



A Lecture in English Poetry

2nd Year Students / Dept of English Language and Literature

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The Sixteenth Century Poetry in England

1. Historical Background:

- Period of the Tudor dynasty (1485–1603), including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.
- Time of political stability and national growth after years of civil war.
- The English Reformation: Henry VIII broke from the Roman Catholic Church and established the Church of England.
- England became a powerful nation with growing influence in Europe.

2. Cultural Background:

- The rise of the English Renaissance, inspired by Italian and European humanism.
- Focus on human values, education, and classical learning (Greek and Roman texts).
- Development of arts, music, architecture, and literature.
- The printing press made books and knowledge more accessible.
- Emphasis on individualism, reason, and creativity.

3. Poetry in the Sixteenth Century:

- Poetry became the dominant literary form of the age.
- Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard (Earl of Surrey) introduced the sonnet to English literature (influenced by Petrarch).



- Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare refined poetic language and style.
- Common themes: love, beauty, time, virtue, and nature.
- Mixture of classical inspiration and English identity.
- Marked the beginning of modern English poetry.

4. Significance:

- • The sixteenth century is seen as the Golden Age of English culture.
- • It laid the foundations for later writers like John Donne and John Milton.
- • Represented the birth of English national literature.

Madrigals in the Sixteenth Century

1. Definition and Origin:

- The madrigal originated in Italy during the Renaissance and became popular in England in the late sixteenth century.
- It is a short lyric poem usually written about love, beauty, or nature, often set to music.
- English madrigals were typically polyphonic, meaning several vocal lines were sung simultaneously.

2. Introduction to England

- Madrigals were introduced to England around 1588, following the publication of *Musica Transalpina*, a collection of Italian madrigals translated into English.
- This event sparked the English Madrigal School, a period of great creativity in both poetry and music.
- The form became a symbol of Elizabethan artistic refinement.



3. Characteristics:

- Written for several voices (usually 3–6), performed a cappella (without instruments).
- Featured word painting, where the music reflected the literal meaning of the words.
- Expressed emotions delicately and harmoniously, emphasizing love, joy, or sorrow.
- Combined poetic beauty with musical elegance.

4. Prominent English Madrigalists:

- Thomas Morley – the most famous English madrigal composer; known for "Now is the Month of Maying".
- John Wilbye, Thomas Weelkes, and Orlando Gibbons also contributed significantly to the genre.
- Many of these poets and composers blended literary skill with musical artistry.

5. Literary and Cultural Significance:

- Madrigals reflect the Renaissance spirit—a union of art, poetry, and human emotion.
- They contributed to the development of lyrical expression in English literature.
- The madrigal's refined and musical style influenced later poetic forms and English song tradition.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542)

1. Biographical Background:

- Born in Kent, England, in 1503, from a noble family.
- Educated at St John's College, Cambridge, where he studied classical literature and languages.
- Served as a courtier, diplomat, and poet during the reign of King Henry VIII.
- He traveled to Italy, where he was deeply influenced by Renaissance culture and Italian poetry, especially Petrarch.
- Died in 1542, probably from a fever while on royal duty.



2. Literary Importance:

- Considered one of the pioneers of English Renaissance poetry.
- Introduced the Petrarchan sonnet form to English literature.
- His works marked the transition from medieval to modern poetic style.
- Focused on personal feelings, love, loyalty, and the complexity of human emotion.

3. Themes in Wyatt's Poetry:

- Love and Desire: Often portrayed as painful, uncertain, and unattainable.
- Courtly Love Tradition: Adapted from Italian models but infused with his own experience at the Tudor court.
- Disillusionment and Politics: His poems reflect the dangers and intrigues of court life.
- Inner Conflict: Expressed through the tension between emotion and duty.

4. Style and Form:

- Used the Italian sonnet structure (abba abba cdc dcd) but later helped develop the English sonnet form (abab cdcd efef gg), which Shakespeare perfected.
- Simple, direct language, yet filled with emotional depth and subtle irony.
- Frequent use of metaphor, imagery, and symbolism drawn from nature and classical references.

5. Notable Works:

- "Whoso List to Hunt" – one of his most famous poems, often interpreted as a reflection on his relationship with Anne Boleyn.
- "They Flee from Me" – a meditation on love, change, and betrayal.
- "My Lute, Awake!" – an example of his lyrical style and emotional honesty.

6. Legacy:

- Wyatt's poetry laid the foundation for Elizabethan lyricism.



- Inspired later poets such as Henry Howard (Earl of Surrey) and William Shakespeare.
- Remembered as the father of the English sonnet, combining Italian elegance with English realism.
- Sixteenth-Century English Poetry
- Historical & Cultural Background • Tudor dynasty (1485–1603), Henry VIII & Elizabeth I • Political stability, cultural growth • English Reformation → Church of England • Renaissance influence on arts and literature • Printing press → wider literacy
- Poetry in the Sixteenth Century • Poetry = dominant literary form • Wyatt & Surrey → introduced the sonnet • Later poets: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare • Common themes: love, beauty, nature, virtue, time
- Madrigals – Definition • Short lyric poem set to polyphonic music • Origin: Italy → popular in England ~1588 • Themes: love, beauty, nature • Combines poetry and music
- Madrigals – Characteristics • For 3–6 voices, a cappella • Use of word painting (music reflects words) • Express emotions: joy, sorrow, love • Elegant, musical, and lyrical
- English Madrigalists • Thomas Morley → “Now is the Month of Maying” • John Wilbye, Thomas Weelkes, Orlando Gibbons • Music + poetry = Elizabethan artistic refinement
- Example: “Now is the Month of Maying” – Thomas Morley (1595)
- > Now is the month of maying, When merry lads are playing, Fa la la la la la la la la. Each with his bonny lass Upon the greeny grass. Fa la la la la la la la la. • Theme: Springtime, love, joy • Tone: Cheerful, lively • Musical refrain: “Fa la la” • Word painting → reflects dancing & festivity



- Sir Thomas Wyatt – Biography • Born: 1503, Kent, England • Education: St John’s College, Cambridge • Courtier, diplomat, poet under Henry VIII • Traveled to Italy → influenced by Petrarch • Died: 1542
- Wyatt – Literary Importance & Themes • Pioneer of English Renaissance poetry • Introduced Petrarchan sonnet • Themes: Love and desire, Courtly love tradition, Disillusionment & politics, Inner conflict
- Wyatt – Style & Notable Works • Italian & early English sonnets • Simple, direct language with emotional depth • Notable works: “Whoso List to Hunt”, “They Flee from Me”, “My Lute, Awake!”
- Wyatt – Legacy • Foundation for Elizabethan lyricism • Influenced Surrey & Shakespeare • Father of the English sonnet → Italian elegance + English realism
- Summary • Sixteenth-century poetry = Renaissance, humanism, Elizabethan creativity • Madrigals = music + lyric poetry, joyful, expressive • Sir Thomas Wyatt = pioneer of English sonnet & lyrical expression

الشعر الإنجليزي في القرن السادس عشر

- الخلفية التاريخية والثقافية • أسرة تيودور (١٤٨٥–١٦٠٣)، هنري الثامن وإليزابيث الأولى • الاستقرار السياسي والنمو الثقافي • الإصلاح الديني الإنجليزي → تأسيس كنيسة إنجلترا • تأثير عصر النهضة على الفنون والأدب • المطبعة → انتشار القراءة والكتابة
- الشعر في القرن السادس عشر • الشعر = الشكل الأدبي الرئيسي • وايت وسري → قدما السونيت إلى الأدب الإنجليزي • شعراء لاحقون: سيدني، سبنسر، شكسبير • الموضوعات الشائعة: الحب، الجمال، الطبيعة، الفضيحة، الزمن



• إرث وايت • أساس الغنائية في عصر إليزابيث • أثر على سري وشكسبير • والد السونيت الإنجليزي → الأناقة الإيطالية + الواقعية الإنجليزية

• الملخص • شعر القرن السادس عشر = عصر النهضة، الإنسانية، الإبداع في عصر إليزابيث • المادريغالات = دمج الموسيقى مع الشعر الغنائي، مليئة بالفرح والتعبير • سير توماس وايت = رائد السونيت الإنجليزي والتعبير الغنائي