

Literature: most generically, is any piece of written works. More restrictively, literature is writing considered to be an art form, or any single writing considered to have artistic or intellectual value, often due to using language in ways that differ from ordinary usage. It can be divided into three main types:

A- Poetry: is a form of literature that uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language—such as structural, sense and sound devices— to suggest meanings in addition to, or in place of, the ordinary apparent meaning.

B- Drama (play): is a story enacted onstage for a live audience.

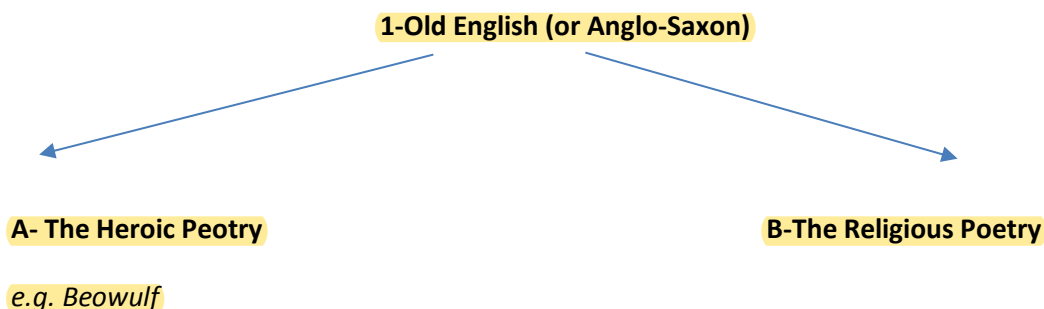
C- Prose: is a form of language that exhibits a natural flow of speech and grammatical structure rather than a rhythmic structure as in traditional poetry, where the common unit of verse is based on meter or rhyme. **It is divided into three main kinds: descriptive, narrative, argumentative.**

****An argumentative** prose is to give the reader opinions, facts, and presents the reader with a claim and support for the claim. It demands that the writer should carefully consider an issue which has two sides and to prove that one side has more merit than the other.

Literary Periods of British & American Literature

Periods of British Literature:

1- Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) Period 450-1066:



The Old English Period or the Anglo-Saxon Period refers to the literature produced from the invasion of Celtic England by Germanic tribes in the first half of the fifth century to the conquest of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror.

During the Old English Period, written literature began to develop from oral tradition, and in the eighth century [poetry](#) written in the vernacular Anglo-Saxon (also known as Old English) appeared. There are two types of poetry: **A- The Heroic Poetry:** one of the most well-known eighth century Old English pieces of literature is [Beowulf](#), a great Germanic epic heroic poem. **B- The Religious Poetry:** [Two poets of the Old English Period](#) who wrote on biblical or religious poetry were [Caedmon](#) and [Cynewulf](#).

2- Middle English Period, middle ages, medieval period 1066-1500: The Middle English Period consists of the literature produced in the four and a half centuries between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and about 1500, when the standard literary language, derived from the dialect of the London area, became recognizable as "modern English."

Prior to the second half of the fourteenth century, vernacular literature consisted primarily of religious writings. The second half of the fourteenth century produced the first great age of secular literature. The most widely known of these writings

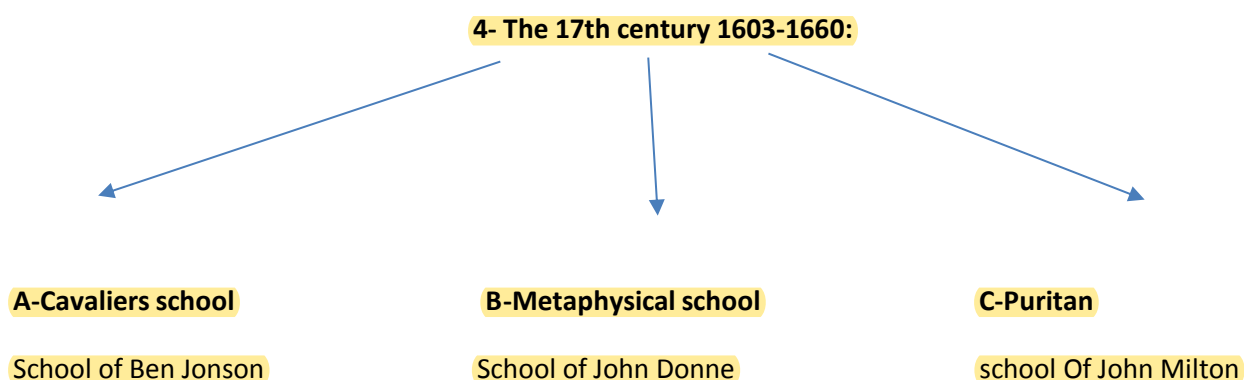
are [Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*](#), the anonymous [Sir Gawain and the Green Knight](#), and Thomas Malory's [Morte d'Arthur](#).

2- The 16th century, The Renaissance, Elizabethan Age 1500- 1603:

While the English Renaissance began with the ascent of the House of Tudor to the English throne in 1485, the English Literary Renaissance began with English humanists such as [Sir Thomas More](#) and [Sir Thomas Wyatt](#).

The Elizabethan Age of English Literature coincides with the reign of Elizabeth I, 1558 - 1603. During this time, medieval tradition was blended with Renaissance optimism. Lyric [poetry](#), prose, and [drama](#) were the major styles of literature that flowered during the Elizabethan Age. Some important writers of the Elizabethan Age include [William Shakespeare](#), [Christopher Marlowe](#), [Edmund Spenser](#), and [Sir Walter Raleigh](#).

4- The 17th century 1603-1660:



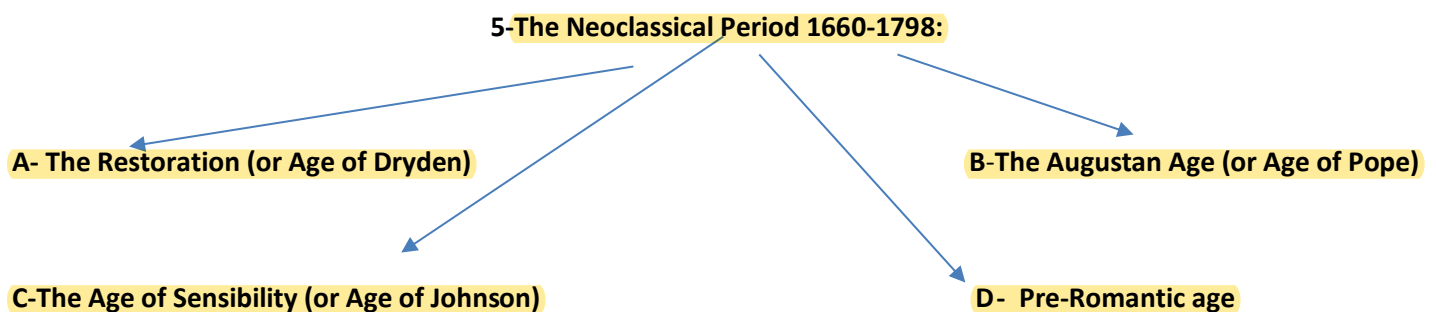
A- The Jacobean Age of English Literature coincides with the reign of James I, 1603 - 1625. During this time the literature became sophisticated, sombre, and conscious of social abuse and rivalry. The Jacobean Age produced rich prose and [drama](#) as well as [the King James translation of the Bible](#). [Francis Bacon](#), and [Thomas Middleton](#) and [Jonson](#) wrote during the Jacobean Age, as well as the **metaphysical school** of [poetry of John Donne](#)

B- The Caroline Age of English Literature coincides with the reign of Charles I, 1625 - 1649. The writers of this age wrote with refinement and elegance. This era

produced a circle of poets known as the "[Cavalier Poets](#)" and the dramatists of this age were the last to write in the Elizabethan tradition.

C- The Commonwealth Period, also known as the **Puritan** Interregnum, of English Literature includes the literature produced during the time of Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell. This period produced the political writings of [John Milton](#), [Thomas Hobbes' political treatise Leviathan](#), and the prose of [Andrew Marvell](#). In September of 1642, the Puritans closed theatres on moral and religious grounds. For the next eighteen years the theatres remained closed, accounting for the lack of drama produced during this time period.

5-The Neoclassical Period 1660-1798:



The Neoclassical Period of English literature (1660 - 1785) was much influenced by contemporary French literature, which was in the midst of its greatest age. The literature of this time is known for its use of philosophy, reason, skepticism, wit, and refinement. The Neoclassical Period also marks the first great age of English literary [criticism](#). Much like the [English Literary Renaissance](#), the Neoclassical Period can be divided into four subsets: the Restoration, the Augustan Age, the Age of Sensibility and Pre-Romantic age.

A-The Restoration (or Age of Dryden) 1660-1700: The Restoration is marked by the restoration of the monarchy and the triumph of reason and tolerance over religious and political passion. The Restoration produced an abundance of prose and [poetry](#) and the distinctive comedy of manners known as [Restoration comedy](#). It was during the Restoration that [John Milton](#) published [Paradise Lost](#) and

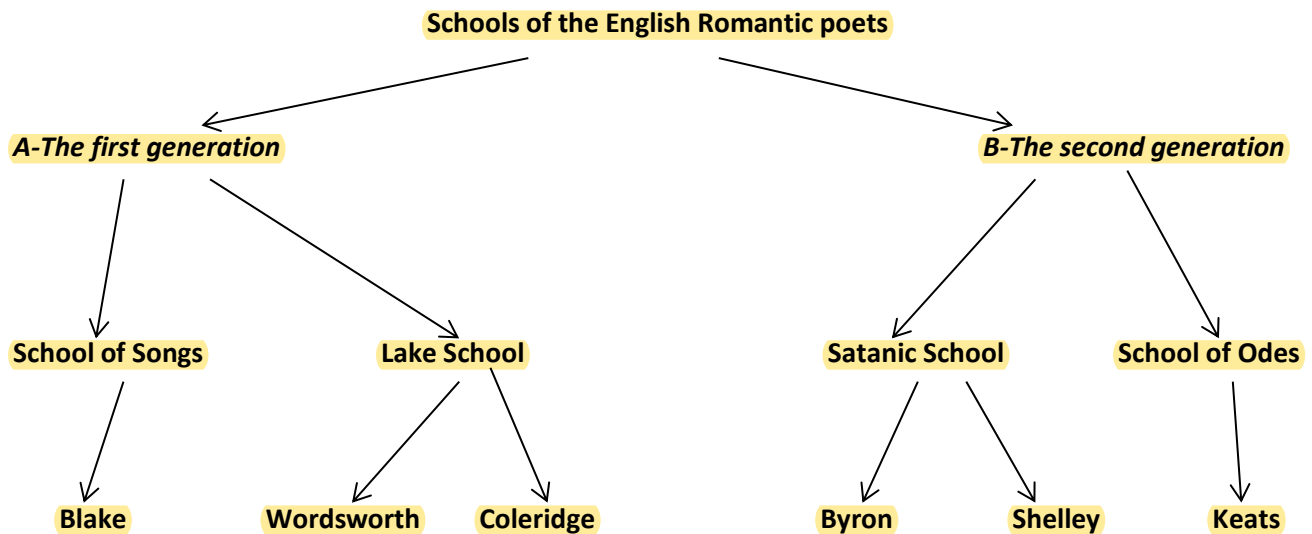
Paradise Regained. Other major writers of the era include [John Dryden](#), [John Wilmot 2nd Earl of Rochester](#), and [John Locke](#).

B-The Augustan Age (or Age of Pope) 1700-1744: The English Augustan Age derives its name from the brilliant literary period of [Vergil](#) and [Ovid](#) under the Roman emperor Augustus (27 B.C. - A.D. 14). In English literature, the Augustan Age refers to literature with the predominant characteristics of refinement, clarity, elegance, and balance of judgement. Well-known writers of the Augustan Age include [Jonathan Swift](#), [Alexander Pope](#), and [Daniel Defoe](#). A significant contribution of this time period included the release of the first English [novels](#) by [Defoe](#), and the "novel of character," *[Pamela](#)*, by [Samuel Richardson](#) in 1740.

C-The Age of Sensibility (or Age of Johnson) 1745-1784: During the Age of Sensibility, literature reflected the worldview of [Enlightenment](#) and began to emphasize instinct and feeling, rather than judgment and restraint. A growing sympathy for the Middle Ages during the Age of Sensibility sparked an interest in medieval ballads and folk literature. Another name for this period is the Age of Johnson because the dominant authors of this period were [Samuel Johnson](#) and his literary and intellectual circle. This period also produced some of the greatest early [novels](#) of the English language, including [Richardson's](#) *Clarissa* (1748) and [Henry Fielding's](#) *[Tom Jones](#)* (1749).

D-Pre-Romantic age 1784-1798: it starts with the death of Johnson and ends with the publication of *The Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth.

6-The Romantic Period 1798-1837:



The Romantic Period of English literature began in the late 18th century and lasted until approximately 1832. In general, Romantic literature can be characterized by its personal nature, its strong use of feeling, its abundant use of symbolism, and its exploration of nature and the supernatural. In addition, the writings of the Romantics were considered innovative based on their belief that literature should be spontaneous, imaginative, personal, and free. The Romantic Period produced a wealth of authors including [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#), [William Wordsworth](#), [Jane Austen](#), and [Lord Byron](#).

It was during the Romantic Period that [Gothic literature](#) was born. Traits of *Gothic literature* are dark and gloomy settings and characters and situations that are fantastic, grotesque, wild, savage, mysterious, and often melodramatic. Two of the most famous Gothic novelists are [Anne Radcliffe](#) and [Mary Shelley](#).

7-The Victorian Period 1832-1901: The Victorian Period of English literature began with the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne in 1837, and lasted until her death in 1901. Because the Victorian Period of English literature spans over six decades, the year 1870 is often used to divide the era into "early Victorian" and "late Victorian." In general, Victorian literature deals with the issues and problems

of the day. Some contemporary issues that the Victorians dealt with include the social, economic, religious, and intellectual issues and problems surrounding the Industrial Revolution, growing class tensions, the early feminist movement, pressures toward political and social reform, and the impact of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution on philosophy and religion. Some of the most recognized authors of the Victorian era include [Alfred Lord Tennyson](#), [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#), her husband [Robert](#), [Matthew Arnold](#), [Charles Dickens](#), [Charlotte Brontë](#), [George Eliot](#), and [Thomas Hardy](#).

Within the Victorian Period, two other literary movements, that of The Pre-Raphaelites (1848-1860) and the movement of Aestheticism and Decadence (1880-1900), gained prominence.

A-The Pre-Raphaelites 1848-1860: In 1848, a group of English artists, including [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](#), formed the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood." It was the aim of this group to return painting to a style of truthfulness, simplicity, and religious devotion that had reigned prior to Raphael and the high Italian Renaissance. Rossetti and his literary circle, which included his sister [Christina](#), incorporated these ideals into their literature, and the result was that of the literary Pre-Raphaelites.

B- Aestheticism and Decadence 1880-1901: The Aestheticism and Decadence movement of English literature grew out of the French movement of the same name. The authors of this movement encouraged experimentation and held the view that art is totally opposed "natural" norms of morality. This style of literature opposed the dominance of scientific thinking and defied the hostility of society to any art that was not useful or did not teach moral values. It was from the movement of Aestheticism and Decadence that the phrase *art for art's sake* emerged. A well-known author of the English Aestheticism and Decadence movement is [Oscar Wilde](#).

8-The Modern Period 1901-1945: applies to British literature written since the beginning of World War I in 1914. The authors of the Modern Period have experimented with subject matter, form, and style and have produced achievements in all literary genres. Poets of the period include [Yeats](#), [T.S. Eliot](#), [Dylan Thomas](#), and [Seamus Heaney](#). Novelists include [James Joyce](#), [D.H. Lawrence](#), and [Virginia Woolf](#). Dramatists include Noel Coward and Samuel Beckett.

A-The Edwardian age is named for King Edward VII and spans the time from Queen Victoria's death (1901) to the beginning of World War I (1914). During this time, [the British Empire](#) was at its height and the wealthy lived lives of materialistic luxury. However, four fifths of the English population lived in squalor. The writings of the Edwardian Period reflect and comment on these social conditions. For example, writers such as [George Bernard Shaw](#) and [H.G. Wells](#) attacked social injustice and the selfishness of the upper classes. Other writers of the time include [William Butler Yeats](#), [Joseph Conrad](#), [Rudyard Kipling](#), [Henry James](#), and [E.M. Forster](#).

B- The Georgian Period refers to the period of British Literature that is named for the reign of George V (1910-36). Many writers of the Edwardian Period continued to write during the Georgian Period. This era also produced a group of poets known as the *Georgian poets*. These writers, now regarded as minor poets, were published in four anthologies entitled *Georgian Poetry*, published by Edward Marsh between 1912 and 1922. Georgian poetry tends to focus on rural subject matter and is traditional in technique and form.

9-The Postmodern Period (1945-2000): the Postmodern Period of British Literature was developed following World War II (1939-1945). *Postmodernism* blends literary genres and styles and attempts to break free of modernist forms.

10-The Contemporary period (2000-present): While the British literary scene at the turn of the new millenium is crowded and varied, the authors still fall into

under the effects of *modernism* and *postmodernism*. However, with the passage of time the **Contemporary** era may be reorganized and expanded.

Periods of American Literature:

1607-1776: Colonial Period

1765-1790: The Revolutionary Age

1775-1828: The Early National Period

1828-1865: The Romantic Period (Also known as: The American Renaissance or The Age of Transcendentalism)

1865-1900: The Realistic Period

1900-1914: The Naturalistic Period

1914-1939: American Modernist Period

1920s: Jazz Age, Harlem Renaissance

1920s, 1930s: The "Lost Generation"

1939-present: The Contemporary Period

1950s: Beat Writers

1960s, 1970s: Counterculture

In addition, American Literature recognizes works of:

African-American Writers

Native American Writers

Asian-American Writers

The Colonial Period of American Literature spans the time between the founding of the first settlement at Jamestown to the outbreak of the Revolution. The writings of this time centered on religious, practical, or historical themes. The most influential writers of the Colonial Period include [John Winthrop](#), [Cotton Mather](#), [Benjamin Franklin](#), and [Anne Bradstreet](#).

During the Revolutionary Age, 1765-1790, some of the greatest documents of American history were authored. In 1776, [Thomas Paine](#) authored [Common Sense](#) and [Thomas Jefferson](#) wrote [The Declaration of Independence](#). In 1781, [The Articles of Confederation](#) were ratified. Between 1787 and 1788, [Alexander Hamilton](#), [James Madison](#), and [John Jay](#) wrote [The Federalist Papers](#). Finally, in 1787, [The Constitution of the United States](#) was drafted and in 1789 it was ratified. The Early National Period of American Literature saw the beginnings of literature that could be truly identified as "American". The writers of this new American literature wrote in the English style, but the settings, themes, and characters were authentically American. In addition, poets of this time wrote [poetry](#) that was relatively independent of English precursors. Three of the most recognized writers of this time are [Washington Irving](#), [James Fenimore Cooper](#), and [Edgar Allan Poe](#). The period 1828-1865 in American Literature is commonly identified as the Romantic Period in America, but may also be referred to as the American Renaissance or the Age of Transcendentalism. The writers of this period produced works of originality and excellence that helped shape the ideas, ideals, and literary aims of many American writers. Writers of the American Romantic Period include [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#), [Henry David Thoreau](#), [Edgar Allan Poe](#), [Herman Melville](#), [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), [Harriet Beecher Stowe](#), [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#), [Emily Dickinson](#), and [Walt Whitman](#). Following the Civil War, American Literature entered into the Realistic Period. The major form of literature produced in this era was *realistic fiction*. Unlike romantic fiction, realistic fiction aims to represent life as it really is and make the reader believe that the characters actually might exist and the situations might actually happen. In order to have this effect on the reader, realistic fiction focuses on the ordinary and commonplace. The major writers of the Realistic Period include [Mark Twain](#), [Henry James](#), [Bret Harte](#), and [Kate Chopin](#).

The years 1900-1914 mark American Literature's Naturalistic Period. Naturalism claims to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. In accordance with a post-Darwinian thesis, naturalistic writers hold that the characters of their works are merely higher-order animals whose character and behavior is entirely based upon heredity and environment. Naturalistic writings try to present subjects with scientific objectivity. These writings are often frank, crude, and tragic. [Stephen Crane](#), [Jack London](#), and [Theodore Dreiser](#) are the most studied American Naturalists.

Between 1914 and 1939, American Literature entered into a phase which is still referred to as "The Beginnings of Modern Literature". Like their British counterparts, the American Modernists experimented with subject matter, form, and style and produced achievements in all literary genres. Some well-known American Modernist Poets include [Robert Frost](#), [William Carlos Williams](#), [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#), and [E.E. Cummings](#). Included among American Modernist Prose Writers are [Edith Wharton](#), [Sinclair Lewis](#), and [Willa Cather](#).

The American Modernist Period also produced many other writers that are considered to be writers of Modernist Period Subclasses. For example, [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#) is considered a writer of [The Jazz Age](#), [Langston Hughes](#) and [W.E.B. DuBois](#) writers of [The Harlem Renaissance](#), and [Gertrude Stein](#), [T.S. Eliot](#), [Ezra Pound](#), and [Ernest Hemingway](#) writers of [The Lost Generation](#).

The Great Depression marked the end of the American Modernist Period, and writers such as [William Faulkner](#), [John Steinbeck](#), and [Eugene O'Neill](#) dealt with the social and political issues of the time in their literary works.

1939 marked the beginning of the Contemporary Period of American Literature. This period includes an abundance of important American literary figures spanning from World War II into the New Millenium. These writers include, but are not limited to, [Eudora Welty](#), [John Updike](#), [Kurt Vonnegut](#), [Sylvia Plath](#),

[Arthur Miller](#), [Tennessee Williams](#), [Ralph Ellison](#), [Gwendolyn Brooks](#), [Zora Neal Hurston](#), [Alice Walker](#), [Toni Morrison](#), and [Maya Angelou](#).

During the 1950s, a vigorous anti-establishment, and anti-traditional literary movement emerged. The main writers of this movement, [Allen Ginsberg](#) and [Jack Kerouac](#), are called Beat Writers. Much writing of the 1960s and 1970s, referred to as Counterculture Writing, continued the literary ideals of the Beat Movement, but in a more extreme and fevered manner.

Currently, the contemporary American literary scene is crowded and varied. With the passage of time the Contemporary Period may be reorganized and/or expanded. In the future will writers such as [Anne Rice](#), [John Grisham](#), or [Amy Tan](#) be included in the canon of American Literature? We will just have to wait and see.