HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY

ENGLISH LITERATURE

Course Overview
This course provides an in-depth analysis of the trends, both aesthetic and philosophical, of British literature, with a special emphasis on comparative literature.

About the Professor
Frederic Will, Ph.D. is a widely published professor of comparative literature who has been a Fulbright Scholar in Greece, Tunisia, and Ivory Coast. He is the founding editor of *Micromegas,* a journal of poetry in translation, and was served as administrator and faculty member of Dartmouth, University of Massachusetts, and University of Iowa.

Contents

Instructions for the Study Guide: Please use the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and to review the concepts. As you read, consider the questions. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay. Your required and supplemental readings can be found in the "Readings" file.

Instructions for Essays: Please write a 1,250 – 1,500 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

Instructions for Final Essay: Please write a 5,000 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

Required Texts

Norton Anthology of English Literature. Volume A: The Major Authors. The Middle Ages through the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century Eighth Ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, General Editors. NY: Norton, 2006.

Norton Anthology of English Literature. Volume B: The Major Authors. The Romantic Period through the Twentieth Century and After. Eighth Ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, General Editors. NY: Norton, 2006.

Supplemental Reading is optional and is indicated by shading.

Assignments: *The texts to be read for each author are indicated in the second column, under TOPIC/WORK. You will find the assignments lengthy in certain cases, brief in others. Where the texts are brief, as with Gordimer's "The Moment before the Gun Went Off," in Unit 5, you will be expected to probe deeply, and to account for the character of the text in detail.*

Unit I Middle Ages (to ca. 1485)

Medieval English Literature

Medieval English literature generally consists of work that was written in the emerging vernacular, spoken and written by the Anglo-Saxons. As the language evolved, Old English (varieties of Anglo-Saxon discourse) evolved into Middle English. The blended language thus constructed is rich in terms and vocabulary, and the works produced in Anglo Saxon English provide insight into the beliefs of the times, as well as social and political arrangements. The early Christian church was a dominant, unifying force in a time of warring nobles, while political and community leadership were largely involved with kinship ties.

The text with which we will begin this Unit, *Beowul*f, is early material, in which Germanic and Old Norse, as well as Anglo-Saxon literary elements are present, and in which we glimpse early English culture before it has passed into the more international blend of Anglo-Saxon which forms the basis of today's English.

Beowulf*(A, 26-97)* Anonymous 8th Century A.D.

Western literatures typically debut with an epic which characterizes the founding spirit of the nation/state in question. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—and a great number of ancient Greek epic poems now lost, the epic cycle—served that purpose; so did Virgil's *Aeneid,* and, in France, *The Song of Roland* (12 th century). *Beowulf* is the earliest preserved epic of English literature, and though its language is more nearly Germanic than what was to become English, this poem touches on themes and issues which were to make themselves formative in subsequent literature in English. Heroism abounds, in this tale of tribal quid pro quos and warrior codes, a tale which embeds Beowulf himself in the soil of early Germanic literature—like the *Niebelungenlied*. But the poet of Beowulf, probably a Christian, probes through epic spiritual possibilities which transcend the heroic warrior code. At the heart of this drama lies the conflict of Beowulf, himself a pagan, to subdue the incarnate evil of the dragon Grendel. Throughout the narrative there is a continuous sense of the cruelty of passing time, and of the human's short tenure of life. This sense assures a unique elegiac dignity to *Beowulf*.

Question: National Literatures and their Origins

Beowulf is the first work of powerful imagination to grow from the English (or pre English) basis of the language of the British Isles. It is thus worth reflecting on the stamp provided by this text, which though barely known to readers of English until our own times, casts a shadow of greatness over the literary culture to follow it. Like much epic literature *Beowulf* embraces themes of heroism, love and fidelity, death, the aging process, and the dignity of death. Has your own literary tradition some such looming originary text in its background? Has American—as distinct from British—literature such a foundational text? The answer (as I see it) is probably no, for great literature was not a starting point for the American cultural

world. That starting point, I would guess, was the American Constitution, or perhaps Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791). What do you think?

Comparative Literature:

1. *Beowulf* shares with the work of other epic traditions a concern with the heroic past. Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno*—though in different senses—all concern a real/fictional past which underlies them. The great national epic of India, the *Mahabharata*, unfolds against a misty blend of tale and historical memory, which links the work to a remote past. Do you see some connection between this past orientation and the oral quality of much epic poetry?

2. *Beowulf* intersects with archeology at many points, the text being confirmed by barrows, funeral tumuli, place names, and artifacts, such as those found at the treasure burial site of Sutton Hoo in southern England. In other words these confirming sites and objects leave us in no doubt about the historical, as well as the legendary/fictive elements of the epic. The oldest epic literature worldwide has been intertwined with history, as is most famously illustrated in the case of Homer's *Iliad*. (Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Troy, to ground our understanding of Homer's text, are only the most dramatic example of the service of archeology in filling out such understanding.) Do you think that archeological discoveries can advance our understanding of the epic as *literature*?

Geoffrey Chaucer 1343-1400 *Canterbury Tales (A, 168-266)*

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London about 1340, to a family of French descent who had made their fortune in the wine trade. It was Chaucer's fortune to have been brought up near the Wine-Trade docks of the River Thames, where he had a chance to watch foreigners at work and play, as well as a wide variety of English types. When he was ready for a career his father got him a job as a page at court, and from there, in a long life of business and diplomacy, Chaucer went on to form many fruitful personal connections and to observe life in its pageantry, especially as it played out into the separation among the three dominant classes of society: the nobility, the church and the commoners.

The Canterbury Tales, which draws on this broad experience of humanity, is a long poem considered by most critics to be Chaucer's greatest work. It consists of a General Prologue and twenty-four stories told by pilgrims making their way as a group to Canterbury.

Question: Literature and Society

You will be struck by Chaucer's fascination with social classes, and their typical representatives, as they gather in the Tabard Inn. Does it seem to you that Chaucer is consciously creating a portrait of his own society? If so, does that portrait spring from the narrative instinct or from the desire to portray society? In other words is Chaucer above all a story teller whose society is rich with interest for him, or is he an observer of society who has found a narrative style for characterizing that society?

Comparative Literature:

1. You see from the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer is fascinated with "character types"—the Miller, the Pardoner, the Knight, The Wife of Bath. Does he conceive of these characters as abstractions, which sum up many traits in a generalized package, or are these fully developed characters, each one distinct as Chaucer conceives him or her?

The question here can take us back to Theophrastus (early 3rd cent. BCE) whose *Characters* were influential in later Western literature, and who established a kind of Linnean classification system for personality types. You will find a searching modern essay on the "rounded character" in literature, in W.K.Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington, l954).

2. Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), presses the idea that the origins of the novel—which took full modern form in the l7th century—lie in the growth of the middle class, which for economic reasons began to develop in the Renaissance. Couldn't it be claimed, though, that the commercial and social bustle of Chaucer's time, and of his own life, sensitized Chaucer to precisely the new realities of "man in middle class society"? To probe the relations of literature to social developments, you might be interested in the work of a Marxist historian, Gyorgy Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (1983).

William Langland (1330-1387) *Piers Plowman (A, 268-281)*

William Langland comes to us virtually without personal details. He was from the West of England, and was, as we can see from the present poem, immersed in the religious and social values of his time, He was also in sync with the aesthetic assumptions of contemporary serious poets—compliant in the long, talkative pentameter line, compliant in the framing of his most serious work in terms of dream and allegory. We have to imagine that Langland's own values are wrapped up in the allegorical clothing of his text, for *The Vision of Piers Plowman* is not only a history of the major events of the Christian story, but a revelation of the poet's understanding of Christ's significance.

Question: Sacred Text as Field for Freedom

Passus 18, our reading, opens on the picture of a world-trudging pilgrim dreaming of "Christ's passion and pain" and of His people, which includes one Piers the Plowman, a slightly tweaked version of our poet himself. Through the lens of dream, Piers allows allegorical figures—Peace, Love, Mercy, Righteousness—to play through an account of the tale of Christ's sacrifice. The Question I pose to you, about this Passus, is: *in what ways do you think the poet's self-presentation, manner of vision, and view of his savior belong to a period far outdated? In what ways is Langland's work fresh and part of your own world?*

Comparative Literature:

1. Chapters 5 and 6, of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (Princeton, l968) analyze two texts of mediaeval literature, and you would do well to consult this model of extended literary analysis. In many ways the Christian mediaeval imagination—allegorical, indirect, trading in symbols drawn from intense belief—is hard for us to read, harder either than ancient classical literature or even the difficult works of our own time, like James Joyce's *Finnegans* Work which requires a detailed commentary. Auerbach's book might help you appreciate the mindset of Langland. You might also like to read Charles Williams, *Descent into Hell* (1937), for a scary and profound twentieth century mediaeval type thriller, with some kinship to Langland's thought world.

2. In *Piers Plowman* Langland creates a character in search of the best way to lead the Christian life. The social perspective, under which that search is imagined as possible, is communitarian, and in a way conservative, supporting the reigning feudal structure of the time. You might think of other ambitious literary texts which attempt to construct and find value in a large social panorama of this sort. I think of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, or Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdottir.* Does literature seem to you of special value as an interpreter and forecaster of human societal possibilities?

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) *Book of Showings (A, 282-284)*
How much can you know of an anchoress who cloisters herself from the world, after a ceremonial burial has ritually closed her off from the rest of society? The answer is, not much: that the cloister itself was in Norwich, in East Anglia, and is still standing, and that we know from Julian exactly the time when she received the visions that she writes of in her *Book of Showings*: May 13, 1373, at the age of thirty and a half. The rest is in the text.

Question: The Vision of a Bleeding Head

With William Langland we asked whether we are able to access the allegorical style today, and whether the dream vision is a captivating literary form for us. We were of course raising the issue of reading Christian literature in an age when narratives of other kinds may be more familiar or attractive to us. With Julian the problem is keener. The physical of the created world—whether Christ's bleeding head or a simple hazelnut—is infused with its spiritual meaning and presence, and yet retains a totally absorbing hereness and nowness. Question: *is this a type of imagination which you are at home with? Do you "understand" it? Can you live with this Vision?*

Comparative Literature:

1. We are getting into mystical territory here, not just into the visionary realm Langland took us through in *Piers Plowman*. This is the time to recommend a great book, Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* (London, l911), which will shed light on the nature of mystical experience, as well as on the mediaeval context for the meditations of a woman like Julian of Norwich. Interestingly enough, mystical insights are inevitably tied to the cultural sensibilities of a particular historical moment.

2. Julian of Norwich writes from the center of her visions, though surely not without literary genius as shaper. You might want to look into the portrayal of religious states *in* literature, as distinct from *as* literature (Julian's case.) Good case studies can be found throughout the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, whose *The Brothers Karamazov* explores the religious sensibility, almost as if from the inside, but still as part of a narrator's portrayal: the characters of Alyosha, Father Zosima, and of the Grand Inquisitor are perfect examples of the portrayal of the religious sensibility from *within* literature.

Anonymous*, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (ca. 1375-1400) (A, 112-164)*

Of the author of *Sir Gawain* we know as little as of the author of *Piers Plowman*. What conclusions we can draw are again based on linguistic evidence, and point to the area of the northwest midlands. From the tale the author creates here, in the alliterative verse which roots this English in the traditions which pre date the Norman Conquest—the dividing line (1066 A.D.) separating Anglo-Saxon from Anglo-Norman England—we see that the author is deeply engrained in the Arthurian traditions which ruled much of mediaeval literature. Arthur and his Knights, in their ancestral home of Camelot, maintain the twin traditions of chivalry and knighthood, under the sign of the Cross and the Holy Virgin.

Question: Honor and Quest in the High Middle Ages

The question of the day is: *What is Sir Gawain really in search of? Why does he accept the original Beheading proposal, and who after all is the Green Knight*? The pentangle on Gawain's shield is a pointer toward *the truth*, the driving concept for this courteous chivalric knight, a kind of paragon of the values of his time. (Truth, as ou see, means both the way things are and,

in the sense of that time, *troth*, fidelity or trust—in this case to the True Religion and to King Arthur's court.) The lovely seductress tries in vain to win Gawain away from his purpose, though in the end he triumphs. *But over what? And to what avail?*

Comparative Literature: The place of Christianity in the text before u

1. The place of the Christian religion, in the thinking and writing of the Middle Ages, cannot be overstated. We have already encountered the Christian world in the Pardoner, the Nun's Priest,
and the Parson of Chaucer; in all which tales there runs a thread of irony; in *Piers Plowman,* and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For further understanding, of how Christianity integrates into mediaeval literature, you might want to look at the scholarly work of C.S. Lewis, himself a Christian and mediaeval scholar. (Cf. *The Discarded Image*; Cambridge, l964).

2. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* invokes what literary scholars have often called archetypal patterns; in this case, say, the patterns of the heroic chivalric quest, that of Gawain, and of the ritual beheading and survival of the Green Knight. These patterns are typical lines of narrative, which occur in multiple texts and which seem to derive from fundamental forms of human experience. Suggestion: look into the notion of archetypal forms in literature, both as they are discussed in the psychologist Carl Jung, and in the critical classic by Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934).

Thomas Mallory (1405-1471) *Morte Darthur (A, 301-318*

Though scholars still debate the life of Thomas Mallory, for whose work there are two possible claimants, it appears that the Thomas we have here is a well attested felon and jailbird, who set his literary imagination on a time and place, the mythical Arthurian period of English history, into which he could interject his disappointments and wishes. Like the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* Mallory found in the roundtable world that same zone of chivalric lords and ladies which keeps Camelot alive before our thoughts even today. (Cf. for instance the legend of the Kennedy clan and their Camelot.)

Question: Dark Passion at the Heart of Chivalry

The question of this day is simple, and bears on the most striking passage in *Morte Darthur*. *What is Mallory's attitude toward the adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere, and toward Lancelot's behavior after that adultery?* This question begs attention because Lancelot is a generically noble figure in the Arthurian scene, and his relation to Arthur is defining for the whole society of the roundtable. Mallory says in an aside that he is not sure what the two lovers were doing in Guinevere's chamber. Is Arthur made a fool?

And yet another question: what is your view of the funeral oration for Arthur by Sir Ector? Does Mallory rise to a high level of poetry, in this assessment of a great man?

Comparative Literature:

1. The broad background to all the works of this Unit, and directly bearing on the Arthur legends, can be checked out in a book like G. M. Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England (Books I and II; New York, 1974)*, which conveys you briskly and thoughtfully from the end of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance.

2. You might want to browse in the Troubadour poetry being composed in Southern France at the end of the Middle Ages, especially in the 13th century. You will find that poetry populated with love/death themes, in which idealized love for the noble lady leads either to dark illegitimate passion or a sublimation of love in which the lover is cancelled out. The thematic material touched there was ripely harvested in the love/death opera of Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde (1865);* the same material is brilliantly anatomized in Denis de Rougemont's *Love In The Western World* (1972; English translation.)

Essay Questions for Unit 1

1. Our class is on English Literature. Does *Beowulf* belong to that literature? Does the author of the poem feel he/she is working in any national tradition, or belongs to a "nation"? Does the poem embody a deep relation to cultures other than British?

2. What attitudes and literary strategies does Chaucer share with the other writers considered in this Unit? Is he deeply touched by the Christian tradition you find in Julian of Norwich or *Sir Gawain?* Would he appreciate the kinds of humor and dark passion we find in *Morte Darthur*? Or is Chaucer a Humanist for the ages, who stands out and above his time?

3. Where do you find allegorical thinking in early English literature, and what do we need to know about allegory, in order to understand the way it works in this early literature? Is it possible for us to take pleasure in allegorical literature today? Do we create and consume allegory ourselves?

Unit II The Renaissance

Renaissance Literature

In England, the Sixteenth Century was marked by the ascent of Queen Elizabeth, whose strategic prowess resulted in an expansion of influence and a sense of prosperity and enhanced world position, particularly as traditional rivals began to lose ground. Elizabethan England was a time of great flowering of literature, particularly in drama and poetry.

In the early Seventeenth Century, after the death of Elizabeth I, England experienced a civil war between Cromwell's "Roundheads" and Monarchists. The desire for a new system of government, together with a rise in literacy and technology, gave a boost to new literary trends.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) *Twelfth Night(A, 510-571)*

William Shakespeare was born in the small market town of Stratford-on-Avon in April 1564, the son of a successful businessman and governmental official who then suffered financial losses. Shakespeare began his career as a playwright in the early 1590s by writing comedies and history plays. His subsequent professional life was involved with the theater.

Twelfth Night was probably written in the same year as *Hamlet* (c. 1601), that is in a time when there was a shift in the tone and character of Shakespeare's writing. Many have suggested that it was a time of personal anguish, but there are no direct records. What we can say is that there is a biting tone, an uneasiness with comic conventions, and a ruthless questioning of the values of the characters. There are dark notes in *Twelfth Night*--mourning, betrayal, and tragic isolation--but all are swept up in a "giddy, carnivalesque dance of illusion, disguise, folly, and clowning"(510).

Question: Comedy and Social Stability

Is comedy related to identity and stability, and is comedy ultimately a conservative kind of writing? This large question is a fitting intro to Shakespeare's creative environment. We see a world in chaos, at the beginning of the present play. Everyone is confused, or wants what he or she cannot obtain, starting with the Duke's passion for Olivia whose own passion is totally devoted to what she takes to be the death of her brother at sea. By the end of the play these confusions have been cleared up and a new restored order imposed. People tend to get answers to what they want. Even Malvolio has been graciously supported, by Olivia, and the Duke has married Viola. *Is this restoration of order*, to repeat our question, of the essence of comedy, and if so would that be because comedy is about norms and the breaking of them? Is the classic comedic situation simply like that of the man walking rhythmically down the street, who slips on a banana peel, is reduced to chaos, then rises again and goes on walking, a little the wiser?

Comparative Literature :

1. It would be worth looking backward and forward in the history of Western comedy, to Aristophanes in the fifth century B.C., and to television sitcoms in our day. Would we discover a conservative nature to comedy as we traveled through these times? Would Lucy, Jefferson, and Jack Tripper amuse us mainly through their unexpected and socially tweaked behavior? (Or is that simplifying the nature of comedy too greatly?) What about Aristophanes' extended satires on the law courts of his time, on the high philosophy of Cloud Cuckoo Land, or on the vanity of politicians? Is Aristophanes able to make us roar, at these excesses, simply because he knows the social norms against which these excesses are established?

2. The literature on Shakespeare is endless. Give yourself a treat and read a small masterpiece, *The Elizabethan World Picture (*London, 1942*)*, by E.M.W.Tillyard. Through the window of this little book you will see a backdrop of customs, religious beliefs and practices, and philosophical assumptions which will help to convince you that Shakespeare lived in an Age profoundly different from ours. I suspect you will also feel the closeness of Shakespeare's world to that of the later Middle Ages, not only to Chaucer but to Christian sophisticates like the author of *Gawain and the Green Knight.*

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) *Faerie Queene (A, 368-434)*

Edmund Spenser spent much of his career life carrying out administrative roles for the British Crown, in Ireland. The colonizing role of England in Ireland was a rough and contentious one, and over an extended period the colonized were in endless rebellion against their "colonial masters." Spenser was on the whole one of the tough colonialists. He was increasingly known in England for his poetic work, and admired in England by all including the Queen. However he probably acquired in Ireland the distinctive blend of fantasist—the *Faerie Queen* creator, the myth maker--and realist, whose knowledge of human psychology is sharp and penetrating. In the end he was, in some sense, conquered by the culture he approved of colonizing.

Question: Is The Faerie Queene *an ancient or a modern poem?*

Spenser was a contemporary of Shakespeare and Marlowe, creators usually associated with the full energies of the Renaissance mind. However Spenser, unlike some of his great contemporaries, consciously looked back on the "archaic past," shall we say the past of *Piers Plowman* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight?* Spenser emulated an old fashioned

poetic English, which smacked of late Mediaeval writers, and he peopled his *Faerie Queene* with allegorical figures and abstractions of the Virtues and Vices. On the other hand, though, Spenser confronts the human situation with a direct analytical eye that makes him read as anything but "archaic." The struggles of the Redcross Knight, on behalf of Una, are testimonies of heroic valor and virtue, but the subsequent faithlessness of the Knight sears him with a sense of sin which we can feel on ourselves today. The Virtues and Vices that play through this poem have the bite of real life on them. *Hence the question about the modernity of Spenser. Does he 'get to you' as much as Shakespeare? Is Spenser too our contemporary?*

Comparative Literature:

1. Among other things, Spenser is a Renaissance Neo-Platonist, fascinated with the theories of ideal love developed by Plato, but widely popularized during the Hellenizing movements of the Renaissance. Much of the inspiration for Spenser's work and thought also came from the Italy of his time, which was a source of artistic inspiration in England. You might cross the channel, and take at look at Erwin Panofsky's great *Studies in Iconology* (London, 1939*)*, which looks at the Neoplatonism in Italian painting of the Renaissance. Anywhere you turn in that book will give you insight into the thought world of Spenser, heir as he was both to Platonism and Italian culture

2. A long set of narrative sequences, concerning the pursuit of virtue, may seem far from what we can imagine enjoying today. Comparative Literature is involved with phases of taste and sensibility, and not least with the tastes of the comparatist him/herself. In other words, there is a reflexive dimension to the critical work of Comparative Literature. From that viewpoint, can you explain what it is, in our cultural reading habits, that puts us far from Spenser's sensibility, but that put Spenser's work at the very center of his own time?

Sir Philip Sidney *(1554-1586) Astrophil and Stella (A, 451-455)*

Sir Philip Sidney was a high born courtier, who moved in circles not far from the Queen, and though his early death in battle cut short a life widely admired, he left behind intense sonnets which established a form and move us still with their passion as well as their formality. His life acquired no less great a reputation than his work. Close servant to the Queen, entrusted with diplomatic missions on the Continent, and conspicuous in London society, Sidney remains the cameo of an Elizabeth courtier.

Question: Can Passion be conveyed in a Highly Formal Metric

The question, so put, is simplistic. We know we find these sonnets wonderfully wrought, and even the wit of a line like "Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write," startles us with a direct freshness. But can a 14 line verse structure, rigidly tied to a complex metric—abba/abba/cdcd/ee—delight our ears without stifling the shaggy heart in our breasts? Can passion be cut to such an intricate form? We may trust that you will say *yes*, but if so, how does that effect work? What makes the emotion survive? How is the work of lyric poetry different, in this way, from the far rangier verse lines of narrative poets like Spenser, the nine line stanzas of whose *Faerie Queene* –abab/bcbc/c—conceal their style more talkatively?

Comparative Literature

1. The sonnet form was used as early as the work of Chaucer and Dante, in the l4th century, and gained widely admired currency—especially among lovers—with the sonnets of

Francesco Petrarch in Italy, and of Shakespeare, who was himself the author of over a hundred sonnets. The form has flourished throughout the development of English literature, and in certain poets of the last century and a half—Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Gerard Manley Hopkins—the sonnet has acquired new forms and emphases. Suggestion: take a close look at the rare, and rarely used, *curtal* sonnet in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

2. Sir Philip Sidney was an astute literary critic, whose *An Apology for Poetry* was one of the principal Renaissance theoretical works on the nature of literature. You might want to look at that brilliant essay, which takes you, in the mode of Comparative Literature, back in thought to Aristotle, whose view of art as imitation is strong in Sidney, to Plato, whose view of ideal forms is dominant in Sidney, and forward to Shelley, the Romantic poet who most admired Sidney's inspired view of the poet as an "unacknowledged legislator of the world."

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) *Dr Faustus (A, 460-492)*

Christopher Marlowe died at the age of 29, tangled in secret agent plots, and living on the borderlines of the underworld. (You will remember that Thomas Mallory, author of *Morte Darthur*, also lived on the borders of lawlessness; evidence that the literary genius is not always Mr. Mainstream.) Yet by the time of his death Marlowe was a highly educated Cambridge graduate, the author of a number of closely admired plays, and a recognized servant of the Queen, running various private anti-Catholic missions for her in Europe. We can trace in the amazingly intense life of this young man his dominant fascination with tragic heroes who will transcend the bonds of normal human existence, becoming "outreachers" of daring power. The characters he portrays clearly emerge from his own life.

Question: The Intersection of Raw Humor with Magnificent Vision

The question, and you have seen it forming in *Twelfth Night* too, is: *how are we to take the blend of raw humor with poetic flights in Elizabethan drama?* (In *Twelfth Night* we saw the exchanges between Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch, and followed the wit and lyric flights of Feste, Olivia's jester. In *Dr. Faustus* we hear the exchange between Wagner and the Clown, and marvel at the blend of wit, learning, grossness, and musicality. This blending of poetic levels, throughout Elizabethan drama, establishes a tone conflict which shocked later dramatic traditions, like that of French classicism in the following century, and still today, in our ready for anything age, we gasp at the blend of the sublime and the harsh which we read in this sixteenth century work. *So how are we to take this blend?* If you can learn to "take it in stride" you will discover secrets of the comprehensive vitality of this great dramatic tradition.

Comparative Literature:

1. Does Marlowe's concern with the "outreacher" take our minds to other literary images of power: Macchiavelli's Prince or Nietzsche's *Uebermensch.* Is there something in common among these power manipulators, and if so what? How are they different? (The Prince, for one thing, is above all a calculator; while the other two figures are passionate extremists.) How does the legend of Faust, in Goethe, play into this tradition? Is Goethe's *Faust* more conflicted than Marlowe's, in his search for the power that goes with knowledge?

2. In hurrying to the center of great works written long before our time, we often hurry past the details which explain the text we seek. In the case of Marlowe's *Faustus* we need to return to the theological strife of Marlowe's learning years at Cambridge at the end of the l6th century. The Calvinists and anti-Calvinists were in heated strife concerning issues of theodicy, of the justification of God's ways to man. (Question: is the pervasive pain and

suffering in the universe part of God's plan? This issue of "justification" will still dominate the religious/epic thinking of John Milton.) These issues frame the desire of Faustus for a temporary respite from the human condition, in order to enjoy perfect pleasure. Comparative literature regularly concerns itself with explaining one cultural mindset to another, probing the geography of possible understanding from one century to another.

John Donne (1572-1631) *Songs and Sonnets (A, 603-629)*

John Donne was born into a devout Catholic family at a time, in sixteenth century England, when prejudice, harassment, and religious hatred made any faith but that of the Church of England, the cornerstone of British national fervor, suspect and diabolical. Having suffered the victim end of his faith, Donne turned to the Church of England in the 1590's, was ordained a priest of that Church in 1615. There, by stages, he rose to positions of high power, finally assuming the prestigious position of Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. In his priestly role Donne wrote fiery and brilliant sermons, much admired to this day for their theology and their prose style. He also, and foremost, continued to create the brilliant sonnets and songs which, already by the l590's, were making him a central figure in London letters.

Question: Can the religious and the erotic sensibilities coincide in great lyric poetry?

The question speaks for itself, and of course invites a *yes*, as we are looking at a poet renowned for just such a combination of sensibilities. But if you really mean that *yes*, try it out on "The Canonization,'"one of Donne's richest poems. Is that poem both erotic and religious? In their love, the two lovers share a hermitage, in which they are enabled to give full growth to their love, and to become images for one another of the whole created world. Imitators of God—Cf. ll. 44-5—the lovers make themselves saintly, secular saintly, worthy of canonization. Donne's erotic poetry, which is passionate and spiritual at the same time, is forever blending the religious with the secular. Try out this notion on any of Donne's sonnets.

Comparative Literature:

1. The fortunes of Donne's poetry are a thermometer for the emotional temper of subsequent English poetry. There was great respect for Donne in l8th century writers like Samuel Johnson and Ben Jonson, but by the l9th century, the moment of Romanticism—we will be there shortly, and your understanding of this point will be sharper—Donne was seen as a wit rather than a real poet. It was only in the 20th century, with the turning of the wheels of taste, that the poet T.S. Eliot (and others) drew new and enthusiastic attention to the achievement of the so called Metaphysicals—Donne and his contemporary lyricists—and privileged Donne as one of the greatest English language poets. Cf. T. S. Eliot's essay, "The Metaphysical Poets," 1921.

2. One of the influential critical movements in 20 th century literary discourse was called the New Criticism. Flourishing from the 20's to the 50s, New Criticism privileged the importance of the text in its particularity, not as a social or psychologically significant document. One of the style setting books of this critical movement was Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), which borrowed its title from a sonnet by John Donne. You might want to pursue the eminent role played by Donne and the other Metaphysicals (Herbert, Marvell), in the formulation of New Critical practice.

Essay Questions for Unit 2

1. Are the Renaissance texts we have read mirrors of their time? Does the social life of England appear clearly through these texts? Is social background a good measure of literary achievement?

2. What relation do you see between the work of Sidney and that of Edmund Spenser? Is Spenser a romantic, in his fascination with archaic diction? Are the two poets similar in their insights into human nature? What is the role of Italian culture and Neoplatonism in shaping the work of the two writers?

3. Is *Twelfth Night* comic, in a sense contemporary to us today? What do you think of the raw humor in this play? Does it contribute to the point of the whole? Does the same kind of raw humor enforce the power of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus?*

Unit III The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century

The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century Literature

The Restoration of 1660 – the return of Charles Stuart and, with him, the monarchy to England – brought hope to a divided nation, exhausted by years of civil war and political turmoil. Almost all of Charles's subjects welcomed him home (854). Much of the powerful writing after 1660 exposed divisions in the nation's thinking that derived from the tumult of earlier decades. As the possibility of a Christian Commonwealth receded, John Milton published *Paradise Lost* (final version, 1674), and John Bunyan's immensely popular masterwork, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1679) expressed the conscience of a Nonconformist. Conversely, an aristocratic culture, led by Charles II himself, aggressively celebrated pleasure and the right of the elite to behave extravagantly (857).

Early in the eighteenth century, a new and brilliant group of writers emerged; Swift, Addison, Steele, and Pope. It was a time of literary innovation, and the novel began to gain great attention, with authors such as Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson. Diarists and non-fiction writers kept careful observations of their life and the ideas around them. Burney, Johnson, Boswell, and Wollstonecraft figured prominently.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) *Gulliver's Travels (A, 974-1113)*

Jonathan Swift, a posthumous child, was born of English parents in Dublin in 1667. Through the generosity of an uncle, he was educated at Kilkenny School and Trinity College. About 1696-7, he wrote his powerful satires on corruption in religion and learning, which were published in 1704 and reached their final form in the fifth edition in 1710. At age thirty-two, he returned to Ireland where he devoted his talents to politics and religion, and his works in prose were written to further various political causes (971).

Gulliver's Travels is Swift's most enduring satire. Although full of allusions to recent and current events, it still rings true today, for its objects are human failings and the defective political, economic, and social institutions that they call into being. Swift adopts an ancient satirical device: the imaginary voyage (975). The structure of his narrative also mirrors the travelogues and explorationist diaries that were very popular in the centuries following encounter with the Americas, and the ensuing colonial efforts.

Question: What is the Secret of Gulliver's Travels' Lasting Fascination for us?

At the time of Swift the European discovery of far distant lands and cultures was far under way. Columbus had come upon a new world, and Montaigne reflected the excitement of that discovery well over a century before Swift's time. Swift taps into the growing fascination with the travel narrative, and puts it to use both to satirize his own culture—especially through the Houyhnhnms—and to fantasize the adventures of Lemuel in relation to other worlds and attitudes. In other words, this set of Gulliver tales in full of self awareness and analysis. Gulliver is in each tale set off from the people he discovers, by size or personal traits. *Does the unique charm of Swift's presentation come down to a kind of inner social geometry each of us carries inside, by which we are intrigued by seeing and feeling events from different angles?*

Comparative Literature:

1. We have gone into the issue of taste changes from one period to another of English literature. In the l9th century, which was on the whole scornful of l8th century British literary styles, Swift was even more reviled than Pope or Dryden. Thomas de Quincy, in the mid 19th century, wrote that *"the meanness of Swift's nature, and his rigid incapacity for dealing with the grandeurs of the human spirit, with religion, with poetry or even with science when it rose above the mercenary practical, is absolutely appalling. His own Yahoo is not a more abominable one-sided degradation of humanity than he himself is under this aspect. . . ."* I think you see that Swift's scatological imagination, his scorn for social traditions, his mocking of human pretenses all goes against the grain of thinking which flies under the "Romantic" banner? You might want to enlarge your sense, of this Classical/Romantic polarity, by checking out Irving Babbitt's scholarly classic, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919).

John Dryden (1631-1700) *Essay of Dramatic Poesy; Absalom and Achitophel; MacFlecknoe (A, 880-916)*

A graduate of Cambridge, Dryden, like many of the literary figures central to British literature, grew up with a disciplined knowledge of the Classics, which were long to be the backbone of his sensibility. The training in formal verse, social participation, and a brilliant ear for the cadences of English, all followed Dryden into a career of highly public literary prominence, which rendered him the most noted literary figure in England for the last forty years of the 17th century. He was a playwright, satirist, lyric and ode writer, translator. From his vast body of work we include, here, three texts: a fragment of his brilliant and judicious literary criticism, which was style setting for his age, and from which we can still learn; two longish satirical poems, one a downright libelous take off on a second rate dramatist, the other a serious accusation of political plotting against the Crown.

Question: Can we read Dryden as Living Poetry in our Time?

This question is simplistic, but we risk it in order to make a point: that Dryden's poetry, robust, full with rhyming couplets and classical allusions, on the whole "morally directed,' delighting in public satire—that this poetry is foreign to the usual tastes in poetry at our time. (The fact is, that the best of l8th century poetry, like that of Pope, to follow, ploughed the same ground as Dryden; but that after the Romantic Movement—and we will soon read Wordsworth—the taste for Dryden-like poetry became rare, and remains so.) Thus the question, *what kind of poetry does Dryden write?* takes aim at the whole issue of style and tone change in literary history. These large formal shifts in tone are also parts of sensibility shifts, which of course are lodged in the larger political-economic landscape of a period, and thus prove difficult to transcend. You might thus reflect on what it means "to be inscribed within a certain period of taste."

Comparative Literature:

1. Dryden was a much published translator of Latin literature, in his age, an age when such work could be remunerative and of intense public interest. (The Renaissance marked a renewal of interest in Greek and Latin literatures, especially in their original forms. By Dryden's time, the ability to read these languages had started to decline, but, like most of the writers we have been reading, above, Dryden was intensely educated, from childhood on, in Latin and some Greek.) To widen your sense of this classical tradition, and the waves of change that have stirred it during our modern centuries, take a look at Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (Oxford, l985*).* You will see that the Renaissance fervor for the Classics has persisted through many ups and downs of taste.

2. Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* may well attract your interest, for its creative role in the development of English literary awareness. Dryden was deeply aware of the classical tradition of criticism, and especially of the role of the Elizabethan period in fortifying the English sense of its own literary values. Long after his tine, Dryden's *Essay* remained a standard setter for writing in English. Suggestion: take a look at Rene Wellek, *History of Literary Criticism*, a massive context setter for the whole western enterprise of literary critical awareness.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) *Essay on Man; The Rape of the Lock; An Essay on Criticism; Epistles (A, 1120-1177)*

As a Catholic, Alexander Pope was unable to go to University, vote, or hold public office, but this wired precocious man—probably the most brilliant-in-youth poet of British literature—rapidly made his way to the heights of London literary life. He was an avid reader, deeply alert to the Classics, and above all a frequenter of those coffee-houses which were springing up everywhere in London. Literary talk was to flourish in those locales, as it was to do throughout the l8th century, in part replacing the Salons of aristocrats, where in earlier centuries the ruling intellectuals met. The tastes of the moment changed, as did the composition of literary groups, but Pope remained for decades a leader of cultural life—in a way worthily succeeding Dryden, who had been such an eminence a half century earlier.

Question: How does Pope's poetry fit the Enlightenment project?

We know the basic outlines of eighteenth century rational humanism, the Enlightenment perspective we have seen announcing itself in the work of Dryden and Swift. (In 18th century England, as throughout Europe, there was to be an explosion of empirical science; building on the theoretical insights of the previous century, in Newton and Descartes.) The heart of that perspective was faith in man, and in the orderliness of the reasonable universe that frames man. *How does Pope's poetry exemplify that perspective*? In the *Essay on Man*, Pope sums it up—and notice his genius at summarizing the human condition—by announcing that "whatever is is right." In his *Essay on Criticism,* Pope recurs to Nature as the model for art, and when it comes to details he turns to the art of the Greeks as the model form of nature, "nature methodized." The "natural," in this sense, is man 's artistic foundation. Whatever is natural is right. This too is the Enlightenment perspective. And *The Rape of the Lock*? How is this elegant poem part of the Enlightenment project? One way of looking at the poem is as a cry of support for women's dignity and private space. Another is, as a satire on the least natural aspect of human affairs, the hypertrophy of elegance in social behavior.

Comparative Literature:

1. Scholarship on the eighteenth century abounds. I recommend a look at Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (1940), for a well written general study of the cultural climate of l8th century English literature. You will see how Pope's view of nature—and that of his contemporaries—was tinted by both contemporary developments in natural science and by the view that the culture held of 'science,' and of the "workings of nature." You can supplement Willey with the classic *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) by A.O. Lovejoy, a history of the idea—intimately congenial to Pope—that all of God's creations were perfectly sorted out by him, and exist as a descending chain of being from him.

Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797)*Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano(A, 1340-1349)*

Olaudah Equiano was an Ibo villager who was trapped by the slave trade, who was forced to suffer the horrors of the Middle Passage, which he describes in appalling detail, and who eventually was enabled to purchase his freedom in London—after years of enduring one slave role after another in the Caribbean and Britain. To have gone through this much, and to have written about it in a whistle clean narrative, is already a lot; but for Equiano there was much more to come; effective testimony and participation in the Abolitionist Movement, as well as life as a sailor, which included a voyage to find a passage to India by way of the North Pole. What a life!

Question: What is the canon of a literature?

When a national literature is anthologized, as in the *Norton Anthology* we are reading from, choices are made about what texts to choose. If you were to peruse a collection of anthologies created in the last hundred years, you would be surprised to see how different the texts chosen are; and you would probably start to ask yourself whether there are some texts that absolutely should belong in any collection at all, texts which have so much 'intrinsic value,' that they require inclusion. In thinking through that question you would be on a threshold of the disputatious literary canon issue, which has sparked many cultural battles in our own times. You would be asking yourself what the canon of British literature is, or whether there is one. What do you think of the inclusion of Equiano in the present anthology? I hope you found the tale telling of Equiano gripping. I hope you are able to distinguish your aesthetic pleasure from your satisfaction in following the course of the author's life. It is hard not to challenge the marmoreal quality of the canon, but equally hard to miss the unappealable greatness of many of the authors we read in this class. *Is there a fixed canon of the best in British literature, or is there simply a list of approved tales maintained by the white male guardians of upper class British society in the last four centuries? Is Equiano a significant, or just a culturally important, writer? Or is there a difference between the two?*

Comparative Literature

1. Several hundred slave narratives were published during the l8th and l9th centuries. Certain of these narratives celebrate the religious inspirations which made slavery endurable, others proclaim the importance of the Abolitionist cause, still others concentrate on the personal joys of freedom. The Federal Works Project Administration, in the l930's, preserved many oral narratives of then still living former slaves. You would find it informative to look into slave narratives in general, and to see what traits they share with other kinds of literature. (Cf. The *American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, 1972-79). You will want to think, as you carry through this research, of the limits of literature; where does "literature" end and "document" begin? Does the "canon" of significant literary texts include "document-like works"or only aesthetic masterpieces?

2. Comparative Literature was in its origins a study of the relations among different national literatures. The operative assumption, in that starting point, was that literatures have national homes. You might want to study the evolution of Comparative Literature as it has worked to incorporate more sophisticated versions of the idea of national literature. A writer like Equiano is a clear challenge to the bond between nationalism and literature. For a view of the early stages of Comparative Literature, cf. Phillip Rhein, *Comparative Literature: The Early Years* (1973). More recent developments, taking account of globalism, and even of "planetarism," have attempted to move the discourse of Comparative Literature far beyond the boundaries initially envisaged by Goethe and other Europeans, who generated the idea of Weltliteratur in the late l8th century.

Frances Burney (1752-1840) *Journal and Letters (A, 1349-1361)*

Frances Burney was the daughter of the first British professional historian of music, a man at the center of London culture. From that setting, Mrs. Burney early became addicted to higher culture, especially to writing, and gained acquaintance with many of the literary geniuses dominating the London scene; especially
with such men as Joshua Reynolds ad Samuel Johnson. She was an active and successful novelist, a long time resident of France, and a cunning observer and commenter on the end of century Napoleonic Revolutionary era. The materials we will be reading, from her *Journals*, give us a glimpse of her intimate and pellucid style, and the original directness of her dealings with life.

Question: What is the Secret of Pure Style?

Sometimes small biopsies of a writer's work enable us to penetrate that work, whereas the sheer mass of a writer's larger fictions, or epic work, may daunt us. Mrs. Burney's *Journal* and *Letters* put us inside people and places, and reveal them as distinctive discoveries of the author's sensibility. *What makes for the extraordinary sharpness and vigor of, for example, Mrs. Burney's account of her mastectomy?* (This course deals so boldly in centuries and vast themes; we need to pause now and then to look at how literature works on the level of detail.) Looking back on her operation, Mrs. Burney invites us into her victim status, which she both dramatizes and watches from a distance, alongside us. Not only that, but she describes herself putting herself into the minds and hearts of the surgeons operating on her. A subtle psychodrama is created, in the course of which we "feel her pain" keenly. The dreadful events transpiring, and the sequence in which they occur, is artfully (and agonizingly) laid out, are at no point inert, but sing in our scorched feelings.

Comparative Literature

1. We brought up the canon issue in discussing the fresh voice of Equiano, and that same kind of issue is in place now. We are asking (but not answering) the same old question: are texts like these worthy of inclusion in an anthology of literary masterpieces? It was perhaps necessary to await Feminism, a movement rooting in European culture of the early l9th century, to valorize the work of a female writer like Mrs. Burney, whose fictional attention was directed to the growth of women's lives in society. With the Feminist movement attention began to drift toward the voices of women in creating the literary traditions of British literature. Take a look at Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 1987, for a large view of this movement, which has done much to multiply the voices heard in literary tradition.

Essay Questions for Unit 3

1. The 18th century, in Western culture, is traditionally called the Age of Enlightenment. That term broadly connotes: a practical, demythologized view of human personality and destiny; a devotion to life on this earth; faith in human reason. Do you see those Enlightenment traits in the work of Swift, Dryden and Pope?

2. What is a national literary canon? Who determines what texts belong in a literary canon? Does it make sense to include "document-like works," such as those of Mrs. Burney or Equiano, in a literary canon?

3. The poetry of John Dryden and Alexander Pope fell under sharp criticism, during the Romantic Movement in the l9th century, for being stiff, too formal, too pointed, and even, in many views, mechanical. (When you read Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the next Unit, you may reflect back onto the gap between these century-separated poetries.) What do you think about such charges. Can you read l8th century English poetry as a living part of your own experience?

Unit IV Nineteenth Century Literature

Romanticism (1785-1830)

The imagination of many Romantic-period writers was preoccupied with revolution, and from that fact and idea, they derived the framework that enabled them to think of themselves as inhabiting a distinctive period in history (1369). The emphasis in this period on the spontaneous activity of the imagination is linked to a belief in the essential role of passion, whether in the province of art, philosophy, or morality (1373). According to Coleridge, "deep thinking is only to be obtained by a man of deep feeling; hence, a metaphysical solution that does not tell you something in the heart is grievously to be suspected as apocryphal." (1371).

The Victorian Age

The Victorian Age represented a time of rapid expansion in British influence in the world, which was accompanied by a prodigious level of energy and output. Technological innovations and advances enabled much of the expansion, and the holdings of the British Empire allowed unprecedented growth, development, and anxiety. The literature of this time reflects the energy, optimism, expansiveness, and anxieties of the times.

William Blake (1757-1827) *Songs of Innocence and of Experience (B, 1406-1441)*

William Blake was born in 1757 to a London tradesman. Blake's only formal education was in art; he taught himself to read, write, and to write poetry. At twenty four, he married Catherine Boucher, who was, at the time, illiterate, but whom he taught to be his assistant. Blake earned a living producing engravings, setting type, and giving drawing/engraving lessons.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1794) are poems accompanied by engravings. They are meant to represent what Blake refers to as "two contrary states of the human soul." (1407).

Question: What does Blake mean by Innocence and Experience ?

For Blake, who developed an elaborate poetic mythology to frame his poetic visions, the same single fallen world can be viewed either as a source of joy or of gloom and despair. To pick a simple example, Blake's Tyger and his Lamb represent the two opposed perspectives. Do you see such a joy/gloom opposition playing out through the two kinds of song we read here? Do you in fact hear these pieces of language as songs, in any usual sense? *Do you begin to grasp the opposition and intimate inter-relation between Innocence and Experience?*

Question: Is this poetry congenial to a modern ear?

A second question seems in order. It moves into waters not typical for literary history. We ask whether this Blakean material is readable with delight and fascination today? Is this material in our present grain? Is it too simplistic? Or too allegorical—almost in the vein of *Piers Plowman*? Or is it so universal and central that it was already there in us when we encountered it on the page?

Comparative Literature:

1. Scholarship is a fine form of our effort to understand cultural products, and among the literary byproducts of a great writer, like Blake, count the scholarly works he/she has brought into existence. You might want to look at Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1968*)*, a now classic work of criticism, which contains copious and insightful references to Blake, while constructing a schema of literature which shares many traits with Blake's own distinctive mythology.

2. A few poets have created private mythologies, while many more have tapped into the mythological thinking of their own age. In English literature the two most original myth making poets have been Blake and the Irish poet, Yeats, whom we will read in our final Unit of this class. Both poets were concerned with contraries, the nature of history and its internal antinomies, the power of imagination to transform. You can pursue the rich mythological relation of these two poets—Yeats greatly admired Blake's thought—by reading the Selection of Blake's *The Book of Thel*, in your Norton Anthology (1425-1430), and then turning to Yeats' *A Vision* (1925), where he enshrines his poetic philosophy of history. Try to see the relation between Yeats' map of the world and that of Blake, with his mythical cosmology.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) *Vindication of the Rights of Woman(B, 1456-1483)*

Mary Wollstonecraft fought her way to literary brilliance from a background of family conflict, domestic abuse, and a sequence of the lowly nanny type occupations which were among the few open to women in her time. In 1788 her novel, *Mary, A Fiction*, was published and caught attention—as Fanny Burney's fiction was contemporaneously drawing attention for its depiction of the "real life" of everyday women. Mary Wollstonecraft took up the cudgel, in a second book*, A Vindication of the Rights of Man,* 1791, which locked horns with Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Like the American Tom Paine, in his *Rights of Man*, Mary Wollstonecraft was a passionate supporter of the French Revolution. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, l792, followed shortly after, and has proven to be her most lasting contribution to our culture.

Question:What are the boundaries of the thing called Literature?

Olaudah Equiano, Mrs. Burney, now Mrs. Wollstonecraft; do these authors' texts belong in a

course on literature? Are they literary texts or are they something else—social commentary, memoir, projections of intentions for the future? Common sense suggests we ignore this question, and delight in fascinating texts wherever we find them and can learn from them. But not everyone would agree that these fascinating texts are literature. For example Wordsworth and Coleridge were supporters of a view of imagination, which they considered the central and indispensible force in literary creation; they thought imagination transformative, able to take disparate pictures of our experience and fuse them into a unique whole, which was very different from the unfused catalogues common to writers of memoirs or commentaries. When you complete this Unit please reflect back onto the present question, which cuts to the heart of what literature really is. Would Wordsworth have accepted Equiano and Wollstonecraft as writers of *literature?* Would they have cared what Wordsworth thought?

Question: What is Skill in Natural Prose English?

Prose style, natural, captivating, human is one of the glories of English literature, but it is never easy to analyze. (Herbert Read's *English Prose Style*, 1928*,* is old fashioned, but a splendid guide to these mysteries.) Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, is at her best in bringing insights out of simple narration. Take her comparison of two educations, that of women and that of military men (1466-1467). "The great misfortune is this, that they both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have, from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature." This sentence, and the surrounding context, are typical of Wolstonecraft's easy but startling analyses. What is the secret of her artistry?

Comparative Literature:

1. The discussion of Feminism, which we opened with Frances Burney, above, inevitably reverts to the classic issue; is there something "feminine" about women's writing, and something "masculine" about men's? The cutting argument of mid 20th century Feminism, in its classical phase of Betty Friedan and Kate Millet, minimized the differences between the abilities and skills of men and women. (Mary Wollstonecraft does the same, exception made for the question of physical strength.) Do you see some sensibility, in the passages we have been reading from women authors, that distinguish them from "masculine style"?

2. Literature has often been viewed as a mirror of life, in which we see the realities of a time clearly reflected. (Mrs. Burney's depiction of her mastectomy brings this to mind.) Does this seem a valuable way to view literature? Take a look at Escarpit, *The Sociology of Literature*, 1971, for insights into literature as a mirror of social life. Marxist theorists saw literature not only as a mirror but as a stage of social development. Cf. on this Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 1971.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) *Lyrical Ballads; Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Tintern Abbey;Prelude(B, 1484-1592)*

William Wordsworth was shaped by the Wye Valley and the Lake District of Northwest England. There he grew up freely in nature, comfortable enough in his family life and from early on sensitive to the still unspoiled peasant communities of his region. His relation to his sister Dorothy, and for a long time, during his most creative period, to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, were decisive foundations of his poetic genius. While he was in early life a passionate supporter of the French Revolution, like Mary Wollstonecraft, and while he was close to France for romantic and cultural reasons, Wordsworth grew more nearly mainline and conventional of philosophy, as he aged; one longs, in reading the older Wordsworth, for

the simple genius of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Question: What is the Genius Behind the Lyric Simplicity of Wordsworth's Early Poems?

The question before us was asked by many, at the time of Wordsworth's publication of *The Lyrical Ballads,* in 1800. The seemingly extreme simplicity of these poems appeared silly, unworthy of the great traditions of poetry. The fact is that Wordsworth and Coleridge were both in rebellion against the concept of the poem in the l8th century and earlier. (Think back to Dryden and Pope, for examples of that earlier poetry at its best. It is full of poetic diction, personified virtues with capital letters, a vocabulary level which belongs to educated speech, instead of to the voices of common people, as Wordsworth understood it.) The answer to our question seems to go in this direction: the lyric simplicity of Wordsworth—see "We are Seven"—is not simple at all. The complexity of this lyric balladry lies in the inner organic mystery of the poet's feelings. (See how many different issues are involved in whether "we are seven.") The description of the poet, in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, (1502), is of a person of "comprehensive soul," and of an imagination which makes wholes out of parts. Because he was this kind of person Wordsworth was able to write this kind of poetry.

Comparative Literature:

1. Wordsworth's place in the shaping of literary history is decisive. His views of the common voice, of the power of imagination, of the omnipotence of memory, of the impending threats of industrialism and vulgarity, all fall into line with perceptions and cultural developments which dominate Wordsworth's own time. From the Napoleonic Wars, to the French Revolution, to the mid-19thcentury growth of the middle class in Europe: all these events coincide with the powerful growth of Wordsworth's sensibility. I suggest you take a look at Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944*),* for a broad survey of the cultural landscape in which Wordsworth lived. Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry* (1964) is a guide to the simple mysteries of Wordsworth's early lyrics.

2. Wordsworth's quality of imagination can suggest the work of Chuang-tsu, the 4th century B.C. Chinese poet, who worked in the philosophical vein of Lao-tsu. If you consult that quiet tweaker of language, you will see that, like Wordswoth, he leaves an after mood of puzzlement and learning, which is an intimate part of the power of his poetry. Compare him to Wordsworth. Then go back to Pope, and note how sharply *he* brings his poems to a point, a precise conclusion that says it all again.

S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834) *Poems; Biographia Literaria (B,1609-1670)*

Coleridge, like Wordsworth, was educated at Cambridge, but proved a wayward student, too much the scholar to fit comfortably with his classes, addicted to high living, and eventually to crippling debt. His only recourse was the military, in which he was even more a failure. Back at Cambridge, Coleridge paired up with the poet Robert Southey, and soon with William Wordsworth, who was to be the great intellectual mate of Coleridge throughout much of his life—though a bitter quarrel estranged them for some years—and for decades he shared with Wordsworth the distinction of being the leading British poet and thinker. It should be mentioned, because it sharply distinguished Coleridge from Wordsworth, that the former spent considerable time studying German philosophy of the day, and came away from that experience, at the University of Goettingen, far more the speculative thinker than Wordsworth.

Question: What is the 'supernatural' quality of Coleridge's poetry?

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge observes that in the *Lyrical Ballads*, which bear the author names of both himself and of Wordsworth, he (Coleridge) created poems of the supernatural, while Wordsworth, as he insisted, wrote poems bearing the real speech of real men in daily life. Do you find this distinction born out in the poems you have read, and if so what is the *supernatural* element in Coleridge's work? Take "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "The Eolian Harp." What is "supernatural" about those poems? Why would Coleridge have used that term about those works?

Comparative Literature:

1. Coleridge's definition of imagination, as given in the *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter 13; l663), claims that that faculty is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception." Do some reading in the thought of those German contemporaries of Coleridge, from whom he drew the foundations of this radical new aesthetic. (Think how totally this aesthetic differs from that of Dryden and Pope, hardly a century earlier.) Good starting point (with a commentary): the German philosopher Schelling's contemporary *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), which gives the priority to the aesthetic, in the human construction of reality.

2. You will have gathered that nature becomes a key concept for both Enlightenment thinkers like Pope—remember the "Essay on Man"—and for Romantics like Coleridge and Wordsworth. Give some thought to the difference between the usages of "nature" in the work of those two groups of poets. Coleridge, you may want to consider first, writes of "the one life within us and abroad, which meets all motion and becomes its soul." ("The Aeolian Harp," ll. 26-7). Would Pope have resonated to this kind of "pantheistic" idea?

Lord Byron (1788-1824) *Poems, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Don Juan (B, 1671-1730)*

Child of aristocracy on both sides, inheritor too of both extreme handsomeness and a club foot, Lord Byron represents the adventurer/dissolute, /genius in the fullest expression of what was to be the Romantic spirit. How appropriate that, after a life of erotic expenditure, passionate friendship—as with the poet Shelley and his wife-- ultimately Byron met his death fighting for Greek Independence in the War against the Turks. This cause, of real and symbolic power throughout Europe, was widely seen in the West as a Battle to release the imprisoned spirit of Ancient Hellenism. Byron was "heroic" to the end.

Question: What is the Secret of Byron's narrative skill?

We turn to a question of prosody, first of all. Byron took the *ottava rima* form of *Don Juan* from a strong tradition in Italian verse. (The scheme is *abababcc*; with an alternation of four and five stress syllables in the rhyming lines. One would say a bouncy, jocose and impish scheme, and so it is.) So what is the secret of Byron's placing a set of tales of romance into the rollicking onward advance of this meter? He never pauses, he presses forward without unnecessary commentary, he mocks himself regularly, he mocks Don Juan regularly, he keeps his own person flittingly intrusive throughout the tale; and above all, of course, he is a master of the erotic tease, as Chaucer had been. *Are we getting close to Byron's secret?*

Comparative Literature:

1. The long poem before you is both narratively enchanting (my opinion) and hard to duplicate in other literatures. I suggest you refresh yourself on the libretto of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which was completed in 1788. In that opera, with a noted libretto by Lorenzo da

Ponte, Don Giovanni comes off as a charming and obsessed sexual predator, attracted to an endless series of women, whom he loves to enumerate. By making this comparison between poetry and opera you will, among other things, double your awareness of Byron's passive Don Juan, to whom women just happen. You will also be asking yourself about the difference of music from narrative poetry, as a medium for constructing character. What difference do you see?

2. In your *Norton Anthology*, 1671, you see a provocative quotation from the French critic and early sociologist, Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893). In essence, Taine praises Byron's work lavishly, while rating the work of Coleridge, Wordsworth and Keats on a far lower level. You might ponder that passage, which reflects a view uncommon, even unimaginable, at our time. Taine's evaluation runs with the spirit of his own time, and counter to the evaluation most critics and historians would give today. All that is neither here or there, as far as Byron's "true value" goes, but it is an alarm bell indicator, that literary historical evaluations blow with the wind of their times. In 18th century France, people in the know typically scorned Shakespeare, for his vulgarity. Among earlier Christian writers ancient Greek literature was viewed as nothing more than a cesspool of bad moral examples. Times change. Is there lasting value in the productions of literature? Have you observed such taste changes in the literary development of your own time?

John Keats (1795-1821) *Poems and Letters (B, 1820-1884)*
The English Romantic poets seldom lived long, and Keats led them all in early death, at age 26. It is the belief of our Norton editors that had Keats lived a full life he would have excelled such as Chaucer and Shakespeare in achievement. Yet rather then mourn we may better suppose that the brevity of this life was the price of Keats' distinctive brilliance, intermixed as it is with the premonition of death. Trained as an apothecary-surgeon, Keats exercised his medical career for a brief period, then found his way into a lively circuit of London poets and before long had decided to devote himself to poetry. His brilliant activity as a poet was frenetic, dominated by his premonition of death, and in fact fate proved him right, for in 1820 he began to cough up blood, a result of tuberculosis, and a year later he was dead.

Question: What is Unique about Keats' poetry?

The question may sound like an excerpt from a parlor game. Surely answers will be as different as answerers. For this author, though, the answer is sure: that Keats' *aesthetic perspective* is uniquely pervasive, and finds exquisite expression in his work. It is not that Keats is "arty," or superficially caught up in the details of beautiful things, but that he finds truth, as he said, in beauty. That is not all he finds in beauty, either, for in the evanescent, shimmering will o the wisp of the aesthetic he finds his own deepest human environment, the proximity of sleep, narcosis, and that kind of loveable death toward which the Nightingale draws him.

Comparative Literature:

1. How is literature related to music? You might want to compare Keats to other poets whose work seems to border on the musical. (I think of Whitman in America, Paul Verlaine in France, Heine in Germany; you can supply other and better examples.) Does pure sound have significance by itself, in poetry, or must sound be allied to meaning in order to constitute poetry? You might apply this subtle question to a poem like the "Ode to a Nightingale," which is about the music of the bird's call, as it ultimately narcotizes rational (or perhaps any) meaning. Keats is forever working the borders between music, as topic and as part *of* his poetry, and music as thematic material *in* his poetry.

2. Sometimes the best commentary on an author's writings lies in other writings by the same person. Keats' *Letters*, of which you have examples in our anthology, are marked by the same fervor, sudden starts and stops, and brilliant flashes as his poetry. Can you think of other literary figures whose letters you know? (Tolstoy? Lawrence? T.S. Eliot?) if so, you may want to see whether letters give us a down to earth appreciation of an author, and thus a special mode of access to the writer's major creations.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1899) *Poems (B, 2158-2167)*

Although Gerard Manley Hopkins was to take his own special career path, he too, like many of the male authors requiring our attention in the preceding entries, took the educational path of Oxford/Cambridge, into the presence of certain eminent professors and literary figures. Matthew Arnold, poet and humanist, was among the "great figures," but the particular inspirations for Hopkins were two: Walter Pater, essayist and aesthete, a thinker for whom the artistic was always close to the moral; John Henry Newman, whose conversion to Roman Catholicism had much to do with Hopkins' own similar move. (Hopkins entered the Catholic Church in 1866, and ultimately became a Jesuit priest.) In 1884 Hopkins was appointed Professor of Classics at University College in Dublin, Ireland.

Question: What led to Hopkins' Conviction that Poetry and the Religious Vocation are Incompatible?

The present question is both simplistic and unanswerable, and yet goes right to the heart of Hopkins' position as a creator. You will have noticed that Hopkins—with his sprung rhythm and inscape and instress theories—puts heavy stress on the manipulation of the oral/sensuous presentational side of poetry. (In his youth, Hopkins wrote in the vein of Keats, and you can see the aestheticism of, say, "Sleep and Poetry," in Hopkins.) In addition, as you note in Norton (2159), Hopkins viewed the instress of inscape as a form of address to the created identity of the object of the poem, and thus a fairly direct access to Christ, the emblem and Lord of the created world for Hopkins. If you follow this issue of confrontation with Christ through its embodiment in a poem you will come on the source of conflict, for Hopkins, between his religious vocation and his artistic creativity. Inside himself he doubted that he should substitute an artistic simulation of the Christ encounter for the direct encounter in the Mass, the central act of his priesthood. In the latter part of his life, Hopkins abandoned poetry.

Comparative Literature:

1. To read Hopkins' lyrics—think of "God's Grandeur" or "As Kingfishers catch Fire"—is to pay close attention to the prosody that drives his thought, (Is Hopkins' prosody itself a kind of embodied thought?) The challenge of this Comparative Literature entry is to review in mind the variety of lyric/poetic styles we have touched on in this course. Spenser, Sidney, Donne, Pope, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and now Hopkins. Does Hopkins ally with some particular voice in this group. Take "The Windhover." Notice the effect of sprung rhythm, as Hopkins called it, in which there is a regular number of stressed syllables, but a highly variable number of unstressed, and some consequent breathless linking of one line to another. Do you see this pattern creating a novelty in English lyric? Or is Hopkins simply varying familiar patterns with a slight tweak?

2. In your Norton Anthology (2159) you note that Hopkins drew on Duns Scotus for the thinking behind *inscape*. Involved here is Hopkins' belief about the kinds of disclosure poetry is capable of, as it allows the other it depicts to reveal its identity, and thereby to

become, in its full createdness, the stamp of the Christ on it. From Plato (say in *The Ion*) to Martin Heidegger, in *Being and Time* in the past century (1962), poets and philosophers have long debated the knowledge poetry seeks and gives; and Hopkins belongs to this tradition of debate. It might be instructive to contrast Hopkins, in this regard, with Spenser, Donne, or Wordsworth, each of whom clearly believes that poetry is more than expression, that it is also inquiry and statement about the world we live in.

Essay Questions for Unit 4

1. You will notice that Pope and Swift died only a few years before the birth of William Blake, in 1757. In with the new! If you were to mix up the works of these three writers in a pile, with no author identification tags on them, would you be able to tell which of the works were by Blake, and which by the other two? How would you tell?

2. Review Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, and the *Preface* to them. Do you find in the early Wordsworth lyrics that simplicity of diction, that general hostility to poetic high style, which will be profoundly different from the "ornate" language of such as Dryden and Pope? Are Wordsworth's lyrics themselves "simple," in language or thought?

3. When you look at the poetry of Byron (d. 1824), Keats (d. 1821), and Hopkins (d. 1899) can you see some unifying factor(s) which marks the group as "l9th century?" Please take this question back into our earlier units, and consider whether centuries seem useful categories for literary history, or whether perhaps "generations" seem more useful benchmarks, for understanding groups of writers?

Unit V Twentieth Century Literature

Twentieth Century Literature

The Twentieth Century represents a break from the preceding times, not only because of the emergence of globally-encompassing "total war," but because the technologies developed during this time made human tampering with fate, human history, and nature a matter of the touch of a button. Sweeping political change and social movements characterize the twentieth century, and they provide much of the underlying tension and motivation in the literary works of the time. While one might imagine that the century's preoccupation with self-awareness would lead to evidence that consciousness of self was, in fact, heightened, the events of the period would argue just the converse to be true. Case in point: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Communism seemed to usher in a freedom from totalitarianism and the threat of globalized war. In retrospect, the "Cold War" seems to have been a time of unique structure--freedom when accompanied by corruption and chaos is not freedom at all. Consumerism and materialism co-opt self-consciousness by reducing spirituality itself to a commodity. At least these were the insights of the late twentieth century. Perhaps they were simply the self-evident truths of a planet of Peter Pans who use the promise of technology to gain power of nature in order to provoke disruption – not just in the status quo, but in processes that were, in the past, known to be inviolable law (of nature, of humanity).

James Joyce (1882-1941) *The Dead; Ulysses (B, 2498-2573)*

James Joyce was born in Dublin, son of a father who, though talented, had difficulty earning a living. Consequently the family moved from home to home, each one successively

shabbier. Joyce studied voraciously to break from what he considered to be the intellectual shabbiness of Dublin. In rejecting Dublin, he embraced continental Europe, and sought to shape his mind into a new way of thinking, and in doing so reinvent literature. To do so required a fervent and unwavering belief in his own genius, which his circle of friends found trying at times.

Joyce's first significant work, *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, dates from 1914, and concludes with the story "The Dead." His greatest work, *Ulysses,* was first published in book form on February 2, 1922, Joyce's fortieth birthday. The book contains innovations in organization, style and narrative technique that have influenced countless other writers; and yet for all that Joyce had difficulty with publication; his work was considered obscene by the U.S. Post Office. Eventually, bans were lifted and the book circulated more freely (2500). Joyce's last major work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939) , took him fourteen years to write, and strives to encapsulate a world history in the dreams of a certain publican named Humphrey Earwicker.

Question: What is the connection between The Dead and Ulysses?

This question has a schoolish ring to it, but goes to the heart of Joyce's development. Here is my answer. Gabriel, in "The Dead", is a fully developed form of the character Joyce imagined as himself. In Joyce's first published set of tales, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914), one Stephen Daedalus, later a major figure in *Ulysses*, assumes the personality which will become Gabriel's: detached, wistful, forced to learn his own artistic mission as an observer of life. That is the personality that will make of Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* a fit base for explorations, through a language made up of languages, puns, and allusions, of the whole frame of human history. As the title of that epic search indicates, Homer's Odysseus (Ulysses, through Latin) is the final everyman, virtuous and vulgar in all the essential mixtures, but at the same time an observer, like Gabriel and Stephen. The Gabriel personality will tightly link "The Dead" to *Ulysses.*

Comparative Literature:

1. Our first reflection concerns literary/cultural history. Is literature a direct reflection of its time? Or has literature a history that is basically independent of its time? (I recommend a look at Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), as an aid to understanding how literature is felt and created from within the practitioner standing in a long line of predecessors.) The spur of this question, in the case of Joyce, is *where did he come from*? The last writer we read, Gerard Manley Hopkins, was just leaving the world as Joyce entered it, but do they seem to belong to the same cultural thread? (Certainly both writers were "experimental" in form, but is that the end of their mutual connection?) Or is the dramatic cultural explosion of the 20th century, described at the beginning of this unit, enough to account for major changes in literary style? Reflection on this concrete instance will be a portal to thinking through the entire critical question of *the place of literature in culture*.

2. In *Ulysse*s, as the title indicates, Joyce intends to wade deeply into ancient Greek myth. Most of the characters and scenes in the novel play off against counterparts in Homer's *Odyssey*, which is the epic of a quasi hero's return to his home, after struggles in war, temptations en route, and a host of self-doubts. Familiarize yourself with these parallels, but then consider what can be the reason for this kind of use of older myth in a modern text. Does this kind of inter-textual reference permit Joyce to enrich his own text? To add extra layers of meaning to his own work? Does this last question raise yet another: is literature in some sense about literature, more than it is about life? Suggested reading:

Hereditas: Seven Essays on The Modern Experience of the Classical, 1964, ed. Frederic Will.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) *Endgame(B, 2661-2688)*

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin. He came from an Anglo-Irish Protestant family. Beckett received a B.A from Trinity College, Dublin, and after teaching English abroad, he returned to earn his M.A. in Dublin in 1931. In 1937, Beckett settled permanently in Paris, where he wrote in French, then translated his work into Irish-inflected English. He is best-known for his plays, especially *Waiting for Godot* (1948*)*, and *Endgame* (1957*)*. Beckett focuses his work on fundamental questions of existence and nonexistence, the mind and the body.

*Endgam*e has, at the heart of it, a vexed relationship between master and servant. They bicker and clearly dislike each other; yet they stay together despite their claims to end it all --to leave, die, or simply depart. The overall sense of the play is tragicomic, and it fits well with an absurdist world, where existentialist ideas can be seen at every turn.

Question: What is the meaning of the title, Endgame?

The term, of course, is drawn from chess, and refers to the final moves of a match, when checkmate is being prepared by one of the two contestants. Who is checking whom in Beckett's play, or does the title simply refer to the dead end of existence, where the meaninglessness of everything makes itself clear? Is there in this play any ray of light that would open the staged events to a sliver of meaning? Nell and Nagg hold onto a furtive set of memories of their former joy together. Clov discusses the possibility that he and Hamm are becoming meaningful, then rapidly dismisses the possibility. Hamm indulges in a long tailor joke, and in rendering it serves us a small portion of (dirty) joie de vivre. Finally, if we are trying to consider any element of light in the play, we might remember that *Endgame* is a kind of absurdist vaudeville show, thus does not take itself dead seriously. Perhaps Beckett is also laughing at the exaggerated desolation of the scene he depicts?

Comparative Literature:

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Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) *Poems (B, 2317-2315)*

Thomas Hardy did not take the path of privileged education at Oxford and Cambridge, nor did he become a world traveler or adventurer. His early career decision to leave architecture for writing, led Hardy down the path of large fate-filled novels in which the English landscape played a major role. In that landscape the forces of nature proved *powerful* antagonists to humanity, as did the human prove to himself, when from within him fate

time and time again turned against him. Hardy composed his dark Wessex novels—like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)-- throughout the later 19th century, then in his last three decades turned increasingly toward lyric poetry. We are reading a small but intense selections from those poems.

Question: What marks Hardy off, as 20th century lyricist, from Hopkins and the Romantics?

This is both a technical question, about Hardy's use of the English language for poetry, and a question about the change in cultural atmosphere that begins to set in with the turn into the 20th century. (We took up the same issue, also in regard to the work of Hopkins, in discussing Joyce's work.) Hopkins experiments in metrics, and manipulates syllables and stresses, so as to accumulate startling emphases and instants of revelation. Hardy, on the other hand, compels us with a tone which, though largely conventional in prosody, stops us with harsh chunks of thought, rough hewn words (*Powerfuller*, in "Hap") and a consistently bleak world view which sharply marks itself off from Hopkins and the earlier Romantics. Hardy also looks closely at the harsh realities of social existence, with a sense for the bitter in the daily. What poem could capture the paradoxical pain of lost virtue loss more spittingly than "The Ruined Maid"?

Comparative Literature:

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W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) *Poems (B, 2386-2422)*
Wiliam Butler Yeats, like Jonathan Swift, was born in Ireland, and like Joyce and Swift remained throughout his life devoted to the cause of Irish independnce from British occupation. Nonetheless Yeats spent his life both in Ireland and England, where he was at the center of an active literary scene. In both cultures he worked with native folklore, ancient mythical themes, and the social power of poetry. Romantic, passionate, he married and had two children, but remained throughout life devoted to the image of one woman, Maude Gonne, with whom a single night of love testified to their bond.

Question: Can you see any consistency among the many styles Yeats displays throughout his writing career?

"The Stolen Child," and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" show us Yeats under the thrall of Irish folklore, and of a dreamy Romanticism. These poems date from the l890's. Poems like "Easter, l916" or "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," put us in the creative stance of political rebellion and the dignity of patriotic honor. Late poems like "Sailing to Byzantium" or "Byzantium "—written in 1927 and 1932—take us both into Yeats' complex personal mythology—perns and gyres, his philosophy of history—and into the subtle worship of art, as a dictating factor in culture. Once again, the question: *can you see a binding stylistic theme among the poems of this volatile career in language*?

Comparative Literature:

1. Both Yeats and William Blake created personal mythological systems. We passed over that issue above, in mentioning Blake. His *The Four Zoas* (begun 1797) incorporates much of the cosmic drama of Blake's mythical scheme. The full fledged cosmology, embodied there, is Blake's effort to recreate the cosmos in language. Yeats' *A Vision* (l925) was his full fledged account of a philosophy of history encapsulated in the form of a widening and contracting gyre, Yeats' geographical image for the development of human history. The challenge of this Comparative Literature entry is to "compare" the two systems of world-explanation on display here, and to evaluate their successes as material for poetry.

2. Comparative literature is typically concerned with the theoretical question: What is literature? To consider what poetry is, specifically, you need to examine what metaphor is. What is Yeats doing with the metaphor of "Leda and the Swan," (2405). What is he managing to say through the metaphor of the Father God, the raped Leda, the "white rush" of the swan, and finally "Agamemnon dead," that he could not otherwise have said? (Let's say, could not have said in the languages of history, of the concatenation of events, and even of the religious perspectives that tie God in one way or another to creation?) What Yeats is able to say, of that metaphorical kind, is hard to discuss, and constitutes the material of the "metaphysic of literature." Suggestion, drop in on a classic of philosophical analysis *Metaphor and Reality (*1962) by Philip Wheelwright. You will be startled by the layers of meaning outfolding around the act of poetry.

Auden (1907-1973) *Poems (B, 2689-2704)*

W.H. Auden was educated at Oxford, and brought up into a thriving but rebellious London literary culture, with friends like C.Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice, all of whom were reshaping British poetry. His observations of WW II, and of the social injustices pursuant on the Depression in Britain, led him (like most of his closest intellectual friends) to support the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, and for a long time to espouse the politics of the far left. All his life, however, Auden was a practicing Anglican, and by the end of his writing career his humanism and love of peace had increasingly taken on the guise of religious suggestion. He gives back a complex, multi-styled reflection of his time.

Question: What marks Auden's poetry off from that of other modernist poets like Hardy and Yeats?

It will be noted that Yeats died in 1939, the year of the outbreak of WW II. Hardy died ten years earlier. Although both writers were increasingly pessimistic, as they aged, neither of them had the special pressure of a global war to factor into their pessimism. Auden's life segued directly into the inter-war years of the 30's, then into the Great War itself, and fully into the Cold War. If you look through the Auden poems in the Norton Anthology you will see that almost all of the included pieces deal somehow with the Second World War, or with the collateral damage done by it. The Age being ushered in, during the period of World War II, has been called the Age of Anxiety, and I believe you can feel the force of that Age in Auden's work, as he sits "in one of the dives/on Fifty-Second Street/Uncertain and afraid…" *Is Auden, then, more pessimistic than Hardy and Yeats?*

Comparative Literature:

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Nadine Gordimer(1923-) *The Moment Before the Gun Went Off(B, 2718-2721)*
Nadine Gordimer, a white South African and life long analyst of the social and human issues of her country, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. Her work has been both historical/critical, much of it inspired by the work of the Hungarian Marxist Gyorgy Lukacs, and fictional. Her novels reflect a deep concern with the social culture of her apartheid torn country, and yet, as our Norton Anthology remarks, Gordimer does not in the end put social concerns before art. She believes that narrative is what makes sense of human reality, and ultimately triumphs over ideology of any kind.

Question: What kind of comment on life and art does the short story before us illustrate?

We shift, with this assignment, to a tightly wrought short tale. (Here's a sub question, already: what relation has such a short tale to a lyric poem—say one with a similar ironic/bitter tone by Thomas Hardy?) The tone of the narration is dry and precise, full of detailed observations of personal traits and local behaviors. (For example, the description of the way Van der Vyver 'hides any change of expression round his mouth behind a thick, soft moustache, …by always looking at some object in hand, leaf of a crop fingered, pen or stone picked up..' (2719). The story is brief, but is it able to extract a view of life and art from its packed details? Your answer will surely be *yes:* will it include the implicit power of art to bring order to the chaos of human experience? *Does this story help us to make sense of life?*

Comparative Literature:

1. Nadine Gordimer lives and writes in a politically charged apartheid era environment, and observes that "politics is character in South Africa," in other words that politics infiltrates deeply into the personal/social structure of life there. At the same time, however, she keeps a broadly humanistic eye on the scene around her, and emphasizes the power of art to give shape and meaning to the stresses of social events. In this latter conviction she aligns herself with proponents of art for art's sake—check our Egan, *The Genesis of the Theory of Art for Art's Sake* (1921)—who privilege the aesthetic view of life over the ethical or the rational. You might want to explore this rich aesthetic tradition. How better can you start than with the classic *History of Aesthetic* (1901) by Bernard Bosanquet?

2. The comparatiste is often involved with the issue of genres, and of the inherent relevance (or lack of it) of the genus (novel, lyric, drama, short story, epic) in the shaping of a given work. {There is a fine study of this issue of genre importance in literature: Emil Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* (1946), English translation l991.}What, to bring this issue down to cases, do you make of the generic being of a small short story like Gordimer's? How is her piece different from a lyric poem? How is it different from a novel—say a novel unpackaging the tight network of events her story compresses?

Walcott (1930-) *Poems (B, 2770-2776)*

Derek Walcott was born on the Caribbean island of Santa Lucia, educated at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, and has taught extensively in the United States, especially at Boston University. In l992 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, and joins the Norton Anthology as part of the laudable effort to widen the sense of English literature, to reach beyond the borders of England itself to colonized parts of the former British Empire. The English of his poems ranges freely between the Queen's own and island patois.

Question: How does Walcott, as poet, relate to the mainstream western literary tradition?

This question arises because Walcott, of mixed racial heritage—African, Dutch, English, and with a language background in French creole—is both outside and inside the traditions of British literature. Though Walcott is very conscious of the complexities of his own heritage—cf. "A Far Cry from Africa"—and though he is critical of the British colonial heritage on the ground, he adores the English language and literature of British tradition. The best test case, for trying to answer our question, is *Omeros (*199*0)*, Walcott's Caribbeanized epic drawn from Homer and Homeric themes. What happens to Homer in that transition? How does Walcott's work relate to that of Homer, the founder of the Western epic tradition?

Comparative Literature:

1. Homer's creations, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, have been translated, recreated, reevaluated in every age. Virgil himself, in the *Aeneid*, developed his profound vision of Roman destiny by remaking Homer's work. Kazantzakis, in his *Odyssey (*1958*)*, created a massive modern version of the work of Homer. Lyric and dramatic poetry have been saturated with reworkings of Homeric themes. Suggestion: look into the network of interpretations of Homer, in the West, and put Walcott's original linguistic remaking in its literary historical setting.

2. The English language has adopted many forms at different times and in different cultures. Think back to *Beowulf,* half English, half Germanic in language. Think of Dryden's poetry, seemingly so close to us, but in diction and tone no easy read for a 21st century American. Then think of Walcott's *Omeros,* with its nuggets of patois, or the mariner's island slangs in "The Schooner *Flight*.' Can you see unpredictable futures ahead for English, as the global community tightens, communication means sharpen, and the borders between languages—as, for instance, between American English and Puerto Rican Spanish—blur away.?

Essay Questions for Unit 5

1. We have noted, in the introduction to this Unit, the prominence of threatening global conflict in the 20th century. Literature of the time inevitably reflects these dark issues. In the material of the present Unit where do you most clearly find this reflection? Which of the writers we have read here seem most attuned to the dark concerns of his/her time?

2. Consider the poetry of Hardy (b. 1840), Yeats (b. 1865), and Auden (b. 1907.) You note that Auden was born almost 70 years after Hardy, and over 40 years after Yeats. Can you see the difference in historical experience between the first two poets and Auden? Does that difference reflect itself in style or view point? What if you add the poetry of Walcott (b. 1930) into the equation? How does this change your view point onto Auden's situation as poet?

3. Joyce and Beckett are both Irish expatriates, virtually exiles when compared to another Irish writer, Yeats, who was an Irish statesman to the end. What do you see in common to

the works of Joyce and Beckett which you read in this Unit? Do they still seem to be writing inside the tradition of “British literature?” What about Gordimer and Walcott, then, neither of whom was British? Do t*hey* seem to write within the tradition of British literature? Or—and this raises the question of our entire class—is British literature just a small element in the large body of creations within the English language?

Unit VI Finals

Review, Annotated Bibliography, Research Paper

Final Essay Alternatives

1. We have discussed the “canon” of British literature several times. Now that you have finished the course, what do you think of that “canon” concept. Does there seem to be an axis of central or defining works, that constitute a canon of the best, or is there nothing of that sort, only a variety of “interesting” works written in England and its cultural orbit, in English? (Or is even “English” an irrelevant definer here?)

2. What role do you see for the Christian religion in the evolution of English literature? At what points in our reading has this role been most conspicuous? At what points has it dwindled? Based on our readings, what direction would you see for the future development of this relation between English literature and Christanity?

3. Do you see the Romantic movement—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, et al.—as a decisive turning point in the development and direction of English literature? (We have pushed this perspective, but doubtless there are various ways to plot the development of English literature.) Or if you were to write a developmental history of English literature, would you look for any large scale scheme at all?

4. Pick one author from each Unit we have studied, and briefly place him or her in his/her historical/cultural context. When you have completed this job, take a look at the general relationship between literary texts and historical setting. Is historical setting a useful framework for explaining the nature of literary works?

5. Is English literature strongly marked by optimism about the human condition—that is, belief that humanity is good, the world surrounding mankind is benign, and there is a purposefulness in the universe? Or is there a strong thread of pessimism, in English literature, in all of the above regards? There will be no simple answers to these questions; they are meant to provoke personal reflections on the character of English literature.

APPENDIX

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
eBOOK

BRITISH LITERATURE eBOOK

An Online Guide to British Literature

Description

Designed for English-speaking readers, this book covers the literary history of Britain. The topics reflect and mirror general aesthetic trends, including Romanticism, Nationalism, and Postmodernism, and the narratives themselves explore various modes of self-expression.

About the Professor

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The guide is divided into the following periods:

1. Pre-Conquest British literature (to 1066)
2. Mediaeval British literature (1066-1485)
3. Renaissance Literature (1485-1603)
    - Prose
    - Poetry
    - Drama
4. The Restoration and the l8th century (1660-1785)
5. The Romantic period (1785-1830)
6. The Victorian Age (1830-1901)
7. The Twentieth Century and After
    - Fiction
    - Poetry
    - Drama

We will profile some of the key issues and authors of each period, characterize the period as a whole, and sprinkle enlivening quotes through the text. Each period section will begin with an overview which concisely places the events of the period in their historical and cultural setting.

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1. Pre-Conquest British Literature (to 1066)

The literary culture of pre-conquest Britain can be said to have opened with the introduction of Christianity into Britain, and to be marked by a date like 597, when the Benedictine monk Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory, arrived in Kent, effected the conversion of King Ethelbert, and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. From that point on access to the classical heritage of the west was made possible. When it came to the discovery of a national literary consciousness, however, the dominant tone in Britain was marked by sharp conflict, among the remaining vestiges of Roman culture and tradition, the introduction of new classical learning, the influence of religious texts reflecting Mediaeval Christianity in several forms, and Germanic influenced "Old English" texts, which reflected the cultural mix created by a confluence of tribes: Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and native Britons. The greatest work of the pre-conquest period, from the literary standpoint, was *Beowulf* (8th century), and precisely there we see clearly the blend of the Christian with the pagan Germanic. In fact the poetry of the time in general reflects the blending of Christianity with the pagan. The poet we call Cynewulf (750-825) wrote, in his *The Dream of the Rood*, about Christ's cross' reflection on the Crucifixion. (The felling of the cross tree, to begin with, swells with pagan implications, while the tree's power, in confronting injustice, is redolent of pre-Christian vitalism.) An even earlier poet, Caedmon (7th century), wrote religious literature of which nothing remains but nine lines of a Hymn admiring the Creator. This hymn praises the noble vault of heaven, but in terms that could ring from a pagan as well as a Christian soul. This pre-Conquest culture will serve as a reference point in our upcoming survey of 'British literature,' but as you read the works from this early period you will experience the difference of their world from the world introduced by the Norman Conquest, to which we keep referring. That Conquest, which will bring French culture and language into Britain, will decisively link Britain to the classical world of Roman and Greek culture, a world which in earlier Britain was present only as a colonial occupation, not as a driving cultural force. Not the least of the post-conquest differences will be in language: for the blend of French (and thus Latin) with English, which was a byproduct of the Conquest, was to set the tone for a new literary culture in the British Isles; and to open the door to an evolving form of the language you speak today.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

1. Ancient Britain: The Setting for pre-Conquest British culture
2. The Old English Language
3. Old English Poetry
4. Beowulf
5.Old English Christian poetry
6. King Alfred and the origins of English prose

Topic 1: Ancient Britain: The Setting for pre-Conquest British Literature

Overview: A layer of Celtic cultures—early kin to the Irish, Cornish, and Breton cultures we are familiar with today—grounded the cultural development of the British Isles. This culture set, which had its own antecedents going back to the Stone Age, had been native to the Isles since roughly 500 B.C, and was first broken into and gradually diluted by the Roman occupation of Britain, which began in 43 A.D. As was their way, the Romans introduced governance and a major infrastructure upgrade into the loose clan organization of the Celts. Successive waves of conquest, from Western Europe and Scandinavia, brought fresh cultural layers to the pre-Conquest structure, so that Angles, Saxons, and Jutes formed a creative ferment enriching to the language English users inherit today.

The formation of a new culture: In the early fifth century, as the Roman Empire began to crumble, Roman legions were withdrawn from the British Isles. Romanized Britain, rough in development and still searching for identity, came into conflict with the Celtic tribes remaining in what are present day Scotland and Wales. In the undecided power vacuum of the moment invading Anglo-Saxons, and Germanic tribes from Western Europe, took over the administrative control of Britain. The resultant culture was diversified and conflictual.

Tribesmen, kings, and society: The new society of Anglo Saxon England was tribal and clan based; no sense of nationhood existed, nor was there any concept of a larger geographical whole than one's immediate region. Speaking broadly for the second half of the first millennium, two social classes dominated—the earls and the churls. Above them both was the king, to whom unquestioned loyalty was owed. Society was shot through with petty turf wars.

Religion: pre-Christian and Christian: By 597, with the arrival of the monk Augustine at Kent, Christianity entered the bloodstream of British culture, and within two centuries had become part of that culture, making its presence known in glorious Celtic Christian art, in Church architecture, and in the finest of Anglo Saxon literature. At the same time, though diminishing through the centuries, the pre-Christian pagan beliefs of Celtic Britain persisted; among them the conviction that heroic death in battle was the way to immortality.

Topic 2 : The Old English Language

Overview: The Norman Conquest will introduce the French of the time (11th century) and the Latin embedded in that French, into the English language. English as we know it will be on the horizon. When we look back onto the Anglo Saxon spoken before that Conquest, we feel we are dealing with a foreign language. That foreignness has many traits. Old English was in some ways far more complex than the new blended English created after Hastings.

Old English vocabulary: The modern student of English, returning to the pre-Conquest form of the language, is struck by the absence of those Romance language elements

(derived from French and Latin) which form half of the vocabulary of the English we speak today. Whereas modern English is voracious for words from various language cultures, old English was conservative in this regard.

Pronunciation: Old English is a loose term covering the developing forms of English to be found in four major dialects spoken in pre-conquest Anglo-Saxon England: Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish, and West Saxon. (The West Saxon dialect was the speech base for most of the significant literature produced in Ancient Britain.) We can not hope to recapture the sound of Old English, as the first lines of *Beowulf* should prove. However the following short (and arbitrary) list of *Beowulf* nouns, followed by a rough contemporary English phonetic transcription, may be suggestive. Aeschere: *ash'-hair-uh;* Eadgils: *ay-ahad'-gils;* Eanmund: *ay-ahn'-mund;* Ecglaf: *etch'-lahf* ; Ecgtheow: *etch'-thee-ow*; Eofor: *ay-oh'-for;* Freawaru: *fray-ah'-wah-roo;* Geats: *yay'-ats.* It may also be instructive, see below, to review a few lines of text from a classic of Anglo Saxon poetry, *The Seafarer*.

Calde ġeþrungen
wæron mīne fēt, forste ġebunden
caldum clommum, þær þā ċeare seofedun
hāt ymb heortan . . . ***[****The Seafarer, ll. 8-11.****]***

[My feet were
oppressed by cold, bound with frost,
with cold fetters, where cares sighed,
heat around my heart . . .]

Note that there are familiar cognates here, which should enable you to see the structure of the poem. We don't know the date of this Anglo Saxon poem, but it is found in the 10th century anthology called *The Exeter Book*.

Topic 3 : Old English Poetry

Overview. The high literary reputation of British literature rests on the firm foundation of Old English poetry, which touches many registers, from heroic war poetry, through touching lyrics, to such deeply religious work as *The Dream of the Rood*, in which the pathos of Christ's suffering is narrated by the cross itself. Then we add *The Seafarer*, an elegiac meditation both secular and religious, or *The Battle of Maldon*, intensely active poetry dealing with the Danish incursion into Britain at the end of the l0th century.

Rhythm: Old English poetry is typically marked by four beat emphasis, which fits the firm harp strumming which traditionally accompanies the recital. Epic or high narrative poetry was customarily performed at banquets or public gatherings, in 'mead halls,' where the male audience could relax and enjoy liquid refreshment. A simple but insistent beat underlay the reciting voice of the *scop*, or bard.

Narrative style: The Old English epic, like *Beowulf*, or the narrative like *The Seafarer*, is customarily rapid paced and elliptical, leaving out many links in the narrative chain, to propel the hearer forward over unfilled aural spaces.

Alliteration: Old English poetry was heavily alliterative; often four or five stressed words would appear in the same line with the same initial consonants. *Oft Scyld Scefing sceathena threatum*, from *Beowulf*.

Repetition: Like alliteration, repetition holds the poetic line together, and Old English poetry is generous with this device. The heavy four-beat line forms a tight package.

Kennings: Old English kennings are all of a simple type, possessing just two elements which compound to form an allusive and penetrating metaphor for a given noun idea: e.g. for 'sea': *seġl-rād* "sail-road" (***Beowulf*** 1429 b), *swan-rād* "swan-road" (*Beowulf* 200 a), *hron-rād* "whale-road" (*Beowulf* 10), *hwæl-weġ* "whale-way" (***The Seafarer*** 63 a).

Excerpt from beginning of *Beowulf*, Heaney translation:

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
A wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.
This terror of the hall troops had come far.
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
As his powers waxed and his worth was proved.
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts
Beyond the whale-road had to yield to him
And begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

Topic 4 : Beowulf

Overview: The greatest single achievement of Old English poetry, *Beowulf* ranks as one of the world's most touching and mysterious epic poems. The pagan and the Christian blend here, and do so in an atmosphere that rinses away the differences between the two cultures. This oral work was composed in Northumbria about 750 A.D., and was doubtless performed by a scop in regional mead halls, to the accompaniment of the harp.

Preservation of the poem: a product of an ancient oral tradition, *Beowulf* was probably put to writing around 1000 A.D., by a literate Anglo Saxon with significant knowledge of both pagan Germanic cultures and Christianity, and with a good feel for the rhythms of Anglo Saxon poetry. The blending of Christian with pagan themes, in the poem, belongs to the end of the first millennium: God, as in Caedmon's *Hymn* (7th century) is the supreme creator, while the beastly Grendel—a descendant of Cain, in the poem—is diabolical, and Hell her appropriate abode.

Historical setting of the poem: *Beowulf* may well have been composed in the 7th or 8th century, and probably, though the work is clearly a blend of legend and history, reflects both ancient Anglo Saxon events, from the sixth century at the latest, and events that transpired at the turn of the millennium in Britain, at the time the poem was written down. Those earliest events, to the extent we can plausibly place them, involved turf wars and rivalries among immigrant Anglo Saxon and Germanic tribes in Britain.

The tale in a nutshell: Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, is the central figure of the narrative, which he holds together by defeating three antagonists: the dreadful monster Grendel, who has been attacking the warrior residents of the mead hall of Hroðgar (the king of the Danes); Grendel's mother; and finally an unnamed dragon. After the first two victories, Beowulf goes home to Geatland in Sweden and becomes king of the Geats. The last fight, against the unknown dragon, takes place fifty years later. In this final battle, Beowulf is fatally wounded. After his death, his servants bury him in a tumulus in Geatland. And so you have it, the ingredients of either a masterpiece or a generic potboiler.

Topic 5 : Old English Christian Poetry

Overview: English poetry of the first millennium builds both on pre-Christian, pagan heritage, and on the Christian themes which from mid millenium on began to populate Anglo Saxon poetry. We have seen the blend of these themes in *Beowulf,* and have mentioned *The Seafarer*, which joins the pathos of a pagan lament to the hope for salvation which marks the Christian. The work of the poet Caedmon (fl. 657-680) highlights the extent to which, already at his time, it was possible to inhabit a Christian theism.

The Story of Caedmon himself: The Venerable Bede, in his eighth century *Ecclesiastical History of the British Isles*, characterizes Caedmon as a prolific author of religious poetry, much of it based either on versifying or interpreting sacred scripture. While we have only nine lines of Caedmon's work in our hands, we realize that Bede's testimony is powerful, particularly given the modest circumstances under which, according to Bede, Caedmon found his vocation. Caedmon is said to have been an 'unlettered' shepherd who found his way to the monastic Abbey of St. Hilda, and in dream found himself, both at the beginning and through a monastic life that followed, deluged with alliterative Christian poetry.

Cademon's *Hymn*:

Now we must praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian, the Measurer's might and his mind-plans, the work of the Glory-Father, when he of wonders of every one, eternal Lord, the beginning established. He first created for men's sons heaven as a roof, holy creator; then middle-earth mankind's Guardian, eternal Lord, afterwards made- for men earth, Master almighty.

Observe: the syntax of Old English—note the phrase inserted between *he* and *established* at the end of the first sentence--is preserved, as well as the *kenning style* (*Glory-Father; made-for-men earth)*.

The Dream of the Rood*:* This poem, attributed to both Caedmon and Cynewulf, is a Christian poem addressed in dream by a poet, to whom the rood (Old English *rod*, or *pole*) addresses a moving and complex speech about its role in the crucifixion. The complexity is this: the tree of the crucifixion is a passive victim, like Christ, but, also like Christ, the tree goes to meet the battle of salvation with the military fervor of an Anglo Saxon hero.

Topic 6 : King Alfred and the origins of English prose

Overview: Poetry typically precedes prose in the development of a culture. (That was true with the earliest works of classical as well as European literature.) It was not until the tenth century that the British began to write prose: the brilliant origins of that development took place under a powerful and enlightened King Alfred, who ruled the West Saxons from 871-899.

Alfred's achievement in political history: The Germanic and Scandinavian incursions**,** which earlier played an important role in fertilizing the culture of Ancient Britain, never totally stopped, and were renewed in the 10th century by Danish invasions. (The last great heroic writing of Ancient Britain, the late tenth century *Battle of Malden*, concerns such an invasion.) Alfred provided the necessary leadership to unite the kingdoms of southern England, and to ward off the real threat that Britain would become a Danish province.

Alfred and literary culture: Alfred was as interested in his culture's literary history as in warfare; at both he was an expert. Alfred translated Boethius' *Consolation of Philosoph*y, a sixth century Latin work of philosophy which inspires still today, for its sensible wisdom about life and death. (The 14th century English poet, Chaucer, also translated this work.) In addition to translating a large number of religious works, including Bede's *Ecclesiastic*

History, to which we have referred, Alfred instigated a translation of the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, a history of England from the Roman invasion by Julius Caesar to the year 891. This seminal effort, the first national history written in prose vernacular in the Western world, was to be continued in monastic centers until the twelfth century. It might be added that in the course of translating, Alfred regularly composed prefaces, in which he established the first coherent theories of what translation is all about.

Aelfric (955-1010): Educated under the inspiration of Alfred, Aelfric was a prolific writer of homilies, exegeses of scripture, and points of grammar.

Bosses who cannot permit those working under them to know kindness during this life of labour should never themselves enjoy lives of luxury because they could easily be kind to their workers every day. And then they would have some kindness in their souls. God loves kindness.

2. Mediaeval British Literature (1066-1485)

The Norman Conquest of Britain was decisive for the English language and what was written in it. French and Latin, intertwined with Anglo Saxon, created a unique blend which was to empower some of the world's greatest writing. What was to be written in that blended language was from early on sharply different from what was written in Old English. (As you proceed, think back to the culture world of Caedmon's *Hymn* or *Beowulf*, and try measuring the cultural distance.) This new world of course was not created without war induced trauma, and cultural dislocations of every sort. 'It is reckoned that in the next twenty years'—after the Battle of Hastings—'two hundred thousand Normans and Frenchmen settled in the country, while at least three hundred thousand English people, one in five of the native population, were killed in William's ravages, or starved by the seizure of their farm stock and their land.' (Howarth, *1066: The Year of the Conquest,* p. 198). The period we call 'mediaeval British literature' will be one in which a new pre nationalist perspective slowly consolidates in the ultimately enriched island, and the tones of *Beowulf's* world fade from memory or imagination.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

7. The cultural Background of Mediaeval British Literature
8. The Language of Middle English
9. The Wycliffe Bible
10. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
11. Geoffrey Chaucer
12. Julian of Norwich
13. English Drama in its Early Stages
14. Mystery, Miracle, and Morality Plays
15. Middle English Lyric Poetry and Ballads

Topic 7 : The Cultural Background of Mediaeval British Literature

Overview: The Middle Ages, into which we now enter, were of course not mediaeval to those living then. (Time characterizations are always applied by the future onto the past.) We enter a time of the first Universities, the inception of trading and commercial practices on a more than regional scale, larger units of group identity, like the first traces of cities, and new daring in the arts and thought. To the 'mediaeval' person this was a time of transition and discovery, though much that was traditional persisted.

The National Sense: By the 14 th century the inhabitants of England were ready to employ English rather than French as their medium of instruction, and at the same time to express pride in what they were slowly starting to conceive as a nation.

Language: the Norman Conquest was destined to inundate Anglo Saxon—which was already a complexly blended language—with thousands of French words which were gradually to be absorbed into English, and to enrich the potential of English. For more than two centuries, after the Invasion and its turmoil, literary works written in England were to be written in Latin or French, and not until the l4th century did English re-emerge as the creative language of the land. When it emerged it was a flexible weapon for expression.

Architecture: any visitor to the British countryside will be struck by the profusion of stocky gray Norman Churches, each landscaped to its setting, and flanked by a culture rich graveyard. But at wider intervals, throughout the land, the British undertook a cathedral building process which was to cover the country in the course of three centuries. Sixteen of these Cathedrals were started between 1070 and 1100.

The Church itself: the Cathedrals expressed the Church, which, along with the King of the time, was the presiding authority over the culture. That authority took many forms: stipulating ethical and social norms; providing a repository for texts—sacred and classical both; and providing a haven both for scholar scribes, who faithfully copied manuscripts, and for people with a spiritual vocation.

The society itself: Chaucer, in **The Canterbury Tales**, gives us vivid portraits of the character types who are beginning to people the new 'middle class' of the l4th century. With that middle class goes a more complex and urbanized economy, and the gradual growth of international trade.

Topic 8 : The Language of Middle English

Overview: The transition from Old to Middle English is gradual. The peculiarities of the spelling of Old English are dropped, as are the declension forms, which are replaced by prepositions. But these are changes on the written level, and probably conceal only very small changes in actual spoken use. A good example of the lexical changes involved is the writing process was the way Middle English scribes (with their French background) transcribed the letter y. In some cases the scribes heard a soft vowel sound in that letter, and transcribed it as *u*, while in other instances the scribes heard a long vowel and transcribed as *ui*. The result was that a single written Old English letter might be replaced by either of two spellings in Middle English.

Chief differences between Old and Middle English:

1. The vocabulary of Old English, which was largely drawn from the languages of Germanic tribes—Angles, Saxons, Jutes—is heavily Germanic, while Middle English is a blend of English with the French of the time.

2. The guttural sounds of Old English have in some places—*hiccough*, *rough*, *cough*—been preserved in Middle English, while in others—*plough*, *thought*—they have been replaced by a soft/smooth vowel sound.

3. The declensions of Old English—noun endings which indicate the relation of a word to the other words in its sentence—have been replaced by prepositions like *by*, *or*, *at,* which do the same work of indicating relationships.

4. The spelling of Middle English is more variable than that of Old English, because it represents speech forms drawn from a more diverse set of regional practices within Britain.

Ripeness of Middle English: We will meet Chaucer soon, but cannot find a better example, here, of the way Middle English, inspired by French and by a broadly Christian cultural climate, carried the language of Old English to a more nearly contemporary level. The first lines of **The Canterbury Tales** make the point:

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veine in swich licour
Of which vertu engendered is the flour;…

Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimage…

Topic 9 : The Wycliffe Bible

Overview: John Wycliffe (1328-84) was an Oxford reformer, scholar, and translator who took it on himself, and on a small group of fellow scholars and believers, to make a new translation of the Bible for the common man and woman. His intention was to make the scriptures available to all, and to spread God's word as widely as possible.

The Wycliffe Bible: There were two versions of this Bible, one from 1382, one from 1395; they constituted the first complete translation of the Bible into English. You can only imagine the importance of this act, which quickly made the Christian message available to all. The **King James** version of the Bible, published in 1621, would make extensive use of Wycliffe's version. In all such cases, of Bible translation, the work is assured of a vast reading audience, and the effect of such reading inevitably has a strong impact on the development of the language itself.

The social impact of Wycliffe and his translation: Making the Bible available in English, as Wycliffe and his co translators intended, meant many positive things, in terms of reader independence, and direct contact with the Creator's message; it also meant an implicit threat to the Catholic Church. Until this time the Church had a pretty complete monopoly on presentation and interpretation of Holy Scripture. With that monopoly went a still largely unchallenged control over the religious practices of the growing nation.

The Lollards: Wycliffe's followers, who were drawn to his translation, to his theology—which was controversial, and included a questioning of the nature of the eucharist--and to his populism—he wanted the people to take over the vast landholdings of the church--were a fervent dissident group, called Lollards. These followers became influential popular preachers, dressing typically in coarse robes and roaming the countryside as itinerants.

Links with English literature and language: Wycliffe and his fellow translators have been credited with adding to the language more than a thousand Latin words not previously used in English. Wycliffe's great creative contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer, refers only once in *The Canterbury Tales* to the Lollards, and once to the peasant uprisings of the England of his day. However Chaucer is profuse with satiric critiques of the land hungry Catholic Church of his time. The influence of Wycliffe is everywhere present in those critiques.

Topic 10 : Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Overview: This romance, which dates from the late 14th century, takes its place among a number of fine works of alliterative poetry: *The Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* are two of the other classics that sprang to life at this time. None of these fine poems is in the genre of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which though their contemporary deals in a less stylized and more narratively fluid manner with the mode of the times.

The Story and literary setting of Sir Gawain: The story is a poetic romance, heavy with an alliterative style that reminds us of Old English poetry, and has its roots in 12th century legends of the Court of King Arthur.

This romance, steeped though it is in mediaeval allegory and symbolism, will strike us as the first 'coherent narrative story' we have read in English literature. We are struck by the richness of implications of this story, which falls into four parts, or fitts. *In the first fitt* an all green knight appears on New Year's day in King Arthur's court. He dares anyone to chop his head off, and promises to respond with a similar chop in return, a year later. Gawain chops off the knight's head; the knight picks it up and races away. *In the second fitt* Gawain sets out to his rendez vous with destiny, but en route loses his way, and stops off in a castle where he is hosted by a lord, his beautiful wife, and a hag. In the *third fitt* Gawain fends off the seduction efforts of the wife, though at the end—and this may prove the only breach in his chivalric virtue—he receives from her a magic green baldric, a lifesaver for the wearer. In *fitt four* Gawain finally faces the Green Knight, and though struck by several blows receives only negligeable wounds in return. At that point Gawain realizes that the Green Knight is his host of the previous castle nights, while the ugly hag, who had been present in that castle, was Arthur's mischievous fairy sister, who had set up the entire set of events as a test of Gawain's virtue.

Topic 11 : Geoffrey Chaucer

Overview: Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) was born into the family of a prosperous London wine merchant, and went on from there to serve as a high government official under three Kings of England. His wide exposure to the public and business world became the material of a large body of literary work, in which the picture of the new middle class society of late l4th century England begins to appear.

The earlier work: Chaucer was a prolific author, and though *The Canterbury Tales* were to be his masterwork, he flexed his literary muscles in many genres and styles before undertaking the **Tales**. Travelling for the English court he found himself extensively exposed to mediaeval French culture and to the work of contemporary Italy. His most noteworthy achievements were *The Parlement of Fowls* (1375), a St. Valentine's Day poem celebrating a royal betrothal, and his longest complete poem, *Troilus and Cressida* (mid 1380's), which copies from the *Filostrato* of Boccaccio, and which continues Chaucer's work inside the French/Italian Romance tradition.

The Canterbury Tales: a long poem (17,000 lines) in which Chaucer brings to maturity the skills at prosody, characterization, and narrative flow which he had been nourishing for decades during his earlier writing. The narrative impetus to the work was Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1350) a tale told by ten people in flight from the Black Plague, and holed up in a villa. The Boccaccio setting lends itself to leisurely and multifaceted narrations, largely concerning Lady Luck and the role she plays in creating good and bad love relationships. From this template Chaucer draws the idea of a setting from his own world, tales told by thirty travellers, pilgrims en route to and from Canterbury. This narrative frame enables Chaucer to characterize, in their own voices, a wide pallette of social types who are the living material of that late mediaeval society.

The characters: For his tales Chaucer draws on characters widely familiar from stock mediaeval social portrayals: the ideal knight on crusade, the hunting monk, the lady prioress, the lusty Wife of Bath, the parson, the Pardoner, who becomes a target representing the Church and its foibles. Each persona tells his or her story, typically building into the preceding tale and laying the groundwork for the next set of incidents. The overall achievement is a brilliant and tolerant look at the whole texture of contemporary British society.

Topic 12 : Julian of Norwich

Overview*:* Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) was one of the greatest English mystics, a writer of power and daring who has been venerated by the Anglican and Lutheran Churches, and has become a beacon to Feminist (and other) thought in our own time. Of her life we know little. Most of that life was passed as an anchoress (a hermit nun, devoted to a lifetime of meditation and prayer, who lived in a cell attached to a major Church). The last record of her alive is from 1416, when she was 73 years old. Aside from these time markers we know little except what trickles out through her writings. We know in particular that at the age of 30, seriously ill and believing herself to be on her deathbed, she underwent a sequence of visions of Jesus Christ; and that shortly after recuperation she wrote down these visions. That record became the raw material for her subsequent lifetime of meditation and writing.

The Writings: Twenty years after her visions, Julian wrote of them in what we call "The Short Text." Twenty years later than "The Short Text" she completed what we call "The Long Text," a theological explication of the vision material. In 1313 she completed, and published, what we now call *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love*, the first book—scholars speculate—written in English by a woman. From that book we derive her broadest statement of the meaning of human existence, while from the visionary material, which was recorded from her thirtieth year, she expresses in sensuous and passionate terms the experience Jesus Christ was for her.

The Sense of the Writings: Julian's visionary imagination was from the start of vivid tenderness, vulnerability to suffering, but also of confidence. Though she lived in a time of devastating external events—the Black Plague—and political upheaval—powerful peasant rebellion, Julian remained optimistic about man's condition. One of her most treasured statements, given her by God, as she says, was "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. " She had this degree of confidence in the creative principles of our universe. God, as well as Christ, she viewed as both female and male, compassionate and motherly in their deepest expression. The human being, Julian believed, must sin, but not because the world is fundamentally evil, for in fact there is no evil; we need to sin so that we can learn and understand. Through sin we grow closer to Jesus, whose suffering is the interface he leaves for us. Both contemporary Feminists and visionary poets, like the 20th century poet T.S. Eliot, have found their deepest inspirations protected by Julian. Eliot masters the issue, in his *Four Quartets*, writing

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.

Topic 13 : English Drama in its Early Stages

Overview:

Ancient Greek drama, which was the glory of a civilization, and the key ritual joy of ancient Athens, was scorned and banned by the early Fathers of the Christian Church, who felt that, among other things, the Greek system of Gods was dangerous material for the Christian. Interestingly enough, the originator of drama, in Mediaeval England, was the very Church that had proscribed the classics a millennium earlier.

The nub of the first drama: The simple question, *quem quaeritis*?, *whom do you seek*?, became the verbal base for the elaboration (in the 9th century) of the earliest form of Christian drama. (Prior to that time public entertainments, jugglers and griots, were the cultural media of the day.) The question is that asked of the three Marys as they came to the tomb of Jesus, who had risen from the dead. In the enactment of this playlet members of the church choir, dressed in angelic white, posed the question to three other members, who were dressed in black.

The Church and drama: Accepting the enthusiasm of the faithful, as expressed in response to early playlets, the Church reached out to the people with more drama, drama that was drawn from Biblical history. Makeshift bleachers were set up inside churches, and scenes were presented to ardent audiences, who, because there were no pews or chairs in mediaeval churches, could crowd close to the action. With the passage of time the actor/priests began to play their parts in English, rather than Latin, to the delight of the faithful. (The enthusiastic reception of the Wycliffe Bible gives us a sense of the popular hunger for the vernacular language.)

The Drama extends beyond the Church: The use of the Church itself as a sometime theater soon became awkward. The clergy needed a dedicated space for the Mass, and the faithful cum audience goers, were growing unruly. Therefore the dramatic performances were transferred to the porch in front of the Churches, or even to the adjacent graveyards. The origins of a living theater were well under way, and would before long, as we shall see, go on to generate one of the world's greatest stage cultures.

Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o christicolae?
Iesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicola.
Non est hic; surrexit sicut praedixerat.
Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit a mortuis.

Topic 14 : Mystery, Miracle, and Morality Plays

Overview:
We have glanced at the simple beginnings of English drama, born within the Church edifice itself. In the l4th and l5th centuries the deveopment of theater moved fully out of the Church, into the public realm, although the stories enacted there were all drawn from The Bible, the liturgy, or the Lives of the Saints.

Plays in cycles: Once the dramatic performance was removed from the Church structure itself, and the actors were no longer the clergy, who tired of this role, l4th and 15th century plays became the province of acting guilds, professional actors who presented their plays from pageant wagons, which rolled from town to town, or settled in larger cities to perform lengthy narrative cylces of dramas. It became the custom, in certain cities in England, for

these pageants to be performed in repeating cycles, the study of which gives us an idea of the kind of ongoing entertainment available in certain British cities. It was the custom for certain craft guilds to present the plays pertaining to the kinds of skill the guild represented: the carpenters guild, for instance, presenting the story of Noah's Ark, the bakers' and brewers' guilds presenting the story of The Last Supper.

The Wakefield Cycle: This cycle contains powerful religious passages from throughout the Bible, and allows into itself that robust humor which had from the start characterized English religious drama. The Cycle contained 32 mystery plays, was performed annually around the feast of Corpus Christi, and continued to be performed until 1576, that is well into the hottest period of the performance of secular stage drama, with Shakespeare and many other great writers.

The morality plays: These plays, performed by professional actors, turned around simple plots, not Biblical but drawn from Christian morality, and featuring abstract characters like Beauty, Gluttony, Virtue and Vice.

The Everyman morality play: This play (1470) is the most famous of the morality plays, and features the whole cast of morality play abstractions. Everyman is called by Death to the Day of Judgment, and, terrified, tries to find a companion for the journey. But none of his friends—Kindred, Goods, Fellowship—wants to join him, so that Everyman's terror grows ever greater. In the end only Good Deeds go with him into Death, and pleads his case before God.

3. Renaissance

Renaissance Prose

The first Tudor monarch, Henry VII, died in 1485, bringing (in some senses) conclusion to the period of what we have been calling Mediaeval Britain. The Normal Conquest, as we have seen, brought with it major changes in the language, cultural outlook, religious attitude, and social structure of Ancient Britain. In the following four centuries Britain took similarly large strides toward what we would, looking back from our moment, probably still call modernity, although we too do not think ourselves so confidently 'modern' as we did a century ago. Kingship under a single monarch and with strong family lines was firmly established in the mediaeval period.The language evolved from a condition in which Latinate French was just merging with Anglo Saxon English, into a coherent blend which is Elizabethan England reached a high point of maturity. Above all the consciousness of the British people, as participants in a single national identity, grew to new clarity. At the same time, during this period, the English people were entering into contact with the wide world of Europe, in which dramatic transitions were holding sway. Columbus' discovery of America opened a new pathway for British exploration and trade; scholars went from England to Italy, and brought back inspiring texts of Greek and Latin literature; Martin Luther led a world shaking rebellion against the practices of the Catholic Church. As if in reaction to these challenging events on the world scene, the British cultivated, under their dominant and brilliant Queen Elizabeth, a new sense of national identity.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

16. General Character of Renaissance England
l7. The Modern English Language
18. Renaissance Humanist Prose
l9. Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Philip Sidney

20. Elizabethan Imaginative Prose
21. Philosophers for the Age
22. Prose stylists of the early l7th century
23. King James Bible

Topic 16: General Character of Renaissance England

Overview: The Renaissance meant a greatly increased interests in the Classics of Greece and Rome, sources of pre Christian inspiration that was discouraged by the Fathers of the Christian Church. (We have however seen that Latin entered the British bloodstream by way of the Church, penetrated the early forms of drama, and in that fashion made classical rebirth possible.) Trade developed at all points of the powerful British navy—and became a harvester not only of vast new wealth but of those foreign cultures (like Italy) from which the 'rebirth' proceeded. British learning and arts were to reflect this new period from 1485 on, the accession year of the Tudor monarchy, until the mid-17th century, two hundred years later.

The new passion to learn: In the mid-fifteenth century occurred two events of huge importance for British culture. In mid century Johannes Gutenberg invented the first practical printing press with moveable type, and thereby opened the world to a comnunications revolution which was to be world wide. Concurrently the British printer William Caxton introduced the first printing press into Britain, and in the course of an active career printed more than 100 books in English. With this development came a rapid growth in the literacy of the British reading public, which surged with the availability of type-set materials. People at all levels of society began the process of reading, naturally prioritizing Biblical texts, like that of the Wycliffe Bible discussed above, which were targeted to a broad reading public. Concurrently there was a huge influx of Latin and Greek texts from Europe, a rapid development of the British school system, and a new monarchical model—Queen Elizabeth spoke five foreign languages and was a patron of one of the greatest artistic scenes in history.

Growth of British Nationalism: The idea of nationhood takes gradual ascendancy in Britain. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) the British navy became the backbone of a huge trading and sea controlling Empire. Slavery and North American plantation colonies joined to promote previously unknown levels of wealth and power in Britain. Great development in stage and the arts lifted national self-pride, and increasing religious freedom came along to liberate social life styles.

Topic 17 : The Modern English Language

Overview: French infiltrated English deeply, at the time of the Normal Conquest, and with French came Latin. We have however seen that by the time of Chaucer and *Sir Gawain* English had sorted itself out as the leading edge of the language spoken in Britain. By the Elizabethan period, the second half of the sixteenth century, English had been brought to a hearty richness in which not only the finest literary expression but the languages of theology, natural science, and philosophy were mature. Latin became a language of scholarship, used only in specialized discourses.

Richness of vocabulary: Many sources were consumed by the voracious new English language, as in the l6th century it expanded its capacity to carry thought and feeling. Latin and Greek were ransacked—*capsule, habitual*, *agile* (from Latin), *catastrophe*, *lexicon*, t*hermometer* (from Greek). Individuals, like the brilliant Thomas Moore, introduced their own words: *contradictory*, *exaggerate*, *monopoly*, *paradox.* The sciences drew on other

languages to generate words never before heard in English: *atmosphere*, *pneumonia*, *skeleton*. As these words were incorporated into a new blended language, they became part of what English men and women prided themselves on as distinctively English.

Plasticity of the new language: At this period 'almost any word could be used in any part of speech,' we read in *The Story of English* (2002). 'Adverbs could be used for verbs, nouns for adjectives….you could 'happy' your friend, "malice" or "foot" your enemy, or "fall" an axe on his neck.' A natural creativeness was at work in this language, whose Elizabethan dramatists like Marlowe and Shakespeare scored by breaking the rules inherited from the Classics, and far more sacrosanct in French itself than they were in Latin and Greek.

Spelling and Pronunciation: The spelling of contemporary English seems to be a settled matter; we go to the Webster's and find, typically, a single orthography reliably encountered. Such was not the case, as the language evolved through the centuries of Middle English into the Renaissance. An example of the typical variation would be the following acceptable Renaissance spellings of the word *fellow*: *felaw*, *felowe*, *fallow* and *fallowe*.

Pronunciation of Elizabethan English: An attractive theory holds that the history of the development of English must be our key to understanding the peculiar vitality of this language. After the Norman Conquest the elites promoted both French and Latin above English, as standards for language excellence. English itself became, in the first centuries of Middle English, the language of the people, who were of multiple ethnic backgrounds and speech practices. These people lived a language which reflected their own tumultuous diversity, and in which you talked to the standards of your region rather than to an abstract standard of propriety.

Topic 18 : Renaissance Humanist Prose

Overview: We have seen that there is a great burgeoning of native English among Renaissance writers. Their own language is finding its true voice in the l6th century, incorporating both French and the dog-Latin of the Middle Ages into a brand new vernacular capable of carrying the finest literature of the time, or any time. At the same time, though, there is a turning back to the world of Greece and especially Rome, through the texts that are entering Britain from European editions and translations of the Classics. This is where the Renaissance Humanists—writers like Sir Thomas More, Sir Thomas Elyot, and Roger Ascham find their voices.

Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) was most famed for his book **Utopia** (1516), which was first written in Latin. (We must think here of a learned Latin, product of reading and training in the best of schools, including two years at Oxford.) Sir Thomas More imagined, in that text, a polity in which many of the humane ideals of the Classical era itself were inscribed: an educated, healthy, tolerant, and peaceable realm not unlike the finest ideals of the Roman Empire.

Sir Thomas Elyot (1490-1546) attracted attention upon the publication of his **Book Named the Governor** (1531), in which he expressed many ideas familiar from More's work, and intertwined with the thinking of the contemporary Dutch Humanist, Erasmus, whose influence on Elizabethan Humanism was strong. Elyot's *Boke* is a treatise on education, which was a central theme of the Humanists, for whom—as for the Greeks with their core notion of *paideia*—the proper training of the young is society's chief job. It is noteworthy that Elyot's interest here was particularly in the training of educated and liberal

rulers. For Elyot—unlike More—the training in question was largely reserved for the male gender.

Roger Ascham (1515-1568) was a tutor to the Queen and an influential scholar Humanist at court. He is best known for *The Schoolmaster* (1570) in which he seeks for 'a plaine and perfite way of teachyng children to understand, write and speake in Latin tong,' but also envisages, as an outcome of that effort, a new studious capacity to use English well for native purposes or clear and rugged statement.

Topic l9 : Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Philip Sidney

Overview: Raleigh and Sidney embody a certain Renaissance ideal of the accomplished, daring, flamboyant, scholarly, and literarily creative gentleman. (This set of high cultural skills was also congenial to the thinking of pedagogues like Ascham, Elyot, and More.) With all these men the new confidence and aggressive nationalism of British culture make their firmest statement.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) is known for the bravoura of his personal valor as well as for the elegance of his poetry and narratives. Sidney was a cavalier and death-defying military man, known for *bons mots* at the time of crisis. He was also a faithful servant of the Queen, to whom he turned many an artful line of verse. His writing itself explodes with a kind of lyric prose that we have not seen before in British writing. ("Who shoots at the mid-day sun, though he be sure he shall never hit the mark, yet as sure he is he shall shoot higher than who aims but at a bush.") His contribution to literary theory is as remarkable as his imaginative work. *The Defence of Poetry* (1579-1584) pronounces the greatness of the poetic imagination as a vehicle for both teaching and learning.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) is best known for prose historical works in which he exalts the expanding power of the rapidly developing British dominion. The scope of his interests is evident in the daring *History of the World* (1614), which he wrote from emprisonment in the Tower of London. (An adept at ancient history, his account *ends* with the events of 130 B.C.). Raleigh also wrote about the 'new discoveries' that were adding daily to the British knowledge of the distant world: for instance, in his large and fascinating accounts of travels to the Azores and Guyanas. At the same time, however, he was, like Sidney, a subtle craftsman in poetry. Whereas Sidney excelled in the first known sonnet sequence, **Astophel and Stella**, Raleigh's lines burned wit and charm wherever they turned:

Final words to the world, from prison:
Say to the court it glows
And shines like rotten wood;
Say to the church it shows
What's good, and doth no good:
If court and church reply,
Then give them both the lie.

Topic 20 : Elizabethan Imaginative Prose

Overview: We have tracked the development of Elizabethan historical and travel prose, have indeed gone back to the time of King Alfred (9th century), the Father of English Prose. We have reviewed various stages of English poetry, as well, from Caedmon's *Hymn* (8th Century) through Chaucer to the lyrics of Raleigh and Sidney. Anything like prose fiction, however, has been missing. We now come to the birth of that development, which will be momentous for the ongoing development of the English language.

Thomas Nashe (1567-1601): **The Unfortunate Traveler** is the signature work of this short lived but brilliant innovator in prose, whose picaresque fictions will herald the work of Defoe, discussed later. The traveler in question, a royal page, finds himself on adventure with the King's retinue, and uses all his ingenuity to trick competitors out of their money or ladies. This is a riotous move toward the novel, and a reminiscence of Chaucerian bawdiness, in "The Miller's Tale."

Robert Greene (1500-1592): a prolific fiction writer, the creator of many tales of criminal cosenage and social tricksterism. Green writes with relish, humor and criticism both, of the kinds of ingenious urban underworlders who were increasingly visible in big city life, and of whom Thomas Nashe writes, in **The Unfortunate Traveler**.

John Lyly (1554-1606): In **Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit**, Lyly writes a plot of little interest, but in an extravagant and consciously overdone style, which framed an amusing but fascinating style template for the sophisticated of the day.

Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616): a travel writer equal to the description of many of the new places on the globe which were being opened to the English through the power of British shipping. Through his vivid descriptions of North America, Hakluyt was instrumental in inspiring British commercial and territorial interest in this new land.

Lyly, *Euphues*

It is virtue, yea virtue, gentlemen, that maketh gentlemen; that maketh the poor rich, the base-born noble, the subject a sovereign, the deformed beautiful, the sick whole, the weak strong, the most miserable most happy. There are two principal and peculiar gifts in the nature of man, knowledge and reason; the one commandeth, and the other obeyeth: these things neither the whirling wheel of fortune can change, neither the deceitful cavillings of worldlings separate, neither sickness abate, neither age abolish.

Topic 21 : Philosophers for the Age

Overview: We have been attending to the development of descriptive and imaginative prose, signatures of a growing 'modernity' in the Renaissance, and we should also mention the development of thought that was increasingly tilted toward the origins of modern philosophy. Both Bacon and Hobbes were men of letters, not philosophers in the technical sense but preoccupied with the 'great questions of life and society.'

Francis Bacon (1561-1626): Bacon wrote philosophy but in the form of literature and literary essays, at which he was a master. (He was also a very busy man, a foremost advisor to King James 1, and from this life in the world he drew a lot of his lessons about life itself.) Like Sir Thomas Elyot and Roger Ascham, two or more generations previously, Francis Bacon wrote primarily for the scions of noble families, in order to help them on their passage into the world of adult responsibilities. The common sense about life, which Bacon retails deliciously here, is the promoting drive for his principal work of organized philosophy. The *Novum Organum* (1620) is a key text in laying down fundamental principles of the scientific method of reasoning.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679): A materialist, Hobbes believed that in a universe without political community there is little solace for mortals. Our chief drive is for self preservation, and we can only assure that condition by working together with one another. This perception grounds Hobbes's greatest work, *Leviathan* (1651), which is concerned with

monarchy and its functions. For Hobbes the people consent to the absolute rule of a monarch because that is their own path to security, but once having given that consent the people earn many rights and freedoms which we would consider democratic. Without such a ruler, and without such mutual consent, says Hobbes in *Leviathan*,

…there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Topic 22 : Prose Stylists of the early l7th century

Overview: We have traced the evolution of style in English prose writing. We have seen that in earlier writers, like Sir Philip Sidney, and far more in John Lyly's *Euphues*, attention was given to an overblown and hyperbolic style. Bacon and especially Hobbes are evidence of the new chastity that entered English prose with the development of the Renaissance. We cannot hope to discuss these changes thoughtfully here, but must raise the question: have stylistic changes a history of their own, or are they grounded in social/cultural change?

John Selden (1584-1654): A great scholar, antiquary, and wit, John Selden is best known to us today for his *Table Talk* (1689) though in his time he was known for his studies of ancient British history, of Jewish laws and Mid Eastern cultural background, as well as for his active participation in the tumultuous political life of his time. His work is everywhere marked by common sense and that chaste prose hinted at in the following, from *Table Talk*:

. . . *Pleasure is nothing else but the intermission of pain, the enjoying of something I am in great trouble for till I have it.*

'Tis a wrong way to proportion other men's pleasures to ourselves ; 'tis like a little child using a little bird, " O poor bird, thou shalt sleep with me " ; so lays it in his bosom, and stifles it with his hot breath : the bird had rather be in the cold air. And yet too 'tis the most pleasing flattery, to like what other men like.

Robert Burton (1577-1649): A withdrawn and yet life loving Oxford scholar, Robert Burton's main text, which he polished endlessly throughout his life, was *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a learned, wry, studious investigation of melancholia, that "transitory *Melancholy* which goes and comes upon every small occasion of sorrow, need, sickness, trouble, fear, grief, passion, or perturbation of the mind, any manner of care, discontent, or thought, which causes anguish, dulness, heaviness and vexation of spirit, any ways opposite to pleasure, mirth, joy, delight…"

Izaak Walton (1593-1683): Best known for his **The Compleat Angler** (1653), a compendious and continually revised review of the art of fishing, with copious quotes from ancient authors and practical advice to lovers of water and nature.

Topic 23 : The King James Bible

Overview: During the years 1604-1611 a committee of forty-six British scholars prepared, at the request of King James, a new translation of the Bible. We have already referred to the Wycliffe Bible, which was targeted ay a broad new reading public. There followed other major versions into English of this ongoing translation project. This work with a sacred text

became at the same time a touchstone for important changes in the expressive ability of English.

Work leading to the King James Bible: Two fine translation efforts followed that of Wycliffe. The translation of **William Tyndale** was the first to work directly with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew scriptures, and yet this version met with sharp hostility from the Catholic Church; leading to a conflict in which Tyndale lost his life at the stake. A second version, by **Miles Coverdale** (1488-1568), continued from Tyndale, concentrated on the Old Testament, and is noted for its musicality more than for its original scholarship.

The King James Bible: Each version of the Bible naturally reflects the development of style in its own time. Wycliffe's translation reflected Middle English, Tyndale's the more sophisticated English of the early Renaissance, and the **King James Bible** is redolent of the mature English prose of such as Robert Burton and John Selden, whom we have just met.

Exodus 22:18-22: *18. Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. 19. Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death. 20. He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed. 21. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. 22. If you afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.*

The incantatory quality, of this prose created by 46 scholars, is of such noteworthy power that it belongs to the creative language of its time in English. In the present set of God given admonitions, note the vivifying alternative options for the second person command ('thou shalt…' or 'ye shall not' or 'if you afflict…') and the gracious intermixture of the third person command ('whosoever…shall').

Renaissance Poetry

We have traced some of the evolution of prose in English, dating back to King Alfred, and we have seen that the style of prose undergoes a variety of sharp changes in the Renaissance. In the same way we have tracked some dramatic changes in English poetry, from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* through Chaucer. The truly modern phase of British poetry, however, begins only with the influence of European verse, as we shall see in the following.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

24**.** Poetry of the Early Renaissance
25. Edmund Spenser
26. Other Elizabethan Writers of Poetry
27. Robert Herrick
28. John Donne: The Metaphysicals
29. John Milton as Poet and Statesman
30. Commonwealth Poets

Topic 24 :Poetry of the Early Renaissance

Overview:

We have already looked into the poetry of Raleigh and Sir Philip Sidney, who were versatile prose writers and narrators as well as poets. We come now to a pair of lyric poets, both aristocrats writing as men of letters—in the fashion of Raleigh and Sidney—namely Sir

Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey. It is worth noting how much Renaissance English literature was the province of the upper class tradition of the gentleman writer.

The Sonnet: The model in vogue, for the British poet in the Renaissance, was the poetic form of the sonnet, which had been long practiced on the continent—reaching back to the famed Italian father of sonnets, Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374). Italian poetries had been experimenting for some time with new forms of the stanza, and had generated two forms, *ottava rima* and *terza rima*, which had become touchstones for the poetic imagination. Wyatt and Surrey adapted Italian and French forms into new sonnet shapes, like what we call now the Shakespearean sonnet, made up of three quatrains and a concluding couplet.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542): As a representative of King Henry VIII, Wyatt made several trips to the Continent in his twenties. These were occasions to encounter Continental verse with its Petrarchan love traditions, exactly the tradition Wyatt brought back to England. His Petrarchan sonnets, divided into octaves and sestets, almost invariably traced the course of tortured courtly love.

Like to these immeasurable mountains
Is my painful life, the burden of ire:
For of great height be they and high is my desire,
And I of tears and they be full of fountains.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547): Surrey followed Wyatt's example of infatuation with the Continental love sonnet.

Thrall or at large, alive whereso I dwell,
Sick or in health, in evil fame or good:
Hers will I be, and only with this thought
Content myself although my chance be nought.

Note the despair of the lover, in face of the wonders of the lady! Compare this form of despair to that we found in those Middle English ballads, 'Barbara Allen' and 'Sir Patrick Spens,' in which death and love are twinned.

Topic 25 : Edmund Spenser; The Faerie Queene

Overview: Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) carried on the mediaeval traditions of allegory—remember *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—in his epic called **The Faerie Queene** (1596). However, in the two centuries that passed, between *Sir Gawain* and Spenser's work, a vast change occurred in British culture. For the author of *Sir Gawain* (presumably) the allegory of the tale was 'real' in a way it was not for Spenser, for whom allegory became a more self-conscious and subtle form of personal self-expression.

The Faerie Queene is one of the longest poems in English literature, and at that was left half complete (as a good half of Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales** was also left uncompleted.) Furthermore this immense epic, created in a nine line stanza unique to it—dubbed *Spenserian stanza*—attempted the difficult task of celebrating a contemporary monarch, Elizabeth 1, in themes and allusions drawn from Middle English epic. The organization of the poem was built around six major virtues—*Holiness*, *Temperance*, *Chastity*, *Friendship, Justice*, *Courtesy*—each of which was to be introduced by a separate sponsoring Knight, in the Mediaeval Manner, while the entire epic was to play through the perils of virtue in the face of a world full of obstacles. The aim of the poem, put in other terms by Spenser, was "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle disguise." In that sense

Spenser picks up the impulse of Sir Thomas Elyot and Roger Ascham, from earlier in the century, to mould aristocratic gentlemen in accordance with classical precepts.

Note, in the epic's second nine line stanza, the way in which the final line rhymes back into the sixth and eighth lines, wrapping up the nine line stanza. Note also that the whole stanza is devoted to the Muses, and presents the author in the stereotypical role of 'thy weaker Novice.'

Helpe then, O holy Virgin chiefe of nine,°
Thy weaker Novice to performe thy will;
Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne
The antique rolles, which there lye hidden still,
Of Faerie knights° and fairest Tanaquill,°
Whom that most noble Briton Prince° so long
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
That I must rue his undeserved wrong:
O helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong.

Topic 26 : Other Elizabethan Writers of Poetry

Overview: The Renaissance in England is a period of exceptional creativity in poetry. It is worth noting that the creators, and the viewpoints of this poetry are generally aristocratic. Have we encountered popular poetry in early periods? Yes, the Middle English Ballad springs from, and is sustained by, the people. So, if we can judge correctly, were such Old English works as 'The Seafarer' and the 'Dream of the Rood.'

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619): This prolific creator of poems and tales was rediscovered in the 18th century, and returns in our day to admiration. Look at the unconventional turns in the following sonnet:

FAIR is my Love and cruel as she 's fair;
Her brow-shades frown, although her eyes are sunny.
Her smiles are lightning, though her pride despair,
And her disdains are gall, her favours honey…

For had she not been fair, and thus unkind,
My Muse had slept, and none had known my mind.

The cruel mistress is characteristically portrayed in the initial quatrain, though with fresh language—*her smiles are lightning*. Then in the final couplet the poet surprises us with a declared benefit of his mistress' mix of cruelty and beauty: except for this punishing combination, the poet would not have written his poem.

Thomas Campion (1567-1620): Another master of poetic detail, like Daniel, Campion consigned his fine tuned pieces to four books of "Airs," poems to be sung.

I care not for these ladies that must be wooed and prayed;
Give me kind Amaryllis, the wanton country maid.
Nature Art disdaineth; her beauty is her own.
Her when we court and kiss, she cries: forsooth, let go!
But when we come where comfort is, she never will say no.

Campion regularly wrote in support of rhymeless verse, because he was creating for song, and in fact rarely needed the support of rhyme. But look how craftily he builds rhyme into the first stanza of the three that make up this incantatory love song poem.

Nicholas Breton (1545-1626): A writer of pastoral poetry, and another skilled craftsperson, so sweetly master of his turns of phrase that we hardly realize what goes into the deftness of the following quatrain, which opens one of Breton's pastorals:

On a hill there grows a flower,
Fair befall the dainty sweet!
By that flower there is a bower
Where the heavenly Muses meet.

Topic 27 : Robert Herrick

Overview: We have pointed out the aristocratic tone of Renaissance literature, which by nature, fervently rediscovering great literatures of the past, is a movement of the educated and the privileged. Nowhere is this trait of 17th century poetry more marked than in the poet Robert Herrick, not a smart young sophisticate around London town but a rural Anglican vicar.

Robert Herrick (1591-1674) and his works. What could be more felicitous than

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

This is the opening of a Herrick song, and both in its inherent music and its sentiment it reflects the personality of this genial vicar, who though living through the Puritan Revolution of Oliver Cromwell, joined most of his creative fellow artists in all the more joyously saluting life. The fact is that Herrick, one of the greatest song writers in English, did not consign complex thoughts to his song/poems, but mastered his work with perfect cadences. In doing so he worked off Latin models like Catullus and Horace, to perfect Renaissance effect. 'Upon Julia's Clothes' deploys his skills at their best:

WHENAS in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free ;
O how that glittering taketh me !

The poem is short and sweet, and mimes, in its rhythmic units, the movement of Julia in her clothes, silken and brilliant. The concentration on that brilliance coheres with the concern, in our first excerpt, with the perfection of the instant of time, on which we must concentrate before it flies away.

The vicar behind this work never married, and as far as we know had no specific woman in mind as he penned his Julia poem. In love with life, radiantly open to all its surprising gifts, Herrick was a Renaissance artist in the fullest sense.

Topic 28 : John Donne: The Metaphysicals

Overview: The poetry of John Donne, and several of his contemporaries—George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw-- constitute what we call 'Metaphysical' poetry.' These men were all deeply involved with religious themes and presented those themes in language which was both passionate and complex. In Donne's case the complexity often involved elaborate conceits and daring metaphors. It is a signature trait of these writers, and especially of Donne, that they blend intense romantic passion with their loftier spirituality.

From the conclusion of A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning:

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

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two:
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do;

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like the other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

The whole genius of Donne is visible in this love poem, which salutes the immortality of the soul as well as the undying earthly passion between two lovers. The famed metaphor of the compass is the vehicle for demonstrating the complex relation of the lovers, between whom an inseparable elastic bonding holds.

Donne's work in world perspective: In the 18th century Donne was widely viewed as extravagant and too sensuous. It was only during the Romantic movement, under the genius of Coleridge, that Donne began to be revived; while in the 20 th century, under the inspiration of T.S. Eliot, Donne and the Metaphysicals were fully restored, glorified as anti-Romantic and complexly religious.

T.S. Eliot on Donne:
In his own poem 'Whispers of Immortality' (1920), Eliot wrote that Donne *'found no substitute for sense, / To seize and clutch and penetrate; / Expert beyond experience, // He knew the anguish of the marrow / The ague of the skeleton; / No contact possible to flesh / Allayed the fever of the bone.*

Topic 29 :John Milton as Poet and Statesman

Overview: As a high government spokesman under the Puritan Government of Oliver Cromwell, Milton (1608-1674) proved that he was both a public and a private figure. He was intimately involved in affairs of state, while working on masterpieces like **Paradise Lost**

(1667), evidence enough of profound involvement in both the life of the mind and the life of the state. In addition to that epic masterwork he wrote essays of lasting importance, sonnets rivaling those of Shakespeare, and long meditative poems of great power and erudition.

Paradise Lost (1667): This epic, composed by Milton in his blindness—through an amazing feat of dictation, a vast text passed on through a filial amanuensis—deals through iambic pentameters, the classic English line—with the struggle by which Satan plotted to overthrow the Heavenly realm, and to generate the entire issue of evil in our world. The imaginative scope of this epic is mind blowing, as, in detail, are the fine uses of classical tradition and myth, and the unerring ear for the way the iambic pentameter plays out.

Early Poems: Two twinned pieces, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Pensoroso' (1631), showed in lighter vein the genius that would one day tackle cosmological themes. The cheerful man and the thoughtful man, representatives of two opposed humors, are set off against one another, and as it were profiled for eternity.

Essay prose: **Of Education** (1644) pursues a theme, the education of the versatile and scholarly gentleman, which we have touched often before; for instance in the early Renaissance writers Roger Ascham and Sir Thomas Elyot. **Areopagitica** (1644) harkens back to the great democracy of ancient Athens, and draws from that source an inspiring defence of freedom of speech, which has been persuasive throughout the ages in democratic cultures.

Lyrics: 'How Soon Hath Time,' composed when Milton was twenty-three, opens as follows, and amply illustrates the genius behind it.

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stoln on his wing my three and twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

Topic 30
Cromwellian Poets

Overview: John Milton was the most illustrious supporter of the Cromwellian inter-regnum, which lasted from 1649-1660, and which established a new moral gravity on the political landscape which the Stuart monarchy had for some time consigned to a degree of courtly frivolity. Milton's brilliant but severe theology belonged to the stern world view of the Cromwellians. But there were other poets, both opposed to and friendly to Cromwell, who wrote vigorously at this time of transition.

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) was the most brilliant lyricist supporting Cromwell's cause. A close friend of Milton, Marvel wrote vitriolic and influential pamphlets against the dangers of "Popery," and in favor of the moral sternness of the new regime—though to judge by many of Marvel's sensuous lyrics he was not averse to a little fun himself:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day;
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide

Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.

Wit, sexiness, mastery of the supple rhythms of the four beat line, Marvel shows his kinship with Donne, a fellow addict of the passing beauties of this life.

Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) was a contemporary of Marvel, but differed greatly from him in style. Whereas Marvel harks back to Donne, Cowley 'looks ahead' to the kinds of odes-writing that would mark the neoclassical John Dryden, who lived a generation later than Cowley.

TELL me, O tell, what kind of thing is *Wit,*
Thou who *Master* art of it…

Is the opening of Cowley's witty and erudite discussion of wit, addressed to another who is a master of that art. This kind of theme, and this address to it, are essential neoclassical gestures in language

Topic 15 : Middle English Lyric Poetry and Ballads

Overview: Lyrics were rare in Old English poetry, which inclined to the epic or narrative. Middle English opens further toward the dimension of personal expression. Both lyric poetry and ballads, which became increasingly popular, were written to be sung, and were common forms of popular entertainment.

Lyric Poetry: A couple of l4th century snippets:

A bountyng or a laverok, Sweet bride. Between her kirtle and her smock
would I were a thrustle cock,
I would me hide…

Or

Lenten ys come with love to toune
With blosmen and
With blosmen and with briddes roune

Such lyric work is full of vernal energy and lightness, and shows the opening out of the personal spirit in the l4th century. Of course many of the lyrics were, as before, religious; frequently devoted to praise of the Virgin Mary.

Ballads: In the l4th and l5th centuries there is a rapid development of the ballad, a tale in which the singer frees himself from the Christian thematic—creative as it is—and turns to issues of the pagan world—the supernatural, tragic love, mythical/historical events. Many of our greatest ballads were written during this period—'Sir Patrick Spens,' 'Barbara Allen,' the Robin Hood Cycle. 'Sir Patrick Spens' illustrates the easy genius of this work. In just over 75 lines—remember this is a ballad sung for public entertainment—a tragic but melodious tale sweeps over the audience, taking a brave sailor to his death, and a tragic shipwreck to these concluding lines:

Half-owre, half-owre to Aberdour/

'Tis fifty fathoms deep;
And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens,
Wi' the Scots lords at his feet!

'Barbara Allen' proceeds with the same tragic simplicity as 'Sir Patrick Spens.' Longed for but not ready to requite her lover's love, Barbara grows overwhelmed, as her lover dies, by the doom this death imposes on her.

Oh mother mother make my bed
Make it long and make it narrow
Sweet William died for me today
I'll die for him tomorrow

The tragic simplicity of these ballads, long favorites in America as well as Britain, testifies to the full human personality ready to break through from the still ritualized forms of much early Middle English literature.

T.S.Eliot on Marvel: *The quality which Marvell had, this modest and certainly impersonal virtue--whether we call it wit or reason, or even urbanity--we have patently failed to define. By whatever name we call it, and however we define that name, it is something precious and needed and apparently extinct; it is what should preserve the reputation of Marvell.*

Renaissance Drama

Our previous contact with English drama has taken us back to the l4th and l5th centuries. At that point we were concerned with the earliest church origins of folk drama, then with mystery and morality plays. By the time we reach the l6th century, the full Renaissance, we find the full blown secular drama which will flower in Shakespeare. We will find that Shakespeare, for all his greatness, is not alone in this explosion of talent. Blank verse is the medium for this new drama, and violence is frequent. Female roles are typically performed by young boys, which may help to indicate that acting was not considered a proper activity for the finer sex.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

Topic 31. Renaissance Drama Before Shakespeare
Topic 32. Shakespeare
Topic 33. The History Plays of William Shakespeare
Topic 34. Shakespearean Comedies and Romances
Topic 35. Shakespeare's Tragedies
Topic 36. Christopher Marlowe

Topic 31 :Renaissance Drama Before Shakespeare

Overview: By the 16th century much had changed since the days of *quem quaerite*, the early Church performed dramas, and the Morality and Mystery plays of the l5th century, edifying but popular dramas based on scripture and promoting popular morality. What had heralded in the great dramatic age that the sixteenth century was to become? Was it the economic/political culture of the Renaissance itself, with its burst of confidence and energy? Was it some harder to explain mystery of cultural awakening?

The dramatic landscape: The morality plays, to which we referred, will still play an active part in popular entertainment, during the Elizabethan Renaissance. There was another genre of popular play, called 'interludes,' which were popular amusements; there were also academic and court dramas, performed in those particular milieux, and evidence of the upsurge of dramatic energy from the popular level. (The new economies of the century had brought "the masses" out into the streets for fun and games, and there were no electronic media to keep them at home.) Fully developed theater for the public can be said to have begun in 1576, with the construction of the first permanent theater in London.

Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy (1597): an immensely popular play, incorporating various elements attractive to the rough and ready (and intelligent) Elizabethan audience: elements of violence and revenge plus the suspense element of a play within a play—which was one of the aspects of Kyd's influence on Shakespeare.

John Lyly, Galathea (1588): A complex and rather daffy comedy, featuring a device popular on the Elizabethan stage, the inclusion of cross dressing. In this instance the play's motor is the demand of the god Neptune, to a village in England, that its most beautiful maidens should be sacrificed to him. To preclude this tragedy the girls' father sends them off into the woods, dressed as boys.

George Peele, **The Arraignment of Paris (1581)**:A Romantic comedy and a pretty tribute to Queen Elizabeth. The plot involves Jupiter's arraignment of Paris, for having awarded the apple of beauty to Venus. The goddess Diana is called in to revise the award, and gives the apple of supreme beauty to Queen Elizabeth herself.

Topic 32 : Shakespeare

Overview: While Shakespeare (1564-1616) is virtually synonymus with British literature, little is known about his life, much less than about the majority of great post Norman Conquest writers. (Many of the pre-Conquest writers are essentially without biographies, though that would not be the case with Chaucer or even King Alfred.)

Shakespeare's Life: Born in 1564 to a prosperous glove maker, in Stratford on Avon, Shakespeare was educated in a public (American sense) school where he was surely exposed to thorough training in Latin, a fine school for any language user. At an early age, l8, he married a woman (Anne Hathaway) eight years his senior, and by her, while he was still in Stratford, he had three children. In the following years, as the scant evidence indicates, he made his way to London, where he took small acting parts, and gradually incorporated himself into the theatrical environment which was to be his bread of life from then on. While acting he turned himself actively to writing as well, making his debut with a long poem, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and the play *Titus Andronicus* (1590). From that point on the interesting part of his life is the sequence first of history plays, then of comedies, then of romances, and finally the great tragedies. Throughout this period he became increasingly recognized for his creative work; he also became prosperous and prominent.

Shakespeare the poet: While of ever increasing prominence as a dramatist, Shakespeare was active as a poet on the page, and one of Britain's greatest sonnet creators. (We have seen, as early as Wyatt and Surrey, Sidney and Spenser, how important the sonnett was to the Renaissance sensibility.) Shakespeare's sonnets were published in a sequence in 1609, and rank at the very peak of his work. Their form is experimental, if within a tight range; their themes range widely, but return regularly to the notion of time's brevity, a cerain "dark lady," the beauty of male youth, and the gift of art, which surpasses the ravages of time.

From Sonnet 59:

If there be nothing new, but that which is
Hath been before, how are our brains beguil'd,
Which labouring for invention bear amiss
The second burthen of a former child.

Topic 33 :The History Plays of William Shakespeare

Overview: Shakespeare's history plays were his debut to London's theatrical life, and a large number of such plays were written and produced in the decade between 1590 and 1600. These plays mainly reached back into British history, often looking into the perennial issue of what a good king/leader is, and into what monstrous depths an evil king/leader can fall. A king like Richard III shows how far into brutality humanity can fall, while Henry V, in the play of his name, proves the greatness of the ideal king. It is interesting to see this search for the good king, in the context of earlier Renaissance thought—Ascham, Elyot, Sir Thomas More—about the education of a cultural gentleman.

The Tragedy of King Richard III (1592): This inner view of a hunch backed and evil minded monarch, who destroys every obstacle in his path, shows Shakespeare's genius for plumbing the depths of the human condition.

The Life of Henry V (1599) is a perfect bookend to King Richard III, this time highlighting a King in love with life and justice, and blessed with the ability to reign and lead.

Before the French occupied Harfleur, King Henry V, assessing the moment and addressing the enemy French, works through the following wisdom:

Therefore, you men of Harfleur,
Take pity of your town and of your people,
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command;
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds
Of heady murder, spoil and villany.

In such a passage Henry formulates exactly the difference between himself and the ruthless Richard III. Shakespeare's range of character understandings is amply suggested by his treatment of these two monarchs. And now Richard:

Give me *another horse: bind up my wounds*.
Have mercy, Jesu!--Soft! I did but dream.
O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What do I fear? myself? there's none else by:
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why:
Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
Alack. I love myself.

Topic 34 : Shakespearean Comedies and Romances

Overview: From the fanciful romance, like **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, to a serious reflective/fanciful work like **The Tempest**, Shakespeare explored a wide variety of comedy/romances which work literary ground virtually unknown before him. This work differs from the historical dramas we have noted, and from the later stage tragedies we will be addressing in the next topic.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1591-96): This play, built around the upcoming marriage of Theseus King of Athens, brings together three plot lines: the royal marriage scenario, a synchronous play of woodland faeries, and a play staged by 'rude Mechanicals' who pass through the wood where the King's marriage is to take place. High jinks, puns, flashes of the evanescence of life underline the play's message, that 'life is but a dream.' Among the most memorable characters are the elfin Puck, a prankster and trickster, and the artisan Bottom, who with his fellow tradesmen puts on a bumpkin play. The play's blend of high fantasy with bumpkinism is one of Shakespeare's trademarks.

Puck: *Captain of our fairy band,*
Helena is here at hand;
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

The Tempest (1611): In this his last play Shakespeare pays his farewells to the theater, saluting one more time the notion that life itself is a kind of passing theatrical. (This theme runs through the dozen comedy/romances composed in the decade between 1590-1600; and which include such well known visions as **The Merchant of Venice** (1596-7), **Twelfth Night** (1600-1601) or **The Winter's Tale** (1610-11).) The characters are brilliant fancy, and strike hard at the human condition: to wit, Prospero the magician who in the end of the play returns to 'reality,' Ariel, a spiritual cobold, twin to Puck in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, and the brutish Caliban, the beast side of man, and in name a version of **cannibal.**

Miranda, in Act I Scene 2, *The Tempest*:

If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dash'd all to pieces!

Topic 35 : Shakespeare's Tragedies

Overview: Many of the post-1600 works of Shakespeare are tragedies, and among them his greatest works: **Hamle**t (1601), **Othello** (1604), **Macbeth** (1606), **King Lear** (1606.) When we search these works for the Shakespearean signature we find that the same aerial brilliance of Shakespeare's comedies and sonnets, only darkened in hue, pervades these tragedies; they are dark and fateful but never depressing.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1601): Critics, though agreed on the greatness of this play, have gone to the mat for centuries over the interpretation of the work. Caught in the

dilemma of how to avenge his father's death, while living as son to his Mother and her new husband, Hamlet himself manages to think and soliloquize through many of the central issues of modern humanity: what can we do about the sense of guilt? of what value is revenge? Is a human life substantial or a tissue of anxieties?

Hamlet: O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

King Lear (1606): A tortured old King—counterpart to Hamlet as the tortured young prince—suffers grievously for having divided his kingdom among three daughters, of whom two, malice filled, persuade him to disinherit the one who is good, Cordelia. Hence Lear's madness, counterpart itself to Cordelia's hanging herself.

Lear, on the heath:
When the mind's free,
The body's delicate: the tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to't? But I will punish home:
No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on; I will endure.

T.S. Eliot on **Hamlet**: '*So far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure. In several ways the play is puzzling, and disquieting as is none of the others. Of all the plays it is the longest and is possibly the one on which Shakespeare spent most pains; and yet he has left in it superfluous and inconsistent scenes which even hasty revision should have noticed.'*

Topic 36 : Christopher Marlowe

Overview: The Elizabethan period, and into the first half of the l7th century, was a time of great creativity for the legitimate stage. We have related this creative burst to a new climate of active public entertainment, increasing prosperity and national self-confidence, though none of these factors is sufficient in itself. Dramatists like Ben Jonson (1572-1637) and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), who would have been the summit of achievement in another age, must in Shakespeare's time fade before the power of that master.

Christopher Marlowe: Everything 'rakehellish' about the reckless Elizabethan man about the City is embodied in Marlowe. Born humbly into a shoemaker family, he managed to get through Cambridge University on a scholarship, and from there moved through personal connections into still not understood missions for the Queen, errands which took him to Europe. In perhaps unrelated business , still in twenties, he was called to court on an arrest warrant, and a few days later, while still under thirty, was stabbed to death in a fight. Seems like enough for one life? Into this scenario we need to factor the writing of several tremendously successful, powerful, bloody, and sometimes gorgeous tragedies.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus (1589): The theme of the brilliant savant who sells his soul to the Devil, in return for power and desire, is known from early Christian

times, and forms thematic material for European letters to our time. (Vide Thomas Mann's **Doctor Faustus**, 1947). In Marlowe's play this scholar/doctor misuses the superhuman powers he is granted, and The Devil, who has signed the pact with Faustus, can say I told you so:

Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joy of heaven
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands
Which strikes a terror to my fainting soul![24

In the end, having wasted his powers, having called up Helen of Troy—'was this the face that launched a thousand ships?—Faust repents, abjuring his entire power contract, but by this time the Devil claims Faustus's soul. Faust perishes in the hell of his mind, like a true Renaissance overeacher..

4. The Restoration and the l8th Century

Just as l066, and the Norman Conquest, marked a significant turning point in English cultural development, so did the end of the reign of Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan Revolution which so sharply divided in two the l8th century. In some sense the modern period starts with the Restoration of Charles II to the throne, in l660. The English were by this time exhausted by Civil War. In l665 a terrible plague struck Britain, and in the following year a Great Fire destroyed most of London. The return to mere survival was oddly bracing to the British, who have always triumphed over disasters. The following half century was to see the nation involved in a series of wars against the French. One result of these many conflicts was that Britain truly formed its Empire, adding India and Canada to its possessions; but at the same time the American Revolution deprived Britain of that valuable piece of property now called the United States. The l8th century, the Enlightenment as it was freely called in Europe, saw a large development both of scientific and philosophic thought in Britain, while the Deist religious position, typically modern in its desire to preserve God but to sacrifice superstition, acquired the ascendancy in British thought.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

37. General cultural characteristics of this period
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Topic 37 :General cultural characteristics of the period

Overview: The return of the Stuart Monarchy, after the dreary and Puritanical Cromwellian interregnum, opened out a period of cultural license and sophisticated urbanity in British culture. The theaters reopened and the Court became a host to high life once again, as

previously under Queen Elizabeth. The l8th century, which followed, was a period of progressive modernization of England, and concluded with the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution and of the Romantic Movement in Literature.

The classical tradition: The l8th century, in English culture, was marked by a rational respect for God, the careful creator who established the laws of the natural universe. Thinkers like Locke and Newton, who were great developers of the vision of science and rational thought, felt sure that the laws of reason were also the laws by which the Universe was regulated. This same privileging of reason led to renewed respect for the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who had laid down, in his **Poetics,** the theory of the three unities, by which the unity of the literary production was governed.

The view of literary criticism: The deference to Aristotle's **Poetics,** which enshrines many of the ideas of classical literary brilliance., was instrumental in formulating the doctrine of the three unities, a central tenet of the literary thinking in the l8th century. By this theory, under which Shakespeare himself came in for harsh criticism, time, place , and action in the drama were to be tightly held to a single concentration. The large, wild, shaggy world of Shakespearean tragedy was an offense to this neat formula.

The social environment: The great, and the successful literati, established splendid norms of comfortable living during this period, but the abysmal poverty, of the urban poor, was shoved out of sight. A minor infraction, on the part of a member of the urban underclass, could result in the death penalty.

The scene in literature: The novel began to take wings, in such writers as Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson, and at the same time the major poetry, of such writers as Alexander Pope, stressed order, control, and wit. By the end of the century, before poets like Thomas Gray introduced the melancholy of the graveyard, and other themes which were sentimental and depressing.

Topic 38 : John Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress

Overview: John Bunyan (1628-1688) was known but widely condemned during much of his lifetime, which he passed in a period of turmoil and contention in British religious life. The Cromwellian interregnum provided a brief period of religious Puritanism, which was in general the seed bed for the kind of strict Protestantism Bunyan was to represent. After 1660, with the Restoration of the Stuart Monarchy, Bunyan found himself living in a culture which from the top down promoted the values of worldly living and pleasure. This climate was the spur to Bunyan's lifetime of religious severity.

Lifetime: John Bunyan was a tinker's son, and pursued that semi-nomadic vocation when he was not imprisoned, which he was for twelve years in mid life. He was in part self educated, unlike almost all of the Renaissance writers to whom we turned earlier, and he was frequently imprisoned for his beliefs, once for a period of twelve years. A prolific author of tracts and religious allegories, Bunyan published **Pilgrim's Progress**, his best known work, during a second imprisonment in l675.

Pilgrim's Progress: This work, published in 1675, is an allegory of the travels and travails of one Christian, a Pilgrim, as he wanders through the labyrinths of evil that constitute this world, and finally makes his way to his eternal home in God. Bunyan is at his best narrating the variety of evil figures whom Pilgrim meets along his way: Vanity Fair, where the showy traps of life are on display; a quagmire of vice and the threatening Slough of Despond; country lanes and sometimes England itself, not made into a figure of evil, but described as

a green and pleasant land. This ‘good story’ is embedded in the morality of Christian struggle. It was a century and a half before this work acquired a large readership, but by the mid l9th century Bunyan’s work was viewed as a masterpiece of (and the last example of) mediaeval allegory, the kind of mindset we saw, for instance, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Bunyan and Milton: Milton’s **Paradise Lost,** published in 1667, is almost contemporary to **Pilgrim’s Progress**. Both texts deal with the struggle of good with evil, but Milton’s in a high literary tradition with powerful allegory that is totally caught up into narrative. Both works, profoundly different but deeply Christian in their time’s sense, remain vivid and intense today.

Topic 39 : Restoration Drama

Overview: The Restoration of the Monarchy, in 1660, found the English people ready for active social life with its pleasures; those pleasures included the theater, which had been closed during the Interregnum, and the night life of a large city. In the theater, given these new conditions, a new type of drama sprang up, which differs remarkably from the lustier and gutsier stage of the Elizabethans. (The stage, more than other genre of literature, reflects the age in which it is created.) This new type of theater was a comedy of manners, for the most part reflecting back the sophisticated life of the genuinely elite and of the would be elite, who typically came in for heavy satire.

The Style and Tone of this Drama: The dominant flavor, of the plays of such as William Wycherley (1641-1715) or Wiliam Congreve (1670-1729), was witty, cynical, bawdy, and ready at every turn to satirize, especially to satirize those nouveau riche upstarts who were the butts of the contemporary French playwright, Moliere.

William Wycherley, **The Country Wife** (1675): The repartee level of such a play is illustrated below, in the following chat between Mr. Horner and Lady Fidget. (The story surrounding this verbal swordplay features a false/innocent young wife, up from the countryside, and a seducer who is a skilled master of fake innocence.)

Lady.
Well, that's spoken again like a Man of honour, all / Men of honour desire to come to the test: But indeed, generally / you Men report such things of your selves, one does / not know how, or whom to believe; and it is come to that / pass, we dare not take your words, no more than your Taylors, / without some staid Servant of yours be bound with you; / but I have so strong a faith in your honour, dear, dear, noble / Sir, that I'd forfeit mine for yours at any time, dear Sir. /

Hor.
No, Madam, you shou'd not need to forfeit it for / me, I have given you security already to save you harmless / my late reputation being so well known in the World, Madam. /

Lady.
But if upon any future falling out, or upon a suspition / of my taking the trust out of your hands, to employ / some other, you your self shou'd betray your trust, dear Sir; / I mean, if you'l give me leave to speak obscenely, you might / tell, dear Sir. /

Topic 40 : John Dryden

Overview: John Dryden (1631-1700) was a tireless writer in a variety of genres: celebratory poems, dramas, literary essays, satiric poetry. For the first time in English literature, we come with Dryden to a *man of letters*, a dominant and forceful figure on the literary scene. He makes us think across the Channel to a wrtier like Voltaire, a couple of generations later, who was an omnipresent and voluminous writer in many salient genres, and who himself an *homme de lettres*.

Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1665): A lengthy defence of the special genius of English—especially as distinguished from French—poetry., and at the same time a detailed discussion of the practices of English poetry in regard to the always cited and often revered ancient Greeks and Romans. The robust character of English poetry, its freedom of inventiveness, is here contrasted to the rule bound and over precise structures of Latin based French literature.

Eugenius *was proceeding in that part of his Discourse, when* Crites *interrupted him. I see, said he,* Eugenius *and I are never like to have this Question decided betwixt us; for he maintains the Moderns have acquir'd a new perfection in writing, I can onely grant they have alter'd the mode of it.* Homer *describ'd his Heroes men of great appetites, lovers of beef broild upon the coals, and good fellows; contrary to the practice of the French Romances, whose Heroes neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep, for love*.

Dryden as Public Poet: A skilled and brilliant translator from Latin, especially famed for his version of Virgil's **Aeneid,** in heroic couplets (rhymed pentameters) which emulated the craftsmanship of the greatest Roman writer, Dryden wrote poetry which was turned outward, as befitted the work of a public figure. In the same vein Dryden became known for his commemorative or celebratory poetry, written for occasions like the death of Cromwell or of the composer Henry Purcell, or to celebrate the courage of the Londoners in surviving the Great Fire.

Dryden the Satirist: As befitted a man of letters, Dryden was renowned for his bitter, formally constructed satires of second rate poets, political foes, or treacherous aristocrats.

Topic 41 : Jonathan Swift the Satirist

Overview: Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was, like Dryden, a satirist, with an eye for the ridiculous or contemptible in human behavior. While Dryden's satiric glance was primarily directed at literary or political figures, Swift was more globally satirical of the whole human condition. He is known to have thought mankind in general contemptible while at the same time he loved certain individuals.

Gulliver's Travels (1726): At this time in history, when the British Empire was still in process of formation, and the British navy was the frontline of maritime discovery, there was throughout Europe and England a vogue for travel literature. Swift draws on an imaginary set of voyages, by one Lemuel Gulliver, to deploy his most extensive satire on human nature. The first two parts of **Gulliver's Travels** display Lemuel in shipwrecked bondage to either tiny indigenes or to huge figures who dwarf him. From both groups he learns through interaction about the baseness of humanity. His starkest lessons are drawn from his encounter with the Houyhnhnms, noble horses who are beset by human like Yahoos, nasty and perverse figures who 'represent humanity.'

Swift the Satirist: Two of Swift's finest satires, **A Tale of a Tub** (1696) and **The Battle of the Books** (1697), indicate how sharp a temper he will bring onto the literary scene. The first of these two texts is a mocking of Church history and Church doctine. (To be noted:

Swift, like John Donne, was a clergyman. Obviously this role, in British higher culture, allowed for a wide variety of doctrines and expressions.) Each of three representatives, of the major Christian sects, receives a coat for an inheritance. They are commanded not to alter their coats. As it happens, each of the clergymen modifies his coat by patching and stitching, just as the Churches have done with their inherited doctrines. The Battle of the Books introduces the long lasting quarrel of the times, over whether the Ancients or the Moderns is greater. In the end the Ancients win the prize, for their recourse to nature for sustenance, while the Moderns, like the spider—here is the satiric bite—spin their creations out of their own guts.

Topic 42 :Addison and Steele and the Modern Essay

Overview: With the extension of the printing industry in the l8th century, with the growth of a middle class reading public for print materials, and with the advent of coffee-house culture as a new European import appearing in the cities of England, a taste for newspapers and journals makes itself felt in English literature. Have we seen anything like the essay in earlier entries? The answer might be that Frances Bacon, and Swift were occasional—and brilliant—essayists, but that for the most part our examples have been poetry, not prose, and within prose only rarely the essay.

Periodicals: the most popular periodicals, among Londoners in the coffee houses, were **The Tatler** (1709-) and **The Spectator** (1711-) written primarily by Richard Steele (1672-1729) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719). The earlier issues concerned items drawn from English life and manners of the times, but as the work in these periodicals matured it took on increasingly broad and ambitious themes, creating a narrative fiction of one Sir Roger de Coverley, and attending to the nature of the imagination, pleasure, and to the skills of such great English writers as Milton.

The Spectator itself: Steele's initial conception of the **Spectator**, which was his creation, was *"to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality... to bring philosophy out of the closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffeehouses" (No. 10).* The purpose of this effort, as the fictional Mr. Spectator put it, was to accustom the person of middle class fashion to expressing him or herself politely, urbanely.

An excerpt from Addison: ***The Spectator*** (March 4, 1712)

MONDAY, *eight o 'clock*.--I put on my clothes and walked into the parlour.

Nine o 'clock, ditto--Tied my knee-strings and washed my hands.

Hours ten, eleven, and twelve.--Smoked three pipes of Virginia. Read the *Supplement* and *Daily Courant.* Things go ill in the North. Mr. Nisby's opinion thereupon.

One o 'clock in the afternoon.--Chid Ralph for mislaying my tobacco-box.

Two o 'clock.--Sat down to dinner. *Mem:* Too many plums and no suet.

From three to four.--Took my afternoon's nap.

From four to six.--Walked into the fields. Wind S.S.E.

From six to ten.--At the club, Mr. Nisby's opinion about the peace.

Ten o 'clock.--Went to bed, slept sound.

Topic 43 : Daniel Defoe and the Novel

Overview: Hobbes, Bacon, Swift, Addison and Steele, Dryden; all these writers were part of the development of prose style in English, and all helped thereby to clear ground for the planting of the novel tradition, which was to become a vast and popular new addition to the achievement of English literature. Though Daniel Defoe (1659-1731) might not seem to us a novelist, today, he comes close to passing into an extended prose narrative, which resembles the novel achievement.

Robinson Crusoe (1719): this tale recounts a version of the shipwrecked Alexander Selkirk, whose rescue and return to London awakened intense public interest. *Robinson Crusoe*, based on the shipwreck adventures of one Selkirk, was essentially a biographical account, with a minimum of attention to narrative continuity. (This is where the limit on the fictional achievement sets in.) This particular work quickly went through four editions.

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders (1722) is a picaresque pre-novel, picking up the love affairs and street walking career of the young Moll, and her mid life career as a thief. This work is closer yet than any work to English to meeting the conditions of the novel, though, because the author concentrates on one scene at a time, there is a limit on the continuity of the text.

A Journal of the Plague Year (1722) bases its novel form on the historical fact of the great English bubonic plague, which wiped out 70,000 citizens. This firm core of fact is given a narrative twist, and fictionalized.

From **A Journal of the Plague Year**: *But the following week it returned again, and the distemper was spread into two or three other parishes, viz., St Andrew's, Holborn; St Clement Danes; and, to the great affliction of the city, one died within the walls, in the parish of St Mary Woolchurch, that is to say, in Bearbinder Lane, near Stocks Market; in all there were nine of the plague and six of the spotted-fever. It was, however, upon inquiry found that this Frenchman who died in Bearbinder Lane was one who, having lived in Long Acre, near the infected houses, had removed for fear of the distemper, not knowing that he was already infected.*

Topic 44 : Development of the novel: Richardson

Overview: We have seen that the development of prose, and especially prose fiction, lagged behind the development of poetry in English literature. (In all western literatures, starting with the ancient Greeks, poetry preceded prose, and was only in a later stage of cultural development challenged by prose.) In the development of the novel, which was to be the leading edge of prose in English, and which is today perhaps the dominant force in English, the challenge was to unite the social personal depictions to a flowing narrative, so that the creative fiction of a tale could be established. That brings us to Samuel Richardson.

Samuel Richardson 1689-1761): He was a career printer, publishing for the middle class, prose consuming market, of which we have been writing. Richardson began to write seriously in midlife and published his first works, *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48), when he was over fifty. From the start it was apparent that Richardson had correctly

understood the sentimental-bourgeois tone of the audience there to receive him. Both these long novels were written around sentimntal romantic themes, and touched topics like caution concerning a young girl's search for marriage, or her perils lest she fall prey to a 'predator.' (See the following introductory letter to Clarissa from her father.)

Your letter was indeed a great trouble, and some comfort, to me and your poor mother. We are troubled, to be sure, for your good lady's death, who took such care of you, and gave you learning, and, for three or four years past, has always been giving you clothes and linen, and every thing that a gentlewoman need not be ashamed to appear in. But our chief trouble is, and indeed a very great one, for fear you should be brought to anything dishonest or wicked, by being set so above yourself. Every body talks how you have come on, and what a genteel girl you are; and some say you are very pretty…

The lengthy cautionary text, about the dangers and potentials of a maiden's virtue, as she finds herself torn between two lovers, goes on to fill out the rest of this lengthy epistolary novel.

Topic 45 : Henry Fielding as Novelist

Overview: As we pass from Addison and Steel to Defoe, to Richardson, we track a gradual increase in fluency; a new mastery over transitions in fiction, and at the sane time a fresh ability to shape a plot with coherent tension building and then resolution; the kind of dynamic of which Shakespeare was long a master, and which lends itself more readily to great drama than to prose fiction.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) takes as his creative motif the satirizing of such as Richardson, who was a sentimentalist, as we have seen, and who played to the virtues admired by the new prose reading middle class. Fielding creates a series of novels written in the picaresque vein—that is, aligning episodes of humor, bumptious adventure, personal/heroic impertinence and a lot of authorial irony—and with a lot of Cervantes' mock heroic style. This formula, as well as Richardson's antithesis to it, played successfully into the hands of an increasingly sophisticated reading public.

Joseph Andrews (1742) began under the name of **Shamela**, as a parody of Richardson's **Pamela.** (Whereas the Richardson novel portrayed **Pamela** as a maiden whose virtue was under threat, at least until she learned how to manipulate it, **Shamela** (the name and core of the tale are transformed into **Joseph Andrews** later) concerns the threat to Pamela's brother, Joseph, from an harassing mistress. (This theme was considered out of bounds for the time.) In the transformation Fielding creates the 'good man,' Parson Adams, one of the author's most beloved creations.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749) is Fielding's most popular, and skillfully constructed novel. The once again picaresque units of the novel are unified into a complex but structurally subtle whole, and the satire of all levels of British society, through the lusty main character, make the novel what everybody loved to protest against, in mid-Restoration England.

From the Introduction to **Tom Jones**:

The same animal which hath the honour to have some part of his flesh eaten at the table of a duke, may perhaps be degraded in another part, and some of his limbs gibbeted, as it were, in the vilest stall in town. Where, then, lies the difference between the food of the

nobleman and the porter, if both are at dinner on the same ox or calf, but in the seasoning, the dressing, the garnishing, and the setting forth?

Topic 46 : Lawrence Sterne and the Experiment of the Novel

Overview: We have hurriedly traced the development of prose fiction in the l8th century, and have found it taking new, 'more mature' forms at every stage. This changing profile was evident from Defoe through Richardson to Fielding—and all of that, of course an artificially shaped profile of a century of writing, showing how ready the novel form was to burst out into the medium of the new middle classes.

Lawrence Sterne (1713-1768): Lawrence Sterne was born in Ireland, and traveled constantly through that country as a young man, in tow to his military father. In his twenties he was given a post in the church, and went on to spend his life as a clergyman in the fashion of John Donne and Jonathan Swift, forebears who like Sterne took dark or at least ironic views of the human condition.

The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy (1759-67): Sterne's first and most famed novel, and the text in which he most pushed fiction to its formal limits. Here Sterne made himself a kind of grandfather to fictional experiments from his time into post modernism, by way of the stream of consciousness technique. For this technique Sterne was largely indebted to the contemporary philosopher, John Locke, an astute analyst of the procedures of the mind. It sets the tone of Sterne's entire novel, that the author is, in the course of the novel, in constant search for the moment of his own birth, a search in the course of which he indulges huge and often obscene digressions, and graphic experiments with such unlikely intrusions as black pages and blank pages.

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost…

Topic 47 : Alexander Pope

Overview: With our emphasis on the development of prose fiction, in the l8th century, we need concurrently to remember the quite different trend of Neoclassicism, which we saw heralded in by John Dryden. The traits of the neoclassical were an emphasis on formal metrical schemes, a ready pleasure in wit, and a deeply inbred respect for the texts of ancient Greek, The classical education, given to the privileged gentleman of the times, was determinative for the kind of literature he created.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744): A child of aristocratic privilege and of elite education, Alexander Pope spent most of his active life at the center of London literary culture, while for long periods he retired to write at his country estate. The wide range of his works—translation, satire, mock epic, and literary criticism—reflects the double range of his life setting.

An Essay on Criticism (1711): a witty defense of poetic wit, style, and taste, and all that written at age 21. (Pope was an unequalled youthful prodigy.) It should be added that the young genius who wrote this work was a natural creator of epigrams.

Tis hard to say if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But of the two less dangerous is th'offence
To tire our patience than mislead our sense:
Some few in that, but numbers err in this;
Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;
A fool might once himself alone expose;
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.

An Essay on Man (1733): Like many l8th century thinkers—Voltaire and Lessing, for instance—Pope thought that the universally valid was the true aim of poetic creation, and that, because God has planned the universe into a harmony, 'whatever is, is right.' This perspective fits with the poetic expressed in the **Essay on Criticism.**

The Rape of the Lock (1712-14): A mock epic, in which Pope dramatizes, while at the same time heavily satirizing, a quarrel between two aristocratic families. In the poem before us a carefully planned attack strategy, by Lord Petre (of one family) succeeds in raping a lock of hair from one Miss Arabella (of the rival family.)

Topic 48 : Boswell the Biographer

Overview: We have been tracking the development of English prose, through the rapid growth of the novel in the century from 1650-1750, a period coinciding with the development of a middle class reading public in England. Have we come on anything like a biography? Perhaps Addison and Steele, in 'creating' the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, were in some sense biographizing, though their object was 'unreal.' But when we get to the case of the Scotsman James Boswell, the biographer of Samuel Johnson, the author of The Life of Samuel Johnson (1791) we come to a sharp maturing of the biographical genre.

James Boswell (1740-1795) was born and educated in Scotland, from where he made his way, first in his late teens, to Europe. There he traveled, drank too much and for too long, visited bordellos too ofen, and kept his eyes wide open. Through those open eyes he observed human behavior to the full, and what he learned he took back with him to London, and to his permanent estate in Scotland. Once thoroughly into the London scene he made it his habit to pass eleven months of the year on his estate, one in London; and once the vast project of biographizing the genius Samuel Johnson had seized him, conversation with Johnson—and the literary lions of the city—preoccupied his one month annual break in England.

I cannot conceive a more perfect mode of writing any man's life, than not only relating all the most important events of it in their order, but interweaving what he privately wrote, and said, and thought; by which mankind are enabled as it were to see him live, and to 'live o'er each scene' with him, as he actually advanced through the several
stages of his life. Had his other friends been as diligent and ardent as I was, he might have been almost entirely preserved.

What Boswell brought to this challenge. From his time in Europe Boswell had proven himself a superb traveller, who took precise notes, based both on observation and on a prodigiously exact memory. In his *Life of Johnson* he brought these skills into an ingenious

structure which read like a novel, but was insistently close to reality.

Topic 49 : Samuel Johnson

Overview: Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is portrayed at length, in many moods and stages, in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*. There Johnson appears as an exceptionally scholarly, often witty, occasionally sharp tongued, city sophisticate, with a profound love of conversation and of value in literature and life. Johnson's wit, a term we have been stressing especially since Dryden, was a superb vehicle of attitude, humor, and conscious thought, and served as an exemplar for his century.

Johnson's **Dictionary of the English Language** (1755): In a sense Johnson's genius came down to a splendid knowledge of his own language, its roots and development. (We have had cause to trace that development, which continues to this day, through Old English into Middle, at the Normal Conquest, and then—to pick one of many great transition stage—through the consciously Latinate sophistication of the Renaissance Humanists.) Johnson required nine years to complete this vast work, which he carried out alone except for clerical copying assistance.

Lexicographer: *a writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the signification of words.*

Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-1781): A vast work of influential literary criticism, in which Johnson interprets fifty two masters of English poetry. Johnson's passion for crisp and insightful scholarship set a standard for all future research in English literature.

Johnson's prose style:

The black dog I hope always to resist, and in time to drive, though I am deprived of almost all those that used to help me. The neighbourhood is impoverished. I had once Richardson and Lawrence in my reach. Mrs. Allen is dead. My house has lost Levet, a man who took interest in everything, and therefore ready at conversation. Mrs. Williams is so weak that she can be a companion no longer. When I rise my breakfast is solitary, the black dog waits to share it, from breakfast to dinner he continues barking, except that Dr. Brocklesby for a little keeps him at a distance. Dinner with a sick woman you may venture to suppose not much better than solitary. After dinner, what remains but to count the clock, and hope for that sleep which I can scarce expect. Night comes at last, and some hours of restlessness and confusion bring me again to a day of solitude. What shall exclude the black dog from an habitation like this?

Topic 50 : Two l8th century comedic dramatists

Overview: The early l8th century favored a sentimental comedy of manners, and we have seen Congreve and Wycherley in this vein. (The latter quite saucy, to boot.) There was also a nostalgic satiric tradition at work, which belonged to the essential societal setting of the literature of the time. That tradition acquires full expression in the works of Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774): *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1776), *'The Deserted Village'* (1770), and the play *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771); all these works, which made Goldsmith an emblematic gentleman author of the second half of the century, deal with aspects of the English countryside, which it this time was gradually being drained of its old fashioned cultural values. (The Industrial Revolution was soon on the Horizon, and the Enclosure

Laws, which severely modified the agricultural life of the nation, were reshaping country life.) The opening of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, though spoken quite tongue in cheek by the Vicar himself, at bottom offers us the speaking voice of Goldsmith:

I was ever of opinion, that the honest man who married and brought up a large family, did more service than he who continued single, and only talked of population. From this motive, I had scarce taken orders a year before I began to think seriously of matrimony, and chose my wife as she did her wedding gown, not for a fine glossy surfaces but such qualities as would wear well.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816): *The Rivals*, Sheridan's most successful play, is a farce taking off the pretentious manners, as well as the fast lane matchmaking, of the upper classes 'taking the waters' at Bath. The play is renowned for the language canards sprouting from the mouth of Mrs. Malaprop-- .
'...she's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of Nile'—but, underneath that level of humor, goes a shrewd eye for the true maladjustment, of rural English society, to the increasingly urbanized and high style fashion minted in society.

Topic 51 :Pre Romantic Poetry

Overview: We have glanced at the poetry and poetics of John Dryden, and at the huge 'neoclassical' poetic output of Alexander Pope. As we have noted, the strong presence of the classical tradition, its formal verse structures, and the faith in reason and order are all components of this Neoclassical perspective. There was some correlation between this view of verbal creation, and the cultural styles of the time in music and painting, as well as in the aristocratic social trends which were style setting for the time. By the third quarter of the century, however, the cultural environment shaping literature was changing. In poetry voices were being heard which longed for new freedom of expression, more attention to nature, and to verse forms which sprang from closer to the heart than Pope's.

William Cowper (1731-1800): Fond of nature, and the natural life, Cowper was at the same time a fervent Evangelical believer. He was the author of many hymns, as well as of poems like 'The Task,' which promote the honest virtues of country living, in the way Goldsmith had done. The tone of humor and simplicity, which pervades this work, suggests the shortly to be realized poetry of William Wordsworth, who like Cowper saw nature as a repository of supernal forces. For Cowper it went this way: *GOD moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants his footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.*

Thomas Gray (1716-1771)*;* Gray's 'The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' is a testimony to the greatness lying unrealized in many simple, but sometimes brilliant, simple inhabitants of the land. (The same concern, here, as we saw in Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village.') Gray's sympathy for 'simple people,' and their speech and practices, is a clear herald of Wordsworth's upcoming belief in the common speech of common individuals.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

5. The Romantic Period

The divisions of a national literature by periods is arbitrary, yet after the periodization occurs it seems to have defined a fact of nature. Such is the case with English literature. As we saw from the pre Romantic poets, like Cowper, there was already by the mid-l8th century a marked softening of sensibility in some popular poetry, and something like a rediscovery of the power of nature. The same changes were visible in the landscape painting of the time. At any rate the period we call Romantic was on the horizon, and it was to acquire sharper definition with the political and social awakening provoked by the Napoleonic Wars, and the defeat of that autocratic Empire on the battlefield at Waterloo. It has become a convention to define the Romantic period from 1798, when Wordsworth and Coleridge published **The Lyrical Ballads**, to l832, the year of the death of the great Romantic historical novelist Walter Scott. By this latter date, the British government had passed Reform Legislation which sanctified the privileges of the Middle Class, and changed England from a rural nation to a semi industrialized urban one.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

52. Distinguishing Traits of the Romantic Period
53. William Blake and Robert Burns
54. Wordsworth and the New Poetry
55. Coleridge as Theorist and Poet
56. Lord Byron and the Romantic Personality
57. Shelley as the Rebel Poet
58. John Keats
59. Essayists and Novelists of the Romantic Period

Topic 52 : Distinguishing Traits of the Romantic Period

Overview: We have seen the power of poetry throughout English literature; from *Beowulf* to the *Canterbury Tales* to Shakespeare to Pope—to create a very mixed bag—dominant expressions in poetry were formative for the whole tenor of a literary age. With the advent of the Romantic Period this feature of English literature is marked: passionate and powerful poetry—in Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and many more—assumes the leading role in defining the art tone of the period. At the same time there is a strong sense that the shape of culture and society is changing. Revolutions –American in l776, French in l798—are convulsing the pattern of Western history, and the Industrial Revolution is beginning to modify the social life of Western Europe and especially England.

The Revolutionary Spirit: All the major Romantic poets, with the exception of John Keats, were enthusiasts for the new spirit of Revolution in Europe and America. All that was liberating in these movements seemed to want expression in the spirit of poetry. Wordsworth thought it was bliss to be born at the time of the French Revolution, while Shelley and Byron were particularly moved by the self-liberation of the Greeks from the Ottomon occupation. Everywhere human rights were being promoted as sacred—just at the Industrial Revolution was rendering those rights endangered.

New conception of literary language: Wordsworth and Coleridge, in **The Lyrical Ballads** (1798) promoted the speech of common men and women, as they heard it in the Lake Country which was home to them. This speech seemed to be the richest source for poetic creation, and it was a source totally different from that privileged by a Neoclassicist like Alexander Pope. (Remember the Latinate sophistication of Pope's rhymed couplets.) There is an unmistakable correlation between Wordsworth's poetic language and the movement toward popular democracy in the Revolutions of the time.

A New Model of the Past: The Romantic Movement saw a turning away from the model of the ancient Greek and Latin classics, and from the historical setting those Classics emerged from. (The trend was reflected in educational practice, too, for from early in the l9th century the study of Greek and Latin gradually began its decline.) In place of the classical model the Middle Ages—a period of grail quests, faith and idealism; at least if you saw it that way—began to dominate the imagination.

Topic 53:William Blake and Robert Burns

Overview: A trend toward symbolism, the mystical, the transcendent was implicit in the Romantic ideology, and William Blake (1757-1827) personified this trend to perfection. Robert Burns (1759-96), a Scotsman popular for his poetry drawn from the peasant creative level, couched in Scots dialect, met in another fashion from Blake the current interest in popular speech and imagination.

Bllake's **Songs of Innocence** (1789-90) and **Songs of Experience** (1794) read as simple and childlike poems. Blake's 'Eternity,' is stripped to nakedness:

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.

Blake's mystical insights enable him to plunge deep into the evil of mankind—materialism, fear, lifelessness—while his upflying lyrics, like the preceding, soar into a powerful affirmation of form and idea. His mythical poem sequences, **The Book of Urizen** (1794) and **The Four Zoas** (1797-1804), spin out vast realms of private mythology designed to emblematize the cosmos, and its ruling forces.

Robert Burns was a popular poet, to this day world beloved and a national hero in Scotland, and furthermore a populist poet, devoted to the causes of the common man, and true throughout his life—which led him into great halls and dining rooms—to his own peasant origins and his laboring youth.

Then let us pray that come it may,
(As come it will for a' that,)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.

Burns and Blake together make a fascinating pair, each of them as far as can be imagined from the Neoclassical assumptions of Dryden and Pope, each of them devoted to the simplicity of the common person, and yet totally different from one another in their poetic procedures.

Topic 54 : Wordsworth and the New Poetry

Overview: William Wordsworth (1770-1850), like Blake and Burns, was interested in the simple and direct, and especially in the speech of the common man and woman. Accordingly, Wordsworth was a revolutionist in language practice as well as an enthusiast

for the Age of Revolutions: Neoclassicism and the Restoration Age in general seemed to him artificial and lifeless.

Lyrical Ballads (1798): In the preface to this adventurous new turn in poetry, Wordsworth and Coleridge, collaborating, expressed as their ambition to see 'how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.' It is up to the reader to judge whether the language we find, in these poems, is just what Wordsworth suggests, or whether it is common speech pervaded by tones and perceptions that are very much the brilliance of the trained poet.

The critical theory implicit in Wordsworth's preface is sharply different from that implicit in Pope, and the two giants of language might be contrasted on the issue of nature. For Wordsworth the natural is what is spontaneous, simple, and passionate: poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,' and thus is fundamentally natural. For Pope, too, the natural is essential, but it is the universal: 'art is but nature to advantage dressed, what oft was thought but neer so well expressed.' Art has nature at its base, but carefully curried nature.

Wordsworth's Prelude (1850) is a vast blank verse autobiography of the poet's mind, and embodies his thought and poetic creativity in fullest measure.

O there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
A visitant that while it fans my cheek
Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings
From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.
Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come
To none more grateful than to me; escaped
From the vast city, where I long had pined
A discontented sojourner: now free,
Free as a bird to settle where I will.

The blank verse of the mature Wordsworth shows mastery of simple flow, artful enjambment, and subtle punctuation. Note, for example, that the first six lines flow together as one whole; and that nothing stronger than the semi colon breaks the progress of this nine line introduction to the *Prelude*.

Topic 55 : Coleridge as Theorist and Poet

Overview: Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) collaborated with Wordsworth on the **Lyrical Ballads**, and developed there ideas which would play a key role in his great book of Literary Critique, *Biographica Literaria*. Coleridge was also a rare poet, given both to intimate conversation poems, and to mystical visionary poetry of the highest order. As a public lecturer of spellbinding power, and a brilliant social conversationalist—on the level of a Samuel Johnson—Coleridge was immensely influential with the dynamic youth of his period.

Poems: Coleridge was capable of writing magical poetry, dream and often opium induced, which set standards for his time, as well as the simplest stanzas of feeling.
In his most enchanted outpouring of lyrical imagination he traveled under opium to the kingdom of 'Kubla Khan,' the great Tartar monarch; in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' similarly, he travels to remote and powerful landscapes—in this instance the frozen polar seas—which morph incrementally into the landscape of the poet's own mind. (It is difficult to find parallels to this kind of mystical inward poetry in English. Would we think back to *Sir*

Gawain, or perhaps to Blake, among the entries in this book?) Some of Coleridge's poetry is 'conversational,' like the intricate and delicate 'This Lime Tree Bower my Prison':

> *Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,*
> *This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost*
> *Beauties and feelings, such as would have been*
> *Most sweet to my remembrance even when age*
> *Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,*
> *Friends, whom I never more may meet again,*
> *On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,*
> *Wander in gladness…*

Biographia Literaria (1817): Coleridge's most potent work of prose, and a milestone in thought about the imagination, and in the relation of poetic creations to those of the analytic mind. In this work, where Coleridge passionately prioritizes the work of the imagination, he provides an underpinning for the creative practice Wordsworth and he both exercised. In this same work he also writes his autobiography, the portrait of himself as artist, and penetrating studies of Shakespeare's work.

Topic 56 : Lord Byron and the Romantic Personality

Overview: George Gordon, Lord Byron, is a paradox of the Romantic Movement. As a proud and handsome aristocrat, a widely known ladies' man, and a generous spirit in love with the Revolution and the new, he established himself as the archetype of the flamboyant Romantic. His extensive writings, however, in many ways revert to the Neoclassical both in perspective and in style.

Don Juan: Byron's uncompleted sixteen canto master work, a satiric epic dealing with a Romantic lover and a narrator who constantly punctures the Romantic by sarcastic observations on sex, love, and society. For that matter the lover, Dun Juan himself, is not the bravado filled masculine hero, but the sensuous passive figure women go for, and seduce. The blend of the erotic with the ironic, packaged in neoclassical type couplets, makes this great work hard to classify.

She was a good deal shocked ; not shocked at tears,
For women shed and use them at their liking ;
But there is something when man's eye appears
Wet, still more disagreeable and striking :
A woman's tear-drop melts, a man's half sears.
Like molten lead, as if you thrust a pike in
His heart to force it out, for (to be shorter)
To them 't is a relief, to us a torture.

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1808): Byron was a master of satirical attack, working over fellow poets in a tradition well known in English literature—dear, as we have seen, to Dryden, Pope, Swift, and many others.

Shall gentle COLERIDGE pass unnoticed here,
To turgid ode and tumid stanza dear?
Though themes of innocence amuse him best,
Yet still Obscurity's a welcome guest.
If Inspiration should her aid refuse…

Byron's personal intervention in his time: Byron's beloved cause, from within the epic of Revolutions being written in his time, was the cause of Greek Freedom from the four hundred year occupation by the Ottomans. This bondage symbolized autocratic oppression, and Byron gave money, time, and ultimately his life fighting for the Greek cause. A malarial fever, contracted in the Greek city of Missolonghi, was responsible for his death in 1824, shortly after arriving in Greece.

Topic 57 : Shelley as the Rebel Poet

Overview: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) lived a short and brilliant life, fierily devoted to Revolutionary causes, prolific with powerful language, and idealistic to the core. It is awe inspiring to consider the brevity of the life spans of the very greatest Romantic poets: Byron lived to age 36, Shelley to age 29, and John Keats to age 25.

Queen Mab (1813): Shelley's first mature work, and his most uncompromising assertion of the rights and dignity of man, and the depravity of injustice and political suppression.

Nature rejects the monarch, not the man;
The subject, not the citizen; for kings
And subjects, mutual foes, forever play
A losing game into each other's hands,
Whose stakes are vice and misery. The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys.

Prometheus Unbound (1818): This verse drama plays powerfully off against the great early fifth-century play of Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*. In the Greek version of the myth, Prometheus has defied the Olympian gods by giving mortals the secret of fire, a bold act for which the Gods punish the rebellious Titan. In Shelley's version of the myth Prometheus conquers the tyrant Zeus, and brings in a new reign of love and harmony for mankind. In elevated verse, the medium of this closet drama, Prometheus declaims in tones such as these:

Ah woe!
Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, for ever.
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
Thy works within my woe-illumèd mind,
Thou subtle tyrant! Peace is in the grave.
The grave hides all things beautiful and good:
I am a God and cannot find it there,

Ode to the West Wind (1819): one of Shelley's finest lyric odes, a genre at which he excelled. The wind is beautifully portrayed as both a destructive force, blasting away the dead leaves, and as a force distributing the seedlings for the next year's fresh life.

Topic 58 : John Keats

Overview: John Keats (1795-1821) died at the age of 25, leaving behind him a brilliant tapestry of poems, which bore the single stamp of his highly aesthetic nature and view of life. We might say that Keats alone, of the major Romantic poets we are considering, was uninterested in the political Revolutions taking place around him, and was drawn primarily to the deeply romantic inner life of perfected language.

Keats the Man: In the course of his brief life Keats experienced deep passions, for beauty, the ideal possibilities of life, and woman—as ideal. His letters remain the truest testimony to the intensity of his feelings: *'My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you — I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again — my Life seems to stop there — I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving — I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. [...] I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion — I have shudder'd at it — I shudder no more — I could be martyr'd for my Religion — Love is my religion — I could die for that — I could die for you.'*

Keats, the sonnets: We have tracked the fortunes of the sonnet from Italy into England, to Spenser and Sidney, to Shakespeare and Donne, and we are aware how fertile a field this form is for the English imagination. (The freedom within tight constraints seems to have turned on the finest of poets in English.) Two of his Keats' Sonnets, 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,' and 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' collaborate in praising the sense of astonishment we feel, when catching our first breathtaking awareness of something's beauty—whether that be the Pacific Ocean or the glory of an ancient Greek sculptural masterpiece.

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Topic 59 : Essayists and Novelists of the Romantic Period

Overview: Poetry, it seems, prevailed over prose in catching the fervor and flow of Romantic energy. Nevertheless there was an extraordinary flowering, during the period in question, both of the personal essay and of several types of novel, from the novel of manners (Jane Austen, 1775-1817) to the historical novel (Walter Scott, 1771-1832).

The personal essay: We have tracked the development of the essay, in English literature, from Thomas More and Francis Bacon, through Addison and Steele, a century later, and we have seen how this relatively intimate genre became increasingly popular with the rise of the novel, and with middle class sensibility, such as we found it in the drama of Wycherley. The Romantic period, not surprisingly, nurtured some of the masterpieces of the English essay: the largely literary essays of William Hazlitt (1778-1830), a brilliant commentator on Shakespeare as well as current cultural events; the wryly humorous personal essays of Charles Lamb (1775-1834) ; the shrewd literary critical observations of Thomas DeQuincey (1785-1859).

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832): the immensely popular master of the historical novel, who delved into what was most adventurous and quaintly antique in the early modern cultures of England. *Kenilworth* (1821), loosely based on events in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, is one of the best of these works.

Jane Austen (1775-1817): one of the greatest masters of the English novel. Austen works in the very English tradition of the comedy of manners—which we mentioned in Oliver Goldsmith or the playwright Wycherley—but she raises this societal dramatization to a

universal level, on which we can read (as in the novels **Pride and Prejudice (1813)** and **Sense and Sensibility (1811)** tea time as a field across which ultimate human truths can parade. Here opens **Pride and Prejudice:**

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

6. The Victorian Age

Victorian Prose

The Victorian period in England is a time of great industrial, scientific, and technological development, and with that development surged a wave of prose analysis, essays and books dedicated to understanding of the new age. (We have noted, earlier, that poetry tends to precede prose, in the development of English literature; and it is not until the growth of Renaissance Humanist prose that we begin to see the balance redressed.) With new economies, based in industrial growth, there was much unsettledness in British society, and critics of every stripe were at work coming to terms with the new world.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

60. Main Traits of the Victorian Period
61. Cultural Critics in Prose: Newman, Carlyle, Mill, Arnold
62. Critics of the Aesthetic: Ruskin and Pater
63. The Novel of the Victorian Period: The Brontes
64. Dickens and Thackeray
65. George Eliot and Anthony Trollope
66. Thomas Hardy as Novelist and Poet

Topic 60 : Main Traits of the Victorian Period

Overview: The Victorian Period in England and Europe is hard to characterize. From its inceptions, with the first glimmer of Romanticism, the explosion of democratic Revolution, and the new industrial skills activated in Factory and Urbanization, to the end, on the brink of a twentieth century with its own calamitous World Wars, and its ideological social changes, is a huge cultural trip. We have inherited a view of the Victorian period as staid and prim; nothing could be farther from the truth.

Social ideology in England: The development of social relations was regulated by the Government and its legislation. (The Corn Laws, 1815-46, were in a sense Britain's version of a Revolution: legislative imposition of import taxes on grain, to keep the English agriculturists happy.) Regulations were passed to prevent abusive child labor, and the roots of Socialism were firmly planted. Marxism, which was going to transform the societal scene in both Europe and Britain, began to take hold.

Science and the public: The growth of experimental science meant a profusion of new and life giving medical and technical inventions. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), arguably the most powerful influence in the century's science, buttressed the idea that the origin of human species preceded by millennia the date indicated in the Bible, and rooted

humanity in earlier forms of life. Debate over this topic, and over the geological evidence that supported it, became an argument for every possible position within the social community.

The mood in the religious community: Serious groups like those who constituted The Higher Criticism in England, raised doubts about the validity of Biblical texts, while within the believing Christian community the Anglican Church came under attack both from religious conservatives and from freethinkers.

The tenor of the literary arts: Both in poetry and prose serious Victorian writers tended toward moral seriousness and concern for public improvement, both in education and in moral behavior. The pervasive growth of the scientific spirit, and of social consciousness, guaranteed in the literature of the time attitudes at a polar opposite, say, from those of the English Neoclassicists, Dryden or Pope.

Topic 61 : Cultural Critics in Prose: Newman, Carlyle, Mill, Arnold

Overview: The four writers named here differed in every regard except their mature seriousness about the character and development of society. (For contrast, to prove the point, look back at Addison and Steele or Hazlitt, whose personal essays did not carry the social issue so gravely. Was it that, prior to the l9th century, writers were less touched with the ideals of democracy than they started to become in the l9th century?) Newman tracked the profile of his own religious life, Carlyle reflected on the nature of history, Mill on the growth of the individual mind, Arnold on the enduring values enshrined in literature and cultural tradition: all, however, returned consistently to the responsibility of the moral human in society, and of his/her responsibilities.

Matthew Arnold (1822-88), *Essays in Criticism*, First Series: Arnold, deeply trained in the Ancient Classics, and conscious of their value to his own time, was a lifelong advocate of the cultural tradition as a source of sustenance for later ages. In his short poem, 'Dover Beach,' Arnold had famously remarked that the 'tide of faith' has gone out. This kind of poignant nostalgia spurred his search for 'touchstones,' in the great literature of the past, which would be points of inspiration and faith for Arnold's own wounded time.

John Stuart Mill (1806-73): A guardian throughout his life of the value of liberty and toleration for society, and for the individual. In his essay 'On Liberty,' 1859, he argued that all opinions should be heard throughout a society, for even the most obscure minority opinion may shed the light of truth. The following, from 'On Liberty':

Though the law of England, on the subject of the press, is as servile to this day as it was in the time of the Tudors, there is little danger of its being actually put in force against political discussion, except during some temporary panic, when fear of insurrection drives ministers and judges from their propriety; and, speaking generally, it is not, in constitutional countries, to be apprehended, that the government, whether completely responsible to the people or not, will often attempt to control the expression of opinion, except when in doing so it makes itself the organ of the general intolerance of the public.

Topic 62 : Critics of the Aesthetic: Ruskin and Pater

Overview: With the growth of the middle class, the development of urban museums, symphonies, large architectural complexes in cities, and Bohemian or art-centered areas in major cities, there is throughout the century an overall increasing awareness of the central role of the arts in the 'civilized life.' John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Walter Pater (1839-1894)

were two prominent critics of art and aesthetics, and both were keenly aware of the role of the arts in society.

John Ruskin: As a prominent critic of the arts—a visitor to galleries, a practical art critic as well as a prolific writer on the arts—Ruskin occupied a central role in English cultural life. In his large study, **Modern Painters** (Vol. 1, 1843), Ruskin put Turner at the center of his value system, and looked down on a number of earlier painters, including even Michaelangelo, for what he considered their lack of interest in nature. Combined with his historical treatise Ruskin includes precise indications of the relation of nature to the painter, with practical suggestions for how to depict cloud formations, valley shapes, and hillsides. In later works, like **The Stones of Venice** (1851, 1853**)**, Ruskin grew increasingly social, stressing the educative and moral value of art.

Walter Pater: Pater, like Ruskin, upholds the central importance of art, but in his *The Renaissance* (1873) he commits himself to art as pure joy, a delight to the senses, and speaks of the true life as one in which the individual 'burns with a hard gemlike flame,' his/her senses ever afire to experience the world more keenly. From *The Renaissance*:

The aesthetic critic, then, regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind. This influence he feels, and wishes to explain, by analysing and reducing it to its elements. To him, the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, La Gioconda, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola, are valuable for their virtues, as we say, in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique, impression of pleasure.

Topic 63 : The Novel of the Victorian Period: The Brontes

Overview: It could well be mentioned, among the social reshufflings of the 19th century, that women too were being accorded increasing attention on the cultural scene. We have seen little evidence of women's writing, in this e book, and indeed the contribution of women, to English literature, may in the end seems surprisingly limited. (Or is that simply because we have constructed a canon which is not too hospitable to women?) Whatever the case, it is noteworthy that three daughters, in one northcountry family, entered the literary arena at the same time, and that two of them, perhaps all three, proved to be highly successful novelists.

Anne Bronte (1820-1849): The youngest of the three sisters, Anne Bronte was the most 'realistic' in her fiction. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) she creates, on the basis of her own brother, the portrait of an alcoholic and débauché—a shocking departure for many of her readers.

Emily Bronte (1818-1848): By most opinions, the most powerful novelist among the three sisters, Emily made herself most known by the powerful *Wuthering Heights* (1847), reaching out, through the far reaches of love between Cathy and Heathcliffe, to awarenesses of the next world. Her sense of narrative is ingenious, and she is engrossed by the interplay of the morbid with the idealistic. Her poetry, too, is distinguished, and is often marked by deep faith in the world beyond:

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality

Charlotte Bronte (1818-1855): The oldest of the Bronte sisters. Charlotte is best known for her immensely successful novel, **Jane Eyre**. The hero, Mr. Rochester, is a Romantic figure, imbued with strong passions, and Jane is equally passionate, though by moral self-discipline she refuses to become his mistress until various plot hindrances—personal and financial—are put aside. Jane becomes the passionate moral hero par excellence.

Topic 64 :Dickens and Thackeray

Overview: While the fiction of the Bronte sisters was much involved with affairs of the heart, it also kept touch with the moral pulse of the time. Victorian novelists were characteristically concerned with society and with the fate of individual virtue as it is plunged into society. Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), though popular in totally different ways, shared the century's concern with fictions that dealt with morality and social generosity.

The early Dickens: The earlier novels of Dickens—*Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), *Oliver Twist* (1837-39) and *David Copperfield* (1849-50)—deal with society, true, but on a smaller canvas than the vast novels of Dickens' middle period. Dickens' own favorite, among his works, was *David Copperfield*, which is a reflection of Dickens himself as a youngster.

Dickens' most ambitious novels: these texts include *Hard Times* (1854), *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and *Bleak House* (1852-1853), all of which are deeply involved with the social and industrial ills of the London of the time. Once again, in *Great Expectations*, Dickens performs self-analysis, as he had done in *David Capperfield*. He mocks his own fruitless efforts to rise above his social class—a frustrating failure which helps him, in *Our Mutual Friend*, to make light of Victorian materialism.

Thackeray and the new middle class: Thackeray is the master of detailed characterization of the social class system in Victorian England. Unlike Dickens, however, Thackeray takes a bemused attitude toward the new middle classes, which are, after all, the audience which is making the novel popular. *Vanity Fair* (1847) is one of the triumphs of middle class analysis, targeting Becky Sharp. This lady rises into the middle class, plays with the hearts of many gentlemen, falls to the depths, sex and gambling, and in the end surfaces again as a successful middle class mother. Here is Thackeray, opening his novel:

Some people consider Fairs immoral altogether, and eschew such, with their servants and families: very likely they are right. But persons who think otherwise, and are of a lazy, or a benevolent, or a sarcastic mood, may perhaps like to step in for half an hour, and look at the performances. There are scenes of all sorts; some dreadful combats, some grand and lofty horse-riding, some scenes of high life, and some of very middling indeed; some love-making for the sentimental, and some light comic business…

Topic 65 : George Eliot and Anthony Trollope

Overview: Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), we might say, is English in a cliché sense: concerned with the oddities, the special cozinesses and country charms, of an England dear to tourist imaginations but rapidly fading from existence in our time. (He takes us to the imaginary realms dear to Dickens' Pickwick or even Thackeray's middle class protagonists.) George Eliot (1819-1880), on the other hand, is a forward looking and immensely intellectual woman, who argues passionately for a more open society and more room for more developmental room in that society.

Trollope's conservative perspective: Trollope remains a friend to the older England which was being menaced by the Industrial Revolution, and by the new societies. The clergyman, frequently a figure preserving the Anglican past, plays a significant role in many Trollope novels. (The Anglican clergy, of which Trollope writes, tend to perform their duties in country parishes, and thus to remain in touch with the older fashioned agricultural values of England.) And here's how *Barchester Towers* opens:

In the latter days of July in the year 185-, a most important question was for ten days hourly asked in the cathedral city of Barchester, and answered every hour in various ways--Who was to be the new Bishop?

George Eliot, Middlemarch (1871-1872): This novel portrays English society as a whole, on a vast canvas of characters and rival ideas; Eliot, in short, is both a superb craftsperson and fully in sync with the issues of her time: women's freedom, the openness of society to cultural change, the significance of the technologization of society. In short George Eliot assumes the perspective of a woman writer, critical of retrograde forces in her society, and true to her art. **Middlemarch** opens thus:

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper.

Topic 66 : Thomas Hardy as Novelist and Poet

Overview: Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) wrote powerful novels and poems, never wandering far from his pessimistic view of the human condition and of man's limits. His thinking is clearly marked by the scientific theses of his day, which are raising questions about Biblical accounts of history, and in the light of the Higher Criticism of the Bible, which reads holy scripture under a sharp lens. But Hardy also picks up a dark and tragic life view from the people and environment of his native Wessex, which is very far from, say, the benign countryside of Trollope's *Barchester Novels*.

The Return of the Native (1878) investigates the interplay of characters against the background of a gloomy heath, and of a Wessex population deep in its pre-Christian traditions. Fate interpenetrates every chapter of this novel which sees mankind as a puppet of destiny.

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1884-1885): Michael Henchard, young, intense, and terribly drunk, sells his wife on impulse to a sailor. Only later, when Michael has become Mayor of his village, does this fateful early decision come back to haunt him. It all starts ominously:

One evening of late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot. They were plainly but not ill clad, though the thick hoar of dust which had accumulated on their shoes and garments from an obviously long journey lent a disadvantageous shabbiness to their appearance just now.

Hardy's poetry: Thomas Hardy is one of the bitterest and most artistically accomplished of the English poets of his century:

I said to Love,
'Thou art not young, thou art not fair,
No faery darts, no cherub air,
Nor swan, nor dove
Are thine; but features pitiless,
And iron daggers of distress,'
I said to Love.

Victorian Poetry

The spell of the Romantic movement in poetry was strong. The great Romantic poets, after all, lived well into the l9th century, where they become onlookers and admirers in the great Revolutionary movements of their time. The poets of Victorian England for the most part adopted the kinds of imaginative, 'romantic,' mythic, historically nostalgic perspective of Romantic poetry, but the issues presenting themselves to the mid-19th century already were part of a new world. These poets, Arnold and Tennyson, took up the social unease of their time, and the growing sense of conflict between science and religion. Some, like Swinburne, struck out against Victorianism—understood as a staid faith in a staid God, and against a set of required social behaviors which was unforgiving and supported by the whole moral environment of the time.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

67. Tennyson
68. Robert and Elizabeth Browning
69. Matthew Arnold as poet
70. Morris and Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelite poetry
71. Swinburne, the non Victorian

Topic 67 : Tennyson

Overview: Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was the central poet of the Victorian Age, poet laureate for the second half of the century, and in that role, naturally, destined to write many poems for public occasions. He supported the general tenor of Victorian society, though he had a strong romantic and mystical side to him. It is not hard to understand why, after his elevation to the peerage, he was strikingly uncomfortable in the aristocratic conservative atmosphere of the House of Lords. No other poet, incidentally, has been 'raised to the peerage.'

Tennyson's 'Ulysses' (1833): A Romantic of a sort, a dreamer, a striver—as all the greater Victorians were, and a poet ready to speak to universal themes, Tennyson was haunted with the issue of moving forward in one's own life. This passion for striving, for living with doubt, but pushing on had been powerfully formulated in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), on the death of a beloved young friend. In 'Ulysses,' however, Tennyson brought his existential sentiments to a sharp focus in the mind of an aging but restless king.

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,

To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King (1859):* Living under a monarch, though not at this time a king, Tennyson thought often of the burdens of kingship, meaning the burdens of trying to regulate yourself and your own world responsibly, and with an eye to life. In the sequence of narratives which make up these idylls, King Arthur holds events together, and distributes over the tales of the legendary figures, who compose the court, a sense of the careful management style that mature life requires.

Tennyson *The Lotos Eaters* *(1832)*: All Tennyson has to say, about perdurance and persistence, is wrapped up in his splendid poem, rooted in Homer, about the seductions of 'the drug' and the insistence of life:

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;

Topic 68 : Robert and Elizabeth Browning

Overview: Elizabeth was already a widely popular poet when a mutual friend introduced her to a rising star among male poets. Their courtship and the love poems they wrote from it, are the darlings of many anthologies of true romantic love, and rightly so, for the couple seems on the whole to have been made for one another.

Sonnets from the Portuguese *(1850*): a passionately romantic cycle of sonnets to her husband and lover, Robert.

What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Aurora Leigh (1851): Elizabeth's masterpiece, a long and witty commentary on many current social contexts, especially the 'position of women.'

OF writing many books there is no end;
And I who have written much in prose and verse
For others' uses, will write now for mine,–
Will write my story for my better self…

Robert Browning: **Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister** (1842) is an apt illustration of Browning's subtle method of revealing action through character. This soliloquy is one of a series of such poems in which Browning draws us into the mind of an individual and tracks the feelings and thoughts of that person—as though that person was speaking. Here a monk verbally starts to vent his hatred of a fellow monk:

Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,

God's blood, would not mine kill you!

The Ring and the Book: this huge novel/poem (1868-69) is based on an actual l7th century Italian murder, the evidence for which Browning found in an old manuscript. The poem, 21,000 lines, is a vast experiment, by the poet, in assuming the voices of a wide palette of individuals involved in the trial.

Topic 69 :Matthew Arnold as Poet

Overview: Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) , like Tennyson, wrote as though he was a spokesman for his time. Also like Tennyson**,** but much more 'intellectually,' Arnold writes with a consciousness of the radical new thought themes swirling around his time. The impact of Darwin's thought, as well as of Huxley and others who debated the evolution issue; the Higher Criticism of the Bible, which pled for a rational reading of Holy Scripture; and of course the blend of Industry with Middle Class economy and democratic value shifts: all these factors weighed heavily on Arnold's mind, which was equally gifted in critical thinking—we have referred to his *Essays in Criticism*—and in poetry.

Dover Beach (1867): This poem is emblematic of Arnold's sense of cultural despair, aa well as of his feeling of human solidarity—our one recourse in a world which has lost its underpinnings of faith and self-confidence, giving itself over to a thoughtless search for material goods. Arnold comes at the end of the following to condemn his age as one in which 'ignorant armies clash by night'…'as on a darkling plain.'

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full…

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world…

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another!...

Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse (1855): Matthew Arnold was forever ringing the bells of cultural sadness. On a visit to the mother house of the Carthusian order, in the mountains north of Grenoble, Arnold elaborates on his sense that he can neither belong to the Mediaeval past, with its faith, nor to the turbulent present.

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,

With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
I come to shed them at their side.

The Buried Life (1852): Arnold wrote this elegiac poem on the difficulty of communication, even between himself and the woman he loves. Note that Arnold is at his most articulate in describing the challenges to articulation.

Topic 70 :Morris and Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelite poetry

Overview: The nineteenth century is a period of intense cultural change. From the century's beginning, enmeshed in the (to some) thrilling turmoil of Revolutions, wide open to the new, to the century's termination, in which English and generally Western culture are far from the issues of the past, are looking at both economic growth and international peril, is a tremendous cultural distance. The famed acceleration of our own time, which is in part measurable by rapid *techne* developments, was already playing its part in the timeframes of the l9th century. Among the l9th century creative responses, to this fluid environment, was the birth of a new aestheticism, idealizing all the arts and looking back toward the Mediaeval. We turn to two painter/craftsman/poets, William Morris (1834-1896) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882).

The House of Life (1869): Rossetti's collection of 101 sonnets, dealing with personal issues, and celebrating the power of the moment from an aesthetic standpoint. The reader will soon recognize that the artist of these poems is actually a celebrated painter, one of the founders of the pre-Raphaelite artistic movement in l9th century England.

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,—
Memorial from the Soul's eternity
To one dead deathless hour.

Jenny (1870); Rossetti's poem of empathy for a prostitute shows, but with reticence, the poet's willingness to test the waters of Victorian propriety:

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea,
Whose head upon my knee to-night
Rests for a while, as if grown light…

The Defence of Guinevere (1858): This is the most accomplished poetry of William Morris, who, as a painter, craftsman, furniture maker, was known as sensuously pre-Raphaelite, and who carried that skill set over into sublime 'romantic' poetry lodged in the Middle Ages.

…she stopped at last and said:
O knights and lords, it seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things past now and dead.
God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness heartily!

Morris wrote much poetry taking its impulse from Norse literature. **Sigurd the Volsung** (1876) is Morris's longest work, dealing with the tragedy of Siegfried.

Topic 71 :Swinburne the non Victorian

Overview: Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) takes us into the 20 th century, and into a world which will look back with some scorn onto Victorian England, but even in his own time the 'pagan' Swinburne viewed the Victorian world with distaste.

Atalanta in Calydon (1865): This early verse drama turns on a plot from Greek mythology. By this plot the handsome young Meleager, great at battle and beloved of the gods, will live only as long as a firebrand, which his mother has laid in the ashes of a fireplace, remains unburned. Inevitably the consumption of the brand, by a series of tragic mishaps, brings to death the young man and subsequently his mother, Althea. The fragility and passion of life, and the pagan matrix in which it plays out, are true Swinburne.

Hertha (1869): Swinburne celebrates the primal Teutonic earth mother, in this powerful pagan poem whose title segues into the 'earth' we know. Hertha is a distinctly pre-Christian force, and through her Swinburne makes clear his rejection of Victorian religiosity.

I AM that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole;
God changes, and man…

Tristram of Lyonesse (1882): This epic celebrates the glory of love, as it expresses itself in the tale of Tristran and Iseult. The Victorian taboo on the discussion of sexual matters is heavily overthrown in this text, which opens its doors to the passion which leads even to adultery.

Love, that is first and last of all things made,
The light that has the living world for shade,
The spirit that for temporal veil has on
The souls of all men woven in unison,
One fiery raiment with all lives inwrought

7. The Twentieth Century and After

Twentieth Century Fiction

The novel had from its onset, even from Addison and Steele's fictive essays, been involved with the growth of new social interactions and the middle class in which the natural material of fiction, social intercourse, is the stuff of daily life. Fielding and Defoe had carried the trend further, and Dickens and Thackeray, for instance, had brought the genre to sophistication. The 20th century was to see the novel deploy into various forms, as it encountered the dreadful and the experimental of a century which would not come to rest.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

72. Characteristics of the 20th century

73. Joseph Conrad
74. James Joyce and the Boundaries of fiction
75. Virginia Woolf
76. D.H. Lawrence
77. Huxley and Waugh as Novelists of Satire
78. Social Criticism in Golding and Orwell
79. Quest in the Fictions of Greene and Forster

Topic 72:Characteristics of the 20th century

Overview: We have seen that British Imperial power took off in the Renaissance, with the development of excelling naval power and control over international trade. The British Empire itself was to be built on these foundations, and to support, both through the slave trade and, later, through Colonialism, the prosperity and cultural pre eminence of British life. By the 20th century, however, vast social and cultural upheavals—the Great Depression, World War I with its devastating toll in deaths and sufferings, and then, shortly after recovery, World War II—dislocated what was basically the confidence of Victorian Britain. By the second half of the century Britain had been forced to disband its vast Empire, and had been reduced to second class power among the world's nations. Literature, always the most sensitive barometer to the moods and hopes of a culture, reflected a wide variety of unfamiliar mindsets.

The Cultural Reaction: In matters of religion the Victorian Age, with its gloomy Arnoldian reflections, fundamental debates about evolution and Revealed Religion, gave way to a far wider palette of evaluations. The Marxian direction led toward Communism, with its explicit rejection of religious values—the opiate of the people, and carried with it influential thinkers like Spender, Auden, and Isherwood. The opposite, Catholic and conservative, reaction displayed out in the novels of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. World War II and its aftermath left many of the intellectuals in Britain dazed, ready for a new world in which many institutions could be modified or removed—the class system, the monarchy, the Established Church. As we live our 21st century now, we continue to work through the same live issues with which the 20th century bowed out.

The Literary Picture: Cultural turmoil is not necessarily bad for literature, which can flourish amidst complex circumstances, provided the creative milieu is there. Fiction, poetry, and drama all flourished through the difficult years of the 20th century. Some of the creators who were most dubious about the values of contemporary culture were the most effective: James Joyce, with novels that not only experimented but included savage reproaches of Victorian morality; a brilliant playwright like John Osborne, one of the 'angry young men' of the time'; a poet like William Butler Yeats, who saw his time as degraded but found ways, through myth, to restore the glories of a nobler time.

Topic 73 : Joseph Conrad

Overview: It is noteworthy that two of the greatest prose fiction writers in English, in the 20th century, were not Englishmen/women. One is James Joyce, the Irishman. Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) is the more remarkable case of the two, because he came from Polish to English, which he learned from mates aboard ship in the British Merchant Marine. (From the age of l9 Conrad had been employed at sea, originally working from Marseille, and during his professional career assuming many assignments to 'distant destinations' like Africa and Indonesia; destinations and personnages whom Conrad would use abundantly in his fictions.)

Lord Jim (1900): This early novel embraces the theme of honor, shame, 'grace' or the lack of it, which were regular ingredients in Conrad's quite stark, often tragic fiction. Lord Jim himself is a sea captain who, along with some of his mates, has abandoned his ship as it found itself in calamitous danger. The passengers were left aboard, uncared for, and eventually survived. The result was that Jim was found guilty, before a naval court, for abandoning ship. He loses his captaincy rights, and only gradually finds a way to attempt to re establish himself, with a 'Lordly' identity among people who know nothing of him, far away in the Indies. The powerful moral tone of Conrad pervades every detail of this novel, in which shame and self-restoration battle for primacy.

Heart of Darkness (1899): Conrad's novella of memory, in which Marlowe, a recurrent sea captain figure in Conrad's fiction, recounts a voyage to 'the heart of Africa,' to make contact with a European trader agent who has virtually disappeared into the jungle of the Congo. We are left feeling—the text is murky and mysterious-- that Kurtz, the agent, has sold out to the primitive in himself, breaking away from the last restraints of the moral norm.

Victory (1915): written In the midst of WW I, Victory once again struggles with the mind of a person pushed to moral limits. A European businessman, Heyst, having suffered a serious financial setback, makes his way to Indonesia. There he finds himself involved in a love affair, is assailed by the woman's former lover, and in the end, as the woman is killed, kills himself, convinced that he has been immoral and caused ruin.

Topic 74 : James Joyce and the Boundaries of Fiction

Overview: Like Conrad, James Joyce (1882-1941) is though not an English person one of the greatest novelists in the English language. (Ireland was under British rule until l920, and long suffered as an underprivileged colony of Britain.) This seems a significant fact, indicative both of the worldwide spread of English, and of the vigor with which world citizens from outside England are today making English their own creative home. In Joyce's case, as in Conrad's, the non Englishman usage of English is fertile in inventiveness and original styling.

Dubliners (1914): this collection of short stories takes a dark look at the residents of a city which Joyce early abandoned, in order to make his home in Trieste. In Joyce's contempt for his own cultural roots lies his impetus to experiment fiercely with the unexpected powers of his native language.

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916): The move into autobiography—Joyce is the 'young man'—is a deepening of Joyce's narratorial power, and from this text on he will be experimenting with fractured self images. He will, in the same vein, be taking increasingly subtle interest in the way language moulds reality.

Ulysses (1922): One of the century's most controversial novels, not, of course, because of its breathtaking and daring language, but because of the sexual content which kept this material before the censors—censored until 1933 in America, until 1936 in England. Homer's Odyssey provides the mythical backdrop to the novel, which transpires during the course of an extraordinarily ordinary day in Dublin. Of course the day does end with a superb orgasm, Molly Bloom's soliloquy.

Finnegans Wake (1939): This supremely cryptic novel, which is in a sense a single sentence returning into itself at the end, is as it were written both in English and in many

other languages which collide with, and jam into, the text. Words from different languages, and different contexts, are moulded together in an English which is transformed.

The text's own description, perhaps, of the way it itself is constructed:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Topic 75 : Virginia Woolf

Overview: Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is in her way as experimental as James Joyce. Her fiction, like his, takes its own language process as part of its theme. That is not to say that Woolf's novels have no 'plot,' but that part of that plot is the way they describe that plot. She does not go as far as Joyce, in *Finnegans Wake*, which might almost be described as a novel about language, but she, Woolf, enters the mind of her characters as they are perceiving and making language, and one result of this procedure is a great deal of innovative writing about how characters think and feel.

Jacob's Room (1922): Woolf's first novel, an experiment in creating the character of a Jacob who does not appear, whose absence is the subject of the book but is created almost solely by what other characters say of Jacob. In the following passage 'the blot' is a blot of ink.

"Well, if Jacob doesn't want to play" (the shadow of Archer, her eldest son, fell across the notepaper and looked blue on the sand, and she felt chilly—it was the third of September already), "if Jacob doesn't want to play"—what a horrid blot! It must be getting late.

Mrs. Dalloway (1925): In this novel Woolf writes from inside the mind of a middle class English woman who is preparing a dinner party for which she is hostess. Her thoughts criss cross back and forth over the events of preparation as well as over her own past and the inter-war period she is living through. Woolf, like Joyce, is here fracturing the experiencing of everyday life into a thousand prisms.

To the Lighthouse (1927): This is Woolf's most ambitious novel. It takes up two separate episodes of travel to a summer home in the Hebrides. The plot itself, like that of *Mrs. Dalloway,* deals with the inner perceptions of the travellers, their interconnections, and their subtle dialogue, but even more with the 'philosophical' dimensions of the way the family perceives, constructs an inner universe, and inter relates.

Topic 76 :D.H. Lawrence

Overview: Like Woolf, David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) is concerned with what is going on in the heads of his characters. Though there are events and ploits, in Lawrence's work, these elements of the tale dwindle by comparison with the inward discoveries happening within those characters. In many of Lawrence's novels the discovery in question involves a self-realization of the character's profound openness to life—not infrequently in sexual/sensuous/erotic terms.

The Rainbow (1915): This novel traces the development of several generations of the Brangwen family, attending with particular care to their growing sexualities and to the interplay between passion and power in their dynamic. At the end, the central figure, Ursula Brangwen, discovers the amazing power and wonder of the whole sensous world:

she saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.

The Man who Died (1929): This tale gives us, in a nutshell, the daring vision of culture which Lawrence brought to bear on his time. Crucified, laid in the tomb, Christ wakens slowly in his winding cloths, to find rays of sun touching the earth around him where he lies. With great slowness, thawing, he feels the life coming back into himself, he rises, and he walks out into the day.

Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928): Lawrence's most complete testimony to the power and beauty of sensual life on earth. Lady Chatterley's husband, wounded in the war, is unable to maintain his marital responsbilities, and his place is filled by the handsome grounds maintainer of the family estate. The power of the earth and its wonders, which include a natural landscape powerfully rendered, reasserts itself despite all the weaknesses and dreads of mankind.

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

Topic 77 : Huxley and Waugh as Novelists of Satire

Overview: Like Pope and Samuel Johnson, in the 18th century, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) and Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966) were trenchant and often comic critics of their own society. Each of them was a high sophisticate with a sharp pen, so that each of them knew, in himself, the world he was satirizing.

Huxley's **Point Counter Point** (1928): This novel of high society, as its title suggests, develops along the lines of a musical composition. Several high society themes are sustained simultaneously, and conversational strands, among different members of British high society, are interwoven to satiric effect. The dominant picture is of an effete and undirected society.

Brave New World (1932): A dystopian vision of a brave world in which human beings are mass produced on assembly lines, and both hormone and sleep therapies are employed to create docile societies, somewhat a blend both of the vulgar Americanism Huxley despised at the time, and the highly overorganized Communist societies taking sway in continental Europe. Henry Ford, and his role in the Industrial Revolution, are important components of this mechanization-of-culture nightmare.

Waugh's **Brideshead Revisited** (1945) bears the author's signature satirical humor, sense of the absurdity and viciousness of life, and delight in witty language. Conversion to Catholicism had reinforced these perceptions and given him the insight, into life's frailty without God, which makes it especially easy to see the folly (and charm) of human striving.

Waugh, The Loved One (1948), is a ravishing satire on the funeral crematorium industry in California. The main character is an Englishman who has become custodian of a pet crematorium.

At the administration building, he carried the dog to the refrigerator. It was a capacious chamber, already occupied by two or three other small cadavers. Next to a Siamese cat stood a tin of fruit and a plate of sandwiches. Dennis took his supper into the reception-room, and, as he ate it, resumed his interrupted reading.

Retrospective thought: *You will be noticing that there is a wide variety of fictions representing the 20th century. Conrad, Joyce, Woolf, Waugh could hardly advance more startlingly different styles and perspectives!. Like the l9th century, the 20th century wades through dramatically different cultural environments! Wait til you see the 21st!*

Topic 78 : Social Criticism in Golding and Orwell

Overview: While Waugh and Huxley wrote witty/brilliant assaults on high society Britain, shedding light on the culture's empty pretensions, William Golding (1911-1993) and George Orwell (1903-1950) went deeper, and in more uncompromising fashion, in their undermining of the human condition. The experience of two World Wars, if nothing else, was enough to convince thinking writers of the alarming evils latent in humanity.

Orwell, 1984 (1949): We have encountered Huxley's **Brave New World** (1932) and noted that it predicts a future in which mankind becomes essentially mass produced, and all humanity is drained out of us. Remarkably, George Orwell darkens even this dark picture with his ***1984***, which foresees a world in which the totalitarian state is essentially able to crush the individual—as it does the single figure in this novel who is fighting for the human condition. In this new state it is a crime to generate original ideas or to hide away in a public life. Big Brother is everywhere, watching your behavior and your language—which must conform to the rigid demands of Newspeak, and sustaining the war psychology, which is the permanent condition of the state.

Animal Farm (1945): Slashing out against the totalitarian state of Soviet Russia, Orwell depicts a society in which the domesticated animals, the pigs, decided to overthrow their human masters, which they manage to do. Upon downing the tyrants, however, the pigs turn upon their masters and start to dominate one another.

Golding, Lord of the Flies (1954): Like Orwell in *Animal Farm*, Golding sees mankind as inherently base, and in this novel he shows how a group of boys, abandoned on an island in the wake of a plane wreck, make their own society—disastrously, turning on one another in bestial fashion.

The Inheritors (1955): This study in paleoanthropology attempts to get into the mind of the Neanderthal, and makes fascinating investigations in primitive language and religion. These primitive folk are invaded by proto humans, a higher stage of historical reality, who defeat and leave them behind, carrying with them a Neanderthal baby, an ominous inheritance for the future..

Topic 79 : Quest in the Fictions of Greene and Forster

Overview: From the Victorian period on—think of Tennyson and Arnold's 'Dover Beach'—there has been in English literature (and culture) a strain of nostalgia, lostness, even sometimes despair. The tide of faith was receding, geopolitical issues were threatening Mother England, social values were in some chaos as the class system came to seem impermanent. This sense of loss has had a way of morphing into a quest for meaning, a search for truth and value.

E.M. Forster (1879-1970), *A Passage to India:* This novel, written in l924, is one of the masterpieces of intercultural search, and could well be applied to our time, in which the notion of the global village has alerted us to many of the issues involved in trying to understand one another. The tale involves the charm of India, including its inscrutability to a certain English woman, who mistakenly—but fatefully—accuses a young Muslim surgeon of rape.

Graham Greene (1904-1991), *Brighton Rock* (1938*)*: The dark world of anti socials and criminals in a British sea side resort turns into a setting revealing strange insights into the implications of religious belief. Greene is Catholic, as are two of his leading characters, but the true moral gold of the text lies in the soul of Ida, a non religious person with a quiet and practical personal morality.

The Heart of the Matter (1948): This intense novel concerns the moral torment of a Colonial police officer in Sierra Leone. The man is a long serving and competent civil servant, but as his wife's personal discontent grows, and he himself faces financial and then adulterous marital strains, he, Scobie, turns to suicide, which he tries to cover with medical explanations. Even his deep Catholic faith cannot save him from this escape from his pain.

The Power and the Glory (1940): This novel is set in Mexico, at the time of severe anti-Catholic persecution, and concerns a certain 'whiskey priest,' and the broken but intense efforts he makes, to remain faithful to his sacerdotal duties.

20th Century Poetry

Not surprisingly, the major poets of this difficult century, punctuated by wars and rapid social change, are critical and generally unfriendly to their environment. Some seek refuge in religion, some in ancient mythologies, others in high aesthetic refinements of the text, still others in secular political commitments, such as, for a while, Communism.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

80. Hopkins and Hardy
81. World War I Poets: Brooke, Housman, and Owen
82. William Butler Yeats
83. T.S.Eliot the Poet
84. Modernist poets, Thomas and Sitwell
85. Auden and Spender
86. Poets of 'The Movement': Larkin, Fuller, Davie

Topic 80 : Hopkins and Hardy

Overview: Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) still live from the values and perspectives of the l9th century, which has to suggest, in this case, that these two writers were not yet, or just barely, aware of the cataclysms which would mark the first half of the 20th century. Yet, Hardy has not enough pessimism to go around for many, while Hopkins, putting his faith in the religious and the art leading toward it, is fundamentally involved with local historical settings.

Hardy the creator: We have earlier looked at Hardy's fiction, and viewed a small poem, from which we could tell that the work of such a writer will deal with fate, doom, dark destinies—but would do so with a fine mixture of bluntness and artistry.

'Hap' (1866): Hardy's thinking prefers a universe in which a vengeful god is the source of our endless sufferings, rather than a universe, ours, in which blind chance rules:

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
--Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan....
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

Gerard Manley Hopkins the creator: Where Hardy writes in a rather harsh, consonantal style, opening no pathways to romantic lyricism, Gerard Manley Hopkins puts a different kind of strain on English, stressing what he called 'sprung rhythms,' potent alliterative combinations, and imagery that forces the imagination to unusual acrobatics. The 'Windhover,' dedicated to Jesus Christ, soars like the Falcon, and like the human soul that rises:

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy!...

Topic 81 : World War I Poets: Brooke, Housman, and Owen

Overview: The Victorian Age, as we have seen in thinkers like Tennyson and Arnold, was troubled by changing values and new views of the universe, and there was either an escape into the past (Morris, Swinburne), or a profound malaise, in many of the major thinkers. However, nothing in the western world's global experience matched the horrors of World War I, which brought unforeseen trench war struggles, battlefield casualties, and a widespread awareness of the non-heroic drivers of war. Naturally enough literary figures were deeply involved in this struggle, and reacted strongly, and with little good to say of the heroisms of the battlefield.

Rupert Brooke (1887-1915): Of the many British poets involved in the war, Brooke was the only one of distinction to preserve the traditional belief in war as glorious—the belief that began in British culture with the Anglo Saxons. Brooke gives this heroic thinking a strongly nationalist twist, in 'The Soldier':

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;…

A.E.Housman (1859-1936): A Professor of Classics, Housman brought to poetry the care, precision, flawless ear that might be expected of a career student of language. He also imported a cool, ironic, and on the whole dubious account of the human experience.

Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries

These, in the day when heaven was falling,

The hour when earth's foundations fled,

Followed their mercenary calling,

And took their wages, and are dead.

Wilfrid Owen (1893-1918): Owen was killed just before the war ended, and left behind him a collection, **Poems** (1920), which is on the whole a bitter assault on the war—poison gas, emotional traumas, destruction of normal human values. His “Dulce et Decorum est” opens thus:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep.

Topic 82 : William Butler Years

Overview: William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) lived to the brink of World War II, thus experienced the horrors of the First World War, but like his great predecessor Wordsworth, who also changed the course of English poetry, Yeats expressed opinions about the political but did not engage in conflict. His public life brought him into constant co-struggle with the Irish Nationalists, in their quest for freedom from Britain.

Yeats' Early Poems (1889-1910): During the first twenty years of his creativity, Yeats wrote what was for him 'romantic,' truly pre-Raphaelite poetry, often devoted to the beauty of Ireland and Celtic culture—a misty past into which the lover of beauty could escape many of the grim realities of daily life. Thus 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree':

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee;
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

Yeats the Public Figure (1910-1925): Yeats' concern with the War, his role as an Irish Senator, and his increasing concern with social issues in his own country, raises his poetry to a public and social level. (His search to recover from the loss of his love, Maud Gonne, also drives him to new forums of action.) In 'The Wild Swans of Coole' Yeats admires tenacious and beautiful nature:

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

The Mature Poet (1925-death): Yeats continued to deepen and enrich his poetic discourse, and in the marvelous poems of his later years—in the collection, *The Tower* (1928)—he develops a set of symbols, based in his theory of history, which reminds us of the work of Blake, and which heralds in Yeats' most complex and profound work. In one of his finest poems, 'Among School Children,' Yeats imagines himself as what he is, a 'sixty-year-old smiling public man.' As he looks at the children he fantasizes, with the aid of the Greek tale of Leda and the Swan, the beautiful and peril fraught journey of these fine children into an adulthood of passion and loss.

Topic 83 : T.S. Eliot the Poet

Overview: T.S. Eliot, American by birth, but later British by citizenship, is widely viewed as the Modernist poet par excellence, and one of the most significant influences on English language poetry of the 20th century. Like Joyce, Woolf, or Lawrence, Eliot had a sure sense for the needs and preoccupations of his time. In his instance he identified the spiritual malaise, which was finally beginning to haunt the West. Does God exist? Have we access to God? Can we retrieve full humanity without a relation to God? Eliot's masterwork, 'The Waste Land', is his deepest attempt to dramatize these questions.

'The Wasteland' (1922) is a difficult long poem in which Eliot portrayed the aridity and purposelessness of his culture, and induced the reader to anticipate a salvational rain, which would enrich what was formerly a wasteland. The brilliance of the poems lies in its allusive

and erudite symbolism, but the basic sensuous force of the poem is unavoidable. As, to start:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land,
mixing Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain…

'**Ash Wednesday' (1930**) is the first poem of Eliot's to place itself squarely inside the Christian perspective. The inspiration for this poem is Dante's, but the spur to understanding comes from Eliot's participation in the Christian ritual of ash bearing at the beginning of Lent. Eliot's Christian move is not unique, and reminds us of the Catholic turn in Waugh and Greene.

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things

Four Quartets (1943): In this sequence of four long poems, Eliot fleshes out the experiences which seem to him to lead into the Christian experience. 'Burnt Norton,' 'East Coker,' 'The Dry Salvages,' and 'Little Gidding' are the stages in this extended meditation, as it were, on the moment 'in the rose garden,' when the significance of human existence on earth reveals itself.

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.

Topic 84 : Modernist Poets, Thomas and Sitwell

Overview: Dame Edith Sitwell (1887-1964) and Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) both straddled two World Wars, but neither made war a chief theme of their poetry. Each writers was deeply interested in language as such, as were, for instance, Joyce and Hopkins.

Dame Edith Sitwell prided herself on the musicality, on the abstract and often 'wild' imagery and 'spiritual' quality of her poems. Her first volume, *Façade*, was performed to the music of a suite by the English composer, William Walton. In 'Still Falls the Rain' Sitwell addresses her Savior, as she would increasingly as her poems matured:

Still falls the Rain---
Still falls the Blood from the Starved Man's wounded Side:
He bears in His Heart all wounds,---those of the light that died,
The last faint spark
In the self-murdered heart, the wounds of the sad uncomprehending dark,
The wounds of the baited bear---

Dylan Thomas in some ways resembled Edith Sitwell, and shared with her a passion to let language have its head, and to let music lead the way. The following lines, from 'And Death

shall have no Dominion,' give us a sense of the kinship between Sitwell and Thomas, at their best. Thomas speaks of the dead:

When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

Comment: The two poems above strike a theme common to Thomas and Sitwell; the overcoming of death. Sitwell, like Greene and Waugh, was to take a Catholic position toward this challenge, while Thomas chose to power himself across the borders of death with the help of language. Eliot and Hopkins will come to mind, as part of this committee of citizens preoccupied with the meaning of death.

Topic 85 : Auden and Spender

Overview: W.H. Auden (1907-1973) and Stephen Spender (1909-1995) were members of an influential group of l930's English poets, who moved away from what we have been calling Modernism, an aesthetic of high sensibility, toward a conscious social engagement with Marxism. As we can see from the following snippets, both poets remained true to the essential importance of music and the ear, in constructing even socially responsible poetry.

Auden, Poems(1930): The poem entitled 'XVI' shows us Auden in his pre-socialist mode, playful and brilliant, dark but vital.

Time will say nothing but I told you so,
Time only knows the price we have to pay;
If I could tell you I would let you know.

On This Island (1936) is the most ideological of Auden's books of poems.

Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,
Seeing at end of street the barren mountains,
Round corners coming suddenly on water,
Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands,
We honour founders of these starving cities,
Whose honour is the image of our sorrow.

Spender, Collected Poems (1955): Communism, though it was later to be seen as 'the god that failed,' appeared for a few decades to be the answer to the self imposed ills of capitalist society.

Stephen Spender is at his best in love with the highest possibilities of mankind, and for that reason is a sharp critic of the viciousness of capitalist society:

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,

Should tell of the spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

Topic 86
Poets of 'The Movement': Larkin, Fuller, Davie

Overview: The 'Movement' poets—and this may help to place them—were united in their dislike of the wordy, over emotional poetry of Dylan Thomas, who seemed to them seriously out of sync with their time. These poets—our examples here are Philip Larkin (1922-1985), Roy Fuller (1912-1991), and Donald Davie (1922-1995)--are not interested in the large scale issues of social ideology, but in the everyday and in the movements of mind on the everyday level. Scrupulous language is their banner.

Philip Larkin: The Less Deceived (1955) is the key volume in which Larkin formulates his skepticism. The poem in which he makes his statement most forcefully is 'Church-Going,' in which

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end…

Roy Fuller, Collected Poems (1962): Fuller, like Larkin, expresses a regretful sense that the age of values and religious truth is past, and that we must live with a rueful and dark present, lost creatures on a doomed planet:

What does this mean? The individual,
Nature, mutation, strife?
I felt, though I am simple, still the whole
Is complex; and that life,
A huge, doomed throbbing—has a wiry soul
That must escape the knife.

Donald Davie is a master of deft verbal voices, in which the intimate sounds of the relations among lovers and spouses mingle:

I heard both voices falter.
Hyperbole, analogy, allusion
Build up what is no lie, although so wishful:
Conspiratorial, conjugal collusion.

20th Century Drama

British Drama of the 20th century is largely concerned with social critique and political issues, unlike, say, the drama of Shakespeare, which is more 'universal' in scope. It is interesting to observe the development of the century's drama from Shavian intellectuality to a theater of the absurd, which reflects developments in fiction and poetry at the end of the 20th century.

INDIVIDUAL TOPICS IN THIS PERIOD

87. George Bernard Shaw
88. Irish Playwrights: Synge, O'Casey
89. Samuel Beckett
90. English Drama Today

Topic 87 : George Bernard Shaw

Overview: George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) dominated the serious British stage in the first quarter of the 20th century. He wrote more than fifty plays, of which the majority have a social critique slant. His chief model was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright, who in dramas like *The Doll's House* (1879), made an ardent plea for women's rights as human beings, both within the family and within society. Shaw shared this belief, as he fought for a social structure in which wealth was distributed, private property abolished, and voting systems revised. Shaw's plays regularly turn around such current topical issues, and arranged sharp criticism of the Victorian solution.

Arms and the Man (1894): In this war based comedy, Shaw depicts a woman engaged but not deeply involved with a wealthy businessman and defender of the status quo. Into the lady's life bursts a war-evading Swiss solder, who hides under her bed in order to escape the fighting, and lo and behold she helps get him out of harm's way. What strikes her, in this non military man, is his respect for her as a woman, and in the end, as you can imagine, she chooses just the man who hid under her bed.

The Doctor's Dilemma (1906): Prefaced by Shaw's lengthy discussion of the inadequacy of medicine in Britain, this play exposes the fallacious bases on which serious medical professionals make their decisions. (The leading research physician in the play, for instance, makes important decisions based on an affair he is having with a colleague's wife.) Shaw goes for the jugular of the British medical profession.

Saint Joan (1923): Shaw created this tragedy after careful reading of the documents pertaining to Joan of Arc's personal history, trial, torture, and ultimate canonization. At the very end of the play the voice of Joan can be heard, asking when humanity will be ready to accept its saints. The play itself makes an interesting assumption, and one not regularly found in Shaw's plays, that the interested parties all acted in good faith and that the tale is a tale of how humanity is.

Topic 88 : Irish Playwrights: Synge, O'Casey

Overview: We have seen the preeminent role the Irish poet Yeats played in the development of modern English poetry. Earlier in English literary history we have looked at the remarkable role played by Irishmen like Swift and Joyce, both of them key figures in the creation of literature in English. John Millington Synge (1871-1909) and Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), both Irish, played a great role in creating the 20th century stage tradition in English literature.

Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (1907): Synge's play presents what at the time was widely taken to be a serious slight to the Irish peasantry. The protagonist enters a bar, claiming to have killed his father, and to be on the run. The peasants at the bar are impressed by Christy's story, and the women in the village fall for him right and left. Subsuquently Dad, who was not quite dead, enters the village; at first the townspeople feel

scorn for Christy, but that perspective changes, as Father and Son go off to travel together, leaving some broken hearts that have again fallen for Christy. Riots broke out throughout Ireland, at this presentation of a drama seemingly indifferent to the intelligence of the irish peasantry.

Deirdre of the Sorrows (1910): a poetic drama set in the misty area of Irish myth. Unfinished at Synge's death, this play was completed by William Butler Yeats, and bears his stamp, too. In essence an old man with power lays marriage claim on a young woman, Deirdre, who has no desire to marry age. In the end, after she has found love at another man's home, Deirdre comes to a tragic death, as does the original aged suitor, who is left with nothing to show for it.

O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars (1907): In this play O'Casey attacks a sacred cow, the Easter Uprising (1916) in which Irish Nationalists made clear their determination to be free of British occupation. O'Casey, a Socialist, indicates strongly, in this deeply partisan play, that sentimental nationalism will do the workingman no good, and that what he needs is simply equal distribution of the wealth. This play, like Synge's *Playboy,* was widely and vociferously attacked by the Irish people, as a desecration of Irish values.

Topic 89 :Samuel Beckett

Overview: Samuel Beckett, another Irish playwright, (1906-1989), brings an absurdist setting into the English language theater, and thus displays some of the environing cultural climate of the France to which Beckett moved in his twenties, tired, like James Joyce, of the provincial life styles of Ireland. Beckett wrote his plays and novels in French, then translated them into English. The power of his innovative symbolism and scenograpy, as well as his trademark tragic-comic bleakness, have exercised huge influence on the English language theater.

Waiting for Godot ((1935): This stark, minimally staged drama joins two tramps, who are endlessly hanging around waiting for the arrival of some mysterious figure, Godot; to which are added two enigmatic characters, one holding the other as a slave, on a rope, symbolizing in their relationship the bitterness of the human condition. Even the aspirations, of this wretched ignorant thing, the human, are dim and fumbling. Who is Godot?

Endgame (1958): In this one act play, with only four characters, Beckett highlights a pair, one aged, blind and comically bitter, the other, unable to sit down, his servant: the two of them locked into a stupefying round of witticisms, while in the corner, stuffed into rubbish bins and occasionally joining the dialogue, are the aged man's legless parents. The bare room of the play, outside which there seems to be no world left although it is said to be near the sea, seems squarely planted at the end of the world, as the title suggests.

Krapp's Last Tape (1959): A one act play, this time originally written in English, and destined for a Northern Irish actor Beckett admired. The play is a monologue, in which the now sixty-nine year old Krapp plays tapes he has made on earlier birthdays, starting with a rehearing of his thirty-ninth birthday tape. Life is visibly darker and more bitter for Krapp now, and his last tape, with its occasional detours into random memory and dirty reminiscence, leaves the appropriately bad taste in the playgoer's memory.

Topic 90 : English Drama Today

Overview: Three English language playwrights born in the l930's will serve to wrap up our survey. All three of these writers—Harold Pinter (1930-2008), Tom Stoppard (1937-) and

Athol Fugard (1932-)—recognized the important influence of Beckett, yet none of them followed quite the bleak path we have seen Beckett taking. Each of these three playwrights finds either humor, persistence, or involvement emerging from the world we live in.

Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (1965): With Beckett, Pinter in this play shares a kind of blunt minimalism of dialogue, rough sentiments, and a dark view of life's possibilities. The story involves social dynamics in a North London working class family, into which a long missing son, Teddy, returns with his just married wife. Teddy, a philosophy professor who has gone to America, does not fit into the picture, and before long Dad and his brother, and two more sons, are flirting actively with Ruth. In the end Teddy leaves to return to America, and the family is once more intact. Noteworthy, and Beckettian, is Teddy's indifference to the family flirtation situation, and Ruth's casual acceptance of whatever comes.

Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (1966): The protagonists in this absurdist/existential play are two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Thrust into prominence by the play, they react to the events of *Hamle*t which are going on around them, and above all they quip, witticize, and philosophize about language in a thousand ways, both accepting and making fun of the convention that has rendered them illusions of reality.

Athol Fugard, Master Harold and the Boys (1982): This play delicately probes the conflicts brought into personal relations by institutionalized racism. Three former friends, one white two black, are making their ways through congenial but slightly fraught conversation, when the Dad of the white man returns from hospital, and unleashes a flurry of racially grounded hostilities which even old friendship can only just barely start to overcome.