

The Sonnet

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In the early part of the sixteenth century Sir Thomas Wyatt (1504-42), who had come in contact with Italian poetry while on a mission to Italy, introduced the sonnet to England, varying the Italian form by ending his sonnets with a couplet, a practice not found in Italian poetry. His friend Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1515-1547), made further changes and produced what is called the English form of the sonnet. Most Elizabethan sonneteers followed this form.

The sonnet has a fixed pattern, a certain discipline not found in other forms. It is a short poem of fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme restricted by a variety of principles. To write a good sonnet was not only a severe test of skill, but also a mark of distinction. It is perhaps for this reason that most poets from Shakespeare onwards have tried their hand at the sonnet. During the Elizabethan era, a gentleman was expected to be able to turn out a sonnet, even if not an excellent one, as one of his accomplishments.

Sonnets are sometimes written in a sequence. A sonnet-sequence is a group of sonnets having a common theme or addressed to a single individual, and usually dealing with love. Petrarch was chiefly responsible for the popularity of the sonnet-sequence in England towards the close of the sixteenth century with his famous cycle to Laura. Some of the most important Elizabethan sonnet-sequences are Sir Philip Sidney's (1554-86) Astrophel and Stella, which was the start of a vigorous tradition, Edmund Spenser's (1552-99) Amoretti, love sonnets in honour of his bride, and Shakespeare's unnamed sequence. Of the Victorian era the most famous are Elizabeth B. Browning's (1806-61) Sonnets From The Portuguese addressed to her husband, Robert Browning, and Dante G. Rossetti (1828-82) House of Life, addressed to his wife.

There are different types of sonnets : the petrarchan

Shakespearean, the Spenserian, the Miltonic and the more contemporary type; but, strictly speaking, sonnets may be divided into three general types: The Petrarchan (or Italian), the Shakespearean and the Miltonic.

The Italian sonnet is divided into two parts: the first part is composed of eight lines and is called the octave. The second part is composed of the last six lines and is called the sestet. At the end of the octave there is a pause known as the 'turn' or 'volta'. The octave states the main idea or problem or theme of the poem; the sestet provides an answer or resolution and bring the matter to a conclusion.

The octave rhymes abba, abba and may be composed of eight run-on lines or two quatrains. The sestet rhymes in any of these patterns: cde, cde, cdc, cdc... Here is an example of Italian sonnet as used by John Keats (1795-1821):

On first looking Into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And manly goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold

a
b
b
a

Of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as him demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold

a
b
b
a

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific -- and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise --
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

c
d
c
d
c
d

The Shakespearean or English sonnet consists of three quatrains and a couplet, rhyming abab, cdcd, efef, gg. In this form the idea is developed throughout the three quatrains and completed with a final couplet than

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often comes in the form of an epigram, as in the following Shakespearean sonnet (no. 18)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? a
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate b
 Rough windes do shake be darling buds of May a
 And Summer's lease hath all too short a date: b
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, c
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd; d
 And every faire from faire sometime declines, c
 By chance, or nature's changing course untrim'd: d
 But thy eternal Summer shall not fade, e
 Nor lose possession of that faire thou ow'st, f
 Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade, e
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st, f
 So long as men can breath or eyes can see, g
 So long lives this, and this gives to thee. g

The Miltonic sonnet was invented by John Milton (1608-74). It rhymes abba, abba, cde, cde. It is a development of the Petrarchan form but without a pause between the octave and the sestet. Milton made his sonnet one unit, a gradual culmination, rather than the contrast of two ideas. In the following example he is using the sonnet form for a personal experience -- his own blindness:

When I consider how my light is spent a
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide, b
 And that one talent, which is death to hide, b
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent a
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present a
 My true account, lest He, returning, chide; b
 "Doth exact day-labor, light denied?" b
 I foundly ask. But Patience, to prevent a
 That murmur, soon replies, "doth not need c
 Either man's work or His own gifts; who best c
 Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state d
 Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed, e
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest; c
 They also serve who only stand and wait." d
 e

Another type of sonnet, an adaptation of the English form, is the Spenserian sonnet. It rhymes abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee., as in the following example from Spenser's the Amoretti (LXXV) :

One day I wrote her upon the strand,
 But came the waves and washed it away
 Agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
 But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.
 Vayne man, sayed she, that doest in vaine assay,
 A mortall thing so to immortalize.
 For I my selve shall lyke to this decay,
 And eek my name bee wyped out lykewise.
 Not so, (quod I) let baser things devize
 To dy in dust, but you shall live by fame;
 My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
 And in the hevens wryte your glorious name.
 Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
 Our love shall live, and later life renew.

a
b
a
b
b
c
b
c
d
c
d
e
e

Sonnet literature has witnessed many variations since the days of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, not in the structure of the sonnet but in the spirit and subject matter. The following are examples of sonnets written at different times writers on a variety of themes.

This is an English sonnet in the hands of Shakespeare :

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
 Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
 Give warning to the world that I am fled
 From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
 Nay, if you read this line, remember not
 The hand that write it; for I love you so,
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
 If thinking on me then should make you woe.
 O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
 When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,

And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free;
So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful liness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

(William Wordsworth)

The Italian form in the hand of Mrs. Elizabeth B. Browning (1806-61) :

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breath and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints – I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life. - and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death

(from Sonnets from the Portuguese, no. 43)

Sonnets are not always written in the Italian or Shakespearean forms. Some of them are irregular. The following example, Ozymandias, by Percy B. Shelley (1792-1822) is one of these irregular sonnets:

Ozymandias

met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Narrative Poetry

Poems which tell stories are called narrative poems. Like stories told in prose, they have characters (real or unreal) and incidents and they are usually vivid, exciting and dramatic. A narrative poem however is told in a more simple, direct and compressed manner than a short story.

Stories told in verse are old in history. They were told centuries before the prose writers of many nations began to tell them. Some of the most famous narrative poems in English are Geoffrey Chaucer's (1340-1400) Canterbury Tales. These are stories told in verse in the most delightful way by a group of pilgrims to the shrine of Saint Thomas a Beckett at canterbury. Equally famous are the stories revolving around the legendary King Arthur and his knights of the round Table -- stories dealing with chivalry, love and loyalty.

Narrative poetry is the three kinds: the epic (the heroic epic and the mock-epic), the ballad (the popular or folk ballad and the literary ballad) and the romance.

The epic is the most elaborate form of narrative poetry. The epic is a heroic poem in high or elevated style, relating the deeds of a hero in a great struggle, conflict or action, as in Beowulf, the first English epic. The epic hero is a character with heroic abilities, endowed with almost superhuman warlike qualities. The most famous examples of epics are Homer's, The Iliad and the Odyssey, Virgil's Aeneid (these are called classical epics) and Milton's Paradise Lost - a long poem relating the story of the fall of man, in an elevated style. Other poems which are not epics in the true sense of the word but have epic dimensions or epic themes are Wordsworth's The Prelude and Tennyson's Idylls of the King, in which he makes use of the Arthurian (after King Arthur) legend.

The mock-epic follows the style and conventions of the classical epic, but instead of treating heroic actions it treats ordinary or familiar or even trivial experiences for the purpose of ridicule or satire. The most famous mock-epic in English is Alexander Pope's (1688-1744) The Rape of the Lock, in which Pope follows Homer's tradition in the Iliad to relate a trivial incident, though with social implications. The incident is about a young man cutting of a lock from the hair of a certain lady!

The Ballad is a narrative poem in quatrains (four lines that rhyme abab). It is of two kinds: The popular ballad and the literary ballad. The popular ballad is often anonymous, passing along by word of mouth from one person to another. It is simple in theme and form, condensed narrative, dealing with elementary emotions such as love, hate, jealousy, fear and so on. Its themes are varied ranging from domestic themes like love tragedies, folklore and superstition. Technically, the ballad makes frequent use of rhyme, repetition and refrain to create a high musical effect. Amongst the well-known popular ballads are Sir Patrick Spence which is an old anonymous Scottish ballad describing the disastrous loss at sea of Sir Patrick, his ship and his crew -- as a result of royal vanity. Also very famous are the stories about Robin Hood. He is the hero of many popular ballads. He was a huntsman who lived in a forest called Sherwood. He stole from the rich to give to the poor.

The literary ballad resembles the popular ballad in theme and treatment, but is different in being more complex and sophisticated. It is anonymous and it is not transmitted orally from generation to generation or from place to place as the popular ballad. Literary ballads usually deal with more complex stories involving psychological themes. The most famous of this type of ballad is S.T. Coleridge's (1772-1834), The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, a story of guilt, suffering and repentance.

The Romance is a long narrative (in verse or prose) of love and adventure in which the events are surprising, magical or miraculous. The most familiar instances are medieval and courtly in setting. The Arthurian (after King Arthur) romances are the most famous in English.

NARRATIVE OR DESCRIPTIVE POEMS

Part 2.

27. *The Supper* is a fascinating story told by Walter de la Mare. As in many of this writer's poems, the real and the fanciful are skilfully blended, so skilfully, indeed, that all seems real. But if all is real, how is it that the wolf loses his supper?

The pictures in this poem are most striking, and the descriptive words and phrases are musical and forcible. Take, for example, the first stanza:

A wolf he pricks with eyes of fire
Across the night's o'ercrusted snows,
Seeking his prey,
He pads his way
Where Jane benighted goes,
Where Jane benighted goes.

How vividly the scene is presented! Cannot you see the fiery eyed wolf padding across the snow where *he walks* all alone at night? Doesn't the atmosphere of this stanza *make* you feel creepy, and fill you with anxiety for the safety of Jane?

Then consider the significance of the following words: *pricks*—to track by footprints; *o'ercrusted snows*—snow covered with a crust of hard frost; *pads*—walks or runs with steady dull footsteps; *benighted*—overtaken by night.

What an immense amount is told us in a few words! Take another stanza, the fourth, and see beautiful Jane, apprehensive of danger, followed by the greedy wolf, his eyes green with jealous rage, gloating over his intended prey:

Now his greed's green doth gaze unseen
On a pure face of wilding rose,
Her amber eyes
In fear's surprise
Watch largely as she goes,
Watch largely as she goes.

NARRATIVE OR DESCRIPTIVE POEMS

When you have read and been thrilled by the story, go over it many times and look for the gems of language, for "He that would search for pearls must dive below."

28. *A Smuggler's Song* is taken from *Puck of Pook's Hill*, one of the many notable books written by Rudyard Kipling. In earlier days smuggling was very prevalent in England. It was a difficult and dangerous task, for the smuggling was done mostly on moonless nights, when, perhaps, the sea was rough and the weather foul; and then there was the added danger of being caught by the king's officers. As this story relates, people living near the coast knew very well from certain signs when the smugglers were busy, but they took care never to betray them, either through fear of the consequences, or because they hoped for a share in the smugglers' spoil.

29. *The Knight's Leap* is a legend. It is a fine narrative, told in a straightforward manner, of a brave knight who, besieged in his castle, refused to be taken prisoner, and went bravely to his death.

27. THE SUPPER.

A wolf he pricks with eyes of fire
Across the night's o'ercrusted snows,
Seeking his prey,
He pads his way
Where Jane benighted goes,
Where Jane benighted goes.

He curdles the bleak air with ire,
Ruffling his hoary raiment through,
And lo! he sees
Beneath the trees
Where Jane's light footsteps go,
Where Jane's light footsteps go

Dramatic Poetry

Dramatic poetry is concerned with the use of verse on the stage. plays. But there are many poems described as 'dramatic' without being necessarily written for stage purposes. They are dramatic in print only. dramatic poetry, the poet, like dramatist, to portray life or a character depends on the use of dialogue (carried out in poetic language) action. At the time it was natural and fitting to write plays in verse form. Both author and audience believed that poetry was the right medium for writing plays.

Verse drama traditions are old in history. The play developed first in poetry. In England the use of verse in drama was popular during the Middle Ages when stories from Bible and the lives of saints were illustrated in verse form. It was believed that such serious themes could only be expressed in language which is elevated and dignified as poetry. But it was during Shakespeare's time that verse drama achieved complete maturity. Shakespeare made great advances in this tradition, as did the Elizabethans who preceded him. The Elizabethans chose to write plays in verse because in these plays they were generally concerned with great persons: kings, queens, statesmen, nobles and generals. They were not writing about the ordinary man in the street. It was the convention that such people as nobles, kings, etc. spoke in a more elevated way than the ordinary people and therefore poetry seemed to be very appropriate. Hence most of the subject of tragedy and history, and even many of the comedy, were given the dignity of verse.

When poets wrote for the stage they had to think not only of language but also of action. On the stage they wished to represent men and women in action, capable of expressing their feelings freely and naturally. The use of rhyme therefore seemed to them to be a hampering device: too artificial and restricting. A more convenient device was the use of blank verse.

At first, Shakespeare used rhyme in his early plays, but later on, common with other contemporary dramatists, he discarded rhyme and made the unrhymed iambic pentameter, i.e., blank verse, his normal medium.

Blank Verse :

Blank Verse is verse which does not rhyme, usually written in iambic pentameter. It is a widely used form of poetry in many different periods. It has been used by such great poets as Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and others.

Blank Verse was introduced into English in the fourth decade of the sixteenth century by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who used the form in translating two books of Virgil's Aeneid. Surrey received the idea of blank verse from Italy. After Surrey a number of writers experimented with blank verse but results were rigid till Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) gave it life and distinction in his verse play Tamurlaine (1590).

Blank Verse as used by Marlowe was carried on by Shakespeare, who employed it with great mastery and variety. In his hands, blank verse was a perfect instrument for character portrayal and for the presentation of ideas and emotions. Shakespeare and his contemporaries experimented with blank verse, making it more flexible. They allowed one line to run on the next; they varied the incidence of the stresses and they used the caesura more flexibly. The stock pattern of blank verse has a caesura about the middle of the line and a heavy pause at the end. Marlowe and Shakespeare varied this rather and monotonous arrangement.

After the Elizabethans, great blank verse drama was weakened; but blank verse was still being used, not in the theatre, but in long poems, as in Milton's Paradise Lost. After Milton blank verse was somewhat eclipsed in favour of the heroic couplet (see glossary). It was revived again toward the middle of the eighteenth century. In the Nineteenth century blank verse was used extensively by almost every major poet: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson and Browning. By the end of the nineteenth century, blank verse had again lost its vitality. Long poems were no longer very interesting. There were still poets who used blank verse narratives, but these were not very popular.

At the turn of the twentieth century poetic drama was revived in an attempt to "create another Shakespeare", but the poets who wrote poetry for the stage, notably T.S. Eliot, used such forms that cannot be described as blank verse in the strict sense of word.

EBGLISH POETRY: ITS BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

A brief survey

Anglo-Saxon poetry : VII to XI Centuries

English poetry has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon period. The Angles and the Saxons were Germanic tribes who settled in Britain, bringing with them their own kind of literature, language and ideals. These tribes were brave and adventurous and like many an ancient people they loved to sing of great battles, heroic deeds, gods, and heroes. It was in these songs that English poetry began not in English as we know it to-day, but in Anglo-Saxon or Old English.

One of the most important poems of this period is Beowulf, in which many of the ideals above are enshrined. Beowulf is the first English epic written in Anglo-Saxon or Old English. It is a long poem consisting of more than three thousand lines full of vivid adventures. It was composed by an anonymous poet around the seventh century. It tells the story of a heroic leader, Beowulf, and his courage in fighting Grendel, the monster, and a dragon. Besides Beowulf, there were other shorter pieces such as Widsith, The Wanderer and the Seafarer.

Other than these poems of heroic deeds, there was also Christian verse written by two notable religious poets of this period: Caedmon, the first Anglo-Saxon Christian poet, and Cynewulf (Kiniwulf). Both these poets were chiefly interested in Biblical material.

Anglo-Saxon poetry is characterized by certain features. Its language is quite different from modern English. It reflects the traditions of an older world. It does not have rhyme. It is based on the principle of alliteration and on the use of 'kennings'. Kenning is an old-fashioned device no longer used by poets. It is a kind of metaphor "in which the simple name of anything is replaced by a phrase describing one of its functions or qualities." Thus, ring-giver is used for king, sea-wood for ship and so on.

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The Medieval Period : XI to XIV Centuries

In 1066 England was invaded by William I the Conqueror who came from Normandy, in France. With this conquest England fell under a Norman-French influence since the Normans brought with them their own way of life and their own literary taste. Thus, a new chapter in the literary as well as the political history of England was inaugurated, quite different from the Anglo-Saxon period. This influence resulted in the appearance of a new type of poetry of which the romances were the most popular. Romances were long poems which dealt with the adventures of brave and loyal knights rescuing beautiful ladies. These stories passed from France to England. Many of them were written in French. Of the specifically English romances is Sir Gawain and the Green Knight which is a long alliterative poem consisting of 2500 lines. It was written by an anonymous poet who is believed to be the same author of one of the finest alliterative poems of the fourteenth century, called, The Pearl. Both these poems were written in the same dialect of the north-west Midlands. Of the other famous romances were the stories about the legendary King Arthur and his knights of Round Table.

The other type of poetry which became popular during this period were the sermons, called homilies, written in metrical form. These poems were didactic in nature.

The third type was the bestiary or fabliaux (called by their French name). These were poems about animals and birds endowed with human vices and virtues. Of these The Owl and the Nightingale, written by an anonymous poet, was the most famous. The Owl represents duty and the Nightingale, beauty.

Geoffrey Chaucer : 1340-1400

Geoffrey Chaucer was the greatest poet of the Middle Ages. He is often described as "The father of English Poetry" (it was Dryden who gave him this title). His work has often been regarded as the actual and effective starting point of English literature. He was the real founder of English poetry. He used the language from which modern English is

directly descended. His poetry differs from Old English in many ways. He introduced rhyme as a new principle not found in Old English poetry and made his verse more regular with a definite rhythm. He used a line of five iambic feet which has become, since his time, a favourite type of line amongst many English poets. His poetry also differs from old English poetry in that it is more literary since he himself was a scholar, a courtier and a man who knew much about the world.

Chaucer's poetical works fall into three periods. In the early period he imitated French models, particularly the famous allegorical romance, called Le Roman de la Rose, of which he made a translation, naming it Romaunt of the Rose. The poem of the second period show the influence of Italian literature. In this period he wrote The Parliament of Fowls, a fable in verse in which the characters are birds, and Troilus and Criseyde, a poem of tragic love, which is one of his masterpieces. In the third period he wrote his other masterpiece The Canterbury Tales. These are stories narrated by a group of pilgrims, from different ranks of society, on their way to visit the shrine of St. Thomas a Beckett at Canterbury. The vivid description of these characters and their manners makes these tales most delightful to read and render Chaucer a great story teller.

Another important poet of this period is William Langland (1332-1400), the author of one of the greatest of English medieval works: The Vision of Piers Plowman. This is an alliterative, allegorical poem in which Langland attacks evil and corrupt practices of society particularly in regard to the oppression of the poor.

During the Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries the Ballad became a popular form of poetry. Many were composed at this time, including the series woven around Robin Hood and his 'merry' man.

Toward the end of the Fifteenth century, in 1476, William Caxton (1422-91) established the first printing-press in England, which was of great service to literature.

The Sixteenth Century : the Renaissance Period

The Renaissance period in English literature is also called the

each virtue in a book, but only six books were completed.

Spenser's greatest contribution to English poetry was the Spenserian stanza, a type of stanza particularly suitable for descriptive or reflective poetry. The Spenserian stanza is a nine-lined stanza, rhyming a b a b c c, at the last line of which has six feet instead of five and is called 'Alexandrine'. Such a line creates a very dream-like, lingering effect.

Spenser's other notable works include The Shepherd's Calendar (1579) which is a pastoral poem, made up of twelve books, one for each month of the year, dealing with love and various other subjects. Spenser is also noted for two lyrical poems The Epithalamion (1594) and Prothalamion (1596), as for his series of sonnets known as the Amoretti. The Amoretti consists of eighty-eight sonnets, written in the Petrarchan manner, describing his love for Elizabeth Boyle whom he married in 1581.

Another great poet, as well as a great dramatist, of this period was William Shakespeare (1564-1616). As a poet, Shakespeare is most famous for his sonnets which number amongst the greatest in the English language. They are 154 sonnets: numbers 1-126 are addressed to a friend and the remainder are addressed to a woman, known as 'the dark lady of the sonnets'. Shakespeare is also noted for his songs many of which have been set to music. Equally important as a writer of songs and lyrics is another poet/dramatist, Ben Jonson (1572-1637). Ben Jonson was the first Poet Laureate of England.

The Seventeenth Century

The Seventeenth Century was one of the richest periods in the history of English literature, both in achievement and variety. It was also an age of conflict, resulting in Civil War fought between King Charles I (1625-1649) and Parliament, whose chief commander was Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). The causes of the war were religious and economic. This conflict went along with a kind of revolution which took place in the human mind, bringing about a new spirit, different from the past and near to the modern. This was a scientific spirit, one of observation and analysis whether of facts, feelings or ideas.

France of Charles II. It is also called the age of Dryden because Dryden was the most dominating literary figure of this period.

When Charles II returned from exile to England he brought with him from France French manners and French literary tastes. He opened the theatres which were closed by the Puritans and in doing so many second-rate writers were encouraged to produce second-rate material both in verse and in the theatres. The romantic spirit of the Elizabethans and the moral discipline of the Puritans became things of the past.

As reaction against this lowering spirit of literary activity, a new type of writing flourished to become the pre-eminent quality of the Restoration period, which is satire. The chief exponent of satire was Dryden. Its aim, as Dryden himself has said, was "the emendement of vices by correction." Along with satire, the writers of the period made two other important contributions to English poetry by emphasizing realism and precision in writing. This developed into a style which is clear, precise, concise, formal and elegant, which is called the Classical Style. It was Dryden who laid the foundation of the classical school of poetry in England.

Besides being a poet, Dryden was a critic and a dramatist as well as a poet, his outstanding achievement was his verse satires of which Absalom and Achitophel (1681-2) and MacFlecknow (1682) are the best known. The first is a plotical satire, in heroic couplets (the heroic couplet was a favourite verse form during this period); the second, a more personal satire is an attack against a contemporary poet, Shadwell by name, whom Dryden disliked. Dryden is also famous for two long didactic poems: Religio Laici (1682) and The Hind and the Panther (1687). His "song for St. Cecilia's Day" is a beautiful ode. It was set to music by the famous composer, George F. Handel (1685-1759).

The Eighteenth Century : The Augustan Age

The chief poet of this period was Alexander Pope (1688-1744). He was Dryden's disciple, bringing to perfection many of the artistic ideals set up by Dryden. In his hands of heroic couplet became highly refined and imposing, and his style retained the same qualities of clarity, balance and elegance which characterized Dryden's style. Like the restoration period,

wrote the famous Elegy written in the country churchyard (1750), in which he reflects on the death of the poor and the humble. Still another who followed the same line of thought and expression is William Collins (1721-1559). Also famous for his extremely musical pieces and his portrayal of country life as well as his rebellious spirit is the Scots poet, Robert Burns (1759-1786).

The Eighteenth century closed with a prominent poet, William Blake (1757-1827), who was also an engraver and a mystic. His poetry is visionary and symbolic. His peculiarities of thought and imaginative vision have placed him more among the Romantics than his own contemporaries. His most famous poems are Song of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794), which form a group of short lyrics, simple in their diction but profound in their meaning. His other works include a series of prophetic books.

The Nineteenth century

The nineteenth century includes both the Romantic and the Victorians. The Romantics were writing between 1790 and 1830. From 1830 to around the end of the Nineteenth century the scene was dominated by the Victorians.

The Romantics

The Romantic movement did not happen all of the sudden. In the last few decades of the Eighteenth century, Neo-classicism in England was dying slowly and Romanticism was growing stronger and stronger until it began to take its final shape, under certain influences which changed many of the ideals of society. Of these the influence of the French revolution (1789) was one and the growing effects of the industrial revolution was another. These events, especially the French revolution made such concepts as democracy, Freedom, equality and brotherhood, popular and inspired many poets to write about them. Almost all the Romantic poets were deeply influenced by the French revolution. They all started as warm revolutionary sympathizers, but were disillusioned by its aftermath.

Byron's work, perhaps even more his personality, became very influential throughout Europe. people were fascinated by his poems, such as Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-1818), which is an autobiographical poem, written in spenserian stanzas, and in which he introduces his Byronic hero, who is very much like Byron himself. His Oriental Tale caused a sensation. These were exotic tales inspired by the East which he has visited. Of his satirical poems, Don Juan (1819-24) is the most outstanding one.

Unlike Byron and Shelley, Keats was not radical in his political views. He indulged himself in art and beauty, being deeply influenced by the poetry of Spenser and Shakespeare. His poetry is rich with sensual images and musical delight. His great year was 1819 during which he produced all the work on which his reputation now rests; the narrative poems like The Eve of St. Agnes, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Isabella, Hyperion and the wonderful odes; to A Nightingale, On a Grecian Urn, Celadon, Melancholy, To Autumn and to Psyche.

Keats like the other Romantic poets used varied verse forms. Like them he was a lover of Nature but was more interested in the physical aspects of nature, its charm and beauty. He was particularly skillful in using imagery and colour. Shelley immortalized him in his famous elegy Adonais.

The Victorians

By 1830, most of the Romantic poets were dead. Wordsworth lived until 1850, but his poetic abilities were already exhausted. With the death of most of the Romantic poets, the spirit of Romanticism lost its vitality and vigour. This change coincided with a wave of great reforms brought about with the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. This Bill opened a new chapter in the life of the Victorian society and, together with other influences, gradually led to the appearance of a new style in literature. Poetry included. Though coloured with Romanticism in its earliest phase, the poetry of this period moved towards realism.

Because the Victorian period is so long, it is often divided into periods

found to be very invigorating, encouraging many of them to write their works on comparable principles.

Thomas Hardy was a novelist and a poet. His poetry is as distinguished as his novels and the best of it was written in his later years when he had stopped writing novels. His themes are traditional, but in his technique he was not conventional. His poems are sharp, dramatic, ironic, compressed, and though he shows a pessimistic tendency, he gives a true picture of human experience. Some of his most admired poems are the ones he wrote to his dead first wife, included in Satires of Circumstances (1914). Hardy was the poet of disillusionment -- a much recurrent theme in modern poetry.

The Modern Period ✓

Modern poetry is very different from either the Romantic or Victorian traditions. The conditions of modern life were not only different but very complex. Radical changes had taken place and various influences were at work which resulted in new attitudes and tendencies both in life and in literature. The 19th century needed poets who were fully alive to what was happening around them, and who had the courage and technique to express it.

To find the right expression, the modern poets experimented with a variety of verse-forms. The traditional forms did not serve their purpose any more; they were no longer adequate or they had to be modified to suit the new age. A more suitable technique was 'irregular verse' and 'free verse' (or vers libre). Free verse is a kind of verse which disregards the traditional rules of rhyme and metre and follows the cadences of spoken language. Rather than being based on actual metre, it is based on cadence. By employing this type of verse, the modern poets made the rhythm of their poems closer to natural speech -- or 'speech rhythm'.

Another distinctive quality of modern poetry is its language. It is highly compressed, symbolic, suggestive and intellectual. It is difficult to grasp despite its simplicity. The poets use language in a realistic manner for realistic purposes, treating the pleasant and the unpleasant aspects of life alike.

Modern poetry was written under various influences: social, intellectual and political, of these influences was the Great War of 1914-