Udall. Another comedy GammarGurton's Needle is about the loss and the finding of a needle with which the old woman GammarGurton mends clothes.

The first English tragedy was Gorboduc, in blank verse. The first three acts of Gorboduc written by Thomas Norton and the other two by Thomas Sackville.

The University Wits contributed hugely for the growth of Elizabethan drama. The University Wits were young men associated with Oxford and Cambridge. They were fond of heroic themes. The most notable figures are Christopher Marlow, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nash, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, and George Peele.

Christopher Marlow was the greatest of pre-Shakespearean dramatist. Marlow wrote only tragedies. His most famous works are Edward II, Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta, The Massacre at Paris, and Doctor Faustus. Marlow popularized the blank verse. Ben Jonson called it "the mighty line of Marlow".

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is a Senecan play. It resembles Shakespeare's Hamlet. Its horrific plot gave the play a great and lasting popularity.

The greatest literary figure of English, William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon on April 26, 1564. He did odd jobs and left to London for a career. In London, he wrote plays for Lord Chamberlain's company. Shakespeare's plays can be classified as the following:

1. The Early Comedies: in these immature plays the plots are not original. The characters are less finished and the style lacks the genius of Shakespeare. They are full of wit

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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. His characterization has improved. The plays in this group are *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

3. The Mature Comedies: The jovial good humour of Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, the urban world wise comedy of Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and the comic scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* etc. are full of vitality. They contain many comic situations.

4. The Sombre Plays: In this group are *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. These plays show a cynical attitude to life and are realistic in plot.

5. The Great Tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear* are the climax of Shakespeare's art. These plays stand supreme in intensity of emotion, depth of psychological insight, and power of style.

6. The Roman Plays: *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* etc. follow the great tragic period. Unlike Marlow, Shakespeare is relaxed in the intensity of tragedy.

7. The Last Plays: The notable last plays of Shakespeare are *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

The immense power and variety of Shakespeare's work have led to the idea that one man cannot have written it all; yet it must be true that one man did. Thus Shakespeare remains as the greatest English dramatist even after four centuries of his death.

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UNIT - III
AGE OF JOHN MILTON

JOHN MILTON AND HIS TIME

John Milton (1608- 1674) was born in London and educated at Christ's College, Cambridge. After leaving university, he studied at home. Milton was a great poet, polemic, pamphleteer, theologian, and parliamentarian. In 1643, Milton married a woman much younger than himself. She left Milton and did not return for two years. This unfortunate incident led Milton to write two strong pamphlets on divorce. The greatest of all his political writings is *Areopagitica*, a notable and impassioned plea for the liberty of the press.

Milton's early poems include "On Shakespeare", and "On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three", "L'Allegro" (the happy man) and "Il Penseroso" (the sad man) two long narrative poems. "Comus" is a masque written by Milton when he was at Cambridge.

His pastoral elegy "Lycidas" is on his friend, Edward King who drowned to death on a voyage to Ireland. Milton's one of the sonnets deals with the theme of his blindness.

Milton is remembered for his greatest epic poem "Paradise Lost". Paradise Lost contained twelve books and published in 1677. Milton composed it in blank verse. Paradise Lost covers the rebellion of Satan(Lucifer) in heaven and his expulsion. Paradise Lost contains hundreds of remarkable lines. Milton coined many words in this poem.Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes are other two major poems of Milton.

Milton occupies a central position in English literature. He was a great Puritan and supported Oliver Cromwell in the Civil War. He wrote many pamphlet in support of parliament.

LYRIC POETS DURING MILTON'S PERIOD (THE CAVALIER POETS)

Milton's period produced immense lyric poetry. These lyrical poets dealt chiefly with love and war.

Richard Lovelace's *Lucasta* contains the best of his shorter pieces. His best known lyrics, such as *To Althea, from Prison* and *To Lucasta, going in the Wars*, are simple and sincere.

Sir John Suckling was a famous wit at court. His poems are generous and witty. His famous poem is *Ballad upon a Wedding*.

Robert Herrick wrote some fresh and passionate lyrics. Among his best known shorter poems are *To Althea*, *To Julia*, and *Cherry Ripe*. Philip Massinger and John Ford produced some notable in this period.

Many prose writers flourished during Milton's age. Sir Thomas Browne is the best prose writer of the period. His *ReligioMedici* is a curious mixture of religious faith and scientific skepticism. *PseudodoxiaEpidemica*, or *Vulgar Errors* is another important work.

Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Thomas Fuller's *The History of the Holy War* are other important prose works during this period. IzaakWalton's biography of John Donne is a very famous work of Milton's period. His *Compleat Angler* discusses the art of river fishing.

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UNIT – IV

AGE OF DRYDEN

RESTORATION DRAMA AND PROSE

The Restoration of Charles II (1660) brought about a revolution in English literature. With the collapse of the Puritan Government there sprang up activities that had been so long suppressed. The Restoration encouraged levity in rules that often resulted in immoral and indecent plays.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

Dryden is the greatest literary figure of the Restoration. In his works, we have an excellent reflection of both the good and the bad tendencies of the age in which he lived. Before the Restoration, Dryden supported Oliver Cromwell. At the Restoration, Dryden changed his views and became loyal to Charles II. His poem *Astrea Redux* (1660) celebrated Charles II's return.

Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (Miracle Year) describes the terrors of Great Fire in London in 1666. Dryden appeared as the chief literary champion of the monarchy in his famous satirical allegory, *Abasalom and Achitophel*. John Dryden is now remembered for his greatest mock-heroic poem, *Mac Flecknoe*. *Mac Flecknoe* is a personal attack on his rival poet Thomas Shadwell. Dryden's other important poems are *Religio Laici*, and *The Hind and the Panther*.

John Dryden popularized heroic couplets in his dramas. *Aurengaxebe*, *The Rival Ladies*, *The Conquest of Granada*, *Don Sebastian* etc. are some of his famous plays. His dramatic masterpiece is *All for Love*. Dryden polished the plot of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in his *All for Love*.

As a prose writer, Dryden's work, *An Essay on Dramatic Poesie* is worth mentioning. John Bunyan's greatest allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Holy War*, and *Comedy of Manners*.

Restoration period produced a brilliant group of dramatists who made this age immortal in the history of English literature. These plays are hard and witty, comic and immoral. It was George Etheredge who introduced *Comedy of Manners*. His famous plays are *She Would if She Could*, *The Man of Mode* and *Love in a Tub*.

William Congreve is the greatest of Restoration comedy writers. His *Love for Love*, *The Old Bachelor*, *The Way of the World* and *The Double Dealer* are very popular.

William Wycherley is another important Restoration comedy playwright. His *Country Wife*, and *Love in a Wood* are notable plays.

Sir John Vanbrugh's best three comedies are *The Provoked Wife*, *The Relapse* and *The Confederacy*.

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UNIT - V
AGE OF POPE

ENGLISH POETS, 1660-1798 ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)

Alexander Pope was the undisputed master of both prose and verse. Pope wrote many poems and mock-epics attacking his rival poets and social condition of England. His *Dunciad* is an attack on dullness. He wrote *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) in heroic couplets. In 1712, Pope published *The Rape of the Lock*, one of the most brilliant poems in English language. It is a mock-heroic poem dealing with the fight of two noble families.

Major Works:

- *An Essay on Man*,
- *Of the Characters of Women*,
- The translation of *Illiad* and *Odyssey*

Oliver Goldsmith wrote two popular poems in heroic couplets. They are *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*.

James Thompson is remembered for his long series of descriptive passages dealing with natural scenes in his poem *The Seasons*. He wrote another important poem *The Castle of Indolence*.

Edward Young produced a large amount of literary work of variable quality. *The Last Day*, *The Love of Fame*, and *The Force of Religion* are some of them.

Robert Blair's fame is chiefly dependent on his poem *The Grave*. It is a long blank verse poem of meditation on man's morality.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) is one of the greatest poets of English literature. His first poem was the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*. Then after years of revision, he published his famous *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Its popularity had been maintained to the present day. Other important poems of Thomas Gray are *Ode on a Favourite Cat*, *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*.

William Blake (1757-1827) is both a great poet and artist. His two collections of short lyrics are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. His finest lyric is *The Tiger*.

Robert Burns is known as the national poet of Scotland. *A Winter Night*, *O My Love is like a Red Red Rose*, *The Holy Fair* etc. are some of his major poems.

William Cowper, William Collins, and William Shenstone are other notable poets before the Romanticism.